



## Submission to the Review of the Australia's Multicultural Framework

The Canberra Punjabi Sports and Cultural Association Inc (CPSCA) is a not for profit community organisation run by volunteers. The CPSCA appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the review of Australia's Multicultural Framework.

### Questions to the government

Prior to the white settlement, Australia was a multicultural community. There were clans and tribes of First Nation Australians that had their own culture and language. There are reports that the DNA of the First Nation Australians has some Indian DNA indicating further multiculturalism. The Chinese came to work in mines, the camel herders from Afghanistan region brought their camels to the central Australia, and people from neighbouring islands also came to Australia and stayed back. The Punjabi Sikhs from India came to work in sugarcane fields and stayed back.

Although Australia opened its borders to migration in early 70's, large scale skill based migration from around the world started in the late 80's. Hence, it has been only about 40 plus years that white Australia has been significantly exposed to non-white Australians. Since then there has been a lot of references to multiculturalism through legislation, frameworks, and policies. The economic and demographic needs of Australia have made migration a necessity for Australia. But is not clear what is the government's commitment to multiculturalism.

1. What does multiculturalism mean for the government?
2. Why does the government want multiculturalism?
3. What is the government's commitment to multiculturalism and how can it demonstrate it?
4. Can the government become a champion for promoting acceptance and respect for migrants?

### Acceptance vs Tolerance

When migration started, probably the scale of non-white migration was fast and high. There was rapid change in demographics and people may not have had the opportunity to understand and assimilate that the world is changing and Australia has to change too. Perhaps the white Australians struggled to adjust to this rapid change in the society. And somewhere along the way, the word 'tolerate' crept into Australian multiculturalism, a word with negative connotations. It is better to have a society that accepts all, as they are, who they are, rather than just tolerates them.

5. Acceptance should be the norm, not tolerance.

### Inclusiveness and Social Cohesion

We frequently refer to 'inclusiveness' and 'social cohesion' in the context of multiculturalism.

Majority of the decision making bodies do not reflect the demographics of the Australian population such as boards, councils, government committees, legislative assemblies, parliaments, etc. There are people from multicultural backgrounds who have skills and abilities who can contribute productively, if present in these decision making bodies. This will prompt policies and processes that are relevant and practical for the multicultural Australia.

A short visit to a community event, giving speeches about the contribution of a migrant community in their own community does not reflect inclusion and social cohesion. Celebrating community



festivals at places of significance may raise awareness but does it promote inclusiveness and social cohesion?

The heads of states/territories, federal/state/territory multicultural ministers and immigration ministers may host events for different multicultural communities which are symbolic and builds relationships and vote bank. However, does it promote inclusiveness and social cohesiveness?

6. It is important to effectively implement inclusiveness and social cohesion and the government has to take lead by demonstrating it.
7. It would be good to know how they are being implemented by the government?

### **Cultural Differences**

Migrants face a lot of issues when they arrive here. The cultural practices of migrants are different from each other and also from the Caucasian or western practices. Many a times due to a lack of understanding by the administrators, unrequired and hurtful actions get taken that scar the families. For example, it is a common practice in many migrant cultures that the newborn infant sleeps with the parents on the same bed. This is frowned upon as a bad practice in Australia as it is considered unsafe for the child and parents have been chastised in the past.

The food, feeding and child raising practices are also different in migrant families. Provided the child is well fed, healthy and there is no abuse such as physical or neglect, the parents should be allowed to raise their child in their own way.

8. The implementers and policy makers of community service departments, the staff at the child care centres and pre-schools must be educated and made aware about different practices and should allow parents to raise kids as per their culture, in a safe and healthy way.

### **Family Structure**

It is a normal practice in many migrant cultures for a household to have three generations living together in the same house, and sometimes even four generations. It is considered a sign of unity and good upbringing if the generations live together. The parents of a migrant person(s) are part of the family, they are not considered extended family, as in western culture.

In Australia, the accepted practice is to be a nuclear family. The children are also encouraged to leave the house and live independently when they turn 18 years old. It is frowned upon if elderly parents of a couple/person or adult children live in the same house. With such opposite practices, education and awareness is required. There are some challenges for the individuals but the benefits and strengths of such a household are not understood by the policy makers. The economic benefits for the government and better support structures for children and the elderly in such a household outweigh any challenges.

9. It may be beneficial to promote the advantages of having strong family connections and living together in a household. Similar to the different combinations of couples and nuclear families that are acceptable, this should also be accepted and promoted.
10. It would be useful for policy makers and decision takers to understand that parents of a migrant person(s) are part of their family, not extended family. Their awareness and understanding is required to support such families when drafting legislation and policies and taking decisions.



## **Discrimination**

Cultural and religious practices of some migrants may make them look different outwardly from the others such as the headscarf/hijab, turban, hair knot at top of the head by some Sikh youngsters, the kippah, facial hair, symbolic religious accessories, some jewellery accessories, etc. Because of these, kids and youth get subjected to bullying in schools and outside. Adults are also subjected to taunts, disrespect, discrimination and racism.

Migrants have also experienced discrimination when it comes to employment, workplace, and access to services due to not having an Anglo-Saxon name, having a different accent and appearance, and a non-Australian birth place, etc.

These can be addressed by education and raising awareness.

11. The teachers, students and parents need to be educated about respecting and accepting the cultural differences. They need to understand the importance of these practices for the migrant students.
12. Media, TV, government decisions, policies and practices may be used to make the adults aware of the importance of accepting and respecting other cultures and their practices.

