



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Migrant settlement outcomes

WEDNESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2017

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Wednesday, 13 September 2017

Members in attendance: Mr Neumann, Ms Vamvakinou, Mr Wood.

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Migrant settlement outcomes with reference to:

- the mix, coordination and extent of settlement services available and the effectiveness of these services in promoting better settlement outcomes for migrants;
- national and international best practice strategies for improving migrant settlement outcomes and prospects;
- the importance of English language ability on a migrant's, or prospective migrant's, settlement outcome;
- whether current migration processes adequately assess a prospective migrant's settlement prospects; and
- any other related matter.

The Committee shall give particular consideration to social engagement of youth migrants, including involvement of youth migrants in anti-social behavior such as gang activity, and the adequacy of the Migration Act 1958 character test provisions as a means to address issues arising from this behaviour.

WITNESSES

AYKAN, Mr Nail, Executive Director, Islamic Council of Victoria..... 1

MOHIDEEN, Mohamed, President, Islamic Council of Victoria..... 1

SALMAN, Mr Adel, Vice President, Islamic Council of Victoria 1

AYKAN, Mr Nail, Executive Director, Islamic Council of Victoria

MOHIDEEN, Mohamed, President, Islamic Council of Victoria

SALMAN, Mr Adel, Vice President, Islamic Council of Victoria

Committee met at 10:08

CHAIR (Mr Wood): I declare open the public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration. In accordance with the committee's resolution of 12 October 2016, this hearing will be broadcast on the parliament's website, and proof and official transcripts of proceedings will be published on the parliament's website. Those present here today are advised that filming and recording are permitted during the hearing. I also remind members of the media who may be present or listening on the web of the need to fairly and accurately report the proceedings of the committee.

I now call on representatives of the Islamic Council of Victoria to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and, therefore, has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard, and attracts parliamentary privilege. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to discussions.

Mr Mohideen: The Islamic Council of Victoria is the peak Muslim body in Victoria representing an estimated 200,000 Muslims and over 60 member societies from over 70 diverse ethnic communities. ICV offers advocacy and social welfare services while also leading state and national initiatives on social cohesion through community consultation, and provides advice to government at all levels.

The Australian Muslim population is increasingly diverse. New migrant communities are establishing themselves and experiencing major growth, and with it challenges of settlement and integration. The ICV offers social and religious leadership via welfare services, community engagement of people of all faith communities, and contributing to building a more cohesive society.

ICV welcomes this opportunity to provide recommendations and advice to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into migration settlement outcomes. ICV believes Australia's migration settlement story is largely a positive one and cautions against any distractions to its migration policy and review of its settlement services, especially by the way of linking migration with youth crime and youth gang activity. ICV is concerned by any references and connections made in the current inquiry with isolated incidents of youth violence amongst some segments of Australia's youth.

The focus by the media on the visible minority and linking this to a broader picture of migration settlement outcomes serve only to undermine what is otherwise a successful migration program. The ICV believes that these incidents serve only to distract from the inquiry. The focus instead should be on what assists young people to feel a sense of belonging, community and work. Migrants continue to face prejudice, despite figures that indicate that they may be less likely to commit crime. There is a false widespread notion that recently arrived youth have some connection to criminal or antisocial behaviour, which is completely inaccurate. Some would argue that white young males are more likely to be committing crime than a particular recently arrived community. We are not seeing the vilification happen across cultures but rather specifically and unfairly targeted.

Research from the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW found that young people in New South Wales who spoke a language other than English were less likely to be involved in crime than their English-speaking counterparts. Victorian youth born overseas were also less than half as likely to be alleged offenders compared with other young people.

In a recent research project partnered with the Victoria University the IC found that Muslim community organisations play a key role in helping migrants from multicultural backgrounds to settle and succeed in Australia socially, politically and economically through their range of services and opportunities for members to become active in their community. This is in stark contrast to the perceptions that mosques, for example, are only places of worship. In fact, they are meeting a gap created by the lack of credible social research data on social services provision to Muslim communities.

In another research project with RMIT University's Centre for Global Research the IC found that people living in more diverse suburbs are less likely to express or experience Islamophobia. The report emanating from the project recommended that further strengthening of the English language and employment programs for migrants in diverse relatively disadvantaged areas can benefit the wider community.

Our overall recommendations to the committee are that it should clearly reject the political discourse that demonises refugees and people seeking asylum. The committee should publicly recognise the need to support and invest in the inclusion of young people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds, and reject the harmful media stereotyping that fosters the exclusion from our community.

