



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

ECCV SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

2008 REVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

1. The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' 2008 review of employment services.
2. ECCV is the state-wide peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria. For over 30 years, ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between multicultural communities, government and the wider community in Victoria. ECCV has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.
3. ECCV recognises the importance of creating sustainable employment opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities within Australia.
4. Barriers to meaningful employment and employment discrimination are key issues for CALD communities and will underpin ECCV advocacy throughout 2008. This submission focuses on strengthening the relevance of employment services for CALD communities and also includes broader employment related recommendations.
5. ECCV commends the Federal Government for its commitment to a national social inclusion agenda which is aimed at reducing societal inequalities across Australia.¹ ECCV would welcome any initiatives aimed at improving the position of immigrant and refugee communities in Australia vis-à-vis the mainstream population within the social inclusion agenda, particularly in the area of employment.
6. ECCV notes that the federal government has committed to the formation of a Social Inclusion Board, to function as the main advisory body on social inclusion,² and recommends that the composition of the board include senior advocates from the multicultural sector. Such an approach would most likely ensure that the needs of certain immigrant and refugee communities are integrated into the social inclusion agenda rather than simply 'added on'.

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¹ Australian Labor Party, 2007, *An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda*, Election 2007 Policy Document, accessed 11 February 2008, http://www.alp.org.au/download/now/071122_social_inclusion.pdf.

² Australian Labor Party, 2007, *An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda*, Election 2007 Policy Document, accessed 11 February 2008, http://www.alp.org.au/download/now/071122_social_inclusion.pdf, page 6.



6. For immigrant and refugee communities meaningful employment is linked to a positive self identity, allows for financial independence and is also important in the process of establishing a sense of home in a new context. Commenting on the importance of economic self sufficiency, the United Nations handbook for refugee resettlement states,

"Economic self sufficiency is one of the most important factors in successful integration, with earning capacity influencing the ability to 'purchase' many of the other resources required to rebuild life in a new country, among them, housing, health care and education".³

7. Given the importance of employment and economic self sufficiency for settlement, a real need exists to address some of the barriers facing refugee and immigrant communities from entering the labour market and securing meaningful employment.

8. Given the Australian context of nationwide skill shortages, it is clear that underutilising the skills of immigrant and refugee communities does not make good economic sense. It is the view of ECCV, that appropriate policy responses that address barriers to employment for immigrant and refugee communities will be important for the sustained economic development of the nation.

9. A recent paper produced by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia suggested that increased labour force participation and increased immigration are the only durable solutions to meeting the demand for labour.⁴ The research suggested that by 2021 the rate of net migration required to satisfy labour market demands would have to increase to 227 000 persons.⁵

10. Consistent feedback from ECCV members and affiliates indicates that the Job Network (JN) fails people from CALD communities. The experience of job seekers from immigrant and refugee backgrounds is consistently that JN is effective only for Australian born members of the mainstream population.

11. As such, ECCV believes that government measures to improve the cultural competency of the Job Network and the quality of the assistance provided to CALD communities, particularly those from non-english speaking backgrounds, are required.

12. Importantly, ECCV also recommends that localised, culturally appropriate organisations such as migrant resource centres or ethnic associations are engaged to provide specialised employment assistance to CALD communities.

13. There are three main forms of unsatisfactory employment experienced by migrants and refugees in Australia which are unemployment, underemployment and occupational downgrading.⁶ When immigrants and refugees work in any of these less satisfactory conditions of employment, their chances

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2002, *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration - Chapter 2.9 Building Bridges to Economic Self-sufficiency*, Accessed 21 January 2008, <<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3d9861584.pdf>>, page 172.

⁴ McDonald, P and Withers, G, 2008, *Population and Australia's Future Labour Force*, Policy Paper #7, The Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, Canberra, page 2.

⁵ McDonald, P, and Withers, G, 2008, *Population and Australia's Future Labour Force*, Policy Paper #7, The Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, Canberra, page 2.

