



# Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia Inc.

## ECCWA Response to Senate Select Committee on Temporary Migration:

[temporymigration.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:temporymigration.sen@aph.gov.au)

### **About the Ethnic Communities Council of WA Inc.**

The Ethnic Communities Council of WA Inc (ECCWA) is Western Australia's peak ethnic umbrella organisation. ECCWA is a non-government, non-profit community-based organisation which takes an active interest in all aspects of multiculturalism, culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) affairs and acts on behalf of all ethnic communities in Western Australia (WA). It has over 60 Community and Organisational members across WA and has relationships with various government agencies at the Local, State and Federal level. ECCWA has been providing advocacy supports to multicultural communities for 45 years and is a member of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA).

ECCWA's objectives are to:

- Ensure that its policy positions contribute to government's policy making;
- Promote and safeguard the interests of CaLD communities in WA;
- Disseminate WA Government information to the ethnic communities.

Through the Ethnic Advocacy and Support Team (EAST), ECCWA provides specialised advocacy support for individuals who are unable to access government funded services.

We also provide support for CaLD community members who have experienced racial discrimination through the Racism Matters advocacy team.

For more information about ECCWA, please refer to our Website at: [www.eccwa.org.au](http://www.eccwa.org.au)

### **Introduction:**

ECCWA welcomes the Senate Select Committee's enquiry on the impact of Temporary Migration in Australia. According to the ABS 2016 census<sup>1</sup>, 33% of Australians are from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) background; another 16% have one or both parents born in another country. The 2016 data also indicate that 53.8% of people in WA have one or both parents born overseas.); speak more than 300 languages (not including the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages) and 20% of people with disability are from CaLD backgrounds. CaLD people are not a homogenous group - there is diversity within diversity.

As Australia is a very large country with most of the population settled in capital cities and other large cities, there is always a need for temporary and permanent skilled and unskilled

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>



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migrants in rural, regional and remote areas. This provides essential support to Australia's service industries including disability, aged care, healthcare, education, information technology, hospitality, construction, mining and farming industries.

## **ECCWA's response to the Terms of Reference:**

On 5 December 2019, the Senate resolved to establish a Select Committee on Temporary Migration, to inquire into and report on the impact temporary migration has on the Australian economy, wages, jobs, social cohesion and workplace rights and conditions. ECCWA provides the following responses and recommendations on the specific Terms of Reference:

### **(A) Government policy settings including their impact on the employment prospects and social cohesions of Australians;**

Since the arrival of the white settlers, Australia has always benefited from properly planned and managed migration programs to advance its economic, political, social and cultural development. Australia's Multicultural Policy<sup>2</sup> states that government services and programs must be responsive to the needs of our culturally diverse communities. It commits to an access and equity framework and puts the onus on government to provide equitable services to Australians from all backgrounds. During the last three decades however, subsequent governments have implemented decisions that appear to go against the overarching Multicultural Policy such as:

- Reducing interpreter and translation funding from most non-government community-based agencies that support migrants and refugees.
- Significantly reducing annual migration intake.
- Introducing written citizenship tests which have excluded many people who are not even literate in their own language but are hardworking, tax paying, responsible people. There has been no recognition for their contribution to the Australian economy, social cohesion and fair workplace rights and conditions.
- Actively demonising asylum seekers as burdens on the welfare system, treating them as criminals and locking them up indefinitely in off-shore detention centres. This policy is unjust, inhumane and has increasingly divided the Australian public.
- Ignoring the impact of temporary protection visas on women escaping domestic violence not being allowed to work and support themselves. Being forced to wait lengthy periods for decisions on their visa status by the Department of Home Affairs means they become dependent on the Not-for-Profit community-based sector for housing, financial and other supports. This leads to perceptions in the community that these women may not be legitimately needing protection but instead taking advantage of the Australian welfare system. These misperceptions lead to these women experiencing prejudice and discrimination within the Australian community.
- Not acknowledging the impact of Australian-born children to Australian citizens and temporary visa holders which has enormous implications for the Not-for-Profit sector. Often the community sector has to support the mother and child as the mother is not allowed to work and the Australian born father wishes to have no responsibility for the child and does not pay child support. These regulations also put a drain on the Family Court System, the Welfare (Centrelink) system, Housing, Health etc.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mia.org.au/documents/item/232>



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The damage to social cohesion within Australia and attitudes of mainstream society is also substantial as a result of these policy decisions and actions.