Furthermore, the committee should ensure it hears from refugee communities themselves as to the best ways to improve their settlement outcomes, learning lessons from previous generations of refugees and humanitarian entrants. The IC is pleased to make the following six specific recommendations to the inquiry. Education is the key to successful integration of migrants, and the government must take a long-term view of investment in education for migrants and their children. Therefore, greater funding for community education programs to address key settlement issues and more flexible English language practices is needed.

There is the need to combat racism in all forms and the need for better support of families adjusting to new cultures. Local government should be supported in an initiative to settle refugees and humanitarian entrants through increased funding to enable them to provide basic essential services. The government should increase the level of funding available to refugee community based organisations within the settlement grants program. Ethnic, multicultural and multifaith peak organisations should be resourced to provide relevant policy advice to improve the way the government policies and lead agencies, for example, law enforcement, engage with diverse communities to strengthen community trust and confidence. There needs to be greater research into settlement outcomes for humanitarian migrants to identify gaps in settlement services to inform government policy and funding priorities. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for coming up here today and for your submission. In regard to issues affecting young people—and I know we have met before and had discussions—when it comes to young people and making sure they do not get involved in crime and they do not fall out of the community and get disengaged—we are going to have to adjourn. We will be back.

Proceedings suspended from 10:16 to 10:30

CHAIR: We will continue. When it comes to kids, what is the best way to support a young person and make sure they do not go down the wrong path? We have heard from a number of groups who have given evidence about how important getting involved in sport is, and activities like that or youth workers. What is your position on that?

Mr Aykan: The Muslim community is fundamentally or predominantly a very young population with two-thirds under the age of 35. Half of the population is born in what we call the post-9/11 era. It is a different era from the one that we grew up in. The environment is different and a bit more challenging. A lot of youth, Muslim youth in particular, are made to feel like the other—not very Australian.

I boil it down to the three Es. One is education, one is engagement and one is empowerment. With regard to education, it is about training. It is about programs, whether it is leadership programs or mentorship. There is a range of programs that we could roll out. With regard to engagement, it is a two-way street. We should not just be telling them what we believe is in their best interests. We should consult them. We should have codesign processes where we get their input and hear from them on what they believe their solutions are. With empowerment, rather than us doing it for them we should empower youth to be the leaders of their own destiny. I personally boil it down to the three Es—education, engagement and empowerment.

CHAIR: Do you think we need more Muslim youth workers?

Mr Aykan: Absolutely. One of the things the Islamic Council of Victoria feels it lacks is skill sets in youth workers and resources. It is all about resources. We could have the best plans and a lot of goodwill/support, but unless we have what I call the field soldiers on the ground in the grassroots engaging with the people we are trying to work with, it will not work. The youth workers are essential. We have a proposal where we train a number of Muslim youth workers who will be ready to go out into the community, engaging with Muslim youth when we are rolling out a multitude of programs. They are essential.

CHAIR: Can you make that submission available to the committee?

Mr Aykan: Absolutely. I can give you a copy.

CHAIR: When do you foresee that person being engaged? Is it the troubled kid who you think will go off the rails or is it more just to provide overall support? How do you foresee it being used?

Mr Salman: I think both. I think youth workers provide essential first response, if you like, for troubled youth, but also more generally. They engage in a whole range of community programs. Where I have seen it work very well with other communities with youth workers is that they actually get involved in the normal programs

that youth undertake—community programs, sporting programs, mentoring programs and leadership programs—as Mr Aykan referred to before. I do not think we should pigeonhole. I think it should be a range, and they should be equipped with the skills to be able to deal with those different types of scenarios.

CHAIR: When it comes to youth workers, how important is it to have a Muslim youth worker to help a Muslim young person?

Mr Mohideen: People relate very well to their own community. They feel a sense of belonging and a sense of understanding as well. That is one of the key aspects. You hear the statement, 'That person does not listen to me.' I think young people like to be heard and like to be taught to be responsible in this area. I think with a youth worker from their own background half the battle is won.

CHAIR: Mr Neumann, do you have another question on this?

Mr NEUMANN: It is on that very point. You raised faith based organisations. How can the federal government work with them and why are they best placed to help young people, particularly in the local communities?

