



**UNESCO Chair for
Comparative Research
on Cultural Diversity
and Social Justice**

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Submission made to the **“Multicultural Framework Review”**

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.

1. Context:

Further to my earlier submission to the Terms of Reference for the Multicultural Framework Review (MFR) (March 2023), and my appearance before the Review Panel on 28 August 2023, I am pleased to make this submission to the MFR. This submission will emphasise some key arguments and issues already made whilst introducing some new points around overall research capacity in this space and the critical importance of capturing and collecting robust data about migration and diversity in Australia.

I would like to start by saying that this Multicultural Framework Review is at once a timely and a most welcome opportunity to reflect on, discuss and hopefully recalibrate Australia’s approach to multicultural policy, intercultural relations, migrant settlement and diversity

governance. I have already discussed and highlighted in my previous submission the critical importance of the following interconnected issues:

1. The extent to which existing regulatory frameworks are effective, including for example:
 - **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. **Clarity around the roles and functions** of government and non-government organisations respectively in the effective planning and provision of programs and services to multicultural communities.
3. Adequacy and effectiveness of current federal **diversity, equity and inclusion** strategies, as reflected, for example, in demographic and cultural representations of the Australian Public Service workforce (and the extent to which this reflects multicultural Australia).
4. The identification of **areas for reform** in order to address any systemic barriers preventing people from multicultural communities from participating in Australian society, in particular in so far as second generation plus migrants are concerned.

This submission focuses on four key areas for reform and improvement in the multicultural regulatory and policy-making space. These are, in no order of priority: i) the importance of a strong research and evidence base for policy making; ii) the necessity of a federal legislative act for multicultural Australia; iii) the critical importance of culturally appropriate service provision to multicultural communities; and iv) the necessity of reinvigorating and relaunching a national anti-racism strategy with enabling resources and implementation strategies.

2. The importance of research evidence:

Good policy making in any area of public life requires reliable data and empirical evidence to ensure appropriate design, successful implementation and optimal impact. This is particularly the case in migration and diversity governance areas, where policy must be attuned to the changing, dynamic needs of individuals and communities at different times along their settlement and integration journeys. Research undertaken within the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) and elsewhere has shown the critical role of empirical evidence for designing policies conducive to engineering successful implementation of migration programs whilst sustaining social cohesion.

Discussing multiculturalism cannot be undertaken without a strong engagement with migration systems, from processing migration visas to the settlement and integration of newly-arrived migrants. Historically, migration has supported nation building and benefited the whole of Australian society and economy. It has driven extraordinary prosperity since

WWII and today it continues to supply two-thirds of population growth in a nation where 'populate or perish' has been the macro-economic motto for decades. More critically, migration and its consequent diversity fuels Australia's knowledge economy and drives innovation and entrepreneurship. A new, recalibrated multicultural framework is important because it will sustain migration programs and migrant integration – critical dimensions that will continue to help the nation address skills shortages in vital sectors and offset the country's ageing population. Furthermore, immigration and diversity sustain Australia's cosmopolitan identity, creating human connections to every country on earth and making Australia one of the world's most liveable places.

However, human migration can have unintended consequences that need to be anticipated and managed. For example, and according to the 2021 census data, about half of all Australians today are born either overseas or to a migrant parent. Yet we still have some challenges in ensuring that the nation as a whole is fully behind the migration/multicultural program. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples have never been consulted about the nature of the migration/multicultural agenda, and recent research shows that two in five Australians say the country receives too many immigrants. Against this background, Australia still lacks a consistent vision for migration and multiculturalism and still maintains a refugee intake system established more than fifty years ago when Vietnamese refugees were the face of the so-called 'boat people' crisis. Now is the time to invest in updating the migration/multiculturalism system as a whole to ensure we have an overall approach that is fit for purpose.

3. The necessity of a federal legislative act for multicultural Australia:

In terms of the existence of supportive legislative and policy settings, the situation in Australia remains inadequate on a number of levels. Indeed, 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-principle 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.

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.

