

ADI

ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR
CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION



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Submission made to the “**Multicultural Framework Review – Terms of Reference**”.

To the Secretariat,

The Department of Home Affairs will provide the Secretariat to the Review Panel.
Parliament House -Canberra ACT 2600
Commonwealth of Australia

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this submission are those of Professor Fethi Mansouri and do not formally represent the views of Deakin University as an institution.

Context

Australia is often invoked as a relatively successful multicultural society. Yet, multiculturalism - as a policy aimed at managing migration programs and ensure positive social cohesion outcomes for the nation- is in need of urgent rethink and possible recalibration. Whilst Australia remains at the forefront of progressive diversity management policies that were initiated almost fifty years ago, there are strong signs backed by empirical evidence that the policy levers and institutional settings are in need of a significant recalibration. Despite the overall public support for diversity and multiculturalism, research has shown that there are persistent even growing

levels of racism in the Australian society that have become more salient with the rise of right wing extremist ideologies that reject any manifestation of cultural and religious difference.

This review of the Multicultural Framework is therefore most welcome, and I am pleased to make a few points in relation to the proposed Terms of Reference. The Review of the Multicultural Framework states that it will consider the following issues:

1. the effectiveness of existing federal:
 - **legislative** and regulatory frameworks
 - **policy** settings and programs
 - **interactions** with communities
 - **services** designed to support multicultural Australia and how these interact with state and local government settings.
2. **roles and functions** of government and non-government organisations respectively. They will also consider appropriate relationships between them, ensuring effective planning and provision of programs and services to multicultural communities.
3. the effectiveness of current federal **diversity, equity and inclusion** strategies. This ensures the Australian Public Service workforce reflects multicultural Australia.
4. identifying **areas for reform** to address any systemic barriers preventing people from multicultural communities from participating in Australian society. This includes second generation plus migrants.

Research undertaken within the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) and elsewhere has shown that the four areas identified above are at once inter-connected, inter-dependent and critical for sustaining successful implementation of migration programs whilst sustaining social cohesion. But the two key areas that I would like to highlight as extremely important dimensions of ToR relate to point 1 above as well as (at least partially) point 4. These need to be made even more salient and visible in the final ToR and ought to be placed at the heart of discussions and public hearings as the review starts to engage with communities, industry, experts and other stakeholders.

Firstly, in terms of the existence of supportive legislative and policy settings, the situation in Australia remains inadequate on a number of levels. Firstly, many experts, practitioners and spokespeople for migrant communities have called on the federal government to think seriously about a **federal multicultural act** that can provide macro-level leadership and clarity on societal expectations and aspirations in relation to multiculturalism and its consequent forms of diversity. Other jurisdictions overseas, for example Canada, and even domestically for example the state government of Victoria have adopted such multicultural acts and this has not in any way led to a weakening of social cohesion nor to migrants leading segregated lives. At a time when new forms of discrimination are emerging including within digital platforms and across social media, it is more critical now than ever before for a strong and unequivocal articulation of the kind of society we aspire to be. And given that Australia has become for the

first time in its modern history, a migrant majority society, an in-principled federal manifesto with accompanying detailed enabling strategies would serve the nation well as it moves towards a respectful, genuine and meaningful engagement with all the diverse groups and communities that make up the totality of the nation.

And needless to say, the federal multicultural act needs to be considered in the context of the even more important and long overdue **constitutional recognition of Indigenous** claims around voice, justice and representation.

And the need to reform and indeed strengthen the legislative and regulatory frameworks extend to **existing anti-discrimination laws**. Indeed the 1975 Anti-discrimination Act, though represents a momentous milestone at the time, has not caught up with more contemporary forms of racism and hate-based crimes that are afflicting many members of our migrants communities in particular those racialized groups such as African communities, Muslim-Australians, Pacific-Islanders, and of course Indigenous Australians. From both academic research on contemporary manifestations of racism in Australia today (see for example Elias, Mansouri and Paradies (2021) *Racism in Australia Today*, Palgrave) as well as more anecdotal evidence, it is clear current anti-discrimination laws place too heavy a burden on victims to prosecute racially motivated hate crimes in ways that discourage reporting in the first place. Prosecuting hate crimes is one of the many levers needed to combat this blight on Australia's reputation, but it is an absolutely essential tool that can complement other tools (education, political leadership, media reporting etc...) in ensuring the fight against racism, discrimination and bigotry can be more successful.

