



**Australian
Human Rights
Commission**

everyone, everywhere, everyday

2010

In our own words



African Australians: A review of
human rights and social inclusion
issues



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Foreword

In 2007, the former Race Discrimination Commissioner, Tom Calma, had a vision to develop a human rights initiative based on the experiences of African Australians, to inform future policy and programs.

Tom told me that certain issues facing African Australians are not dissimilar to some of those faced by Indigenous Australians. Some experiences are also similar to those of previous waves of migrants to Australia. But at the same time, we agreed that the needs of African Australians present unique challenges for policy makers and service providers.

In our own words is significant on several fronts. It is the first time that human rights and social inclusion issues for African Australians are being recorded at the national level. It is also the first time that everyday experiences are being told from the viewpoint of African Australians themselves, in a human rights context. It is the culmination of three years of work between African Australians, the Australian Human Rights Commission and partner agencies.

The project has utilised many innovative approaches. For example, during the national consultation Tom chaired a meeting between Indigenous and African communities in Melbourne with the City of Yarra. I understand this was the first formal meeting of its kind in Australia, bringing together Australia's oldest and youngest communities. As one African Australian leader said: "this gathering reflects the true spirit of reconciliation and inclusion". I think that is a critical point.

In our own words is a presentation of the issues, solutions and best practice as identified by African Australians. The voices of African Australians are complemented by observations and suggestions from other government and non-government stakeholders. As a result, a solid evidence base has been established from which to move forward.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has a mandate to protect and promote human rights. However, there is a shared responsibility to ensure people are treated equally and have equal opportunities, including those from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

African Australians have spoken. *In our own words* identifies the next steps that can be taken. Let us take these steps together.



Graeme Innes AM

Race Discrimination Commissioner
Australian Human Rights Commission

June 2010



Graeme Innes AM
Race Discrimination Commissioner

Contents

Introduction	3	Engaging with the justice system	28
About the project	5	Low awareness of Australian laws	28
Supporting research and analysis	6	Language barriers	29
Guiding principles	7	Relationships with police and law enforcement officials	29
Project findings	8	Non-reporting of crime	30
Addressing discrimination and racism	8	Relationship with the courts	31
Improving services for African Australians	9	Access to legal services	32
Issue-specific suggestions	9	Child protection	32
		Family violence	33
Training and employment	10	Emerging issues	34
Access to vocational training programs	10	Respecting and maintaining culture heritage and values	34
Job placement and career advice	11	Building positive gender relations	35
Finding and securing employment	12	Addressing intergenerational issues	36
		Countering negative media stereotypes	36
Education	14	Access to transport	37
Experiences of school students	14	Using sport to promote social inclusion	37
Experiences of tertiary students	15		
Engaging African Australian parents	16	Ways forward	39
Improving access to education	17	The First Voice	39
		Citizen-driven change and policy	39
Health	18	A solid evidence-base	39
Barriers to health services	18	A focus on best practice	39
Health needs of new communities	19	Priority areas of action	40
Health issues for women	20	Holistic and integrated response	40
Health issues for young people	20	Learning from the National Human Rights Consultation Report	40
Support for people with disability	21	Learning from the past	41
Mental health services	21	Future work of the Commission	41
Torture and trauma services	22	Project review	41
Building culturally appropriate health services	23		
		Appendix:	
Housing	24	Steering Committee and	
Housing assistance	24	Community Reference Group Members	42
Barriers to secure and affordable housing	24		
Improving support and increasing awareness	26		
Relationships with real estate agents and housing providers	27		

Introduction

There is a long history of migration between Africa and Australia – however in recent years, it has accelerated.

In 2006, a total of 248,699 people born in Africa were living in Australia.¹ This figure represents 5.6% of Australia's overseas-born population and around one per cent of the country's total population. Since then, around 50,000 more migrants born in Africa have arrived in Australia.

They come from nearly all countries on the African continent, representing a diverse range of cultures, religions and language groups. The majority (72.6%) are from Southern and Eastern Africa, with 22.9% from North Africa (which includes Sudan) and 4.5% from Central and West Africa.

Around 100,000 people (41%) of the total African population in Australia were born in South Africa. Other large communities include Zimbabwe (8.1%), Sudan (7.7%), Mauritius (4%), Kenya (4%) and Ethiopia (2.3%).

In December 2007, the former Race Discrimination Commissioner Tom Calma launched a project to build a national picture of the lives and experiences of African Australians.

The aims of the project were to:

- identify what can help – and what can hinder – the settlement and integration experiences of African Australians
- suggest practical solutions to inform the development of policies, programs and services for African Australians, as well as broader community education initiatives
- address some of the stereotypes about African Australians that had been raised in recent public debate and media reporting.

African Australians have so much to contribute to the Australian society, but this can only happen **when there is a sense of belonging, when people feel part of this country, when they call this country home.**

Community consultation,
South Australia



There is so much that has been said about Africans in the last couple of years, but if you look at who is writing it, it is often done from the perspectives of everyone but African Australians ...
What a difference it will make if it is our voices that appear and our voices that are listened to.

Community leader, Victoria

While this project is not the first to draw attention to the urgent challenges facing African Australians, it does – for the first time – consider everyday experiences **from the viewpoint of African Australians**, from a **national perspective** and within a **human rights context**.

A key goal of the project was to explore the structural and attitudinal barriers that impact negatively on the lives – and life opportunities – of African Australians and which can leave them on the margins of Australian society. It also gathered their suggestions to bring about positive change.

History shows that each new wave of migrants that comes to Australia faces a range of issues – both positive and negative – as they settle and become part of society. This is certainly the case for African Australian communities.

However, African Australians also face a range of unique experiences and challenges in the process of settlement and integration.

The suggestions made by community members to constructively address these issues deserve thoughtful consideration and responses from policy makers in the government and non-government sectors, service providers, academics and the broader Australian community.

The project sought to recognise some of the positive contributions of African Australians, of which there are many. It also documents the many creative and successful initiatives that have been established by African Australian communities and other organisations to respond to these barriers.

The approaches that underscore these initiatives provide a valuable template for communities and service providers in other parts of the country to address specific challenges and promote social inclusion.

In our own words

In our own words is the key document in a suite of resources developed for the *African Australians: Human rights and social inclusion issues* project. The suite of resources includes:

- this document
- a compendium
- background papers and literature review
- a summary guide – translated into several community languages and plain English

More information about these resources is provided in the following sections.

The Commission recommends that ***In our own words*** be read alongside the **compendium** which provides comprehensive recordings of the national consultation (including a summary of the responses from community consultations, stakeholder meetings and public submissions).

To read the compendium, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/

About the project

African Australians: Human rights and social inclusion issues is one of several projects undertaken by the Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) under its Community Partnerships for Human Rights program.

It was largely funded by the Australian Government as part of the National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security.

The project was established with the following partner organisations, which contributed knowledge, expertise and financial resources:

- Adult Multicultural Education Services (Victoria)
- Australian Red Cross
- Diversity Health Institute
- Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia
- Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Over the course of the project, the Settlement Council of Australia and the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship also joined as project partners.

Representatives from each organisation were part of a project **Steering Committee**², which also included two African Australian community representatives.

The project also had significant input from the national **Community Reference Group**³, made up of over 100 African Australian community members from around the country.

Myriad Consultants were commissioned to work with the Steering Committee and the Community Reference Group to organise and conduct the national consultations, undertake research and analysis and document the project's findings.

The African Australian community representatives on the Steering Committee – Samia Baho and Abeselom Nega – were closely involved in assisting Myriad Consultants with several community consultations.

The Commission released a **Discussion Paper** in March 2009, which called for submissions from

African Australians, other stakeholders including government, non-government and community organisations, service providers, academics and the public.

A summary of the Discussion Paper was translated into 10 community languages (Amharic, Arabic, Dinka, Nuer, Somali, Kirundi, Swahili, Krio, Tigrinya and Oromo) and invited responses on five key areas of human rights concern: **training and employment, education, health, housing and justice**.

Over 2,500 African Australians took part in **50 community meetings** held around the country. A number of workshops were conducted in **regional locations** in NSW and Victoria, the states where the largest African Australian populations reside, as well as one in Bordertown, South Australia, to identify specific issues facing these communities.

Representatives from **over 150 government and non-government stakeholders and service providers** also participated in the consultations. In addition, the Commission received **over 100 submissions** (written and oral).