Mr Mohideen: When a young new migrant comes into Australia one of the key things he seeks is his faith and his community, because there is a sense of settlement, a sense of belonging and a sense of understanding, 'I am part and parcel of this bigger picture', which is Australian society. They see the positives. They see successful people and they look at them as role models as well. I think it is important that you engage communities. For example, with the Islamic Council of Victoria lots of youth come to us with various issues. We can talk with them. We can help them as well. They see there are success stories. We can also show them success stories among their peers. That is one of the key elements.

Mr NEUMANN: What services do you deliver specifically across this area that help integrate young people in particular? You said that two-thirds of your community are under 35. How can you engage with the younger and older people? What do you think works best?

Mr Aykan: Currently the ICV is running a series of youth programs, funded from both federal and state. Our biggest focus is really on youth. We have what you may call proactive and reactive programs. Reactive programs are generally in the problem solving area, whether it is a prison chaplaincy or other social issue.

With youth it is all about relationships. The bedrock of relationships is trust and confidence. In order for youth to be able to want to engage and be accessible for us to reach they have to have trust and confidence in the people they are working with. Trust takes a while to establish. As to having trained Muslim youth workers, we believe with the cultural sensitivity/understanding that comes with those individuals we will not need to waste time building up trust. Trust is won in credibility and confidence is won in capacity to deliver. Relationships here are critical and, therefore, the essential need to have qualified youth workers is fundamental.

Mr NEUMANN: Can I pick up something which we haven't had submissions in during the course of this inquiry but that I picked up from your very fine annual report 2015-16, and that is the interfaith aspect. While Australia is a very secular society, there is still a majority of people who believe in a supreme being of some description—narrowly—and many of those adhere to a Christian faith of some description—Catholic, Anglican, Uniting, Pentecostal or whatever. In the ICV you seem to have a lot of interfaith activities.

Mr Mohideen: It is huge.

Mr NEUMANN: Friendship walks, interfaith dinners, interfaith mosque visits, a winter conference, e-breakfast, and a national mosque open day story. How does that help in settlement services and should we be looking to promote interfaith services with Islamic, Christian, Jewish and other religious bodies to assist in settlement services?

Mr Mohideen: Interfaith dialogue is a key important aspect of any community. The mutual respect for each other and the support that comes from each other as well. As migrants, many of us come from areas where there is a multicultural society, where there is respect for each other's faith as well, and there is a lot of interaction. But some of them come from areas where they have been persecuted and they come over here. But they see the success stories of interfaith dialogue taking place here. For example, last year I was on a journey to Jerusalem, four Christians, four Muslims and four Jews.

Mr NEUMANN: Very interfaith in Jerusalem.

Mr Mohideen: It was wonderful. We hear all of the negativity out there. While we were in Jerusalem we met young people from all three faiths working together trying to achieve peace.

Mr NEUMANN: As to that experience that you had in Jerusalem, should we be funding, for example, services that promote interfaith dialogue? Does that facilitate and enhance settlement services and help integration?

Mr Salman: The key thing, before all of that, is recognition of the important role faith plays in communities. I think that is more important. Any government policies or programs that recognise the centrality of faith in many of the communities in Australia, and particularly the Muslim community, obviously, is important.

When we are dealing with the Muslim community, youth or even problems within the Muslim community, recognising that the faith perspective is a very important consideration that should be brought to bear in delivery of services is very important. You talk about the appropriateness of having Muslim youth workers/social workers. Faith based organisations dealing with members of the Muslim community is really important, because they actually have that understanding. It comes naturally to them. They understand the particular sensitivities, the framework and the mindsets.

Sometimes when Muslim community members are engaging with non-Muslim parts of service provision they often feel that their particular needs are not understood. They also feel that sometimes their particular needs or perspectives are—and maybe 'discredited' is a strong word—not given any real importance. That can be a challenge. It comes back to the issue of belonging. People need to belong so they can feel like they can contribute.

CHAIR: There was an issue that arose when the committee was overseas. In Germany they had for the Muslim community a hotline. In Australia, we have the National Terrorism Hotline. However, this was a hotline for family members concerned about someone else who may be showing extremist views. It could be an employer. So, someone could ring up. Obviously, if it was a dangerous or severe case of a person is going to carry out a terrorist act, that would go to the police. But most of the time it was more just to get the youth worker in and some community support. What is your view about, if someone has a concern with a family member, ringing up the National Terrorism Hotline compared with some other hotline?

