

NEWS



ALL TOGETHER NOW: Migrant contribution recognised

Understanding a key to our future together

Research boost would help guide multicultural policy.

Multiculturalism has enriched and enhanced Australian society over many years, but better research is needed to fully understand its effects and guide the policy into the future.

Those are the findings of a two year inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration.

Committee chair Maria Vamvakinou (Calwell, Vic) said the broad-ranging inquiry clearly showed that despite the vocal opposition of some sections of the community, multiculturalism in Australia has been and continues to be enormously successful.

“Australia, like all societies, is dynamic and can adapt over time to the pressures of changing conditions and differing influences,” Ms Vamvakinou said.

“The positive contribution of migrants, including refugees, to the social, economic and cultural richness of our nation is indisputable.”

The committee made 32 recommendations, centred on improving the research base to inform migration, settlement and support services, and reconfirming social inclusion, anti-racism and intercultural and interfaith understanding as the pillars of Australia’s multiculturalism policy.

The report also confirmed the opposition of the major parties to legal pluralism, addressing the many submissions to the committee concerned about a potential introduction of faith-based legal systems such as Sha’ria law.

Key among the recommendations were calls for a government funded research institute for excellence in research on multicultural affairs and an expansion of the Australian Migrant English Program to provide extra vocational specific English training.

Ms Vamvakinou said better outcomes are likely if the efforts of Australia’s three tiers of government are coordinated and based on good quality information and research.

“The reduction in national research capacity has had a significant impact on the ability of agencies to deliver, monitor and evaluate their efforts,” Ms Vamvakinou said.

“As such, rebuilding research capacity is a priority to ensure policies and programs are well informed, tailored and effective.”

Ms Vamvakinou said settlement and integration services also need to be supported to ensure people and communities do not become isolated from the mainstream and Australia takes best advantage of the skills and abilities of new migrants.

“There are many highly educated and skilled people who come to Australia via the humanitarian program,” she said. “The well-known syndrome of the over-qualified taxi driver needs to be better researched and addressed.

“No-one should be left behind, and Australia can ill afford to waste such expertise.”

Deputy chair Louise Markus (Macquarie, NSW) said the committee welcomed the opportunity to meet people at the grassroots where businesses and local communities were collaborating to improve relationships and build skills and opportunities for people from different backgrounds.

Mrs Markus said there was no doubt immigration has enriched the social, economic and cultural life of our country.

“In Dandenong, the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance is bringing employers and young refugees together; the National Australia Bank’s African Inclusion Program is exemplary; and social enterprises, like The Studio, are inspirational,” Mrs Markus said.

“These initiatives deserve special mention and prove that cooperation, cross-cultural awareness, and commitment provide tangible results.”

Coalition members of the committee supported all recommendations of the report in whole or in principle, qualifying their support for recommendations involving significant new expenditure to only be undertaken within current budgetary parameters. •

LINKS

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