Secondly, in relation to the dot points pertaining to **services and programs for supporting multicultural Australia**: these are important questions that need to be examined both historically (regarding the shift towards more mainstream service provision models) as well as horizontally in terms of the impact of such shifts on social integration and community cohesion.

Public and academic discourses about social service provision for multicultural communities tend to use a binary approach whereby service providers are categorised as either mainstream or multicultural. Mainstream services often cater to the whole population (normally including non-English speaking background communities) while multicultural (or ethno-specific) services try to accommodate exclusively migrant communities, in particularly recently arrived groups. But as our research at ADI has shown (see for example Mansouri, F., E. Weng & M. Vergani (2022), 'Australia's growing cultural diversity requires a long-term strategy to meet its changing needs'. *Melbourne Asia Review*), service provision to multicultural Australia remains both fragmented, lacking in systematic coordination and is often depicted in an unhelpful binary duality. *The* reality, however, is that service provision on the ground seems to occur across a spectrum, with services providers often adopting a hybrid model to meet the changing needs of diverse service users.

Overall, there are two main lessons to take away from our research findings. The first is that there are many multicultural service providers with high multicultural capacity that are based on very insecure funding models. These are the multicultural service providers that are also key in supporting new, emerging communities, even though they have less secure forms of funding compared to mainstream service providers. This funding insecurity can mean a disruption in the staffing and resources required to ensure a continuity of care for these communities.

The second is that, in the plethora of service provision modes for multicultural communities, the service providers that have high multicultural capacity and are securely funded are primarily aged care and settlement services providers. The needs of the post-war generation of migrants are well-covered through aged care provision. Despite bilingual worker shortages in some of these communities, overall the situation for this demographic cohort is satisfactory with service providers such as Fronditha Care (Greek), Co.As.It (Italian), and the Australian Multicultural Community Services (multicultural aged care) all playing a vital role in ensuring culturally and linguistically sensitive care. Similarly, providers of settlement services, such as Migrant Resource Centres (SMRC) and Settlement Services International, are mostly funded through federal funding, and have significant bicultural workers to support newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants.

These are two important issues that need to be approached with an open mind by policy-makers in order for the nation to heal, come together and move forward with empathy, solidarity and mutual understanding.

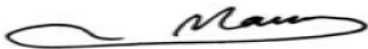
Other possible ToR that need to be considered as part of this review relate to Australia's **research capacity and current practice around migration/diversity data collection.**

There is indeed a critical gap in Australia in relation to **using scientific research evidence as basis for informed policy and practice.** As we have argued in previous public inquiry submissions and research publications, and unlike other countries such as Canada and New Zealand, Australia has not as yet fully updated and recalibrated the way multiculturalism and migration are understood and managed in ways that reflect changing global realities. Good multicultural policies and migration systems will be crucial in managing future prosperity and in supporting the long-term recovery of the Australian economy from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A reframed multicultural policy with stronger federal legislative framework as well as a fit-for-purpose, modern migration system will help in driving stronger social cohesion outcomes as well as offsetting the long-term structural problems of population ageing. The review should logically lead to significant strategic investment in building a strong research base for Australia in achieving an even more equitable and inclusive multicultural society as well as in understanding, even predicting shifting drivers, patterns and manifestations of emerging migration trends.

Finally, as I have argued in recent publications (Mansouri, F. 2023, 'The future of migration, multiculturalism and diversity in Australia's post-COVID-19 social recovery', *Social Sciences and Humanity Open*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2022.100382>) key challenges remain in the multicultural and migration policy space in particular new drivers of mobility and diversity such as climate change, tectonic technological transformations, structural demographic shifts, increased urbanisation, a declining public trust in political institutions, and shifting geopolitical dynamics in our region in particular the implications of the rise of China and more broadly Asia.

This review, and whatever policy action that might emanate from it, must deal with this twin challenge of ensuring strong and unequivocal legislative settings in particular in relation to some kind of a federal multicultural act, as well as committing to a sustainable support services for multicultural communities that respond to the changing needs of migrants communities across socio-religious, inter-generational and socio-economic variables.

Yours sincerely



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