

Migrant Services and Programs – Statement by the Prime Minister

From: Commonwealth of Australia Background to the Review of Post Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1978.

Background to the Review

The Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants was established by the Commonwealth Government and announced by the Prime Minister on 31 August 1977.

Mr F. Galbally, C.B.E., a prominent Melbourne barrister, was appointed to head the Review.

Other members of the Review Group were Miss F. Merenda, M.B.E., a migrant welfare worker who is well known in both the Italian and the Australian communities in Sydney; Mr N. Polites of Melbourne, a migrant social worker who is active in the Greek community; and Mr C. Stransky of Perth, a schoolteacher and former Field Officer of the Good Neighbour Council was born in Yugoslav territory and who has been active in interpreting and ethnic radio.

The Review was established in the light of the Government's concern to ensure that the changing needs of migrants were being met as effectively as possible, and was conducted with regard to the Government's Federalism policy and its objective of encouraging self-help and supporting the enterprise and dedication of community groups and individuals in the provision of such programs and services.

The Review was charged to examine and report on the effectiveness of the Commonwealth's programs and services provided by non-government organisations which receive Commonwealth assistance, and to identify any areas of need or duplication of programs or services.

During the course of the Review, the panel sought the views of as many migrants as possible. Submissions were received from individuals, organisations working with migrants, and of course, from many migrant organisations and societies.

The Review thus provided an opportunity for migrants to participate in identifying problems and difficulties and in designing programs relevant to their needs.

Statement by the Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser April 1978.

Mr Speaker,

I present the report of the Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants.

Mr Speaker,

I also present copies of this report translated into the following languages:

Arabic
Dutch
German
Greek
Italian Serbo-Croatian
Spanish
Turkish and
Vietnamese.

I seek leave to make a statement relating to the report.

It is with particular pleasure that I lay 10 copies of this report on the table of this House.

This is the first occasion on which a report commissioned by the Commonwealth

Government has been tabled in this Parliament in languages other than English. It is singularly appropriate that a report directed specifically at programs and services for migrants should be the first to be available in ethnic languages. I hope that this will set a pattern which will be followed in future where reports are of such direct interest to migrants.

Honourable members may recall that this Review was announced by the Government on 31 August 1977. We established it in the light of our concern to ensure that the changing needs of migrants are being met as effectively as possible. We asked the Review to have regard to our Federalism policy and our objective of supporting the enterprise and dedication of community groups who provide programs and services to migrants.

As I said then, the Government is conscious of the special language, housing, employment and other difficulties faced by migrants during the transition from one society to another. We saw the need to provide an opportunity for migrants themselves to participate in identifying their problems and difficulties. We believed they should help to design programs and services relevant to their needs.

The Review Group was headed by Mr Frank Galbally and its members were Miss Francesca Merenda, Mr Nick Polites and Mr Carlo Stransky.

Migrants and their children now make up about one-third of the total population of Australia - they have come from many different ethnic origins.

Few Australians in their life time have to face the same psychological and social stresses - the homesickness, loneliness, anxieties and frustrations. Few Australians face the difficulties many migrants, particularly in the early years after their arrival, are confronted with.

When the migrant first arrives he is under great pressure. He has to buy the goods necessary for living. He has to solve housing and employment

difficulties and arrange education for his children. He has to make adjustments to a myriad of strange laws, regulations and an unfamiliar political system. He often has to struggle with a language he does not understand.

Generally Australians have given a great deal of understanding and generous help to migrants. Ethnic groups themselves have generated their own organisations and societies. These assist the more needy amongst their communities and encourage them to become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

The Review has taken full account of all the problems migrants face. It has noted that notwithstanding these problems, migrants have struggled to maintain their cultural heritage and preserve their sense of cultural identity.

Notwithstanding these efforts we recognise the special needs which migrants, particularly the non-English speaking and the more recently arrived, have in settling here. It was for this reason we established the Review.

The Government agrees with the general conclusions of the Review. It agrees Australia is at a critical stage in developing a cohesive, united, multicultural nation. It agrees there is a need to change the direction of its services to migrants and that further steps to encourage multiculturalism are needed.

In forming these conclusions, the Review has pointed to significant changes in recent years in the pattern of migration and the structure of our population. It noted changes in attitudes to migration and to our responsibilities for international refugees. It pointed to the large and growing numbers of ethnic groups in our community, and to the changing roles of governments. Against that general background, it conducted its own examination of programs and services it received many submissions and held many discussions in the community over the past few months.

