Submission: Multicultural Framework Review

Settlement Council of Australia

October 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 is the peak body representing Australia's migrant and refugee services and allied organisations. We provide leadership to the settlement sector and broader society to enable people of migrant and refugee backgrounds to experience positive settlement outcomes. We represent over 100 member organisations nationally, all working towards a shared vision for an Australia where all people of migrant and refugee backgrounds belong, thrive and experience fulfilling lives.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Multicultural Framework Review (the Review).[1] As the peak body representing 125 member organisations across Australia, we are the largest network of workers specialising in supporting migrant and refugee communities. Our submission reflects a combination of evidence and grassroots insights from across our network.

Multiculturalism is one of Australia's greatest assets, defining our national identity and contributing to the richness and vibrancy of our society. Our nation has a long history of welcoming people from all corners of the globe, and the success of this endeavour relies heavily on effective settlement services. These services, which encompass various programs, support networks, and resources, assist newcomers in navigating the complexities of their new lives in Australia. Australia's settlement service infrastructure is an essential pillar of our successful multiculturalism.

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This submission is structured in two parts. The first part outlines SCOA's conceptual approach to multiculturalism and settlement, and provides suggested key principles that should be reflected in Australia's multicultural framework. The second part canvasses the most pertinent issues in multiculturalism at present, and makes specific recommendations for the multicultural framework.

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[1] Department of Home Affairs (2023), Multicultural Framework Review, https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-framework-review

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: *Australia should adopt a strong multicultural framework that:*
    i. Re-affirms multiculturalism as a critical pillar of how society responds to cultural and religious difference
    ii. Clearly articulates the principles of multiculturalism, our shared identity as a nation, and the terms of engagement with minority faith and cultural communities
    iii. Requires adequate resourcing of services that specialise in responding to the needs of minority cultural and faith communities.

Recommendation 2: *The immigration and multicultural affairs portfolios should be represented by a minister in Cabinet.*

Recommendation 3: *Enhance civil society advocacy on multiculturalism by explicitly resourcing advocacy work at all levels (peak bodies, service providers, and local community groups). This provides the appropriate level of insight to government for rigorous policy making and program delivery.*

Recommendation 4: *Refresh and re-commit to Australia's access and equity policy, ensuring it is accompanied by a strong accountability mechanism.*

Recommendation 5: *Settlement services should be expanded to ensure all migrants who come to Australia are eligible for at least a basic level of support. This can be achieved by enhancing the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program and removing limitations based on visa category and length of stay in Australia.*

Recommendation 6: *Leverage SCOA's Road to Belonging Strategy in delivering on the goals of the Multicultural Framework.*

Recommendation 7: *Ensure there are specialist programs for migrants and refugees across the breadth of government funded social and economic services.*

Recommendation 8: *Continue to reduce reliance on temporary visas, and ensure those intending to settle in Australia permanently are given permanent visas as soon as possible.*

Recommendation 9: *Abolish the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period.*

Recommendation 10: *Implement measures to make citizenship more accessible.*

Part I: Australia's conceptual approach to multiculturalism and settlement

What is multiculturalism?

Australia prides itself on being a successful multicultural nation. Multiculturalism is typically viewed positively in Australia. In 2022, 88 per cent of people believed multiculturalism was good for Australia, with this level of support being consistent since 2013.[2] But what do we mean when we talk about 'multiculturalism'?

Multiculturalism can be talked about as a demographic reality, and as a philosophy. As a demographic reality, there can be little doubt that we are a multicultural nation with high levels of migration contributing to deep cultural and religious diversity. As a philosophy, an ethic of multiculturalism underpins many aspects of Australian society, including in policy and politics, and communities.

Multiculturalism as demographic diversity

Australia is rich in cultural, religious, ethnic and language diversity. Australia is home to the world's oldest continuous cultures, with Indigenous Australians having lived on this land for at least 60,000 years.[3] More than 167 Indigenous languages are spoken in Australia.[4]

In more recent times, migration has had a significant impact on Australia's population diversity. Historically, migration in Australia has been driven by developments and events all over the globe. Factors that shaped Australia's migration intake over the years include the Gold Rush and industrialisation in the mid-1800s, the First and Second World Wars, and the Vietnam War.[5] Australia's first federal immigration portfolio was established in 1945 following the Second World War, and since then more than 7.5 million people have migrated to Australia.[6] The White Australia Policy, governed by the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* was dismantled in 1970, and since then greater diversity of migrants under various programs have built new lives in Australia.

This history has resulted in a vibrantly diverse demographic reality in Australia. Australia's diversity continues to grow as we welcome people arriving from all corners of the globe. As the migration program continually changes, new cultural communities are continually being established and they further enrich our diverse social fabric.

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[2] O'Donnell, J (2022), 'Mapping Social Cohesion' The Scanlon Foundation, https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/MSC%202022_Report.pdf
[3] Reconciliation Australia (2017), 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the Constitution', available online at https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Recognising-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-people-in-the-Australian-Constitution.pdf
[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), 'Snapshot of Australia, 2021' https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/snapshot-australia/latest-release
[5] Australian Government Department of Home Affairs (2017), 'A History of the Department of Immigration, Managing Migration to Australia', available online at https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us-subsite/files/immigration-history.pdf
[6] Phillips, J, Klapdor M and Simon-Davis, J (2010), 'Migration to Australia since federation: a guide to the statistics'

Policy approaches to multiculturalism

The term multiculturalism is often used to describe the policies and norms that support and uphold this cultural diversity. Although multiculturalism is a well-known term, there is no consistent articulation of what multiculturalism is. In popular discourse, politics and academia, multiculturalism is a contested concept, and opinions vary on whether or not it should continue to be used.[7]

However, it is SCOA's position that there is benefit in clearly articulating and using multiculturalism. Though multiculturalism has somewhat diminished in popularity since its introduction in Australia in the 1970s-80s,[8] it still remains ingrained in how we see ourselves as a nation.[9] The widespread familiarity with and support for multiculturalism, as shown in survey findings discussed above, makes it well placed to be mobilised to foster social cohesion and promote positive outcomes for migrants.[10] In addition to being familiar and widely supported, multiculturalism, properly defined, remains a useful framework for managing cultural diversity and ensuring society reaps its benefits.[11]

The settlement sector has long acknowledged multiculturalism as an effective framework for promoting good settlement. However, in the years since multiculturalism was first coined as a term and started being used in Australia, we have learnt much about cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Our sector has been at the forefront of that journey, seeing first-hand what works and what does not to empower migrants to reach their full potential. These insights, together with the volumes of research on multiculturalism, are invaluable in informing the specific type of multiculturalism we want to promote for our future.

Below, we outline a vision for multiculturalism that is informed by the literature and academia on the subject, as well as the practical experiences of our sector and the individuals served by the sector.

SCOA's vision for multiculturalism

We support an Australia that recognises and values **difference**, recognising that difference is often **intersectional.** We promote **equality**—both formal and substantive. We encourage society to make room for migrants and refugees to become formal and active **citizens**; and we support migrants and refugees to take that up. We engage in **dialogue** and support dialogue at all levels to increase understandings of different cultures and worldviews.

