



FECCA 2019 Pre-Election Policy Paper #1

Family Reunion, Citizenship and Regional Settlement

Purpose

This Policy Paper is based on the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) 2019 Election Platform, *Governing for culturally diverse Australia*, and the priorities outlined in the Platform. In this policy paper, FECCA provides an elaboration on some of the issues mentioned in the Platform. You can find FECCA's full Election Platform [here](#).

About FECCA

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to government and the broader community. FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Australians from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

Key Messages

FECCA calls for all parties to adopt a fair, sustainable and non-discriminatory migration and population policy, based on principles of justice and equity. This policy should achieve an appropriate balance between various migration streams.

FECCA calls for a commitment to clearing the backlog of visa and citizenship applications and ensure new applications are processed within a reasonable timeframe.

FECCA calls for the input of First Nations people as custodians of all settlement destinations in Australia. First Nations people should also be consulted in matters of cultural exchange and building social cohesion.

FECCA calls for all parties to value the contribution of migrants and refugees to rural and regional communities. This includes the assurance that, regardless of location, all people from CALD backgrounds have access to the same level of service and opportunity and acknowledgement that rural and regional locations present specific challenges.



Background

Family reunion

The availability of family reunion is important for successful settlement, allowing migrants to maintain family ties and connections. Family reunion also relates to core human rights of Australians to live with their family members. Restricting the number of people who can access permanent family reunion has already led to people finding other temporary means to come to Australia that provide limited opportunity to settle and integrate.

There is considerable evidence to show that the reunification of families is a crucial element of successful resettlement into a new community. Allowing families to settle together encourages long-term social and economic growth. Families are also better equipped to build new social networks, reduce isolation and navigate through new social systems. This is especially important for families who have experienced the trauma of fleeing conflict or persecution. Many parents volunteer at cultural, religious and community events and contribute to maintaining cultural and linguistic diversity. Parent visa holders are diverse in age, skills, and experience; these individuals contribute to the Australian community in many tangible and intangible ways.

FECCA is concerned that a shift away from permanent parent visas to flexible, expensive temporary parent visas will leave many individuals without a social safety net and reduced access to crucial services. This will put pressure on Australian families and individuals who hold temporary parent visas. It could also create a class of migrants who are not supported to settle in Australia, affecting social cohesion. Empowering immigrants and allowing them the resources and tools to participate in Australian society is critical in fostering their economic and social contributions.

FECCA is also concerned that recent changes to Australia's migration policy have created additional barriers for people of refugee backgrounds who are trying to reunite with their families. The Coalition Government recently announced to cap the numbers of migrants coming to Australia each year from 190,000 to 160,000. The number of humanitarian arrivals will freeze at 18,750.¹

Waiting Period for Citizenship

Good settlement and integration outcomes are, as demonstrated by considerable research, dependent on the ability to feel welcome, to contribute and to participate in the new society. The ability to participate fully in Australian life is, however, dependent upon immigration status. The right to vote and influence how the financial contributions one makes to the country are distributed; the right to ease of travel; the right to serve your country in jobs reserved for citizens; and access to improved opportunities for education are important facets of integration. Becoming a citizen provides a gateway to full participation in the life of the Australian community.

The granting of Australian citizenship is symbolic of acceptance into the Australian community, and the sooner we can bestow citizenship upon eligible migrants the sooner they can get on with making valuable contributions to our society.

¹ <https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/korean/en/article/2019/04/11/migrants-may-have-wait-56-years-bring-their-families-australia>



Unwarranted delays in the processing of citizenship applications cause significant hardship for families. These are families already living in Australia who wish to formalise their commitment to this country.

FECCA is concerned with reports showing that applications for citizenship by conferral have not been processed efficiently or in a timely manner. Processing times have increased, and long delays are evident between applications being lodged and decisions being taken, and there are significant periods of inactivity for both complex and non-complex applications.