Unfortunately, having people from diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds in a melting pot without programs to support their healthy integration and adaptation into mainstream Australia is likely to be detrimental and create further disadvantages for these minority groups. This could also lead to Australian migrants not feeling welcomed, not included in the wider community or being unable to develop a sense of belonging to Australia. It may also cause them to become very isolated, increase their risk of being discriminated against and abused through poor workplace conditions.

The Australian Multicultural Policy is not monitored, evaluated or audited and government departments are not appropriately resourced to support CaLD people and communities more equitably. Australia needs a labour force to sustain production and improve the services in regional, rural and remote areas and therefore needs to improve the infrastructure and policies to enable the integration of migrants into Australian society.

**Recommendation 1:**  
**Interpreter and translation services must be adequately funded by the Government.**

**Recommendation 2:**  
**Increase migrant intake especially where particular skills and expertise are needed within Australia.**

**Recommendation 3:**  
**Review the requirements of the current Australian Citizenship Test to ensure it is fair and equitable.**

**Recommendation 4:**  
**Urgently end the inhumane policy and practice of indefinitely holding asylum seekers in off-shore detention centres.**

**Recommendation 5:**  
**Review the requirements for temporary protection visa holders, to ensure their safety, health and wellbeing.**

**Recommendation 6:**  
**Review the support mechanisms for children born in Australia, whose parent(s) are temporary visa holders.**

**Recommendation 7:**  
**Provide funding and resources towards programs that support migrants to integrate into Australian society.**



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## **Recommendation 8:**

**Design and implement ongoing monitoring, auditing and evaluation of Australia's Multicultural Policy to ensure it is effective.**

### **(B) The impact of temporary skilled and unskilled migration on Australia's labour market;**

As Australia has an ageing population and birth rates are low, through people on Working Holiday and 457 Visas (since 1996), Australia has been benefiting significantly from the temporary migration of skilled and unskilled labour in regional, rural and remote areas in the mining, farming, construction and services industries. For example, most agricultural towns in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria can only be sustainable through properly managed temporary and permanent migration programs. Most young people from these towns move to larger cities for better education and employment opportunities and the loss of their labour can only be mitigated by increased migration to these areas.

[www.pc.gov.au](http://www.pc.gov.au) › [\\_\\_data](#) › [assets](#) › [pdf\\_file](#) › [sub062-migrant-intake](#)<sup>3</sup>

## **Recommendation 9:**

**Implement temporary migration of skilled and unskilled labour targeted towards rural, regional and remote locations within Australia.**

## **Recommendation 10:**

**Improve infrastructure and supports in rural, regional and remote locations to facilitate integration of migrants in these communities.**

### **(C) Policy responses to challenges posed by the temporary migration;**

It is concerning, that while employers may use their resources to train migrants on temporary visas, these temporary migrants may not be granted permanent visas or be allowed to bring their family to Australia and may have to leave the country after gaining training and experience. This is a waste of limited training resources and the workforce also loses the experience and expertise of the employee. We then have to spend more time and resources to train a new workforce which may not be sustainable for the long term. It would also be difficult to maintain and sustain a workforce if temporary migrants cannot benefit from Australia's Medicare, healthcare, education, and other services equally as everyone else. Australia's temporary and permanent skilled and unskilled migration programs must consider its international obligations and covenants under the Family Stream Migration requirements.

## **Recommendation 11:**

**Federal Government must consider its international obligations and covenants under the Family Stream Migration requirements.**

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## **(D) Whether permanent migration offers better long-term benefits for Australia's economy, Australian workers and social cohesion;**

ECCWA believes that permanent migration may offer long term benefits to Australia's economy and social cohesion. The Government however, needs to fully resource its multicultural policy and programs and build the infrastructure to equitably meet the employment, housing, education, healthcare, disability, aged care and other needs of migrants.