Australia's multiculturalism should ensure **Australia is a country where all people of migrant and refugee background belong, thrive and experience fulfilling lives.**

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[7] Other alternatives suggested in the literature includes the concept of interculturalism. However, concepts such as the importance of intercultural dialogue are in fact central to contemporary multiculturalism.
[8] Poynting, S & Mason, V (2008), 'The New Integrationism, the State and Islamophobia: Retreat from multiculturalism in Australia', *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, vol. 36, pp.230-246
[9] Mansouri, M & Modood, T (2020), 'The complementarity of multiculturalism and interculturalism: theory backed by Australian evidence', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, p.9
[10] Markus, A (2019) 'Mapping Social Cohesion' *The Scanlon Foundation Surveys*
[11] Hart, G (2020), 'Why We Still Need Multiculturalism: A Critical Review of Approaches to Cultural Accommodation', *The Journal of Multicultural Society*, vol. 10, no.2, pp.26-50

SCOA's vision is for a multiculturalism where diversity in cultural background, religion, and migration experience is acknowledged and respected, and where all people have equal opportunities to, and do, fully participate in Australian society.

Our vision for multiculturalism is rooted in and aligned with Australia's commitment to human rights. Transgressions against people on the basis of race and religion were much of the impetus for the development of human rights, and so it is unsurprising that multiculturalism would sit neatly within a human rights framework. The right to be different (particularly on the basis of race, colour, language, birth status, or national or social origin) is central to human rights,[12] and a host of anti-discrimination principles work to protect this.[13] Human rights further mean that all people can actively participate in their society without discrimination.[14]

International human rights law has developed to affirm that governments have obligations to "respect, protect and fulfil" rights. The obligation to respect means a government must ensure it does not commit violations. The obligation to protect means governments must protect individuals and groups from having rights interfered with by third parties and punish perpetrators. The obligation to fulfil means governments must take positive action to facilitate the full enjoyment of rights. We view multiculturalism as an effective framework to satisfy these obligations, and particularly for *fulfilling* rights.

Our experiences in settlement over decades show that a dedicated multicultural lens to programs and policy is required in order to address the particular needs of migrants and refugees. There are many experiences, circumstances and needs that are unique to either the migrant or refugee experience, or their cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. These experiences can become obstacles to the fulfilment of human rights in a myriad of ways. Without a framework that provides a dedicated lens for seeing and addressing these, systemic barriers to the fulfilment of the rights of migrants and refugees remain unaddressed.

We propose that the fulfilment of rights can be facilitated through a multiculturalism that has the elements outlined below.[15]

1. Difference

Recognising that people can hold different group identities is a central tenet of multiculturalism. The ability to form and maintain a group identity on the basis of culture, faith or language is a human right as articulated in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights.

Cultural, faith and language communities are an invaluable part of Australian society, and bring many benefits. Through these communities, many individuals form connections essential for

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[12] United Nations (1948), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 2
[13] United Nations (1948), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 7; Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth), Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth), Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth), Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth).
[14] United Nations (1948), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 7
[15] In articulating these elements, we have drawn extensively on the work of Fethi Mansouri and Tariq Modood in Mansouri, M & Modood, T (2020), above n 9

social wellbeing.[16] Those connections can also result in innumerable health and economic benefits by providing a site for the sharing of information, building of networks, and sources of material support.[17] Further, Australia cannot enjoy the diversity of thought, food, culture or arts which it does, unless that diversity is able to be preserved. It is therefore critical to proactively support community groups to retain their language and cultural practices through initiatives such as language schools, supporting ethno-specific community groups, resourcing cultural centres, and other supports.

Although we advocate through multiculturalism for a recognition of different cultural identities, we caution against the tendency to view culture as homogenous and static. Cultural communities globally are internally diverse, fluid and dynamic,[18] and in Australia, the processes of migration and settlement further heavily influence the formation of cultural identities.[19] It is also crucial to recognise that individuals do not necessarily belong exclusively to either one or another cultural community—they may, and many in Australia indeed do, hold several cultural identities in tandem.[20] People can also experience difference not because they actively identify with another culture or faith, but because broader society sees them as different and treats them as such. This element of difference also needs to be grappled with by multiculturalism.[21]

2. Intersectionality

Cultural, faith and language difference are not the only markers of difference. Early conceptualisations of multiculturalism have been criticised for failing to recognise the heterogeneity of multicultural communities, and the complexity of the human experience.[22]

People who migrate to Australia may have a range of intersecting factors that impact their experiences and position in society. This can include gender identity, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status, regional/metropolitan location, and other factors. It is often those who face intersecting challenges that experience the most marginalisation. The intersections between these identities must be seen and addressed, to ensure that all people of migrant backgrounds have their needs addressed, and to ensure that patterns of discrimination and disadvantage are not replicated within migrant and refugee communities.

In a similar manner to the way current approaches to gender equality increasingly adopt an intersectional focus, multiculturalism should also reflect a more intersectional approach than in the past.

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[16] Australian Government Department of Social Services (2017), 'Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants, *findings from the first three waves'*, p.92
[17] Ibid, p.93-96
[18] Ghosh, R (2018), 'Multiculturalism in a Comparative Perspective: Australia, Canada and India,' *Canadian Ethnic Studies,* vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 18-19.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Yampolsky, MA, Amiot, CE & de la Sablonnière, R (2013), 'Multicultural identity integration and well-being: a qualitative exploration of variations in narrative coherence and multicultural information', *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 4, no. 126; Zolfaghari, B., Möllering, G., Clark, T., & Dietz, G. (2016), 'How do we adopt multiple cultural identities? A multidimensional operationalization of the sources of culture.' *European Management Journal*, vol. 34, no.2 102-113.
[21] Mansouri, M & Modood, T (2020), above n 9
[22] Song, S (2020), "Multiculturalism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available online at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/multiculturalism/

In a similar manner to the way current approaches to gender equality increasingly adopt an intersectional focus, multiculturalism should also reflect a more intersectional approach than in the past.

However, it is critical not to allow intersectionality to replace multiculturalism. An effective state policy of multiculturalism is essential to give meaningful effect to the promise of intersectionality. Intersectionality requires an ecosystem that supports the flourishing of the variety of frameworks, skills and service types that combine to meet the needs of individuals. Without multiculturalism, the cultural and religious element of the ecosystem suffers, and there is little foundation from which intersectionality can draw to respond to specific cultural and religious needs. While intersectionality itself has increased in prominence, the multicultural element of the intersectional ecosystem is lacking, and has been persistently undermined over recent decades. The multicultural framework review provides an important opportunity to rectify this neglect and strengthen this component of intersectionality.

However, it is critical not to allow intersectionality to replace multiculturalism.