⁶ Colic-Peisker, V and Tilbury, F, 2007, *Refugees and Employment: visible difference on discrimination*, Centre for Social and Community Research, Murdoch University.



of gaining secure, meaningful employment may diminish markedly. Put simply, the longer a person works outside their field of qualification and experience, the harder it is to re-enter the field.

14. ECCV supports the targeting of intensive assistance to job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage. Amongst CALD communities, ECCV believes that the following groups should be prioritised for intensive assistance to secure meaningful employment –

- Refugee and humanitarian entrants⁷
- Refugee and immigrant women;
- And those from new and emerging communities.

15. The barriers to employment experienced by CALD communities do have a profound effect on the individual. The following personal accounts of barriers to the labour market are included to give a sense of the impact of finding oneself unable to participate in meaningful employment in Australia:

"Both my husband and I are qualified and I am still looking for work after six months and my husband is doing cleaning jobs at night so we can support ourselves".⁸ Skilled Migrant in Australia.

"The biggest problem is that our/my work experience was not taken into consideration by employers at all. The fact that I had offered documents of qualification that are recognised did not mean anything to them. Interviewers told me, 'We are not interested in what you were doing before; we want to know about your work experience in Australia.'"⁹ Refugee in Australia.

"Employment procedure, criteria and standard is too inflexible to allow new arrivals to enter job market. The disregard for overseas qualification and experience leads to the feeling of exclusion and in extreme cases the sense of racial discrimination."¹⁰ Refugee in Australia.

"My wife and I are skilled workers. I am trained in the IT industry and my wife was a kindergarten teacher in Sri Lanka. We are willing to work to support ourselves but unfortunately because of our visa situation we are not permitted."¹¹ Asylum Seeker in Australia.

There are strong social and economic motivations for the Federal Government to address the inequalities and barriers to employment facing CALD communities. ECCV would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the issues or recommendations raised in this submission.

⁷ Including asylum seekers whom ECCV believes should be entitled to the right to work in Australia while their claim is being determined.

⁸ ECCV 2008 interview in relation to employment barriers for skilled migrants.

⁹ Colic-Peisker, V and Tilbury, F, 2007, *Refugees and Employment: visible difference on discrimination*, Centre for Social and Community Research, Murdoch University, page 16.

¹⁰ Colic-Peisker, V and Tilbury, F, 2007, *Refugees and Employment: visible difference on discrimination*, Centre for Social and Community Research, Murdoch University, page 16.

¹¹ Right to Work Campaign, 2007, flyer, Asylum Seekers Seeking Safety not Charity, 2007, Accessed 17 January 2008,

<<http://safetynotcharity.victas.uca.org.au/>>.



ECCV Key Recommendations

1. That the Labor Government commit to the development of a *National Employment Participation Strategy for Immigrant and Refugee Communities*.¹²

A National Employment Participation Strategy for Immigrant and Refugee Communities should:

2. Include the targeted intensive assistance for CALD job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage with the following groups prioritised for intensive assistance to secure meaningful employment –

- Refugee and humanitarian entrants¹³
- Refugee and immigrant women;
- And those from new and emerging communities.

3. Fund migrant resource centres, ethno-specific organisations and other community organisations with cultural expertise to deliver flexible and intensive employment programs to secure meaningful employment for CALD communities in local contexts.

4. Ensure that greater cultural competence is incorporated in to the operation of the Job Network, resulting in greater numbers of sustainable employment outcomes for clients from CALD backgrounds.

5. Facilitate and support the development of small businesses and community enterprises amongst immigrant and refugee communities.

6. Include systematic and industry focused English language programs for migrants and refugees with higher levels of qualification and education to assist the transition of skilled persons into their area of expertise early in their settlement process.

7. Incorporate a national advertising campaign which highlights the multicultural and diverse nature of Australian society and the social, political and economic gains diversity brings to the nation

¹² Such a strategy would compliment the Labour commitment to a national strategy for mental health in disability employment within the Australian Social Inclusion Agenda.

¹³ Including asylum seekers whom ECCV believes should be entitled to the right to work in Australia while their claim is being determined.