There was a particular focus on gathering the views and experiences of **young African Australians, African Australian Muslim communities and African Australian Muslim women**, who often encounter specific and multiple challenges. 'Women only' and 'young people only' consultations were held to ensure participants could express their views freely.

In addition, the community consultation process included forums to identify **good practice approaches**; local government and community forums; multi-faith forums; an Indigenous and African communities forum; a policing and communities forum; a community arts forum; and a sporting organisations forum.



For more information on the project methodology, consultation locations, participating organisations and public submissions, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/

Support research and analysis

A literature review was prepared by the Commission to summarise the current knowledge and research on issues particular to African Australian communities and inform the methodology of the consultation process.

Throughout the national consultation process, African Australian communities were encouraged to submit research – both published and unpublished – so that the insights and analysis of African Australian communities could be properly reflected in the literature review.

The project was also complemented by a series of three background papers:

- *Migration between Africa and Australia: A demographic perspective* by Professor Graeme Hugo, University of Adelaide
- *Australia's migration policies: African dimensions* by Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, University of Technology, Sydney
- *Human rights issues relating to African refugees and immigrants in Australia* by Associate Professor Simon Rice, Australian National University, Canberra.

To read the literature review and background papers, visit

www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/



Guiding principles

In developing the principles to guide the national consultation process, members of the Steering Committee and the Community Reference Group emphasised the need to highlight the great diversity that characterises African Australian communities.

Not only does this include the wide range of cultures, religions and languages of African Australian communities, but also the rich diversity within and among community members who have arrived in Australia over recent decades as migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants.

The Commission's project was also informed by a number of other guiding principles, including:

- the importance of **The First Voice** of African Australian communities (see below)
- understanding that **identity and language** are major contributors to people experiencing social inclusion and exclusion
- the need to **build evidence of good practice** in relation to social inclusion and human rights
- the need to employ and promote a '**strengths-based**' approach to the consultation process and in the development of 'next steps'
- the need to be **solutions-focused**, without minimising evidence of disadvantage and exclusion.

We should capture what we have achieved. If the wider Australian public really understood the things that we did to contribute they would be amazed. In such a short time.

Community consultation,
South Australia

Community members, as well as members of the Steering Committee and the Community Reference Group, highlighted the importance of promoting the many positive contributions made by African Australians to the nation's social, cultural and economic life.

The First Voice

The First Voice concept⁴ has its origins in the heritage conservation and museology; however it is now more widely applied as both a process and principle. **The First Voice** involves consultation on the basis of respect and equality, collaboration on the basis of ownership and participation, and action on the basis of substantive equality.

A central aspect of this project was the commitment to respecting **The First Voice** of African Australian communities, which was critical in identifying:

- the issues
- what works and what is not working
- achievements and contributions
- preferred solutions and suggestions for progressing the issues.

Respecting and encouraging **The First Voice** acknowledges that communities are collaborative partners who are best placed to identify what needs to be done. It requires active engagement and meaningful dialogue with communities at all stages throughout a project.

The project compendium provides a comprehensive record of the outcomes of the national consultation process, with strong emphasis on **The First Voice** of African Australian communities. Visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/

Project findings

The consultations with community members and other stakeholders – including government, non-government and community organisations, service providers and academics – highlighted a number of barriers to the settlement and inclusion of African Australians and identified the need to:

- develop effective and targeted strategies to address discrimination, prejudice and racism experienced by African Australians
- include African Australian communities as genuine partners in the development and delivery of services, programs and education initiatives for their communities
- provide information and education programs on the backgrounds, culture and diversity of African Australian communities, and the pre-arrival experiences of refugees, to assist service providers and other stakeholders
- engage and support African Australian communities to develop initiatives to address particular areas of concern they have identified, including child protection and family violence.

The big problem is that, even if there is work or even if there is some houses, it is people and how they think about Africans, that is a bigger problem. **We get told that we cannot be trusted, that we are lazy. This is much harder to fight than looking for houses.**

Community consultation,
South Australia

Addressing discrimination and racism

The vast majority of African Australians who participated in the project said that having a ‘visibly different’ appearance did impact upon their everyday experiences.

While African Australians said that a lack of housing, limited employment opportunities and access to education were barriers to successful settlement and social inclusion, discussion of these issues was overwhelmingly prefaced by problems they encounter from negative stereotypes, prejudice and racism.

There was agreement by community participants, service providers and stakeholders that African Australians experience widespread discrimination – both direct and indirect – in relation to employment, housing, education, health services and in connection with the justice system.

Regardless of how they arrived in Australia, or whether they had been here for a short time or their whole lives, many African Australians said they experienced discrimination and prejudice as part of their everyday lives.

Community members felt that discrimination was the key factor that undermined their rights as equal citizens in Australia:

You start to feel that you have no place in this new land and you wonder what the experiences of your children will be as they grow up, and perhaps also find that the colour of their skin is the only reason that they will not be seen by some as belonging here. This is what I mostly fear.

Community consultation, NSW

African Australians expressed concern about the negative coverage their communities received in the mainstream media, often triggered by comments from public figures, which influenced overall perceptions of their communities and undermined their relationships with the broader Australian community.

They also perceived that members of their communities, especially young people, received increased scrutiny from police and other law enforcement agencies.

There is a clear link between experiences of discrimination and social exclusion. Discrimination can lead to exclusion, while those who find themselves on the fringes are also more likely to encounter discrimination.

All participants expressed the view that there was an urgent need for governments to prioritise action to address discrimination and racism as part of their commitment to promoting social inclusion for all Australians.

Improving services for African Australians

Stakeholders who participated in the consultations identified issues around the provision of services, especially service quality and service gaps (including cultural competence), as barriers to social inclusion for newly-arrived African refugees and humanitarian entrants.

In contrast, a major concern of community members was the ‘appropriateness’ of services offered to African Australians. A number cautioned that, in some instances, services and interventions can inadvertently undermine the collectivist basis that is crucial to African Australian communities, particularly the family unit.

Some community members expressed the view that family breakdown was increasing, which was attributed, in part, to inappropriate interventions based on a limited understanding of the background, experiences and cultures of African Australians. Other factors, such as internal tensions, external pressures and the stress of change, also contributed to instances of family breakdown.

Emphasis was also placed on the need to develop strategies targeting the multiple barriers faced by members of African Australian communities, including Muslim African Australians (and especially women), young people, older people and people with disabilities.

Consultations also raised issues involving humanitarian entrants from Africa who arrive in New Zealand but then move to Australia as migrants. In Australia they do not have access to income support, public housing, employment training or most English language programs because they have arrived as migrants, rather than humanitarian entrants. In the view of several community leaders, this group was particularly excluded.

The Commission’s project highlights the critical importance of governments, service providers and other stakeholders working in partnership with African Australian communities to develop and deliver programs and services that will meet their needs more effectively and appropriately.

It is clear that a collaborative approach is required, which builds on the strengths and assets of African Australian communities, promotes their genuine participation, appreciates their different backgrounds and patterns of arrival, respects their diverse cultures and also recognises, for some, particular vulnerabilities and risks.

Participants in the consultations repeatedly made the point that employing a collaborative, ‘strengths-based’ approach to policy development and service delivery results in greater levels of support and acceptance among community members. As a result, programs are more likely to deliver positive outcomes for African Australian communities.

Issue-specific suggestions

In response to the issues raised in the Discussion Paper, community members and other stakeholders provided a number of specific suggestions for improvements in the areas of **training and employment, education, health, housing** and the **justice system**.

The consultations also highlighted a number of other important issues for African Australian communities, including the need to inform, educate and support communities to address issues of **child protection** and **family violence**.

Other emerging issues raised by African Australian community members during the consultation process included the importance of:

- respecting and maintaining culture, heritage and values
- building positive gender relations
- addressing intergenerational issues
- countering negative media stereotypes
- ensuring access to transport
- using sport to enhance social inclusion.

An overview of these discussions, along with good practice examples identified in the consultations, is included in the following section.

Training and employment

For migrant and refugee job seekers finding paid work is vital to their successful settlement and integration into the Australian community. Meaningful employment also ensures that they can be part of the social and economic life of the communities in which they settle.

African Australians who took part in the consultations brought with them considerable professional and vocational skills, qualifications and experience. They also said they were eager to make a positive contribution to their new home.

However, many said they faced significant barriers when they seek suitable work and training, including:

- lack of information about relevant vocational education and training programs
- employment support services that can be confusing and difficult to access
- difficulties having overseas training, qualifications and experience recognised
- experiences of discrimination when applying for jobs, during interviews or in the workplace
- lack of knowledge or experience of Australian workplaces and employment conditions.

