

**Joint Standing Committee on Migration – Inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes****Submission by the Islamic Council of Victoria**Parliament House, Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017

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The **Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV)** 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.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian Muslim population is increasingly diverse. New migrant communities are establishing themselves and are experiencing major challenges of settlement and integration. The ICV aims to support all Victorian Muslims to have a strong sense of belonging, through strong relationships with key stakeholders that lead to increased understandings and respect for all.

The ICV offers socio-religious leadership by promoting greater understanding, engaging with people of all faith communities, and contributing to building a more cohesive society and anticipating our diverse communities' needs and expectations.

ICV welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's Inquiry into Migrant 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 way of linking migration with CALD youth crime, youth gang activity and youth radicalisation.

The ICV is concerned by any references, and/or connections, made in the current inquiry with isolated spates of youth violence among some segments of Australian's youth. The focus by the media on the 'visible minority', and linking this to the broader picture of migration settlement outcomes serves only to undermine what is otherwise a successful migration program.<sup>2</sup> The ICV believes that these instances 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 worth.

Migrants continued to face prejudice, despite figures that indicated they may be less likely to commit crime. There is a false widespread notion that recently arrived youth have some connection to criminal, or anti-social, behaviour, which is completely inaccurate. Some would argue that white young males are more likely to be committing crime than particular recently arrived communities, and we are not seeing the vilification happening across cultures, but rather specifically and unfairly targeted.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Islamic Council of Victoria visit its website at [www.icv.org.au](http://www.icv.org.au).

<sup>2</sup> See 'Get to know your Muslim neighbours, says Islamic Council after "religious visibility" study released, SBS World News, 15 August 2017, at: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/08/15/get-know-your-muslim-neighbours-says-islamic-council-after-religious-visibility> (accessed 12/09/2017).

Research from the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW found that young people in NSW who spoke a language other than English were less likely to be involved in crime than their English speaking counterparts.<sup>3</sup> 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 Victoria University, the ICV found that Muslim community organisations play key roles in helping migrants from multicultural backgrounds settle and succeed in Australia, socially, politically, and economically, through their range of services and opportunities for members to become active in their community.<sup>4</sup> This is in stark contrast to perceptions that mosques, for examples, are only places of worship. In fact they are meeting a gap created by a lack of credible social research data on social service provision to Muslim communities.

In another research project, with RMIT's University Centre for Global Research, the ICV 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 English language and employment programs for migrants in diverse, relatively disadvantaged areas can benefit the wider community.<sup>5</sup>

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 their 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 the lessons from previous generations of refugees and humanitarian entrants.

In addition, the ICV is pleased to make the following **10 specific recommendation** to the Inquiry;

1. Greater funding for community education programs to address key settlement issues.
2. Focus on the need for more flexible education and English language learning practices, the need to combat racism in all forms, and the need for better support of families adjusting to new cultures.
3. Local governments should be supported in their initiatives to settle refugees and humanitarian entrants through funding to enable them to share best practice and collaborate on projects.

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<sup>3</sup> See Carmille Bianchi, 'Calls to break down barriers as young migrants face institutionalised prejudice', SBS News, 4 April 2017, at: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/04/04/calls-break-down-barriers-young-migrants-face-institutionalised-prejudice> (accessed 12/09/2017).

<sup>4</sup> Mario Peucker, *The Civic Potential of Muslim Community Organisations for Promoting Social Cohesion in Victoria* (Project Report), A project by Victoria University's Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing (CCDW) in partnership with the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV), Melbourne: Victoria University, 2017, available at: [http://vuir.vu.edu.au/32791/1/Civic%20potential%20of%20Muslim%20community%20organisations\\_final%20document.pdf](http://vuir.vu.edu.au/32791/1/Civic%20potential%20of%20Muslim%20community%20organisations_final%20document.pdf) (accessed 01/09/2017).

<sup>5</sup> Val Colic-Peisker and Karien Dekker, *Religious Visibility, Disadvantage and Bridging Social Capital: a comparative investigation of multicultural localities in Melbourne's north: Final Report*, Melbourne: RMIT University Centre for Global Research, 2017, available at: <http://www.icv.org.au/new/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Project-Report-Religious-visibility-Aug-2017-Final.pdf> (accessed 12/09/2017).

4. The Federal Government should increase the level of funding available to refugee community-based organisations within the Settlement Grants Program.
5. Improvements to the current settlement program should be based on best practice models drawn from our OECD peers and that this can only be established following thorough research and comparison of qualitative and quantitative data.
6. Education is the key to successful integration of migrants and the Federal Government must take a longer-term view of investment in education for migrants and their children.
7. Migrant settlement outcomes are a separate matter to the issue of law and order.
8. Ethnic/multicultural and multi-faith peak organisations be resourced to provide relevant policy and practice advice to improve the way government policies and lead agencies (e.g. law enforcement, engage with diverse communities and to strengthen community trust and confidence).
9. Migrant youth should be able to access support services earlier, from the age of 12, instead of 15 years of age.
10. There is currently no national record of crimes connected to ethnicity: we recommend greater research and data be made available. Further research into settlement outcomes for humanitarian migrants, building on existing research, combining qualitative and quantitative data, and addressing identified gaps in research.

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