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Digital Economy Strategy Team
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Submission to the National Digital Economy Strategy

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (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 diverse cultural and linguistic 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.

We welcome the invitation to make a submission to the National Digital Economy Strategy.

Recommendations

FECCA recommends that the National Digital Economy Strategy:

- Recognise the barriers faced by some CALD communities when they engage with the digital economy, and support those who require further assistance
- Include positive and culturally appropriate actions that are also inclusive, accessible and equitable to all CALD Australians
- Encourage organisations and agencies to:
  - develop websites that are easy to navigate and understand
  - utilise accurate and culturally appropriate translations
  - harness innovative digital technologies to overcome language and literacy barriers
- Include a plan to develop a free program tailored to CALD Australians that encourages and assists them to get involved in the digital economy. This could be based on the Department of Human Services initiative for older Australians – "Be Connected".
- Ensure that future consultation processes and papers related to the digital economy are open and inclusive

Overview

As Australia's digital economy grows and services move into the online space (increasingly the only platform they can be accessed from), it is important that all Australians can easily engage with the digital economy. Although FECCA recognises that the Australian Government has been working to improve access and outcomes for vulnerable communities in this area, future efforts to expand the internet economy must be fully inclusive and accommodate those Australians from CALD backgrounds who may face additional barriers in accessing and navigating online services. The National Digital Economy Strategy should recognise that the digital literacy of migrants can vary greatly, and that there is sometimes a gap in ability, basic skills, and attitudes to technology. It should also include actions to support those who require further assistance.

In 2016, FECCA published a report entitled '[Digital Access and Equity for Multicultural Communities](#)'. This discussed the Australian Government's move towards digital service delivery and its impact on CALD communities. It found that while many CALD individuals such as skilled migrants, young migrants, and those with good English language skills, were able to adapt to digital service delivery, some migrant cohorts struggled to access online services and processes because they did not cater to a range of digital literacies or English language proficiencies. FECCA strongly encourages the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science to ensure that the National Digital Economy Strategy includes positive and culturally appropriate measures that are also inclusive, accessible and equitable to all CALD Australians

Where webpages are only available in English or are particularly text dense, Australians with low written English language proficiency can struggle to interact with them. Websites must utilise clear, plain English instructions together with symbols or images that facilitate effective communication. Translated webpages can be of use when they are easy to locate and the translation is accurate and culturally appropriate. However, some migrants may have low reading proficiency in their preferred language so it is important that links to interpreter services are also provided.

There exists an excellent opportunity for innovative digital technologies to be utilised to overcome language and literacy barriers. For example, interactive technologies such as hovering over translatable texts and access to audio translations can be used to improve the user experience for non-English speakers. In addition, videos in languages other than English could be employed to convey key messages to CALD communities. Some government departments such as the Department of Human Services and the Fair Work Ombudsman are effectively using these technologies. Many Australian and international commercial organisations also use similar technologies to ensure products and services are available to a broad range of customers.

Some organisations and agencies are already harnessing digital technology to engage with groups of people that could be excluded in the online economy. For example, the Department of Human Services manages "Be Connected" – a free program for older Australians that helps them increase their online confidence by teaching them basic skills such as using a digital device, sending emails, using social media, shopping online, and much more. A similar initiative for CALD communities would ensure that they are not left behind in the future digital economy. FECCA would be well placed to design and deliver a similar program for CALD Australians through its extensive network of members across the states and territories, including regional and rural Australia.

FECCA is concerned that the National Digital Economy Strategy consultation paper was not open to or inclusive of CALD communities. There was only a vague reference to people that might be excluded in the digital economy, and no mention at all of Australia's significant CALD population. If the future digital economy is to include the 49.3% of Australians that were born

overseas or have at least one parent that was born overseas[1], this strategic plan must consider their needs. Engaging migrants and refugees, particularly those who do not speak English as their first language and/or with limited digital literacy or access, ensures that linguistic and cultural factors are considered, and appropriate responses developed.

The consultation paper and all the information related to the consultation process was in English and unavailable in any other language. The Translating and Interpreting Service (a service provided by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection for people who do not speak English, and for agencies and businesses that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients) was not available. Nor was there any mention of alternative translation and interpreting services. In addition, involvement in the consultation process assumed and required a relatively high level of digital literacy. This would have excluded many of FECCA's constituents from making comment on a strategic plan that has a direct impact on them. Consultation processes as well as strategic plans must be co-designed with CALD communities if they are to be accessible and equitable.

FECCA is well placed to assist the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science develop and implement policies, programmes and projects that have a positive impact on CALD Australians. FECCA has a large network of member organisations that we could collaborate with to increase CALD engagement in the digital economy, and support the digitalisation of the economy in an inclusive and accessible way.

Conclusion

The National Digital Economy Strategy is of interest and concern to FECCA because it will have an impact on our constituents. Although the digital economy provides many opportunities for CALD communities, the strategic plan must adequately examine, and tailor responses to, access and equity issues experienced by this cohort. Multicultural access and equity embodies the notion that CALD Australians can access programs, services, and information, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. FECCA encourages the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science to consider linguistic and cultural factors during the development of the National Digital Economy Strategy, in order to fully include CALD Australians and enable them to be involved in the future digital economy.

FECCA would be glad to contribute in more detail on this matter. For further information please contact FECCA Director, Dr Emma Campbell, on emma@fecca.org.au or 02 6282 5755.

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census