The reality is that so many just don't know that these programs exist and are missing out. I think so much more needs to be done to bring these programs to the attention of those who need them most.

Community consultation,
Northern Territory

Access to vocational training programs

A number of vocational education and training programs are available for migrants and refugees, including tertiary courses at universities and colleges, as well as courses run by TAFE colleges. Specific programs, funded by government agencies and other organisations, also provide training and support to disadvantaged job seekers.

African Australians, especially recent arrivals, said a major barrier to accessing training and employment support was the limited information available about these services. They said there was an urgent need to provide more targeted information to communities to advise them about relevant programs and services:

The reality is that so many just don't know that these programs exist and are missing out. I think so much more needs to be done to bring these programs to the attention of those who need them most.

Community consultation, Northern Territory

Ensuring new arrivals had sufficient English language skills to participate in vocational training was another key issue raised, and one that featured in almost all of the consultations:

500 hours of English language training – this may be adequate for immigrants from Europe ... but for others, such as those of us from Africa, especially remote areas, it's just not enough.

Community consultation, Western Australia

The cost and availability of childcare was another factor that community participants said limited the ability of parents, particularly newly-arrived mothers, to attend English classes and other training programs. The cost and availability of public transport was also a barrier, especially in rural and regional areas.

Community participants stressed their desire to gain practical work experience in Australian workplaces. They also noted the need for more intensive support during the training program and following completion, as well as the importance of training approaches that are suitable to their needs and backgrounds:

Training providers need to understand more about the backgrounds of Africans who use their programs ... when you come from a place where the idea of 'training' is somewhat alien, and you learn through doing or oral discussion, then the approaches that are taken just don't seem to work.

African Australian settlement worker, Victoria

.....

A number of suggestions were provided to improve access to vocational training and better prepare newly-arrived African Australians for local workplaces, including:

- on-arrival information about education, training and employment options
- vocational education programs linked to English language skills
- mentoring programs involving members of the Australian business and employer groups
- programs that combine basic training in trade skills with job placement and post-placement support
- flexibility about when programs are offered, as well as child care, to better enable women to attend
- more preparatory training programs and bridging courses.

Job placement and career advice

African Australians said they encountered a number of challenges using employment service providers.

They described the system as complex, frustrating and overwhelming and said that there was often not enough time provided to help people explore individual employment pathways or find work that matched their skills, interest and experience.

A particular challenge for newly-arrived African Australians, especially those from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds, was the lack of support provided to help them develop the necessary computer skills to navigate the system, identify employment opportunities and prepare applications:

The system assumes clients have access to technology and information, rather than being there to help them navigate the system.

Community consultation, NSW

Service providers and stakeholders also expressed the view that, on the whole, employment service providers were failing to provide appropriate assistance to help African Australians find jobs. A number of factors were raised, including:

- lack of cultural awareness by providers
 - negative stereotypes about African Australians held by providers
 - lack of specialist services, such as those provided by Centrelink's Multicultural Liaison Officers.
-



It was all fine until I turned up for the interview. They didn't expect to see a person with black skin. I knew the minute I sat down that I wasn't going to get the job. Well this was a year ago, and I have had that experience at least six times.

Community focus group,
South Australia

Most community respondents said that the front-line staff of employment service providers should be equipped with the skills to work effectively with African Australians, particularly those who are newly-arrived.

They know that because of the colour of my skin I won't get a job, but they pretend and put me through the motions.

Community focus group, NSW

Specialist migrant/refugee services were seen as being better able to understand the issues facing newly-arrived communities and, therefore, better able to support them to enter the workforce. They were also more likely to employ people from different backgrounds, including African Australian communities, which helped build the confidence of service users.

Community participants also highlighted the importance of career advisors being realistic when offering information and advice about the Australian labour market.

Finding and securing employment

African Australians said that discrimination was one of the greatest challenges to finding and securing employment. Participants in community consultations provided numerous examples of:

- difficulties getting interviews, which they believed was because of their accent or having an unfamiliar name

- attending interviews but feeling that employers would be unwilling to give them a job because of their skin colour or other visible differences
- believing that they had been passed over for promotion
- harassment and discrimination by co-workers.

These barriers were perceived to be further compounded for Muslim African Australians, especially women who wear the hijab.

Women, particularly African Muslims, spoke of feeling generally more vulnerable to exploitation around workplace arrangements. Several women also spoke of their experiences of sexual harassment.

The issue of employers requiring 'relevant experience' was raised consistently in community consultations. African Australians said they needed work experience opportunities to learn first-hand about Australian workplaces, how they operate and employer expectations.

Service providers and stakeholders identified the failure to recognise overseas qualifications as a major barrier to meaningful employment for many newly-arrived migrants.

The process of having overseas qualifications recognised is often a lengthy and costly experience, as are the costs of bridging courses and sitting professional examinations. As a result, many tertiary-educated professionals fail to find employment or take up positions as factory hands, taxi drivers or cleaners:

My daughter said to me the other day that she was better off leaving school because she should at least earn some money because she was never going to get to live her dream of being of a scientist. She looks at me and says 'Mum how can you work in that nursing home when you were a doctor at home?' This is not how I want my eldest daughter to be thinking.

Community focus group, Queensland

While this is clearly true for African Australians, it is an issue that affects many other individuals and groups in Australia.

Community members also noted that humanitarian arrivals, having spent many years in refugee camps, often arrive in Australia without official documents relating to their education and employment background.

A small number of consultations noted particular challenges for older African Australians in finding employment and training. Refugees and those who arrive

through the Family Reunion program as mature age are the most disadvantaged. Barriers such as learning English and new skills to access the labour market are further compounded by negative employer attitudes to mature age workers.

Unemployment and underemployment resulted in lower self-esteem and self-confidence. Some community members said they felt ashamed that they could not find a job and parents worried about the effects on their children, especially the possibility of perpetuating intergenerational disadvantage:

We came here for our children, and we want them to feel that they are part of this society. But when they see us working in cleaning jobs or retail jobs, when some of us have been teachers, doctors ... and they then think that there is no hope for them.

Community leader, South Australia

Consultations with community participants, service providers and stakeholders identified a number of strategies to better support African Australians to find and keep meaningful employment, including:

- specific programs to provide information to new arrivals about the Australian work environment and what employers expect
- programs and initiatives to help employers better understand the assets and capabilities of African Australian migrants and refugees.

Participants suggested that there was an ongoing need to raise community awareness about how to make a

A number of good practice models were provided, including **Work It Out**, a work experience program for migrants and humanitarian entrants at TAFE Tasmania. The program also includes classroom language support, with a focus on workplace communication, and coordinated support for participants. Tailored resources have also been developed for employers and workplace mentors.

Migrant Resource Centres and some **Legal Aid centres** are providing education programs for employers on the refugee experience and employer obligations under anti-discrimination legislation, while some **employer groups** have also been developed successful education programs to demonstrate the positive contributions of African Australians to their workplaces.

We came here for our children, and we want them to feel that they are part of this society. But when they see us working in cleaning jobs or retail jobs, when some of us have been teachers, doctors ... and they then think that there is no hope for them.

Community leader,
South Australia

complaint of workplace discrimination, with information and complaint forms available in a number of languages. Stakeholders also suggested that the process of lodging a complaint could be made simpler.

Several participants also noted that local social enterprises can be particularly helpful to newly-arrived African Australians. These initiatives offer valuable work experience opportunities which make it easier for them to enter the workforce.

A number of good practice examples were identified during the consultations including **The Ambassador**, a newspaper established in Melbourne in 2004 by the Horn of Africa Community Network, which trains community members in various skills and provides work experience opportunities for TAFE students.

Good practice initiatives

For a full list of good practice initiatives taking place around the country to promote greater access to training and employment opportunities for African Australians, visit

www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/training_and_employment/ and www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/regional/

Education

African Australians who took part in the consultations stressed how important education was in ensuring good outcomes in other parts of their life, such as health and well-being and employment. Access to education was seen as an essential component in their successful settlement into Australia.

Young people said they wanted to learn and to succeed academically. Many wanted to complete tertiary studies and find employment in different professions.

However, consultations with community members, service providers and stakeholders indicated that African Australians often encounter negative experiences when attending schools, universities and other educational institutions.

There was a common view expressed that schools and education institutions generally lack the cultural competency and the flexibility to properly meet the needs of African Australian students.