3. Equality

In a multicultural society, people should have equal rights and equal opportunities irrespective of the differences outlined above. This means having measures in place to prevent discrimination, as well as recognising that different groups have different needs that must be actively accommodated and protected.[23] For example, having anti-discrimination laws in place further prevents inequality on the basis of race, an accent, or religious dress-codes. As another example, providing those who arrive in Australia with little to no English with adequate opportunities for English language tuition promotes equality by facilitating access to education and employment opportunities. Practical measures that promote equality are essential for embodying true acceptance of difference, and for *fulfilling* rights, rather than only respecting or protecting rights. For Australia to be accepting of difference, we must ensure that people are not disadvantaged simply by virtue of being different.

4. Citizenship

The idea of citizenship has been recognised as foundational to a successful Australian multiculturalism. In Australia, it has always been made clear that, irrespective of cultural or religious differences, there remain some things that we all have in common. These include a commitment to parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, equality of the sexes, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. These are fundamental tenets of citizenship, and the adoption of these by all citizens builds a strong common starting point for a successful multiculturalism.[24]

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[23] Mansouri, M & Modood, T (2020), above n 9
[24] Soutphommasane, T (2017), 'Citizenship, multiculturalism and anti-racism', *Speech to the 2017 conference of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia,* accessed online at
https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/citizenship-multiculturalism-and-anti-racism

In addition to formal rights and responsibilities, active participation in citizenship is also important, and this includes not only the understanding of rights and responsibilities, but participation in economic, social and civic spheres. These key sites of participation should reflect the diversity of Australian society.

Importantly, multiculturalism must foster the equal rights of people of all cultural backgrounds to contribute to *shaping* our nation. Narratives often position migrants and refugees as having to integrate into Australian society, however full citizenship also supports them to be a part of the development of our national identity and culture.

> *Narratives often position migrants and refugees as having to integrate into Australian society, however full citizenship also supports them to be a part of the development of our national identity and culture.*

5. Dialogue

Dialogue is an essential part of ensuring multiculturalism results in social cohesion. In referring to dialogue, we include broad concepts of dialogue as articulated in the multiculturalist literature,[25] as well as intercultural dialogue. Intercultural dialogue refers to "the open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures, that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's global perception."[26]

In a multicultural society, dialogue occurs at both the macro and micro levels. Examples of dialogue may include neighbourhoods, youth groups, or sports clubs, which embrace differences while bringing people together around a shared experience.[27] It can also include dialogue and advocacy in civic and political spheres.

While some have argued for frameworks alternative to multiculturalism to promote greater dialogue, such as interculturalism, we suggest that given the strong existing commitment to multiculturalism, it is more fruitful to include it more explicitly and strengthen it as an an element of multiculturalism.[28]

Social cohesion's relationship to multiculturalism

Social cohesion is a term frequently used in connection to multiculturalism. Like multiculturalism, social cohesion has numerous articulations, but essentially includes ideas of shared values, inclusion, participation, solidarity and togetherness.[29]

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[25] Mansouri, M & Modood, T (2020), above n 9..

[26] Council of Europe (n.d.), 'The Concept of Intercultural Dialogue', accessed online at https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept_EN.asp#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIntercultural%20dialogue%20is%20an%20open,of%20the%20other's%20global%20perception.%E2%80%9D

[27] Mansouri, M & Modood, T (2020), above n 9.

[28] This aligns with the argument of Mansouri and Modood in: Mansouri, M & Modood, above n 9.

[29] Triggs, G (2014),'Social cohesion in a multicultural Australia: The importance of human rights',*Speech at the Affinity Friendship and Dialogue Iftar Dinner,* https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/social-cohesion-multicultural-australia-importance-human-rights#fn3; Scanlon Foundation Research Institute,'What is Social Cohesion', https://scanloninstitute.org.au/what-social-cohesion

SCOA sees multiculturalism as central to fostering a socially cohesive society. Though social cohesion can be achieved through a variety of ways, for example, through a culturally and ethnically homogenous society, our vision is for a social cohesion that is brought about through an effective policy of multiculturalism, grounded in a broader framework of human rights.

What is settlement?

Our articulation of settlement

Settlement is a two-way process of migrants and refugees adjusting to a new life in Australia, and Australia welcoming migrants and refugees. A migrant or refugee is settled when they are independent, secure and accepted across the ten *National Settlement Outcomes Standards.* Successful settlement enables migrants and refugees to fully participate in life in Australia.

According to the National Settlement Outcomes Standards (NSOS), effective settlement includes migrants and refugees being able to achieve positive outcomes across the following ten areas:[30]

1. education;
2. employment;
3. health and wellbeing;
4. housing;
5. language services;
6. transport;
7. civic participation;
8. family and social support;
9. justice; and
10. finance.

When migrants and refugees are independent, secure and accepted, and demonstrate positive outcomes across these ten areas, they can be said to have 'settled.'

Settlement is not a sequential or linear process that is the same for everyone. The time it takes for people to feel settled in Australia may be shorter, or longer; and may even be a lifelong process. In many cases, a life event—such as a relationship breakdown, or job loss—may set migrants 'backwards' in their settlement journey. Some migrants may also undertake elements of settlement while on temporary visas, and prior to becoming a permanent resident.

What are settlement services?

Settlement agencies and other support services are vital to supporting the successful settlement of migrants and refugees in Australia. Australia's settlement services are internationally recognised as being world-class.[31]

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[30] Settlement Council of Australia, (2020) 'National Settlement Outcomes Standards' https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NSOS-2020.pdf
[31] UNHCR (2020), 'The History of Resettlement', *Celebrating 25 years of the* ATCR, pp.24, 27, accessed online at https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/5d1633657; Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 'National Settlement Framework', p.1; Collins, J., Reid, C., Groutsis, D., Watson, K., Kaabel, A., Hughes, S. (2019), 'Settlement experiences of recently arrived refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in Queensland in 2018*: Executive Summary', *Centre for Business and Social Innovation, UTS Business School*, Sydney, p.5

Settlement agencies provide a range of services that support people of migrant and refugee backgrounds on their settlement journey, and across the ten NSOS. Settlement services include agencies, 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.

Settlement services have traditionally provided the most intensive settlement support for humanitarian entrants during the first 12-18 months of their arrival. There are a number of factors specific to the experience of forced migration and displacement that mean this intensive period of support is required; including but not limited to possible experiences of torture and trauma, arriving with fewer material resources, health problems and family separation. Intensive settlement services support refugees to navigate these additional challenges and best prepare them for their new life in Australia.

Further settlement support is provided in the first five years of the settlement period for humanitarian entrants and eligible permanent residents through federal government programs.[32] Many settlement agencies also provide ongoing support to communities through a range of smaller programs and initiatives, that are often funded on an ad hoc or local basis. Settlement support provides essential information, advice, advocacy, capacity building, and access to mainstream and relevant services. Through this work, services assist newly arrived people to participate fully in Australian society and maintain connections to their culture and community.

The Australian government also provides English language tuition for eligible migrants and refugees.[33] This support is generally provided through vocational education services. English language tuition not only enables newly arrived people to learn English but is also an essential site sharing relevant settlement information and creating strong social connections, particularly for those who may not be eligible for other settlement programs.