Current data show that some people could wait up to 56 years for family reunion visas. According to the Immigration and Visa Services, 75 per cent of partner applications take between 14 and 21 months to be processed and 75 per cent of child applications are processed in 10 and 12 months. Contributory parents, or those who can pay a \$47,455 fee, need to wait on average 45 months. The average wait time for non-contributory parents is more than 30 years and for 'other family' members is up to 56 years. Currently 49,983 non-contributory parent applications and 8,111 'other family' applications are waiting to be processed.²

Regional Settlement

Family connections, job opportunities and life style are three major reasons given by migrants for settling in regional and rural areas. However, it is critical that regional settlement for migrants is underpinned by adequate planning and funding for rural development.

Encouraging more international students, skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants to move to rural and regional Australia is dependent on the ability of the regions to cater for their specific needs and facilitate their settlement in an environment free of discrimination or racism. Adequate settlement services, access to culturally appropriate support mechanisms, and improved infrastructure are just a few of the key issues to be factored into the policy design and planning process.

Many refugees and humanitarian entrants come from rural or inland communities that are similar to the environment in rural Australia. Encouraging their settlement in rural areas may therefore not only provide suitable settlement options to them but would also benefit the rural society and economy in which they settle, help to maintain populations and economies, and foster innovation. The international experience that migrant workers bring is valuable to regions that seek to develop ties with markets beyond Australian borders. To develop the agriculture sector in regional Australia, migrants and refugees can contribute new ideas and methods of operation to revitalise agriculture while also contributing to other industries.

Targeted migration programs can address issues such as sparse population and skill shortages by encouraging and assisting settlement in the region of immigrants and refugees who can contribute with much needed experience and skills. The Australian government has a history of regionalising immigration policy through various initiatives and visa pathways, as well as by focusing on the relocation of unemployed workers from areas of high unemployment

² <https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/korean/en/article/2019/04/11/migrants-may-have-wait-56-years-bring-their-families-australia>



to areas experiencing skills shortages. This is beneficial to rural and regional communities where settlement services and the appropriate infrastructure and support systems are in place.

FECCA is concerned that some immigrants who initially settle in regional and rural areas are not obtaining adequate support and settlement services. As a result, after a brief period in a rural location, these immigrants move to metropolitan areas where they can access a greater range of services and support including larger communities of people with whom they share a language or cultural heritage.

FECCA's call for action

FECCA calls for a review of the fairness and equality within the Migration Program for existing Australian citizens who wish to be reunited with family or partners from overseas, as well as potential new migrants. The migration program must achieve an appropriate balance between skilled and family migration because the availability of family reunion is important for successful settlement.

FECCA calls for all political leaders to ensure clear pathways to permanency for all visa types and abandon all efforts to increase barriers for temporary visa holders in becoming permanent residents and then Australian Citizens. Extended wait times for citizenship eligibility offer no benefit and only delay welcoming hard-working, dedicated residents who dream of becoming full participants in our community.

FECCA urges all political leaders to ensure a system where citizenship is not denied to our new arrivals because of arbitrary and unfair procedures or by extended waiting periods. Fair, transparent and timely access to Australian citizenship is essential to the social cohesion and harmony of Australian society.

FECCA recommends that adequate and appropriate resources be devoted to settlement services in regional areas to attract and retain new migrants, particularly skilled migrants, and their families. Further, that any focus on decentralisation or regional development pay close attention to the positive role and contribution migrants and refugees could play in this process.

FECCA recommends that adequate and appropriate resources are devoted to assisting migrants and their families to build sustainable, prosperous and successful lives in regional areas. FECCA highlights the need to create adequate support infrastructure, developing targeted policies and strengthening social cohesion in the region as well as developing clear pathways to citizenship for all new regional visas.

FECCA NATIONAL OFFICE

FECCA House
Unit 1, No.4 Phipps Close
Deakin ACT 2600
Phone 02 6282 5755

Email admin@fecca.org.au
twitter @iFECCA
facebook @iFECCA
web www.fecca.org.au