### **Recommendation 12:**

**Federal Government to fully resource the implementation of its Multicultural Policy, to ensure the needs of migrants are met.**

## **(E) The impact of wage theft, breeches of workplace rights and conditions, modern slavery and human trafficking on temporary migrants; and**

Australia has harsh penalties for people who are involved in human trafficking, modern slavery, wage theft, etc but unless a formal complaint is made, there is no regular monitoring of employer practices and their employees work and living conditions. ECCWA believes that many international students and other migrants on temporary visas may be forced to work under inhumane conditions, being paid less than the minimum wage and/or working against their will. There needs to be regular inspections and monitoring of the workplaces and industries where migrants on temporary visas work to prevent wage theft, breaches of workplace rights and conditions, modern slavery and human trafficking.

### **Recommendation 13:**

**Implement a formal monitoring system for employers and industries who specifically employ migrants on temporary visas.**

## **(F) Any related matters.**

A fundamental flaw in the entire system of temporary migration that presently exists, is that accessibility to most taxpayer funded services are restricted to only permanent residents or citizens.

According to a research conducted by Deloitte Access Economics<sup>4</sup>, international students on a temporary visa make up about 60% of Australia's hospitality industry. During the CoVID-19 Pandemic, when restaurants, cafes, hotels, bars, farms, etc closed, international students, employment visa holders and people on working holiday visas were the first to lose their jobs. As they were not permanent residents, they were not eligible for the Federal Government's Jobseeker and Jobkeeper payments. Without a sustainable income, they suffered significantly as they could not pay for essentials including their rent, utility bills and food. As the borders were closed, they could not even return to their own countries. They mainly relied on already under-resourced non-government charity sector for assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.internationaleducation.gov.au](http://www.internationaleducation.gov.au).





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In addition to this, 457 and 450 visa holders and some special category New Zealand visa holder are also not able to access services such as the NDIS, Disability services, Healthcare, Aged care, etc. Temporary visa holders are more often than not tax payers. They are often employed in more than one job, subject to a very high tax rate and yet they are unable to access taxpayer funded services of any kind. Australia's universities and the hospitality industry are highly dependent on temporary visa residents in order to be successful and sustainable. The Australian Government should be assisting this group or be prepared for other countries to advise their residents to reconsider coming to Australia. This will have a significant detrimental impact for Australia's economy.

The Government failed miserably to support temporary visa residents during the CoVID-19 Pandemic only providing a small one-off Emergency Relief payment through the Red Cross. ECCWA strongly argues that regardless of their visa status, temporary residents who are contributing to Australia's economy through the tax-payer system should be treated more humanely and supported like everyone else through all government-funded programs. Australia must adhere to its international obligations and covenants.

## **Recommendation 14:**

**Temporary residents, regardless of their visa status should have access to all government-funded programs.**

## **Key Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1:**

**Interpreter and translation services must be adequately funded by the Government.**

### **Recommendation 2:**

**Increase migrant intake especially where particular skills and expertise are needed within Australia.**

### **Recommendation 3:**

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**Federal Government must consider its international obligations and covenants under the Family Stream Migration requirements.**

**Recommendation 12:**

**Federal Government to fully resource the implementation of its Multicultural Policy, to ensure the needs of migrants are met.**

**Recommendation 13:**

**Implement a formal monitoring system for employers and industries who specifically employ migrants on temporary visas.**

**Recommendation 14:**

**Temporary residents, regardless of their visa status should have access to all government-funded programs.**

## **Closing**

ECCWA commends the Federal Government on publicly seeking views and expertise on this critical area of policy development. ECCWA welcomes the opportunity to provide further advice and input to this enquiry including participation in public hearings or meetings.

For further information on any of the issues or recommendations within this submission please contact Vivienne Pillay, Executive Officer on (08) 9227 5322 or via email [vivienne@eccwa.org.au](mailto:vivienne@eccwa.org.au) or Suresh Rajan President of the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia

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**29 July 2020**