Experiences of discrimination and racism, within and beyond the school environment, were regularly highlighted during the consultations.

So many of us are getting through and achieving all sorts of things. My brother is now a biochemist and my sister is a teacher.

This really shows how determined we are.

Youth focus group, Victoria

Experiences of school students

African Australian young people in every state and territory said that discrimination, prejudice and negative attitudes about their ability to succeed were a constant part of their education experience.⁵

Many young people, especially girls, recounted being told by some teachers that they “shouldn’t aim too high” to avoid disappointment and were actively discouraged from pursuing further education. They also felt unfairly targeted for not knowing class rules or how to behave in different social settings:

I didn’t know that you had to put your hand up, and I was always getting into trouble for doing that. I also didn’t know the rules about wearing the uniform properly.

Youth focus group, Northern Territory

It’s embarrassing when I think about it, but even things like not knowing what you have to bring when they say it’s [Kris Kringle] and other things like that.

Youth focus group, South Australia

Stereotyped views of women’s capacities to learn were also repeatedly raised as a barrier for women, particularly young women:

You can be locked in as a young woman. One the one hand the wider society looks at you and thinks you don’t have the intelligence to learn, and then within your own family and community there might be cultural issues and values that means it’s hard for you as a girl or woman to study.

Community consultation, Tasmania

A number of students reported finding the school curriculum very challenging, particularly if their proficiency in English was still limited. This also meant they felt anxious and self-conscious about participating in classroom discussions.

African Australian young people also spoke of their unfamiliarity with the teaching and learning styles of Australian schools, while several newly-arrived students expressed frustration at being placed in classes to match their chronological age, rather than ones that reflected their educational attainment:

I am in a class with people who are my age, but they forget that I have been in the camps for a few years, and I did not go to school. Sometimes this makes me feel stupid.

Youth focus group, Victoria

.....

Another major issue of concern was the lack of appropriate support available to them at school, including a lack of people who could understand the background and culture of African Australians.

A number of young African Australians said they sometimes felt blamed by teachers for tensions in the schoolyard and that they were often accused of starting fights. They also reported that they did not feel accepted by their peers and struggled to feel as though they belonged:

You start to feel like an outsider and then you get desperate and angry and you think ‘will I ever be part of this place?’

Youth focus group, South Australia

The negative effects of these experiences on young African Australians can include low self esteem; reduced motivation; increased delinquency; depression and other health problems, particularly linked with using drugs and alcohol; and a greater likelihood of encountering problems with the law.

Despite these concerns, young African Australians also shared positive experiences of school, which often involved receiving affirmation and support from their teachers:

It makes a big difference when the teacher says to you in front of the other students that you did very well in an assignment. It tells everyone else that you are intelligent.

Youth focus group, Tasmania

Several also said it was important to promote positive role models for young African Australians. This would help build their pride and motivation, as well as counter negative perceptions and stereotypes of young African Australians.

Experiences of tertiary students

Several tertiary students reported feeling inadequately prepared when starting university, even though they had finished preparation courses to assist them with the transition:

I just didn’t feel ready. For starters, even though my English improved, I was still struggling with computers and how to use them properly for things like research.

Youth focus group, South Australia

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The local support group helped us a lot ... We didn't even understand the issue about enrolment and how old your child has to be, and rules about which schools you can get your children to go to.

Community consultation, Victoria

They said they frequently found the culture of Australian educational institutions alienating and had difficulties with their academic studies and forming friendships with others. Some had established small, informal groups for support:

We decided that no one else was going to help us, so we are helping ourselves. We meet regularly and talk about the challenges and how we can help each other out. It really helps address problems of isolation and also just basic friendship needs.
Youth focus group, South Australia

Some tertiary students also found the emphasis on a teaching style which encourages students to challenge their lecturers to be particularly confronting, especially given their cultural expectation that young people should respect the views of their elders.

Engaging African Australian parents

African Australian parents, especially newly-arrived refugee or humanitarian entrants, said they needed support to understand what education options were available for their children, along with practical information on issues such as enrolment. This was generally provided by settlement service providers or community networks.

African Australian parents stressed that they wanted to establish positive ties with the schools that their children

attended. They said that the educational progress of their children was greatly enhanced by schools and teachers who kept them regularly informed about how their children were going.

However, a number of parents said they felt intimidated by the school environment and others said they encountered stereotyped views that African Australian parents were not interested in their children's education.

Language barriers were another area of concern, with parents reporting that only limited translated information was available to describe the school program. In addition, interpreters or bilingual workers may not be available to help them participate in school events, such as parent-teacher nights.

Several parents also expressed concern that their own limited proficiency in English hindered their children's access to further education and other opportunities:

It really affects you. You know that you are not good for your children at school because English is not good. This makes them not lucky at school.

Community consultation, NSW

African Australian parents also shared a number of very positive experiences with individual teachers and schools and highlighted the importance of:

- schools that were welcoming, respectful and supportive of African Australian families (such as having 'welcome' signs in a number of languages)
- school counselling services provided in the language of the parents and family
- being invited to run school-based events, including cultural information days for students and other parents.

Employing Multicultural Education Aides and teachers from African Australian communities was identified as a particularly helpful way to strengthen relationships between parents and schools and better support African Australian students.

Service providers and stakeholders agreed that schools should ensure that information on their programs and student progress is made available to parents in their first language.

Other suggestions included establishing an orientation program for parents and students prior to starting at the school and holding oral presentations to share information with parents, rather than relying solely on printed materials.

Improving access to education

Just because I come from a war-torn country doesn't mean I cannot learn.
Community consultation, ACT

The development of a whole of-sector approach was seen as crucial to ensuring greater access to education and improved opportunities for African Australian families.

This should involve all organisations with responsibilities for educational services – including settlement agencies, state and federal government departments and community outreach programs – and focus on strategies to better coordinate and target resources and promote learning opportunities.

Community members, service providers and stakeholders also provided a range of specific suggestions to help improve access to education for African Australian students, including:

- allowing students to stay in English as a Second Language classes until they are ready to move on to mainstream schooling
- providing transition programs to improve school readiness and orientation for new arrivals
- increasing resources for primary and secondary schools to provide greater language support
- employing more teachers from African Australian backgrounds
- holding more classes in informal community settings and providing after-school tutoring programs.

It was also suggested that there was a pressing need for schools with refugee students to develop effective and culturally appropriate engagement strategies to connect and communicate with parents from new communities.

Community participants said that any training or support that increased the awareness of educators about the experiences of newly-arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants would be of benefit:

There is no doubt that schools and others need to have more knowledge and understanding so that they can appreciate what the barriers for our children might be. This might make them more understanding when the children have problems.
Community focus group, Tasmania

However, they stressed the critical importance of engaging members of African Australian communities to help develop and deliver these programs to ensure that certain stereotypes were not reinforced:

It is important that schools use people within the community as the experts of their own culture. There is so much around that is delivered about us by people who are not us.
Community leader, Western Australia

Bridging programs were also identified by several respondents as an effective way of accommodating the needs of newly-arrived migrant and refugee students who cannot access secondary school in Australia due to age, English language proficiency or low levels of general education.

A number of good practice initiatives were highlighted that helped improve access to education by African Australians, including:

- training programs on the needs of students from refugee backgrounds for teachers, school counsellors and others involved in educational institutions, provided by organisations such as the **NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors**
- homework support programs run at schools, rather than community centres, to increase the involvement of teachers and African Australian parents, organised by groups such as the **St Vincent de Paul Society**
- tutoring programs for African Australian students, including the **SAIL** program in Melbourne which has over 370 volunteer tutors working with members of the Sudanese community on Saturday mornings
- the **Beaut Buddies Program**, run by **Foundation House**, where volunteers 'buddy' with young refugees to support them in their transition from English language programs into mainstream education and training
- the **Refugee Students Assistance Scheme**, provided by the **NSW Department of Education and Training**, which provides financial support for refugee students in the first year after arrival to meet the costs of text books, uniforms, excursions and stationery.

Good practice initiatives

For a full list of good practice initiatives taking place around the country to promote greater access to education for African Australians, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/education/

Health

Good health and a sense of well-being lie at the heart of social inclusion. Healthy individuals and communities are better able to contribute to, and benefit from, Australia's social and economic life.

African Australians who took part in the consultations highlighted a number of factors that undermined their physical and mental health, as well as their capacity to get the support they needed.

These were largely associated with the settlement process and included:

- feelings of 'culture shock'
- language barriers
- changes in food and diet
- social isolation and absence of family networks
- lack of culturally appropriate health services.