Though settlement work is led by settlement services, settlement is a whole of community responsibility, and settlement services work closely with all parts of society to deliver on successful settlement outcomes. For example, many work closely with employers in their local areas to improve employment outcomes, and facilitate social programs that enable greater connection to the broader Australian community.

Settlement and multiculturalism

How do settlement and multiculturalism relate?

Effective settlement is a key factor in ensuring Australia's multiculturalism is successful, and that Australia remains a socially cohesive country. For multiculturalism to be successful, individuals must have the opportunities and ability to fully participate in society.

Settlement services have unique expertise in working with newly arrived individuals and migrant and refugee communities. This expertise equips them to support individuals to fully participate in society, and to work with broader society to create a welcoming, inclusive and supportive society.

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[32] Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 'Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program', accessed online at https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/sets-program
[33] Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 'Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)', https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/amep/about-the-program

Multiculturalism and settlement are inherently interlinked concepts. SCOA conceptualises settlement as the 'how' of multiculturalism. That is, settlement is one of the key factors that enables multiculturalism to thrive in Australia.

SCOA conceptualises settlement as the 'how' of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is more likely to succeed if the two-way process of migrants and refugees being supported to adjust to their new life in Australia, and Australia welcoming migrants and refugees, is effective. Settlement supports migrants and refugees to engage and participate in life in Australia while still having the ability to retain their cultural, ethnic and religious connections. Both the settlement sector, and broader society have an important role to play in this process, and thereby in supporting multiculturalism, as outlined below.

The role of settlement services

Greater social and economic participation supports successful multiculturalism, and research confirms that settlement support contributes to greater social and economic participation.[34]

After living in Australia for a number of years, and accessing settlement support, migrants and refugees are more likely to be self-sufficient and connected to the community. The Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) study measured humanitarian migrants' settlement outcomes over their first five years in Australia. The study found that over time, people become more confident and self-sufficient as they navigate life in Australia; measured by their confidence in using public transport, getting help in an emergency, getting help from police, using bank services, finding out about their rights, finding out about government services and benefits, and finding a school or childcare.[35] After a longer time in Australia, people are more likely to feel confident about making life choices.[36]

With the right settlement support and after time in Australia, migrants and refugees are more likely to connect with their communities, including their ethnic, cultural or religious communities.[37] This is important to multiculturalism as it allows migrants and refugees to retain their identity. The BNLA study found that participation in these activities increases over time.[38] Many organisations within the settlement sector support this through community capacity building activities such as working with new and emerging communities to build their own cultural communities and develop their leadership skills.

Settlement support also helps to facilitate dialogue and connection between communities. This may be through specific programs or events encouraging connection, but also by supporting people to gain skills and confidence as they navigate life in Australia. When humanitarian entrants first arrive in Australia, they are more likely to initially have friends from inside their own cultural, religious and ethnic groups, but in a few years, these friendship groups expand to be a mixture of people, both within their groups and outside of them.[39] Settlement agencies foster these outcomes by delivering numerous programs that facilitate learning and connection

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[34] Department of Social Services (2017) 'Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants - Findings from the first three waves' pp. 92-96
[35] Ibid, p.85
[36] Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2011), '*Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals'*,
https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/settlement-outcomes-new-arrival.pdf
[37] Department of Social Services (2017) 'Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA)'
[38] Ibid, pp.92-93.
[39] Ibid,p.95

through programs such as parenting support groups, youth groups, multicultural sports activities and cooking, English, citizenship and computer classes.[40]

Likewise, settlement can play a role in creating a welcoming environment for immigrants and refugees and support multiculturalism in this regard. For example, settlement services work alongside mainstream services to build their cultural competency. However, settlement services are not the only factor in developing a welcoming society that allows multiculturalism to thrive, and this is where broader society has an important role to play.

The role of broader society

Broader Australian society plays an important role in supporting both settlement and multiculturalism. Welcoming attitudes and cultural competency—whether expressed through the prism of settlement or multiculturalism—lead to improved settlement outcomes. Feeling a sense of welcome from a broader community is an important aspect of settlement for all cohorts of migrants, especially youth.[41] Research by Deloitte Access Economics also highlights the important role greater social inclusion plays in supporting better employment and health outcomes, as well as reducing discrimination.[42] By treating people equally and embracing multiculturalism, everyday Australians are more likely to make friends with migrants and refugees, which is important for settlement.[43] Settlement agencies play an important leadership role in facilitating community support for multiculturalism through their ongoing advocacy and work within local communities, however without the engagement of broader society in that work they will experience limited success.

Settlement agencies play an important leadership role in facilitating community support for multiculturalism through their ongoing advocacy and work within local communities

Benefits of settlement and multiculturalism

The benefits of settlement and multiculturalism to Australia are diverse and wide-ranging. From having more vibrant, connected communities, greater diversity in workplaces and educational curriculums, to substantial economic benefits—settlement and multiculturalism truly benefit all aspects of life in Australia and will continue to do so in the future.

Migrants and refugees continue to engage with and make significant contributions to the broader community. For example, they have a high level of engagement in volunteering.[44] Volunteering is seen to be a way to give back to a community and make a positive contribution,

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[40] For a full suite of best practice case study examples, see SCOA's website:http://scoa.org.au/category/settlement-best-practice/
[41] Correa-Velez, I, Gifford, S M, Barnett, A G, (2010). 'Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia', *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 71, no.8, pp.1399-1408
[42] Deloitte Access Economics, (2019) 'The economic benefits of improving social inclusion', https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/my/Documents/risk/my-risk-sdg10-economic-benefits-of-improving-social-inclusion.pdf
[43] Settlement Council of Australia (2020), 'National Settlement Outcomes Standards', p.12
[44] Volunteering Australia and Settlement Council of Australia (2019), 'Volunteering and Settlement in Australia', accessed online at http://scoa.org.au/our-publications/scoa-publications/volunteering-settlement-australia-may-2019/

while building social connections and gaining Australian workplace experience.[45] Community engagement across a range of sectors has also been shown to increase over time.[46]

The benefits of multiculturalism and settlement are further evidenced by research that shows inclusion and diversity in the workplace leads to greater innovation and productivity, improved employer performance, reduced employee turnover, and greater wellbeing outcomes[47] Further, multiculturalism benefits educational outcomes by promoting greater acceptance of difference, encouraging new ideas and critical thinking skills, promoting dialogue, anti-racism and community harmony.[48]

The economic benefits of multiculturalism are well recognised. The positive economic impact of migration in areas including work participation, employment, wages and incomes, national skills base and net productivity are well understood,[49] and migrants support new economic opportunities and links globally.[50] Migration leads to increased demand for goods and services, and brings new skills and entrepreneurship.[51] Migrants also contribute more in taxes than they consume in benefits and government goods and services.[52]

Given the innumerable benefits of settlement and multiculturalism, it is critical that we ensure both are well embedded across society, and supported at a whole-of-community and whole-of-government level.