The Review adopted the following guiding

principles which the Government fully endorses:

- (a) all members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services;
- (b) every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures;
- (c) needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community, but special services and programs are necessary at present to ensure equality of access for migrants;
- (d) services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to helping migrants to become self-reliant quickly."

Having regard to those principles, the Review sought to identify the most critical areas of need. It sought to determine whether present services and programs meet those needs adequately. It concluded that the migrants who arrive with little or no understanding of English have the greatest difficulties and often remain at a disadvantage because of that. Difficulties were judged to be greatest immediately after arrival, particularly for migrants who come from countries without a long established tradition of migration to Australia.

The Review found that those who do not learn adequate English continue to be at a disadvantage and often suffer considerably in employment, through isolation from social contact and in many other ways.

It found that these same people are often not effectively reached, and sometimes not reached at all, by present services and programs.

The evidence suggests that nearly half a million of our population face these problems and that many suffer severe hardship because of them. This group includes large numbers of those who are isolated at home (especially women), elderly migrants (whose numbers are expected to increase dramatically in the course of the next decade), those from smaller ethnic groups (whose own support services are limited), migrant women at work and the children of migrants.

The Review draws attention to the fact that the bulk of Commonwealth Government expenditure is through general programs designed for the whole Australian community.

It points out that, since about 20 per cent of our community are currently migrants, a similar proportion of the Commonwealth's general expenditure on education, health, social security and welfare and other areas should be for the benefit of migrants. It endorsed the view that services to migrants should as far as possible be through general programs, and consistent with its terms of reference. The Review has not sought to assess the effectiveness of these general programs as such. Rather, it has concentrated on establishing whether migrants are placed at any disadvantage through ignorance of available services or through difficulties with access, communication and so on.

Honourable members will be aware of the current Commonwealth programs and services directed specifically to migrants, covering migrant education, migrant welfare, interpreting and translation and other programs and services. The funds allocated to these totalled some \$53m in 1977-78. The Review concluded that most of these programs and services are valuable and effective, but that there are also important gaps and deficiencies.

The Review found that the main areas of need (such as for fluency in English and for better communication and information) - are common to virtually all areas such as health, welfare, education, employment and the law. Accordingly the majority of the initiatives

proposed are directed at these general areas of need rather than at specific services or programs. Careful consideration was given to finding an appropriate balance between services and programs directed at the newly arrived (which can be costly at the time but can save significantly in the longer term) and those services directed at the backlog of needs in the established migrant community.

An integrated package of measures has accordingly been developed and the Review recommends that the Government implement this package over a period of three years. The package is shown in summary table form, together with suggested additional financial allocations, at paragraph 1.43 of the report. Altogether, the additional financial allocations proposed (in constant April 1978 prices) total \$7.9m in the first year, \$15.0m in the second, and \$26.8m in the third.

After examination, I am pleased to inform honourable members that the Government accepts these proposals and the financial commitments which they entail. We believe the Review has developed a well-balanced and practical plan of action, and that it is now the job of the Government to see that this plan of action is properly implemented.

The Review itself believes there should be continuing evaluation of the effectiveness of these initiatives throughout the implementation period, and that some modifications may prove to be desirable. Whilst we accept the proposals, timetabling and the general thrust of the Report, there will be an opportunity for adjustment through regular close monitoring of external circumstances such as the responses of migrant groups. Subject to possible modifications arising from such monitoring the Government accepts the proposals which I now summarise.

The proposals are in the fields of initial settlement: English language teaching: communication: information: voluntary, self-help and Good Neighbour Council services: special need and special groups:

multiculturalism: ethnic media: and co-ordination and consultation. I emphasise, however, the close inter-relationships of the proposals in these different fields.

The Review found that many of the problems encountered by migrants arise from inadequate arrangements for their initial settlement. It recommended a comprehensive initial settlement program which will require extra funding of \$12m over three years. This will cover classes in English and formal orientation courses including advice and assistance in housing, education, employment and other areas of need. This program should enable savings to be made by preventing later settlement difficulty. The program will be available to all migrants either in residential hostels or by attendance at new community centres. A living allowance will be paid during a specified initial settlement period. Management of the program will be through new bodies known as migrant settlement councils, representing Commonwealth and State governments, the ethnic communities and voluntary organisations.

Because migrants' knowledge of the English language was found to be a critical factor in enabling successful settlement in Australia, special attention has been given to the teaching of English both to children and to adults. For children, there is compelling evidence that there are many who need special instruction in English but who do not receive it. The Review also found room for significant improvements in teaching methods and materials and in the distribution of funds for teaching English to children. In accordance with their recommendation, the Government will be providing extra funding of \$10m over the next three years, to be distributed so as to reflect the needs of children in different areas who do not speak adequate English. We will also be seeking the co-operation of the States in setting up arrangements for better planning and assessment of English teaching to migrants.