The impact of discrimination and racism was another area of major concern.⁶ African Australians said that these experiences were stressful, upsetting and affected their relationships with others:

People in our communities worry that they may not properly understand what the doctor tells them or that they can't adequately explain the nature of their health complaint. **And so anxiety wins out and they end up not going to see a health care professional at all.**

Community leader, Queensland

If every day you go out on the street and people stare at you, or you are told you cannot get a job because of your skin colour, or your children are told they will not be successful because they are African, then you get sick in your heart and your head.

Community consultation, NSW

Community members, service providers and stakeholders also raised specific issues around health issues facing newly-arrived communities, women, young people, older people and people with disabilities, as well as receiving support for mental health issues.

A key area of discussion during all consultations was the need to support health professionals to better understand the background, experiences and perspectives of African Australians so they can deliver more appropriate and effective health services.

Barriers to health services

Most newly-arrived community members said they lacked sufficient information about Australia's health and community services system. In addition, many faced significant challenges understanding and navigating the complex system of health services.

Community members suggested ways in which important information on the health care system could be – and in some instances was being – provided to newly-arrived African Australians, including:

- information sessions provided in the language of the audience
- fostering connections with cultural, social and religious groups of their own ethnic background
- training and utilisation of bicultural community trainers.

Community members also said that culturally appropriate education materials that promote healthy lifestyles, encourage preventive health care and explain other aspects of the Australian health system, such as Medicare, would also be of benefit. This could be provided to people in their own language through settlement support services on arrival in Australia.

English language proficiency was a common barrier to accessing health information and services, as well as in communicating with health professionals.

African Australians said the use of interpreters was critical to ensuring safe and effective health care and treatment for people in their communities. However, this was often not provided and could result in miscommunication and confusion about health issues or procedures.

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Examples shared by community participants ranged from having the wrong dental work done to leaving a doctor's appointment with severe anxiety about the state of their health or their children's health.

There were also examples of children being inappropriately acting as interpreters for their parents and other family members:

I was very embarrassed to be talking about my pregnancy with my son and I could see that he was not very happy or comfortable himself.

Community focus group, NSW

Other examples included situations where interpreters had been arranged without the consent of the client, resulting in either the wrong dialect being spoken or feeling that their privacy had been breached.

Community participants said it was vital that trained interpreters were available in some of the more recent African languages. Similarly, it was crucial that health professionals made better use of these services.

Stakeholders highlighted the value of interpreting services such as The Doctors Priority Line, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week – and interpreting services for pharmacies, provided through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Health needs of new communities

In your own country, you feel strong and you are confident. You know what is expected of you and where your place is. Here everything is just different and I feel so unsure about everything.

Community consultation, South Australia

African Australians who had recently arrived in the country through the refugee and humanitarian program frequently said that feelings of culture shock had a profound impact on their health and well-being.

This was often combined with other health issues related to lengthy periods of time spent in refugee camps, including overcrowded living conditions, poor nutrition and limited access to immunisation and health care facilities.

Many community respondents also raised the issue of oral health and expressed anxiety about visiting a dentist, with some saying that had never previously received dental care.

The physical and psychological impact of torture and trauma was another factor that affected the health and well-being of some new arrivals.

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There isn't a lot of work done in African communities because they think that you shouldn't discuss disabilities in the public realm. **There is a view that it should be a responsibility that is carried by the family, rather than government.**

African Australian disability support worker

Some service providers expressed the view that overseas health screenings were often inadequate and that conditions such as anaemia, Vitamin D deficiencies and various infectious diseases (such as malaria and tuberculosis) were not being properly detected.

They also noted that African Australians often face a significant change in lifestyle when they settle in the country – for example, changes in diet and available foods, accompanied by more sedentary lifestyle – which can lead to unhealthy eating and obesity.

Community members recognised that health issues identified during the first year of settlement, such as dental and oral health needs, often became more acute the longer they are left unaddressed. However, in some cases there was a cultural reluctance to discuss issues of a personal nature and, therefore, not seek treatment.

In addition, participants said that the six months support provided to new arrivals under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy was generally not long enough to meet their needs and that, when this concluded, many people did not continue to make or attend medical appointments.

A number of participants highlighted the value of targeted information and assistance to help them understand and navigate the health system and develop the confidence to seek and receive the medical care they need.

Health issues for women

Many African Australian women said that they prefer to see health professionals of the same gender, particularly

when they have questions or concerns around sexual and reproductive health.

Other issues raised by women during the consultations included:

- sexual health issues among newly-arrived young women, particularly unplanned pregnancies
- the importance of addressing family conflict and preventing family violence, which can have profound health consequences for women and children
- the negative impacts of social isolation and a lack of family support networks, especially during pregnancy and child birth
- refugee women who may have suffered from poor nutrition during early pregnancy, which can lead to low birth weight and other complications for babies
- exposure to particular infectious diseases – such as malaria, hepatitis or tuberculosis – that can complicate childbirth.

Issues involving female genital mutilation were specifically identified by participants in 'women only' focus groups conducted in each state and territory, often in connection to mismanagement of care during pregnancy and labour. In addition, some African Australian women said that attitudes expressed by health workers made them feel ashamed and 'criminal'.

Several sessions were conducted with older African Australian women. Many said that they were largely unaware of the health services available to them and felt that their limited proficiency in English made them more vulnerable to poorer health outcomes.

Health issues for young people

Young African Australians identified a number of issues that affected their health and wellbeing, including the loss of family members, the effects of torture or trauma, feelings of dislocation and the tension of balancing family expectations with 'fitting in' to a new culture.

They also discussed the importance of seeking reliable advice about drug and alcohol use, sexual health issues and nutrition.

Young people spoke strongly of their desire to make their communities and families proud of them, but said they struggled with experiences of racism, discrimination and prejudice:

It really does affect your confidence, and then your health suffers too. Not just physical, but emotional too.
Youth focus group, NSW

Sport, recreational and artistic programs were seen as effective approaches to address issues of discrimination and isolation, as well as boosting physical and mental health and well-being.

Some good practice examples raised during the consultations included the **Sudanese ‘Lost Boys’ Association of Australia**, which offers recreational programs and support networks, and **Ayen’s Cooking School** in Adelaide, which aims to improve the nutrition, health and well-being of young Sudanese men.

Support for people with disability

A number of consultation participants said there was a desperate need to build awareness around issues and services for people with a disability in African Australian communities. Indeed, it was noted that some African languages do not have a word for ‘disability’.

African Australians with a disability face multiple disadvantages, discrimination and often neglect. They commonly grapple with stigma and prejudice about their disability from others within their community and sometimes within their own family:

Her family were ashamed of her because of her disability and used to hide her away.

Community consultation, South Australia

Access to disability services, and the provision of services specifically for people in African Australian communities, was seen as crucial.

Issues around childcare, particularly for single women with a disability, and services for carers of children and young people with a disability, who are predominantly women, were identified as specific barriers.

There was a general lack of awareness about respite services, as well as feelings of distrust of paid carers who might be insensitive to the requirements of Muslim Australian clients.

Mental health services

The issue of mental health drew mixed responses from community members, service providers and stakeholders who took part in the consultations.

Views ranged from a perception among some African Australian communities that there was an over emphasis on mental health issues, through to a concern that mental health was deteriorating within newly-arrived communities and there was a lack of resources and services to meet this growing need.

Anxiety about the welfare of family members left behind in situations of danger and deprivation sustains a sense of helplessness and contributes to depression and long-term post-traumatic stress reactions.

Stakeholder consultation

There was also considerable discussion about the meaning of the term ‘mental health’ and the extent to which normal responses to abnormal events, especially those who have had to flee their countries of origin, have been ‘pathologised’?

Despite this, almost all participants agreed that the effects of family separation on the mental health and well-being of African Australian families were significant and overwhelming:

Anxiety about the welfare of family members left behind in situations of danger and deprivation sustains a sense of helplessness and contributes to depression and long-term post-traumatic stress reactions.

Stakeholder consultation

Community participants also highlighted a number of other factors that undermined their mental health and sense of well-being, including family breakdown and including: intergenerational conflict; unemployment or underemployment; difficulties finding housing; and experiences of racism and discrimination.

In addition, it was felt that the mental health needs of older African Australians had been largely neglected:

Refugees who arrived twenty, thirty years ago, their mental health needs were often not addressed and, as a result, these people now have exacerbated mental health issues ...