## **Australian Values and Legislation**

Sometimes there may be a clash between what and/or how much is acceptable in a migrant culture compared to that in Australia. For example, in some cultures slight smacking of a child as a deterrent or demand for dowry may be acceptable, but in Australia they are not. It is important that when people move to Australia they understand that domestic violence and family abuse, financial abuse, use of coercive tactics, animal abuse, etc are not approved and may lead to criminal charges.

13. The universities need to have a mandatory course which international students should have to pass that makes them aware of such differences and the implications. For those who enter the work force, it must be a mandatory part of their employment induction. Engaging the community leaders, social workers and educating the law enforcement agencies can assist with raising awareness. The media can also be utilised to raise awareness.

## **The spouse/partner/parent/child rights when the migrant PR/citizen dies**

Usually when a person migrates and is a primary applicant, their spouse or partner or parents or children migrate to be with them later but they may not be a PR or a citizen yet. Sometimes they may be subjected to threats and abuse, including financial abuse or in an unfortunate situations, the main applicant (permanent resident or citizen) may die. The spouse/partner/parent/child should be able to have some protection, support and redress.

14. What consideration is given in such a situation?

In many migrant cultures, parents support their children even in their adult lives if there is a need, to the point that they may take loan or sell their assets to educate their children or support them. When the children get employment, they help in paying off the loan or supporting the parents financially with family expenses. It is also a cultural practice that the adult children look after their ageing parents and the ageing parents look after their grandchildren.

In many migrant cultures, the rights of parents are the same as that of the spouse of their adult son or daughter. In Australia, if there is no legal will and the adult child dies and has a spouse or a partner,



the law gives all decision-making and financial rights to the spouse/partner, even if theirs was a recent relationship. The spouse/partner of their dead child may choose not to give any money or help to the parents of the dead spouse. This is unethical and wrong because parents are totally ignored and left to fend for themselves.

15. The parents who have lost their adult child should have equal right as the spouse/partner of their child in decision making and financial matters if there is no legal will.

### **Ageing Migrant Population**

The population of ageing migrants is growing. The nuclear family concept will require many ageing migrants to move into aged care homes. Unfortunately, except for a very small number, a big majority of the aged care homes cater to people of Caucasian and European cultures based on the food, practices and entertainment provided to the residents.

Although the aged care homes are a private business initiative with government subsidy, it is difficult for a community to get it established unless someone sees it as a profitable business proposition and has interest in developing it.

16. Government supported community cooperatives may be developed and may be able to run culturally appropriate aged care homes in the absence of private businesses,

### **Leave for special cultural or religious days**

Migrants have come to Australia from all over the world and have their own religious and cultural practices. They have their own festivals which they celebrate. It would be considered equitable if they were able to celebrate their cultural and religious festivities without having to take days off from their annual leave.

17. All employees should be able to access two days of cultural/religious leave without having to use their annual leave.

### **Multicultural Community Venue**

In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Queanbeyan region NSW, there is a dearth of suitable and affordable multicultural community facilities for having gatherings of 500 or over where the communities can hold their events/functions and do their own catering. The venues should be such that the parking and noise should not disturb the residents. As the community events are usually family oriented, it is imperative that the venue is safe, appropriate and affordable, there is adequate parking and the communities do not have to compete with commercial entities to access the venue.

18. The ACT needs a safe, adequate, available and affordable venue to hold community events by the communities.

### **Multicultural Community Centre**

In the ACT, the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre was fit for purpose when it was built. Since then the demographics have changed, population of the ACT has increased significantly and the Centre is no longer adequate to meet the community needs.

19. The ACT needs a multicultural centre on the lines of the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre that meets the growing needs of the multicultural community now and in the near future.



## **Venue for Outdoor Activities**

There is no venue in the ACT where community organisations can hold affordable large-scale outdoor events without disturbing the residents with noise and parking. The communities should not have to compete with commercial entities.

20. The ACT needs at least one affordable and appropriate outdoor venue for sports fairs, festivals and other large scale community events (5000+ people) at a location where residents are not disturbed by noise and parking.

## **Community Organisations, Volunteers and Grants**

The migrant community groups are run and managed by volunteers who have other responsibilities like jobs and their family commitments. They also have to find time to organise community activities, apply for suitable grants, provide submissions, attend consultations, organise their own meetings, comply with regulatory requirements, do fund raising, find sponsors, try to be inclusive, etc. The volunteers use their own assets for their community organisation. On top of that, the grants provided are too small to make a difference but the work required to comply with acquittal outweighs any little benefit.

21. The volunteers and community organisations can be supported to make their work easier.

## **Avoid Silos and Getting Siloed**

As migrants, people come with their cultural practices and religions. It is important that the migrant groups do not get siloed through their own actions, their community or that of the Australian society, people do not bring their divisive agendas to Australia and create unrest in the Australian society.

22. The various communities can be encouraged to be open, engaging and participative in the broader Australian society and give respect and acceptance to others.
23. Do the residents of Australia need to be reminded regularly of their civic rights and duties towards each other, the society and the country they live in?

Multiculturalism is not just about having access to and enjoying various cuisines, festivals, religions and music, it is much more than that. It requires acceptance, effective inclusiveness and social cohesion, change in thinking and education, and above all, respecting the cultures and their cultural practices and making room for them. It is a two-way street which can be traversed safely when Australian values and laws are abided by all while the decision makers and society stays open, respectful, welcoming, and willing to learn about migrant cultures and be flexible.

I see the Australian multicultural society as a tapestry that has a strong frame and the various cultures are like the colourful threads in a tapestry that together form a beautiful scenery called Australia.

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