Mr Salman: We fundamentally believe that families require support. ICV places a real emphasis on providing family support. We have developed a concept in partnership with an Australian university which basically is around our own crisis services, to provide families with an opportunity to call someone, to engage with someone, if they have concerns about a family member. It is not about reporting them to the authorities. In fact, their whole aim is to deal with it as a community and provide the troubled person, in particularly youth, with the support they need to work through the issues. It could be issues to do with drugs, disenfranchisement, delinquency or whatever the case may be. Obviously, radicalisation could also be a factor here. What we want to do in the ICV is actually keep youth in particular out of the criminal justice system.

Mr Aykan: An in-house solution.

Mr Salman: In-house solution. Community led solutions. That is why we put forward this proposal. We think this is a ground-breaking proposal. It is meant to create a sustainable capacity within the Muslim community to deal with these sorts of issues. We recognise there is a gap.

CHAIR: One issue—and obviously there has been talk about this between us out of this session—is that we had the Attorney-General's Department come in last week. They were talking about programs when someone has been identified who may be demonstrating extremist views. They said that they would work with them in a voluntary capacity to give them support, help and everything else like that. I have two questions. Firstly, have you had interaction with state or federal government over programs to assist someone who may be showing extremist views? I know it is a very small percentage of people. Maybe if you can answer that first. Are you aware of working with the government or police in regard to that?

Mr Aykan: We have several programs running concurrently. One particular one, which is now public knowledge, is what is called CISP, which stands for Community Integration Support Program, which is essentially a prison chaplaincy program tailor made to those who are convicted on terrorism related offences. We have been running that. It was initially funded by the Attorney-General in partnership with the Victorian Police. That was an internal prison program for the first four years. Recently, over the last couple of years, we have been expanding that outside. It has been a very successful program. However, it is a very minute proportion of the total. We have experience—

CHAIR: So you were approached? So, the community is working closely with government?

Mr Aykan: That is the success. As I think George Brandis and a few other ministers recently mentioned, about 13 cases of potential terrorism related incidents have been thwarted because of the working relationships with the Muslim leadership. Through our working relationships with all forms and all tiers of government, we are working with the government on prevention. Also, we are very mindful that in addition to preventive programs

we are also focused heavily on capacity building and training with average idle youth who are looking for direction and who are looking for guidance. That is kind of like the tail end. People who enter into that space are at the tail end.

CHAIR: Yes. So, youth workers are very important. I asked the Attorney-General's Department: if we have a person who has extremist views and they don't want to engage in a voluntary capacity—and I know the deputy chair had Benbrika in her electorate—but are not committing any criminal offence, in fact they could be trying to engage other young people to share their extreme views, or you may have a young person whose workmates are concerned they are going down a certain path. The notion I raised before is potential community protection intervention orders. It would work in a similar way to family violence—and I am going to ask your opinion on this—where, say, you have a young person who is trying to recruit other people with extremist views, potentially the police could go before a magistrate and give the evidence why they are concerned about this person. The magistrate could make a number of orders that they could no longer go and hang out at a mosque and try to recruit people or maybe keep away from social media or hanging around with other people who may be a bad influence. Potentially the order could also direct that they receive counselling from an imam or someone else in the Muslim community. What are your thoughts on that? Is that something you are open to?

Mr Salman: We would need to know a lot more about this before we make any comment. I have a couple of general statements. We would support any initiatives, programs or policies that build community trust. We would be opposed to any programs that erode community trust.

CHAIR: I understand.

Mr Salman: Our concern about things like this—and, again, without knowing all of the details—is that this potentially could erode community trust. What we also want is to avoid criminalising extreme or radical thought. We want to avoid that and we want to keep youth out of the criminal justice system for expressing extremist thought. There will be a point where the authorities need to become involved, but we believe that point should be carefully judged and assessed by the experts.

If we believe that youth are expressing extreme thought or are at risk, they should be directed towards the community. Rather than directed through the court system, they should actually be directed to the community and for the community to engage with these youth. That is what we fundamentally believe. I think that is far more successful than putting them in front of a magistrate and saying, 'You will do this.' In fact, that could be a recipe for them doing the exact opposite.

CHAIR: How do you then get that person who everyone is concerned on a voluntary order? If it cannot be a voluntary basis, how do you get them to engage? The concern that law enforcement has is someone like Numan Haider, who was in a shopping centre with a flag, and police and other people could not engage with him. How do you deal with someone like that?