Stakeholder consultation

It is important that the doctor encourage questions as many of us in the community have had bad experiences with some health people, including doctors, and so some women are just too scared and will only speak or ask questions if they are made to feel safe.

Community consultation

The issue of stigma associated with mental health was seen as a major barrier to seeking help, as was a lack of understanding about doctor confidentiality. In addition, the idea of one-on-one counselling was not familiar to some cultures.

Suggestions to address stigma and improve access to mental health services for African Australian communities included:

- promoting messages about mental health through local media, in particular ethnic community radio and newspapers
- engaging respected community leaders, especially religious leaders, to discuss mental health issues and the importance of seeking help
- using cultural values and belief frameworks to empower communities to address the issue in ways that are most appropriate for them
- increasing physical access to services and activities, especially with transport.

African Australians said that services and programs that were ‘family inclusive’ were the most effective in responding to mental health issues.

The **Families in Cultural Transition** program was cited by community participants as a good practice model for addressing mental health issues, allowing refugees to receive information and support in a relaxed environment, make friends with others in similar situations and learn how to be more confident and self-reliant.

Torture and trauma services

Some African Australians who arrive as refugees have experienced torture and trauma in their countries of origin or while fleeing those countries. This can have a significant impact on their mental health and their ability to adjust to the challenges of settling and integrating into life in a different country.

Torture and trauma services provide specialist psychosocial recovery and support for people in this situation. However, feedback received during consultations with community members highlighted a number of barriers to seeking and receiving these services, including:

- communication difficulties
- cultural differences and cultural misunderstandings around mental health concepts and experiences
- a perception that some services lack sensitivity and cultural understanding.

Several participants suggested that information about torture and trauma services should be disseminated more widely in culturally appropriate ways, as there was a general misunderstanding about their role and the services they provide:

Most people think that they just do counselling and a lot of Africans find this very culturally inappropriate.

Community leader, Victoria

Service providers strongly rejected the view that providing a service to respond to the impact of torture trauma amounted to ‘pathologising’ clients. They noted that a ‘strengths-based’ approach was the most effective way of supporting clients and providing services.

This includes developing strategies and initiatives, including group-based programs, to assist individuals and communities identify and build on their internal strengths, resources and skills in order to improve their overall mental health.

Good practice initiatives

For a full list of good practice initiatives taking place around the country to promote the health of African Australians, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/health/ and www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/regional/

Several service providers also highlighted the importance of having people on their staff who belong to the communities with which they work.

Another key issue raised by service providers was the importance they attached to working with mainstream mental health services in order to build greater cultural awareness and capacity.

Building culturally appropriate health services

African Australians said they valued doctors who listened to them, and almost all mentioned this quality when describing a positive experience with a doctor or the health system more generally.

They also said they valued health professionals who took the time to explain health issues and treatment options, explained how the health system worked, organised appropriate interpreters when needed and showed respect for traditional methods of healing.

Bilingual health workers who understood the cultural perspectives of African Australians were seen as an important component in good medical care, as was having the choice to see either male or female health practitioners.

Community participants, however, shared numerous examples of health services and treatment that failed to meet their needs.

African Australian women, particularly Muslim women, reported experiencing widespread discrimination and disadvantage in relation to accessing appropriate health care, particularly prenatal and perinatal care.

This can result in deteriorating health outcomes for African Australian patients and undermine confidence in the health system. It can also result in people not seeking help for future health needs, including potentially serious issues.

Service providers and stakeholders agreed that some African Australians did receive differential health care, which was commonly the result of cultural assumptions, stereotyping or miscommunication on the part of health professionals.

They noted that further work was needed to build the capacity of mainstream services to appropriately manage health issues involving newly-arrived African Australians, particularly refugees. This includes providing support for general practitioners, refugee health nurses and other nursing and allied health staff.

They also emphasised the need for cultural awareness training for health professionals and identified other

In your own country, you feel strong and you are confident. You know what is expected of you and where your place is. Here everything is just different and I feel so unsure about everything.

Community consultation,
South Australia

institutional barriers that could be addressed, such as hospital policies around family visiting.

Community members said it was crucial to involve African Australians in the development of training programs. This would ensure there was an accurate discussion of cultural issues and perspectives on health and treatment, including spiritual and religious beliefs.

However, a more fundamental requirement was the need to ensure community participation in the development, implementation and evaluation of effective, integrated and appropriate health care services for African Australians, particularly those who are newly-arrived.

Community consultations highlighted a number of positive initiatives that government and non-government agencies have implemented to address the health needs of recently-arrived refugee communities. Some of these good practice examples included:

- the **Refugee Health Nurse Program**, which supports the early health assessment of newly-arrived refugees in Victoria and assists them with referrals to other primary and specialist health services
- **Good Food for New Arrivals**, an online resource which aims to improve access to nutrition information for newly-arrived humanitarian and refugee families with young children, as well as enhance the cultural competencies and skills of service providers
- the **Refugee School Health Project**, which is a key entry point for newly-arrived children under 12 and their families to access health and welfare services in Victoria.

Housing

New migrants and refugee communities are among the most disadvantaged groups when it comes to finding accommodation to meet their basic needs.

They face further challenges trying to secure affordable housing, especially in the private rental market, given Australia's current chronic shortage of properties.

The difficulties confronted by newly-arrived African Australians are further compounded by the discrimination that many say they face when seeking to rent a house or apartment.

Other key issues raised during the consultations included:

- lack of information regarding housing and how to understand and access the system
- lack of affordable and appropriate housing, especially for larger African Australian families
- lack of awareness of tenancy rights, making people vulnerable to exploitation
- long waiting lists for public housing.

It's just a complete shock when you are out on your own trying to find somewhere for you and your family to rent. We are just not ready to do this after just six months, when we are also trying to learn the language, put our children into schools, trying to find work...

Community consultation,
Western Australia

Housing assistance

The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy provides initial on-arrival support for newly-arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants settling in Australia. Those eligible under the program can receive intensive settlement assistance for the first six months after arrival.

In the consultations, community participants expressed the view that this six-month period of assistance was too short and most newly-arrived African Australians were not able to locate affordable accommodation on their own at the end of that time.

They also said that they were at a serious disadvantage when competing for housing in the private rental market, especially in the midst of a severe housing shortage and the rising cost of rent.

The majority of community participants suggested that the housing assistance should be extended to 12 months to better support families and individuals as they address a number of connected settlement issues, such as finding a school for their children and looking for work.

Participants also suggested that the Australian Government could consider providing hostel-type accommodation for refugee and humanitarian settlers for a minimum of two years.

A common area of discussion was the need to further develop tenancy support programs so that newly-arrived African Australian communities are able to receive the information and practical assistance they need to find, apply for and rent a suitable property, as well as move in and maintain their property.

Service providers and stakeholders agreed that ongoing information and education would better equip refugees with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the private rental market.

They also noted that practical support, such as transport and attendance at property inspections, greatly improved the likelihood of a client securing a rental property, although these activities are often not funded as part of normal settlement programs or services.

Barriers to secure and affordable housing

Racial discrimination – both direct and indirect – was the most common barrier that African Australians said they faced when attempting to find affordable and appropriate housing:

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The amount of times I hear real estate agents say that they had a bad experience with an African and so they are not renting out to Africans. How many times have they had a bad experience with a white Australian? They would need to shut down if they took that attitude with every skin colour that didn't pay their rent.

Community consultation

Community members gave numerous examples of discriminatory practices and attitudes of real estate agents and landlords, such as failing to supply details of vacant properties or requiring African Australians to sign long rental contracts without properly understanding their rights.

Other instances of discrimination described by African Australians included being denied private rental housing due to their family size and real estate agents failing to properly attend to repairs and maintenance of properties.

Community respondents also said their lack of knowledge of the housing system in Australia was another major barrier. This included having little awareness of the processes and protocols associated with tenancy and tenancy laws.

People gave examples where bond money was not returned because they had not correctly filled out the initial conditions report or were told they were required to fix damages that did not actually exist.

Low levels of awareness were often compounded by varying levels of English language proficiency. This was seen as a particular challenge when completing applications for rental properties or applying for public housing, which required a number of supporting documents.

African Australians also said that there were very few houses available – either through public housing or in the private market – to accommodate large families:

Australian houses just are not made for African families. We are large extended family networks and we are trying to survive in a country that just likes one or two children.

Community consultation

Many African Australians shared experiences of having to move away from extended family to find somewhere to live. Others chose to stay together for support and financial reasons, which often resulted in overcrowding.