For adults, English language teaching will be an important part of our initial settlement

program. But there will also be a continuing need for special programs for certain groups and for the 'backlog' of migrants in the community whose English is not adequate.

Accordingly there will be extensions to the availability and coverage of full-time courses of instruction. The current continuation classes will be replaced by certificate courses at different levels of difficulty. Advanced courses will be extended and there will be a wider use of 'on-the-job' English instruction and the home tutor scheme. There will also be provision for better education for teachers of adult migrants, additional funds for training such teachers and for the provision of teaching materials. The adult migrant education program will be established as a three-year program and an extensive survey of the needs for English of the various migrant groups will be conducted to improve planning and monitoring.

In spite of this increasing emphasis on the teaching of English to migrants, there will always be a substantial number in the community who do not understand English, and who therefore face difficulties in communication. We will therefore introduce financial incentives for bilingual staff occupying public contact positions. We will establish intensive English courses for migrants with overseas professional and sub-professional qualifications to help their work here. We will help relevant professionals to obtain or upgrade their knowledge of other cultures and languages. We will also be extending and bringing together existing Commonwealth Government translating and interpreting services, and offering to share with the States the costs of providing additional services in areas of State responsibility.

The Review found that migrants are often placed at a disadvantage by their ignorance of their rights, entitlements and obligations in Australian society. It found that resources for information programs are not necessarily inadequate, but that they are wastefully used through inadequate consultation and co-ordination. Accordingly the Government will

move to strengthen the Information Branch of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to provide a focus for co-ordination of advice. There will be an extensive survey of migrants' needs in information and its dissemination. In accordance with the recommendations of the Review, steps will be taken to improve the ways in which migrants get information in areas of special need, including information relevant to employment, health, consumer protection, bail procedures, the Commonwealth Ombudsman and legal aid.

The Review gave careful consideration to the best means of providing support for self-help activities by ethnic groups, and the place of voluntary agencies and the Good Neighbour Councils in delivering services to migrants. They concluded that the ethnic communities themselves and the voluntary agencies can meet the welfare needs of migrants more effectively than government agencies. In accordance with their recommendation, the Government will be establishing a special program of multicultural resource centres. This will be phased in over three-years and will involve the local communities in the management and operation of the centres. There will also be an increase in the numbers of ethnic welfare workers through an extension of the grant-in-aid scheme. Funding under the scheme will also change from one-year to three-year grants. As these recommendations take effect, the demands for direct services from the Commonwealth migrant services units are expected to decrease. Accordingly the Government will reduce its own direct service delivery role and strengthen instead its capacity to provide a consultancy, community development and co-ordination service. We will introduce a special program to provide 'once only' grants of up to \$5,000 to assist voluntary groups to introduce new approaches to welfare service delivery or to restructure existing welfare services.

As required by their terms of reference, the Review examined the effectiveness of the Good Neighbour Councils, their relations with other non-government bodies working in this area and the arrangements for government funding.

The Review noted that when the Good Neighbour Councils were first funded no other non-government or major ethnic organisations were active in migrant settlement and the councils performed with energy and enthusiasm a difficult, almost impossible, task. However, the Review concluded that because the needs of migrants have changed since the councils were established, and because it is not possible to revise the councils' functions so that they do not duplicate or inhibit the role of the ethnic communities, there is no justification for continued Commonwealth Government funding of the councils. The Government acknowledges the very valuable role played by Good Neighbour Councils in times past. It is conscious of the goodwill and effort of those, including volunteers, associated with the movement both in the past and today.

Nevertheless it accepts the assessment of the Review and their recommendation that funds previously allocated to Good Neighbour Councils be redirected over two years to other community programs. In keeping with the Review's recommendation it will give special assistance in the councils' administrative problems associated with this, and it will assist in the redeployment of staff and the placement of volunteers.

I now refer to some special areas of need identified by the Review, and to some groups judged in need of special assistance.

The Government will be taking action in the area of the law to protect migrants' rights in criminal investigations and in voting, and to improve information on such aspects as the legal system generally and family law. On income security, we will be giving high priority to resolving anomalies affecting migrants, in the light of the problems outlined by the Review. On employment the Government will extend the responsibilities of the Committee on Overseas Professional Qualifications. This will allow it to advise on sub-professional qualifications and to make suggestions for improving recognition of overseas qualifications and occupational retraining. Also, in accordance with the recommendation of the Review, trade

unions will be eligible for special project grants to improve migrants' knowledge of and participation in union affairs. In the health area, the Review noted significant cultural and communication problems and, in addition to the Government's recently announced program for funding interpreters, increased funds will be provided for the use of ethnic health workers.

