

Australia's 2015 UPR—NGO Coalition Fact Sheet 13

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People and Communities

Disproportionate Levels of Disadvantage

People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia continue to face multiple disadvantages, despite a number of positive developments since the last UPR, including Australia's multicultural policy, *The People of Australia* and Australia's *Multicultural Access and Equity Policy: Respecting Diversity, Improving Responsiveness*.¹

Amongst Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations, Australia has the third highest overseas born population². According to Australian Bureau of Statistics, as of June 2013, the population born overseas is over 25%.³

However, many social indicators reflect the disproportionate disadvantaged position of the culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia. This is especially evident in areas of unemployment or insecure employment, poverty, and access to government services. Unemployment rate of recent migrants (8.5%) is much higher compared to unemployment rate of Australian-born population (4.6%).⁴ Newly arrived migrants, particularly those without English, are more vulnerable to poverty and disadvantage⁵. According to a report of Australian Bureau of Statistics, 38% of skilled migrants, 58% of family stream migrants and 72% of humanitarian stream migrants have incomes of less than \$600 a week. 42% of migrants from the latter group were in the lowest income group (\$1-

\$299 per week. It is also important to note that 22% of the family stream migrants have a negative or nil income.⁶

In addition to these statistics, the disproportionate levels of disadvantage among women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were highlighted in a research conducted by the Fair Work Australia, where 51% of low paid employees were women compared with the total of 47% of the total workforce.⁷ These examples clearly demonstrate the disadvantages and vulnerabilities of the culturally and linguistically diverse people in Australia.

Proposed Recommendation:

Australia should adopt necessary targeted measures to alleviate poverty and increase the economic and social participation of culturally and linguistically diverse communities by enhancing the capacity of culturally and linguistically diverse people and assisting them to enter the Australian workforce.

Equitable Access to Programs and Services

Limited access to Government services deters or discourages people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from cohesively engaging with the Australian community.

The numerous hindrances encountered by culturally and linguistically diverse communities in accessing services include understanding government processes, language barriers such as accessing translating and interpreting services, limited systems knowledge, and lack of specialist service provision to assist culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

¹ *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy; Australia's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy: Respecting Diversity, Improving Responsiveness*.

² OECD data, Foreign Born Population, 2011 <https://data.oecd.org/migration/foreign-born-population.htm>

³ Overseas born population in Australia as of 30th June 2013 was 27.7%. Data accessed at : <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3412.0Chapter12011-12%20and%202012-13>

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Perspectives on Migrants: Characteristics of Recent Migrants*, 2011. Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main+Features22011?OpenDocument>

⁵ Parliament of Australia, Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, *Bridging our Growing Divide: Inequality in Australia* (December 2014), 147.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Understanding Migrant Outcomes – Enhancing the Value of Census Data*, accessed at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3417.0Main%20Features22011?opendocument&tabname=Summary&rodno=3417.0&issue=2011&num=&view=>

⁷ Nels L, Nicholson P, Wheatley T, *Employees earning below the federal minimum wage: review of data, characteristics and potential explanatory factors*, Minimum Wages and Research Branch, Fair Work Australia (2011).

Access to translating and interpreting services is vital when accessing services, however the additional costs attached to using interpreters and unawareness of what services are free of charge, many refrain from obtaining these services.

Given the important role employment plays in social inclusion, specialist job service provision catered for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse people is paramount. There is little clarity around the role of JobActive in this regard.

Inability to access government sponsored supports such as Disability Support Pensions and Age Pensions, where a 10-year waiting period applies for individuals holding permanent residency or temporary visas.

The Multicultural Access and Equity policy⁸ is a key development in terms of social inclusion and access to services. However, there are significant gaps in terms of a whole-of-government approach to the implementation and evaluation of the policy which exacerbate the challenges experienced by Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse population. For example, obligations of government agencies with regards to development and implementation of Agency Multicultural Plans are largely subject to the Government's interpretation and discretion.

Further, the Multicultural Access and Equity framework lacks oversight and enforcement mechanisms to ensure policy implementation by all government agencies. This results in fragmented program design and delivery that does not fully cater to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Proposed Recommendation:
Australia should ensure that the Multicultural Access and Equity is underpinned by a strong social inclusion agenda, and that its implementation is binding on all government programs and agencies, as part of a whole-of-government approach.

Racial Discrimination

Discrimination based on race, ethnic background and religion continue to exclude culturally and linguistically diverse communities from the social participation.

Racial discrimination continues to be a growing issue that affects culturally linguistically diverse people living in Australia. According to the Human

Rights Commission Annual report 2013-14, the human rights commission has received 380 complaints related to Race Discrimination Act which is 17% of the total complaints received by the Commission.⁹ Australia's Social Inclusion Agenda, designed to build a stronger, fairer Australia where everyone regardless of their background has the same opportunities to participate, was discontinued in 2012 with the abolition of the Social Inclusion Board. According to their report *How Australia is Fairing*, the proportion of Australians reporting experiences of discrimination based on skin colour, ethnic origin or religion increased between 2007 and 2011, from 9% to 14%.¹⁰ It must also be noted that there is a lack of detailed statistics around the issues of racial discrimination.

Proposed Recommendation:
Australia should strengthen measures to combat race discrimination, including against incitement of discrimination or violence on racial, ethnic or religious grounds, particularly through education and intercultural dialogue.

⁸ Department of Social Services, Multicultural Access and Equity Policy, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/multicultural-access-and-equity>

⁹ Australia Human Rights Commission, *Annual Report 2013-14*, Table 10, 135.

¹⁰ Australia's Social Inclusion Agenda, *How Australia is Fairing*, 55.