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[45] Hugo, G (2011), 'A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants', Canberra, p.46; Volunteering Australia and Settlement Council of Australia (2019), 'Volunteering and Settlement in Australia', p.14

[46] Hugo, G (2011), Ibid,, p.55

[47] Diversity Council Australia (2020), 'Business Case for Diversity & Inclusion', accessed online at https://www.dca.org.au/di-planning/getting-started-di-business-case-diversity-inclusion

[48] NSW Government (2020), 'Culture and Diversity', accessed online at https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/multicultural-education/culture-and-diversity#:~:text=It%20encourages%20a%20pluralist%2C%20just,engage%20in%20intercultural%20understanding%20activities; Martin, D (2014) 'Good education for all? Student race and identity development in the multicultural classroom' *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol 39, pp.110-123; Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez, (2004) 'The Benefits of Diversity in Education for Democratic Citizenship', *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 60, No. 1, pp. 17-34

[49] Business Council Australia (2023), Migration makes Australia Stronger, https://www.bca.com.au/migration_makes_australia_stronger#:~:text=Migration%20is%20an%20essential%20element,frontier%20elements%20of%20our%20economy.

[50] Hugo, G (2011), above n 45,p.41; Carrington, K, McIntosh, A & Walmsley, J (2007), 'The Social Costs and Benefits of Migration into Australia.

[51] Chow, B (2003), *Opening Address to the The Challenges of Immigration and Integration in Australia and the European Union* Conference, 18 Feb 2003, accessed online at https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41480/3/chow.pdf
Hugo, G (2011), above n 45

[52] Australian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, 'Planning for Australia's Future Population', Canberra, p.28

Part II: Key issues and priorities

Australia must not take a successful multiculturalism for granted. Australia's multiculturalism will only be as successful as the quality of its social policy and programming in relation to migration, settlement and cultural diversity. This requires dedicated and sophisticated policy thinking, together with dedicated resourcing. At present, there are significant gaps in policy and program settings that are undermining equity for migrants and refugees. The key priorities and recommendations are outlined below.

> *Australia must not take a successful multiculturalism for granted. Australia's multiculturalism will only be as successful as the quality of its social policy and programming in relation to migration, settlement and cultural diversity.*

Prominence of multiculturalism in government

Research has documented the relative decline in government focus and action on multiculturalism since the 1970s and 1980s. The 1970s to mid 1980s were characterised by strong recognition of migrant groups as being disadvantaged and proactive state intervention to address injustices. From the late 1980s, while multiculturalism was retained as a formal policy, the focus shifted toward the economic benefits of migration and this came with less proactive state action on multiculturalism.[53] The period during which multiculturalism enjoyed greater focus and prominence was characterised by stronger formal institutions that safeguarded it. We support a number of changes to current institutional settings to encourage a greater focus on multiculturalism.

A strong multicultural framework

First, Australia must adopt a strong multicultural framework. The framework should emphasise the importance of multiculturalism as a positive and foundational social policy for a country made up of many minority cultures and faiths. A renewed commitment to, and elevation of, multicultural policy is essential after many years of undermining multiculturalism. The practical impact of a weakened commitment to multiculturalism has been directly observed by our network who support migrant and refugee communities on a daily basis.

> *A renewed commitment to, and elevation of, multicultural policy is essential after many years of undermining multiculturalism.*

Second, the framework should more clearly articulate the principles of multiculturalism, our shared identity as a nation, and the terms of engagement with minority cultural and faith communities. This clear foundation provides a basis for meaningfully and fruitfully engaging cultural communities. The absence of such an articulation has seen many institutions shy away from deep engagement with migrant and refugee communities due to uncertainty about the

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[53] Ho, C. (2014). From Social Justice to Social Cohesion: A History of Australian Multicultural Policy. In A. Jakubowicz & C. Ho (Eds.), *'For those who've come across the seas...': Australian Multicultural Theory, Policy and Practice.* Anthem Press.

terms of engagement. The discussion above in relation to SCOA's conceptual approach to multiculturalism and settlement provides some guidance on this.

Third, the framework should require adequate resourcing of services that specialise in responding to the needs of minority cultural and faith communities. Improving cultural competency in mainstream services requires the existence of both a multicultural framework and the infrastructure to embed that competency across services. Mainstream services are, by definition, limited in the depth of their cultural and religious knowledge and so cannot maintain adequate levels of cultural competency without some external support.

However, improving cultural competency alone will not yield equitable outcomes for migrants and refugees, as there are inherent limitations in the extent to which mainstream services could ever holistically respond to their needs. Thus, investment in services that specialise in responding to cultural and faith communities is an essential feature of a multicultural society. There has been a tendency to view specialist and mainstream services through an 'either or' paradigm, whereas the framework should explicitly require both the resourcing of specialist services and the improved accessibility of mainstream services – these are interdependent, not competing.

> *There has been a tendency to view specialist and mainstream services through an 'either or' paradigm, whereas the framework should explicitly require both the resourcing of specialist services and the improved accessibility of mainstream services – these are interdependent, not competing.*

In building specialist infrastructure, it is further necessary to strike a balance between organisations that can respond to a multiplicity of cultural groups; as well as those that respond to one particular cultural group. These too are not an 'either or' equation, but rather serve distinct functions and respond to different preferences among community members. On the one hand, non-ethno-specific migrant services usually offer greater professionalisation, a level of anonymity, a broader array of services, and carry their expertise and knowledge onto benefit other communities long after earlier ones have become well established. On the other hand, ethno-specific services offer a deeper connection to community, a stronger social engagement, and an even more nuanced cultural approach. Both are essential elements of an effective approach to settlement and multiculturalism.

In summary, Australia's multicultural framework must achieve three key goals: re-affirm multiculturalism as a critical pillar of how society responds to cultural and religious difference; clearly articulate the principles which govern minority cultural and faith communities; and invest in a sector of services that specialise in responding to the cultural and religious needs of various groups of society in a dedicated manner.

> *Recommendation 1: Australia should adopt a strong multicultural framework that:*
>
> i. Re-affirms multiculturalism as a critical pillar of how society responds to cultural and religious difference.
> ii. Clearly articulates the principles of multiculturalism, our shared identity as a nation, and the terms of engagement with minority faith and cultural communities.
> iii. Requires adequate resourcing of services that specialise in responding to the needs of minority cultural and faith communities.

Elevating the Immigration and Multicultural Affairs portfolio to Cabinet

Second, the immigration and multicultural affairs portfolio should sit within cabinet. Immigration is foundational to Australia's economic and social prosperity for the foreseeable future. The wellbeing of migrants and the children of migrants determines to a large extent our overall national wellbeing, given Australia's increasingly culturally diverse demographics. It is therefore not only appropriate for the portfolio to be represented in Cabinet, but necessary to give the portfolio the prominence it (and migrant communities) deserve.