Mr Aykan: If I could reiterate and highlight that the key word here is trust. If parents, peers or colleagues in whatever area feel that they could trust a particular group of people, an organisation leading these types of programs, then they could refer to that organisation, because they could trust them. The proposal for a youth crisis support centre could be one of those centres that could earn the trust and the confidence of everybody. People could refer themselves over and say, 'I have heard you're doing a lot of wonderful things.' It is really about the reputation that you earn in the community such that people will volunteer themselves, approach themselves because they feel very comfortable. That really comes down to trust.

As a leadership, we have to be very mindful that no matter what we do we have to bring the community with us. It is a journey. It is not something that we just engineer ourselves on behalf of the community. We have to do it with the community and actually bring them along for the journey. Once you establish that trust and build a reputation, it will just flow.

CHAIR: What about the person with the really extremist views?

Mr Salman: There will come a point where they will go over the edge and that becomes a security issue. We have the laws and the policing.

CHAIR: I will just finish my question. The problem is that at the moment there is a gap. There is a gap between the person who is showing very extremist views and not committing a crime. It is trying to make sure that they do not commit that crime, because the next step is the police to fill that gap.

Mr NEUMANN: I will come back to the issue that I was talking about before. In Sweden and Germany, they have, as part of integration, not just language training but cultural training so that people can understand what it is like to live in Germany or Sweden. We have those settlement services, but not quite to the same extent that they do in terms of what it is like being good citizens, contributing to the community and so on.

You have run interfaith dialogue, forums and steering committees, and you have a lot of interfaith activities. We have not had until today this evidence. We have had evidence that faith based organisations do a fantastic job in this area and we should be contributing more. The idea of promoting interfaith dialogue to assist in that cultural acclimatisation and integration seems to be an opportunity that you could give in terms of settlement services as well. I am very keen to hear from you about whether those types of interfaith dialogues, as part of settlement services, can be promoted and funded.

Mr Mohideen: That is an important aspect. We have tried to do that through the ICV, getting young people involved. We also try to do that with new migrants and refugees. For example, we had a rally on Saturday that brought in a lot of people from different faiths together, sharing this common platform and common concerns. As migrants, they come and see that there is support and there is interaction taking place and a dialogue of mutual respect and understanding. It is not tolerance; it is mutual respect and understanding for each other. Projects like that are very supportive.

Mr NEUMANN: You mentioned local councils, and we have heard this repeatedly in the public hearings. Can you explore the role that local councils can have in terms of settlement services?

Mr Mohideen: For example, I come from the Monash Council area. We have worked very closely with the Monash Council, with new emerging communities, to teach them how to work with people, how to get basic amenities, like going to a bank, and supportive exercises. There is a lot of work that local councils do. I think we can work more with them and get the faith groups involved as well. Monash Council is a good example.

CHAIR: I need to wrap it up, because we have a meeting with the minister at 11 o'clock.

Mr Aykan: I have two quick comments. Interfaith is one channel, but we would need to approach it multifacetedly. It is not the only one.

CHAIR: Absolutely.

Mr Mohideen: It is bringing the family into it. The family unit is very important.

Mr NEUMANN: This is one thing that we have not quite picked up in the course of the inquiry. We have not quite picked it up, but you do a lot of great work in this area. I am thinking this is an option for us to consider as a recommendation.

Mr Aykan: It is well worth—

Mr NEUMANN: Considering.

Mr Aykan: One last thing about local council is it is about a sense of belonging. If new communities or new migrants have an immediate sense of belonging to their immediate space, indeed that would be—

Mr NEUMANN: Yes, to the Monash area or Toowoomba or wherever they go.

Ms VAMVAKINO: Mr Mohideen, effectively you said that if people who are feeling angry about things going on overseas that affect them directly, if they can find a place to come to and a political engagement with myself, other speakers there, a process they can feed into in a constructive way to get change, rather than go off and be misled by someone else to make change—I think that is a very good point that you made.

CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance here today. If the committee has any further questions, they will be put to you in writing. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence and you will have an opportunity to request correction to transcription errors. The only other issue is we have Dr Anne Aly coming in at probably quarter past. Can we suspend, so that we do not need the quorum, just in case everyone cannot be here?

Ms VAMVAKINO: Yes, I think so, and then catch up.

Mr Mohideen: Can I just, with your permission, just make a statement.

Ms VAMVAKINO: Yes.

Mr Mohideen: Today marks 25 years since I arrived into Australia.

CHAIR: Congratulations.

Mr Mohideen: It has been wonderful to be here. Thank you.

Ms VAMVAKINO: Here you are sitting at the table.

Mr Mohideen: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you so much.

Committee adjourned at 10:58