Another issue raised concerned the overall standard and quality of housing provided to African Australians,

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The amount of times I hear real estate agents say that they had a bad experience with an African and so they are not renting out to Africans. How many times have they had a bad experience with a white Australian? They would need to shut down if they took that attitude with every skin colour that didn't pay their rent.

Community consultation

particularly new arrivals. There were numerous examples of people moving into accommodation with no heating or cooling systems, broken windows and other problems:

For a long time I would just fix it myself with my own money because I didn't know what my rights were. The real estate agent didn't bother to tell me either.
Community consultation

Unaffordable rent increases meant that African Australians often experienced insecure housing. It was not uncommon to hear of families having to move every year, causing major disruptions to their settlement experience:

This is having a disastrous effect on the families' sense of stability and on peace of mind. The impact on the children and their schooling is also significant. This whole process you can see just locks people into this merry-go-round where you just don't feel that you have much of a future.
Community consultation

Community members also said that being on a long and uncertain waiting list for public housing was a significant contributor to feelings of stress and anxiety.

Service providers and stakeholders stated that the combination of all these factors meant that newly-arrived refugees were at particular risk of homelessness.

Other groups of African Australians reported specific challenges in finding affordable and appropriate accommodation, including single mothers, women

without husbands, young men without families and people with disability.

Several community members also raised the specific issue of African Australian women fleeing domestic violence. Accessible and culturally appropriate crisis accommodation services were required to meet the needs of these women, often accompanied by their children, as well as ensuring that information about these services were provided to communities in a language and format that was appropriate to them.

Improving support and increasing awareness

African Australians expressed their appreciation for service providers and agencies that provided them with support and help to find a place to live.

As part of the consultations, community members were invited to describe the assistance that was most helpful to them, which included:

- receiving culturally appropriate and relevant information (including through interpreters) about tenancy agreements, including the rights and responsibilities of all parties
- people attending appointments with them to inspect properties, as well as providing transport to get to appointments
- assistance filling out application forms for rental properties, nominating referees and completing entry condition reports
- assistance with bond and rent in advance through state and federal government funds, as well as assistance with emergency relief.

The issue of tenancy education programs for African Australian communities was identified as an area of urgent need, to both improve their prospects for finding suitable accommodation in the private rental market and to ensure that their rights are respected.

Tenancy education should address the specific needs and questions of different African Australian communities and cover a number of key topics, including: what is involved in establishing a tenancy; tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities; connecting utilities and paying bills; how to maintain a property; how to exit a tenancy; and what to do when things go wrong, including making complaints of discrimination.

Since many refugees and humanitarian entrants often experience 'information overload' in the initial period

following settlement, it is important that tenancy education is provided over an extended period of time and using culturally appropriate resources and formats.

A number of good practice examples of tenancy education programs were raised during the consultation, including through the **Residential Tenancies Authority** in Queensland and the **Australian Red Cross**.

Relationships with real estate agents and housing providers

Service providers and stakeholders drew attention to programs operating in different states and territories that sought to build cooperative relationships with real estate agents and improve access to housing opportunities for African Australians.

Some housing support agencies had established arrangements to act as a guarantor for individuals applying for rental properties, overcoming the need for refugees or humanitarian entrants to provide a rental history. These 'head leasing' arrangements had reportedly been implemented in a number of locations, both formally and informally.

They also said that **rental guarantee programs**, such as the one being piloted in NSW, also had the potential to lower the perceived risk associated with low income and related vulnerabilities and assist in the maintenance of tenancies in private rental markets.

Service providers and stakeholders also highlighted the value of the free **Telephone Interpreter Service for Real Estate Agents and Landlords**, provided through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, in renting and managing properties with African Australian tenants.

Strategic partnership arrangements between community providers and real estate agencies in some locations had also helped to reduce instances of discrimination and misunderstanding involving African Australian families.

However, there was broad agreement that, in general, real estate agents and landlords lacked understanding about emerging African Australian communities. As a result, there was a need for targeted education initiatives for this group on anti-discrimination laws and on the background and settlement experiences of these communities.

For example, one suburban settlement agency in Victoria hosted a one-day 'Housing Expo', which brought together refugees and representatives from banks, real estate

agents and the state government housing department. The event helped build greater awareness of the local refugee communities and encouraged greater interaction between different groups.

There was also a need identified for government agencies to better resource housing services that support refugees and humanitarian entrants.

Community reference groups could be established to ensure that tenants from refugee backgrounds have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to discussion on local housing issues and concerns.

Good practice initiatives

For a full list of good practice initiatives taking place around the country to promote the access to housing for African Australians, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/housing/

This is having a disastrous effect on the families' sense of stability and on peace of mind. The impact on the children and their schooling is also significant. **This whole process you can see just locks people into this merry-go-round where you just don't feel that you have much of a future.**

Community consultation

Engaging with the justice system

Engaging with the legal system and relationships with law enforcement agencies emerged as areas of significant concern for African Australians.

Of particular concern was the relationship between young African Australians and the police, with many young people saying they felt they were being ‘over policed’.

Community members who took part in consultations said they found the Australian legal system complex, confusing and overwhelming.

They also identified a number of specific areas of concern, including:

- lack of awareness of the law, which can inadvertently result in contact with the police and courts
- language barriers with police and courts
- limited awareness of family and domestic violence laws, particularly among newly-arrived communities
- concerns around the child protection system and interventions by child protection agencies
- underreporting as victims of crime, often due to a lack of confidence in the system
- difficulties accessing affordable legal assistance, leading to situations where people self-represent.

Sometimes we do the wrong things not because we want to break the law but because we don't know the law. How can you live without knowledge about the law?

Community focus group, South Australia

Low awareness of Australian laws

There was a widespread view expressed during community consultations around the country that African Australians, especially those who were newly-arrived, had very low levels of understanding of Australian legal system and its laws.

This lack of knowledge means that African Australians can quickly find themselves involved in a legal issue, leaving them feeling shocked, anxious and confused. A number of examples were provided where people said they had inadvertently broken the law without knowing they had done so:

Many of us did not know that you needed a licence to be able to drive. How easy it is here to get into problems with the law.

Community consultation, Northern Territory

In addition, a lack of understanding of how Australia's justice system works can leave many African Australians in a very vulnerable position. This problem can be further compounded by a lack of accessible information:

The law is often written in English. It is hard for our community to read the booklets in English. I ended up doing a course about the law and I asked if the legal brochures could be translated in different languages so that my community can know the law and then not break it.

Community focus group, Queensland

Not surprisingly, most African Australians who took part in the consultations said a key priority was to increase their knowledge of Australian law and the legal system as a whole. They were especially keen to receive information on child protection and family law, including domestic violence.

Young people who took part in focus groups said they had limited awareness of their rights and responsibilities and the role of courts, police and legal services.

Service providers and stakeholders reiterated the importance of building legal ‘literacy’ among African Australian communities. They suggested legal information should be shared with communities on an ongoing basis.

A number of good practice models were identified, including community policing awareness programs provided across a number of states and territories, as well as police participating in orientation programs for newly-arrived communities under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy.

Community participants also noted that there was often limited access to information about anti-discrimination laws and complaints mechanisms, especially in more recently-arrived African communities. They strongly recommended that greater effort be made by complaint handling agencies to provide culturally appropriate and translated information.

Language barriers

Issues relating to language barriers and difficulties accessing interpreters featured in a number of consultations.

Participants gave examples where African Australians said they had not been given the opportunity to have an interpreter, including situations involving the police.

A small number also highlighted experiences where court hearings at local courts or magistrates courts had proceeded, even though an interpreter was not present.

A number of courts, including the Federal Magistrates Court, have recently adopted policies on the use of interpreters to prevent these scenarios from occurring.

Relationships with police and law enforcement officials

I don't think there is a day where I haven't been asked to move on, or police have come over to us and asked us why we are hanging around. We do go around in big groups, but that is normal for us.

Youth focus group, NSW

African Australians, especially young people, raised a number of concerns about their relationship with police and law enforcement agencies, including:

- perceptions of being targeted by police, security guards and transit officers
- feelings of being 'over policed' in public spaces where young African Australians gather
- the extended surveillance on African Australian Muslims by federal police.

Young African Australians gave examples of being regularly stopped and questioned by police in public, police asking them to move on without any legitimate reason and racist comments being made to them by police officers.