> **Recommendation 2: The immigration and multicultural affairs portfolio should be represented by a minister in Cabinet.**

Enhancing civil society advocacy

In order for government to effectively do its work in responding to the needs of migrant and refugee communities, it must be informed by perspectives from the grassroots level. However, capacity to engage in structured advocacy has weakened. This is due to several factors. First, organisations have been either dissuaded or prohibited from engaging in advocacy as part of their funding arrangements. Second, funding pressures on both services and peak bodies alike have limited the extent to which community organisations can elevate the experiences and views of the communities they serve into the policy landscape. Third, the socio-economic conditions are such that individuals and family units are working many more hours in order to sustain themselves, and this leaves less time for voluntary advocacy work – in essence, it is no longer practical to rely on volunteerism for grassroots community advocacy. The reduced capacity for organised advocacy partly results in a discourse around migration that becomes dominated by more well-resourced sectors and industries, which primarily focus on the economic benefits of migration rather than the wellbeing on migrants and refugees. We recommend explicitly resourcing advocacy work at all levels (peak bodies, service providers, local community groups) to provide the appropriate level of insight to government for rigorous policy making and program delivery. It further ensures that when government does make increased calls for consultations or advisory groups (as it would be likely to do with an enhanced multicultural framework) civil society has the capacity to respond to those calls.

> **Recommendation 3: Enhance civil society advocacy on multiculturalism by explicitly resourcing advocacy work at all levels (peak bodies, service providers, and local community groups). This provides the appropriate level of insight to government for rigorous policy making and program delivery.**

Reinvigorate Australia's Access and Equity Policy

Migrants and refugees have the right to benefit equally from all public spending. However, across our settlement network in all parts of Australia, we observe their exclusion from many government services and government funded programs.

Australia's Access and Equity policy is a critical mechanism for ensuring all government agencies and government funded services are accessible to and meet the needs of people of migrant and refugee backgrounds. This policy has been stagnant and ineffective for many years. As a result, we have observed a decline in the accessibility of government and government funded services, and a decreased dedication to tailoring approaches to meet the specific barriers faced by migrants and refugees.

We strongly support a refresh of Australia's Access and Equity policy. This policy should both require that all services are accessible to all migrant and refugees, as well as requiring tailored multicultural services and approaches across all key aspects of social services. The importance of dedicated tailored multicultural services across various areas of social policy is outlined further below.

Further, under the revised policy all Australian government departments, and agencies should be required to report on their multicultural access and equity performance. Accountability to communities, organisations, and the broad public is essential to ensuring the policy does not once again become sidelined and ineffective.

> ***Recommendation 4: Refresh and re-commit to Australia's access and equity policy, ensuring it is accompanied by a strong accountability mechanism.***

Universal settlement services

We propose the establishment of universal settlement services that include all migrants for several compelling reasons:

- A universal settlement service ensures that all migrants, regardless of their visa status, have equal access to the support they need to thrive in Australia. This approach aligns with our nation's commitment to fairness and inclusivity.
- Temporary migrants, including international students and skilled workers on temporary visas, often become permanent residents. By providing comprehensive settlement services from the beginning, we can better prepare them for successful integration, which, in turn, contributes to a more cohesive and prosperous society.
- Ensuring that migrants have access to settlement services helps reduce the strain on social services in the long run. Well-settled migrants are less likely to rely on government assistance, contributing positively to Australia's fiscal sustainability.

All migrants go through a process of settlement, but currently only a very small subset are eligible for any kind of support to navigate the settlement journey. Currently the majority of migrants to Australia arrive with little orientation and the expectation they will work it out on their own. Despite coming for work or study, some may still come across circumstances that mean they require more support. Others may not need much support but would still benefit from being able to ask someone for advice on things as simple as how the health system works, how to choose a school for their children, or other matters.

All migrants go through a process of settlement, but currently only a very small subset are eligible for any kind of support to navigate the settlement journey.

Skilled migrants in particular bring economic benefits, but we also have social obligations towards them. This social support further enhances their economic contributions (increasing the tax base through increased income, etc). The absence of social support has a number of negative impacts. For example, it can result in entrenched social inequities that create clear socio-economic divides along racial lines. The lack of support for most migrants and their families also has gendered impacts, as women are often very isolated while not always having the same qualifications and social capital as the primary applicant. SCOA has heard from our members that they are supporting a number of people who fall outside the remit of settlement support services and their needs are often acute.

Other countries, such as Canada, fund 'newcomer services' available to refugees, permanent residents, and temporary residents.[54] The services are highly used by skilled migrants (outside of humanitarian entrants). In 2018-19, 55% of Economic Class (skilled migrants) to Canada accessed employment-related services, 38% accessed language training and 42% accessed information/orientation services.[55] By supporting all migrants who arrive in Australia to navigate their new lives, Australia will remain a competitive destination for global talent.

If settlement services are opened up to a larger cohort (i.e., skilled migrants, temporary migrants, international students etc.) then there needs to be commensurate increased resourcing to the sector to be able to meet the level of need. It is relevant to note that substantial revenue is raised by government through visa fees. Through allocating a portion of visa fees to support new arrivals the Federal Government would be able to resource universal settlement services. Doing so would fulfil the obligations towards migrants who pay substantial fees to arrive in Australia. At present, these fees are not being directed towards supporting migrants post-arrival.

In addition, with increased flexibility on eligibility, service delivery should not happen at the cost of very disadvantage migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants. Recognising that not all people will need settlement support services to the same degree or intensity, there should be flexibility embedded to allow a range of assistance from intensive individual case management, to allowing people to walk into a service and ask where they can enrol their children in school.

The Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program is an existing suitable avenue for delivering this expanded support. SETS provides support to humanitarian entrants and other eligible migrants for up to 5 years after arrival. SETS client services help in accessing English language skills, education, employment, and domestic and family violence support among other supports. We have advocated for limitations to accessing SETS based on both

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[54] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC]. (2022). Newcomer services. Available online at: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigrationrefugees-citizenship/campaigns/newcomers.html ; Welcome BC. (2022). Settlement Services. Available online at: https://www.welcomebc.ca/StartYour-Life-in-B-C/Settlement-Services ; Government of Canada. (2019). IRCC Minister Transition Binder 2019: Settlement and Integration. Available online at: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/transition-binders/minister-2019/settlement.html
[55] Ibid.

length of stay in Australia and visa category to be removed due to the varying settlement journey of migrants and refugees.

> ***Recommendation 5: Settlement services should be expanded to ensure all migrants who come to Australia are eligible for at least a basic level of support. This can be achieved by enhancing the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program and removing limitations based on visa category and length of stay in Australia.***

Reviewing settlement service program settings

Australia's earliest settlement services recently celebrated their 40th anniversaries, marking the fourth consecutive decade of a formal settlement services sector in Australia.[56] This is old enough to have amassed a wealth of knowledge and skill in delivering positive settlement outcomes, and yet young enough that Australia's approach to settlement services is still evolving and crystalising.