4. Reinvigorating and relaunching a national anti-racism strategy:

Racism and discrimination are one of the **most pressing and pernicious social problems affecting the international community today, with Australia being no exception**. Australia, a country settled through European colonial invasion and populated by immigrants from all over the globe, has a history of fraught race relations and racism, enduring since the beginning of white settler colonialism in 1788. In recent papers and projects undertaken with colleagues in the ADI and in collaboration with colleagues from other tertiary institutions, we argue that in Australia, **racism remains historically and structurally entrenched**. Using primary and secondary source data, we further show that racism remains interpersonally pervasive with harmful consequences across various life spheres, spanning areas as broad as economic participation, justice and incarceration, and health and wellbeing.

Under the **White Australia policy**, the country enacted racism as an explicit, institutionalised state policy, restricting non-white immigration and facilitating an Anglo-European cultural privilege that to date limits the inclusion of non-Anglo Australians across multiple sectors. Racism in Australia derived initially from colonial extraction, exploitation, expropriation, and competition with Indigenous peoples, and later extended into discrimination and exclusion of different immigrant populations. Recently, we have seen racism directed towards numerous ethnic, racial, national, religious, and migrant groups, while colonisation and profound structural racism towards Indigenous peoples continue to have devastating effects in all areas of life.

The need to reform and indeed strengthen the legislative and regulatory frameworks should also extend to **existing anti-discrimination laws**. Indeed, the 1975 Anti-discrimination Act, although it represented a momentous milestone at the time, has not caught up with more contemporary forms of racism and hate-based crimes that afflict many members of our migrant communities – in particular those racialised 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 book *Racism in Australia Today*, Palgrave) as well as more anecdotal evidence, it is clear that current anti-discrimination laws place such a heavy burden on victims to prosecute racially motivated hate crimes that they 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.

Against the context described above, there has been a **renewed commitment from the Federal and state governments to addressing racism** through proactive anti-racism strategies and programs (see for example the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) recent National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF 2022); State Government of Victoria, 2021). Yet, as argued earlier, robust, high-quality data remain crucial for understanding racism and also for informing anti-racism action. The AHRC has emphasised the importance of racism data among its key priorities and argued that this is crucial (i) to identifying the prevalence, severity and impact of racism; (ii) in nuancing collective understandings of racism necessary for enacting anti-racism; (iii) in raising awareness about the extent of racism and inequity; and (iv) in securing resources for addressing racism (AHRC, 2022: 8, 11). As we have shown in previous publications from within our Alfred Deakin Institute, similar discussions underlining the importance of data for anti-racism policies have been unfolding both domestically (e.g., Parliament of Victoria, 2021; see Recommendations 34–35) and internationally (e.g., European Commission, 2020; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022).

All of this points to the paramount importance of a **renewed anti-racism strategy** that is anchored within a strong research framing and built upon a robust empirical evidence basis.

5. The critical importance of culturally appropriate service provision:

In relation to issues 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's 2022 paper, 'Australia's growing cultural diversity requires a long-term strategy to meet its changing needs'. *Melbourne Asia Review*), service provision to multicultural Australia remains fragmented and 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 (MRC) and Settlement Services International, are mostly funded through federal funding, and have significant bicultural workers to support newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants.

6. Some concluding observations:

In addition to the urgent activities discussed above, there are a number of other possible reform areas that need to be considered and prioritised as part of this review relating to Australia's **research capacity and current practice around migration/diversity data collection**.

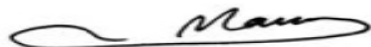
There is a critical gap in Australia in relation to **using scientific research evidence as a basis for informed policy and practice**. As we have argued in previous public inquiry submissions and research publications, and unlike other countries such as Canada and New Zealand, Australia has not as yet 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 a 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.

We continue to highlight the interconnected nature of the reform areas and action items articulated above and indeed elsewhere in publications and research dissemination outputs. For example, 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>) that **key challenges remain unaddressed** in the multicultural and migration policy space, in particular regarding our understanding of new drivers of mobility and diversity. Such new drivers include, among others, 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.

In focussing on the legislative, research, service support and anti-racism strategy, this submission does not understate the importance of other action items such as post-arrival settlement programs, the much-needed connection with Indigenous recognition aspirations or the key role for government-community partnerships in this space. Indeed, the current MFR, and whatever policy actions might emanate from it, must deal with the interconnected challenges of ensuring **strong and unequivocal legislative settings** (particularly in relation to some kind of a federal multicultural act), as well as committing to **sustainable support services for multicultural communities** that respond to the changing needs of migrant communities across socio-religious, inter-generational and socio-economic variables.

Yours sincerely



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