The Government is conscious that many of the initiatives it is taking have been designed with regard to the special needs of migrant women. It will ensure particular account is taken of those needs in the implementation period. In addition, for these women and for their young children, the Government will encourage establishment of more child-care facilities at places of work.

It will also assist with development of more appropriate community child-care and pre-school services for migrants. The Government notes the particular advantages of the family day care scheme for migrant communities to which the Review draws attention. There will be special provisions for workers to be employed by ethnic communities to work in child-care centres and pre-schools to foster a multicultural approach and to help bridge the gap between school and home.

Action will be taken to follow up the Review's observation about handicapped migrants experiencing problems of access to rehabilitation services, and that there should be greater use of ethnic workers in rehabilitation centres.

For older migrants, we will follow up the suggestion that greater support be given to those willing to care for their elderly relatives at home, and that institutions accommodating old people should specialise more in providing an environment acceptable to ethnic groups. There will be an increase in funds for the employment of ethnic workers for the aged to work in this area.

The Government accepts that it is now essential to give significant further encouragement to develop a multicultural attitude in Australian

society. It will foster the retention of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups and promote intercultural understanding. We agree that schools are the key element in achieving such a goal and we will allocate \$5m over the next three years to develop multicultural and community language education programs. As the Review recommended, we will establish a small group of experts in cultural and racial differences to advise on how these funds can most effectively be used to develop multicultural and community language courses in the schools.

For students training in professions, we will encourage introduction of components of courses on cultural backgrounds of the major ethnic groups.

Because of the lack of information on multicultural developments in Australia and overseas we will establish an Institute of Multicultural Affairs, which among other activities would engage in and commission research and advise government bodies on multicultural issues.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Review, The Australia Council will be asked to reassess its financial assistance to the arts of ethnic communities, to ensure that such arts are given more equitable support.

As well as extending the ethnic radio service of the Special Broadcasting Service to all States, we will upgrade the Sydney and Melbourne services, and will provide funds to the National Ethnic Broadcasting Advisory Council to carry out research on migrants' views and expectations of ethnic radio. For ethnic television we agree that the Government should proceed as quickly as possible to establish a pilot station drawing on existing technical resources. This will assist in the assessment of public reaction and in working out the details of programming and administration of the permanent service which we will develop over the next three years.

We will seek improvements to existing mechanisms of communication and co-

ordination between governments, voluntary agencies and ethnic groups and give special attention to encouraging consultation with, and between, local agencies. At the Commonwealth level there will be greater co-ordination of the work of advisory bodies and a strengthening of policy planning and monitoring capability for all Commonwealth programs and services in so far as they are used by migrants.

From that outline of the various steps we will be taking, I am sure honourable members will appreciate the comprehensive nature of this package. It is of crucial importance, in the implementation period and thereafter, that ethnic communities themselves must be closely involved and that there is full co-operation with other levels of government.

The Review has pointed to increasing emphasis in State Government programs on meeting the needs of migrants, and to the growing awareness of cultural differences which has led to the development of State ethnic affairs units. There has likewise been increasing interest and participation by local governments. Similarly, the welfare and cultural activities of the non-government sector have grown considerably in recent years. This has occurred through agencies representing particular ethnic groups as well as through some redirection of effort within the more traditional broad-based agencies.

I have already advised Premiers of the findings of the Review and of our decisions, and have sought their co-operation.

A group of senior officials from relevant departments will supervise the implementation of the recommendations. They will be required to report at least every three months to me and to other Ministers concerned on progress. In addition, an independent evaluation of the implementation will be carried out through my Department.

The Government undertakes to report at least annually on the progress in implementing this package of measures.

In conclusion, it will be evident to Honourable Members that the Government is accepting a commitment to additional expenditure in the areas I have outlined in a period when strict expenditure control is being applied. I emphasise that strict expenditure control will continue to be applied and the Government is presently conducting a most vigorous reassessment of all areas of expenditure. We have accepted a commitment to additional expenditure in this case because, after thorough consideration, we are convinced that the Review has responsibly identified areas of particular need where many members of our community are at a disadvantage. It is only in such circumstances that the Government is prepared to make exceptions.

Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank the members of the Review Group for their excellent work. I mention in particular the Chairman, Mr Frank Galbally, for his personal commitment in preparing a report which is both sensitive to the needs and feelings of migrants and practical in its recommendations. I commend the Report to Honourable Members.