Since the establishment of settlement services (or Migrant Resource Centres as they were known then) society itself has undergone significant change. Migration has shifted from being predominantly family based and permanent, to being skill based and temporary.[57] The economic conditions have changed, and opportunities for social mobility have shrunk.[58]

Against this backdrop, the contract settings and overarching framework used to administer the main settlement programs funded by the federal government, have not kept pace with these changes. In some instances, changes have aggravated the gap between community needs and available funding. As such, settlement services nationally have increasingly struggled to bridge the gap between a changed social and economic landscape, and increasingly mis-matched funding.[59]

In this context SCOA advocates for bold change in Australia's approach to settlement services, and a review of the principles and frameworks that guide settlement. SCOA has undertaken a number of processes that invite big picture thinking about the future of settlement services.

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[56] Comprehensive settlement programs were recommended in the 'Galbally Report' in 1978 and many migrant resource centres were established thereafter. The majority of these continue to operate as settlement services today, together with a range of other organisations that deliver settlement services. See: Frank Galbally (1978), 'Migrant Services and Programs – Summary,' available online at: http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/galbally_1.pdf; National Archives of Australia (1981).

[57] Hugo, G (2018), 'Change and continuity in Australian international migration policy,' *International Migration Review,* vol. 48, no. 3.

[58] Cobb-Clark, D (2019), *Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantage in Australia,* ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course, available online at: https://www.lifecoursecentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-19-LCC-Working-Paper-Cobb-Clark-1.pdf.

[59] This has had further consequences, including a lack of national coherence in settlement as providers increasingly rely on a 'patchwork quilt' of funding sources to meet needs, and a reduced capacity to engage in community capacity building work and other work that addresses the root causes of disadvantage for people of migrant and refugee backgrounds.

These are outlined below.

The National Settlement Outcomes Standards (NSOS)

As discussed above, SCOA established the National Settlement Outcomes Standards (NSOS) in 2015.[60] The NSOS comprise of 10 standards that together articulate the outcomes that are needed for migrants and refugees to be considered settled. The ten standards are: education and training; employment; health and wellbeing; housing; language services; transport; civic participation; family and social support; justice; and finance. Each of the indicators are accompanied by a set of indicators.

The NSOS were first established out of a recognition that Australia needed a cohesive framework to guide settlement, and a common set of principles. The NSOS were a first attempt at this. SCOA worked closely with the Federal Government to develop the NSOS and they were rolled out through training and have since been embedded within settlement services.

In 2020, SCOA reviewed the NSOS following five years of implementation. The review identified that the NSOS were valuable in bringing consistency across the sector in the understanding of settlement, and content of settlement work. Because of their practical nature, the document was relatable and easily grasped at all levels of organisations, and at all levels of the sector. However, the practical focus of the document was a double-edged sword. While it meant that it was widely understood and applied, we also identified a need for great clarity and coherence on the higher order principles and broader outcomes of settlement.

SCOA sees it as critical that Australia have a clearer conceptual framework for settlement, including the high-level outcomes and principles underpinning settlement. This is an essential basis for making any decisions about new tenders and contracts for any settlement service. The Multicultural Framework is an ideal mechanism for this overarching broader framework and can helpfully couch the NSOS within a bigger picture vision.

Road to Belonging: A collective strategy for Australian settlement services

In 2021, SCOA led the development of the **Road to Belonging** strategy as a collective strategy for Australian settlement services. SCOA worked with 46 individuals from different settlement organisations, peak bodies, government departments and other key stakeholders - many with lived experiences - to co-design an ambition and roadmap for the settlement sector.

Through this process, we were able to identify an overarching ambition for Australian settlement services. Namely, that we are working to ensure **Australia is a country where all people of migrant and refugee background belong, thrive and experience fulfilling lives.** This ambition is the 'north star' we are all collectively working towards.

The various work, activities and impact of our sector align with this broader goal. The ambition is supported by a set of principles, focus areas for action, and an ecosystem map of who is involved in the process of settlement.

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[60] The NSOS is aligned to the National Settlement Framework: Department of Social Services (2016), *The National Settlement Framework,* available online at: https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/the-national-settlement-framework.pdf.

SCOA is leading active implementation of the strategy over the next five years. We have established a governance group to oversee implementation. We have also established working groups for the six focus areas of the strategy – empowered settlement journeys; partnering with migrant and refugee communities; connecting with other sectors and broader Australian society; supporting workforce and organisational capacity; building monitoring, evaluation and data capability; and driving research and systems change. Priority actions have been identified for the focus areas ensuring tangible progress is made, and the first lot of actions are well on their way to being delivered. This includes work such as identifying best-practice approaches to case management, mapping the settlement sector workforce, developing standardised training for the sector, developing a theory of change for the sector, and many other actions.

The Road to Belonging Strategy is an effective collaborative mechanism for tangibly making progress towards the goals of the new Multicultural Framework. We therefore encourage it to be supported, used and leveraged to further enhance Australia's multiculturalism.

> **Recommendation 6: Leverage SCOA's Road to Belonging Strategy in delivering on the goals of the new Multicultural Framework.**

Specialist programs for migrants and refugees

In addition to enhancing settlement service infrastructure, it is also critical to increase the number of specialist programs tailored to meet the needs of migrants and refugees across the breadth of government portfolios. This is a necessary complement to accessible mainstream services. While all government services should be accessible to Australians, we must also acknowledge the limitations of generalist services. Different cohorts experience unique barriers that require nuanced responses, and it is unrealistic to expect one type of service to respond to the multiplicity of backgrounds and experiences across the Australian population.

> *While all government services should be accessible to Australians, we must also acknowledge the limitations of generalist services.*

The process of migration and cultural adjustment is a key factor affecting many areas of social and economic wellbeing, and people who have undergone this process share many similarities in their experiences. It is therefore appropriate for there to be specialist services that respond to this across the breadth of social and economic services. This is similar in nature to the wide range of programs funded under different government portfolios for women (who like migrants and refugees, are not a minority as such), people with disabilities, and many other groups.

We currently observe the burden for meeting the majority of specialist migrant and refugee needs being placed with the Department of Home Affairs, and at a state level, the agencies responsible for multiculturalism. This results in a relatively small proportion of government budgets being used to respond to the unique needs of migrants and refugees. Rather, every government department and agency should view it as their responsibility to have tailored programs that respond to these needs. As taxpayers, citizens, and active members of

communities, migrants and refugees have the right to benefit equally from all government funding, and for some, this means being able to access a specialist tailored service.

> **Recommendation 7: Ensure there are specialist programs for migrants and refugees across the breadth of government funded social and economic services.**

The box below highlights specialist employment services as a case study. We highlight this as it is a critical gap that affects social and economic outcomes for migrants and refugees, as well as because it is a useful illustration of the benefits of embedding a specialist service in a non-multicultural portfolio.

Case Study: Specialist employment services

The ineffectiveness of mainstream employment services in supporting migrant and refugee jobseekers has been well established by several reviews and reports.[61] We have heard from our member organisations that many Workforce Australia providers are not familiar with the complexity of settlement journeys. As a result, settlement service providers are educating Workforce Australia providers on the support that is on offer for migrants and refugees and to understand the pathways to improve their English first, before entering the workplace – which is a critical and central part of supporting migrants and refugees into employment.

Our member organisations expressed frustration in need to constantly explain and re-educate job service providers on various programs (AMEP, IELTS etc). We have heard that where migrant or refugee job seekers have long term career aspirations, these are often dismissed so as to get a client into any job as fast as possible. One key frustration was the lack of understanding about AMEP, and points earned from attending English classes, especially the time and patience needed to learn English. People who are doing 16 hours a week or more of AMEP to satisfy the Workforce Australia 100-point activity test, yet clients are being pressured to do more outside these 16 hours of English. We have also heard clients have had to take time off from AMEP to attend Workforce Australia appointments, hindering their learning journey.

In the new Workforce Australia contracts, there are a small number of specialist providers for CALD and refugee cohorts. Our member organisations who do not directly deliver employment services have reported a significant improvement in the usefulness of specialist employment services for refugee and CALD cohorts, as compared to when they refer clients to mainstream employment services.

However, these specialist services are not widely available. In the last tender round for Workforce Australia, only three (3) 'refugee' licenses were issued across Australia – and all are in

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[61] Shergold, P., Benson, K., & Piper, M. (2019). *Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia: the findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia.* Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Available online at: https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf

Melbourne, while ten (10) 'CALD' licenses were issued in various locations across Australia.[62] SCOA is therefore advocating for more specialist refugee and CALD licenses to be issued as well as for licenses to be issued in areas that have high caseloads of CALD and refugee jobseekers.

This is just one example of the specialist needs of migrants and refugees being overlooked by mainstream systems and the way specialist services can enhance outcomes, particularly given Australia's mainstream social infrastructure is a long way away from being inclusive of the full diversity of the population.

Permanency, citizenship, and waiting periods

Pathways to permanency

In previous generations, migrants to Australia predominantly arrived on permanent visas. This sets a different tone for settlement, multiculturalism and a sense of belonging, to the current visa system which sees a large number of temporary migrants entering Australia.

Temporary migration serves as a pathway to permanent residency for many individuals. In the 2021-22 period, a significant majority, more than 82 percent, of the 26,103 permanent employer-sponsored migrants were already in Australia. This trend persisted even before the pandemic, with a similar percentage recorded in 2018-19 (85 percent). These individuals initially arrived in Australia on a temporary basis, subsequently establishing roots and experiencing the Australian lifestyle, leading them to choose permanent residency.

We commend the government's decision to offer a pathway to permanent residency for all temporary skills shortage visa holders, regardless of the specific visa stream through which they entered the country. Ensuring temporary workers have access to a pathway to permanency is crucial to prevent them from being trapped in an endless cycle of temporary visa renewals. It is also vital for enhancing Australia's competitiveness in attracting talent. However, we support work to even further reduce the extent to which people intending to live permanently in Australia are arriving on temporary visas, and remaining on temporary visas for extended periods of time.

> *Recommendation 8: Continue to reduce reliance on temporary visas, and ensure those intending to settle in Australia permanently are given permanent visas as soon as possible.*

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[62] Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2021). *Successful Organisations for Workforce Australia Services (previously referred to as Enhanced Services – Generalist and Specialist).* Available online at: https://tenders.employment.gov.au/tenders/b0bb0fc3-23ae-ec11-983f-002248d3b28f#LICENSES; One (1) in Sydney Greater West, one (1) in Sydney North and West, one (1) in Inner Metropolitan Melbourne, one (1) in North Eastern Melbourne, one (1) in North Western Melbourne, one (1) in South Eastern Melbourne and Peninsula, one (1) in Western Melbourne, one (1) in the Gold Coast, one (1) in Wivenhoe and one (1) in Adelaide North.

Newly arrived residents waiting period

Currently, most permanent visa holders are subject to a 'Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period' (NARWP) which precludes them from accessing most forms of income support. SCOA has long opposed the NARWP.

The notion that permanent residents are to be taxed the same rate as citizens whilst receiving no social support from the government taxing them contravenes the notions of fairness Australia is built on, with substantial impacts on Australia's social cohesion as a result.

It is important to note that those who are subject to these changes are not necessarily 'newly arrived.' A significant proportion of Australia's permanent residents take a temporary visa pathway, meaning they have often already resided in Australia and paid tax for several years. After doing so, and then becoming a permanent resident, these migrants will then be subject to a further four-year waiting period. By the end of the four-year waiting period, it is certainly not accurate to regard these migrants as 'new arrivals.'

The NARWP is short-sighted in terms of both economic impact and social cohesion. Economically, those who are subject to these exclusions contribute far more than they take, and the investment we make in migrants is returned to Australia ten-fold. Socially, these changes are detrimental to families and children, and undermine social cohesion by applying different rules to those permanently residing in Australia and paying equal taxes.

The Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period is short-sighted in terms of both economic impact and social cohesion.

Recommendation 9: Abolish the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period.

Citizenship access

Many service providers and local communities have raised with SCOA the challenges in accessing citizenship. These challenges are particularly acute for those who may have low levels of English language literacy and struggle to complete the test. This includes many humanitarian entrants and older migrants. Further, in regional locations accessing testing centres is a significant obstacle, both practically and financially. There can also be extensive costs in obtaining the appropriate documents to apply for citizenship.

Equal access to citizenship is an essential part of successful multiculturalism. Citizenship is an important marker of belonging, and making it difficult to access citizenship has a negative impact on social cohesion and a sense of belonging for those who are excluded.

Citizenship is an important marker of belonging, and making it difficult to access citizenship has a negative impact on social cohesion and a sense of belonging for those who are excluded.

> ***Recommendation 10: Implement measures to make citizenship more accessible.***

Conclusion

Australia's settlement services and the communities we serve have long supported a strong ethic of multiculturalism as the foundation of Australian society. Adopting a strong multicultural framework is what makes Australia a welcoming and inclusive society. The various contested conceptualisations of multiculturalism, at their essence, all share a commitment to supporting minority cultural and faith groups to retain their cultural identity while accessing their full rights as citizens.[63] It is this multicultural underpinning which distinguishes our present approach to settlement from its predecessor, assimilation. We hope the current review process will result in a re-commitment to this foundation, with a framework enhanced by the learnings of our sector and various waves of migrants and refugees over the course of the past several decades.

We have shared some of the learnings over recent decades in this submission, including some thoughts on how our conceptualisation of multiculturalism can reflect our current societal make up and attitudes; the need to ensure immigration and multiculturalism have appropriate prominence within government infrastructure; the need for both accessible mainstream services and specialist multicultural services; and ensuring clear and simple pathways to permanency and citizenship.

Key among our learnings is that the process of settlement, and the infrastructure to support that process, are critical to the success of Australian multiculturalism. Settlement provides the practical pathway through which migrants and refugees are able to belong, thrive and live fulfilling lives in their new country. It is therefore critical that our multicultural framework include a firm commitment not only to our current settlement infrastructure, but to expanding it so that those currently excluded from support can also experience a warm and inviting welcome.

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[63] Song, S. (2020), above n 22.