Participants in community forums in other states and territories also raised concerns about perceived



That trust is probably not there for a number of reasons, including the fact that a lot of Africans have come from countries where the legal systems and police were corrupt. But there is also the fact that police haven't always behaved fairly towards many Africans in the community.

Stakeholder consultation, NSW

stereotyping of African Australians by police and law enforcement officials.

There was a widespread view that further efforts were needed to counter what community members viewed as 'entrenched stereotypes' among police – often perpetuated by the media – of young African Australian men belonging to gangs. They believed this had been a significant factor in undermining relations between police and African Australian communities.

Mutual distrust between African Australian communities and law enforcement agencies was identified as a significant barrier by community members, service providers and other stakeholders:

That trust is probably not there for a number of reasons, including the fact that a lot of Africans have come from countries where the legal systems and police were corrupt. But there is also the fact that police haven't always behaved fairly towards many Africans in the community.

Stakeholder consultation, NSW

Community members expressed the view that some law enforcement officials, especially police and sheriffs, lacked cultural awareness.

While acknowledging these concerns, service providers and stakeholders stressed that significant time and effort has recently been invested by police across a range of jurisdictions to address tensions between police and young African Australians.

The **Justice for Refugees Program** administered through the Victorian Department of Justice, and the appointment of a **Sudanese community liaison officer** with the NSW Attorney General's Department, were also identified as contributing to more positive and informed interactions between African Australian communities and the justice system as a whole.

Relationship building activities with young people, particularly through sport and arts-based programs, were viewed as positive strategies for improving community understanding and interaction with police.

Participants agreed there was a clear need to bolster training and education initiatives for police and those working in the justice system. Of particular importance was the need to build understanding about the pre-arrival experiences of people coming to Australia as refugees and humanitarian entrants, as well as the need for police to appreciate the key differences between different African Australian communities.

Non-reporting of crime

African Australians around the country provided numerous examples of being subjected to verbal and physical assaults.

Experiences of violence and harassment took different forms, ranging from occasional incidents of serious assault to more frequent examples of racial abuse and threatening behaviour, as well as damage to mosques and churches.

Some community respondents described having eggs thrown at them and being pelted with beer bottles from passing cars. Others said they had been pushed and shoved in public places, including schools, because of their appearance.

Several African young people, especially in Victoria and NSW, raised issues related to religious discrimination, expressing the view that "if you are both black and Muslim then you're done for".

A large number of community members also referred to the impact of negative stereotypes of African Australians in the mainstream media and how news reporting of incidents, or comments by high-profile figures, can act as a 'trigger' to acts of discrimination and racism:

I have had people in my community get attacked, but they went to the police station and were asked what they did to provoke it. Why would I go and get that sort of treatment?

Community consultation, South Australia

While a large number of African Australians said they felt increasingly concerned about racist violence being directed at them, their family and those in their community, most were not confident that it could be properly dealt with by law enforcement authorities.

Examples were given of people who had been assaulted but did not report the incident to police. The reasons for non-reporting included a fear of authorities (often based on perceptions of police from their country of origin) and a fear of being seen to 'make trouble'. However, the primary factor was a lack of confidence that the matter would be properly investigated.

Some young African Australian women said they would feel particularly vulnerable about reporting a crime to police, especially a crime that had been committed against their own person.

Most community participants felt that improved relations with police would greatly enhance their confidence in reporting a crime.

Other suggestions included making information about victim support services more accessible to African Australian communities, using peer education strategies to share information within communities and building greater cultural awareness among police officers:

For instance, a woman may not tell a police officer who is a male that she is experiencing domestic violence because it might be culturally inappropriate for her to share that kind of information with a man.

Community focus group, South Australia

Relationship with the courts

African Australians said they lacked understanding of how Australia's court system worked and expressed concerns about the impact this had on some community members.

Courts were also perceived to be intimidating and extremely formal. The legal language used also made proceedings difficult to understand.

Community consultations highlighted concern about an overrepresentation of young African Australians coming before the courts for minor public order offences such as loitering, disorderly behaviour or fare evasion.

Participants also felt there was a lack of diversionary programs available for African Australian young people.

A number of positive comments were made about recent initiatives taken by various courts and judicial officers to

build awareness and understanding among newly-arrived communities and courts:

There was an open day at the Blacktown local court and people talked about their confusion about the way the courts work and learned a lot.

Community focus group, NSW

One example provided was a moot court organised by Magistrates from the **Victorian Magistrates Court**. Other positive initiatives included presentations given by judges and court officials to community meetings, dialogue sessions between community leaders and community visits to courts and tribunals:

The judge showed us the court room and she showed us how the court works. We all got a chance to sit in the witness box and understand more about how the court does things. This is good because I don't feel frightened of the court anymore.

Community consultation, Victoria

This has been a good way for people to know that they can get legal advice instead of just ignoring the problem. **There are so many times when I know people in our community have just thrown a paper away not knowing that it was a court order.**

Community consultation,
Western Australia

It is often not fully explained to refugee families how child protection laws work in Australia ... I don't need parenting classes. I need to understand the law and also how some of my culture may be misunderstood.

Community focus group,
Northern Territory

Access to legal services

Access to legal services, including legal aid and legal representation, was raised by a number of people as an issue of growing concern, particularly for African Australians wanting to bring family members to Australia.

A chief barrier was cost. Many in the community said they could not afford immigration lawyers or migration agents. Legal aid is not provided for these cases and Refugee and Immigration Legal Centres do not have sufficient funding to assist all families in this situation.

Several African community workers and leaders also spoke of the increasing number of people in their communities who 'self represented' in court as they did not understand that they could get free legal advice or, in some instances, legal aid.

Language difficulties, especially for members of newly-arrived communities, were raised as a key barrier to getting appropriate advice or services:

The lack of English however affects our confidence and might mean we don't make all the enquiries we need to if the law enters our world.

Community consultation, Northern Territory

In addition, African Australian women said that social isolation, limited English language and a lack of knowledge of Australia's justice system and their legal rights left them feeling vulnerable.

Some consultation participants highlighted positive developments that had recently taken place with community legal services. This included the development of collaborative models for legal education and legal support and, in some instances, co-location of services with migrant resource centres.

Co-location was seen as a particularly effective way of reaching out to African Australians, especially when information sessions could be organised through the migrant resource centre. This helped build awareness of legal issues and also meant community members were more likely to feel comfortable about accessing the service if a legal issue did arise:

This has been a good way for people to know that they can get legal advice instead of just ignoring the problem. There are so many times when I know people in our community have just thrown a paper away not knowing that it was a court order.

Community consultation, Western Australia

Another 'good practice' example identified was the NSW Legal Assistance Forum, which is working with Blacktown Local Court on the feasibility of a free legal information and basic legal representation service for the Sudanese community. They have also developed a Sudanese Community Legal Resource/Referral Guide.

Child protection

People participating in community consultations said that information about the child protection system was a pressing concern for newly-arrived African Australians.

Many expressed frustration, anger, dismay and despair at the impact that child protection interventions were having on their families and the number of out-of-home care placements involving African Australian children.

African Australian community members gave examples of what they felt were ill-informed assessments by child protection workers and wanted to know more about how decisions were made and what scope existed to challenge those decisions.

They also expressed the view that many child protection workers did not have sufficient cultural understanding of African Australian families and lacked skills in cultural competency, with interpreters often not used or used inappropriately.

They said there was confusion in African Australian communities about how the legal system conceptualised child abuse and they wanted to know more about the legal definitions and standards:

It is often not fully explained to refugee families how child protection laws work in Australia ... I don't need parenting classes. I need to understand the law and also how some of my culture may be misunderstood.
Community focus group, Northern Territory

Many community members said they were unaware of the Australian definition of the legal rights of children at 16 years and as young adults at 18 years.

Service providers and stakeholders also highlighted the urgent need to increase resources for programs that provide information and build legal 'literacy' on child protection issues among African Australian communities, especially newly-arrived families.

The need for child protection agencies to develop culturally sensitive approaches to assessment and intervention was also strongly emphasised by the vast majority of community participants.

Family violence

A number of African Australian communities that participated in the consultations expressed deep concern at levels of family violence, which many viewed as a growing problem:

Family violence is a major issue in our communities ... So many of our families are breaking apart. We need information but we also need to know that when we ask for help it is appropriate to our needs.
Community focus group

The changing roles and dynamics within families following settlement in Australia – including the roles of women, men and young people – were seen as a major factor contributing to family violence. There was also concern raised about violence or threats of violence directed by young people against their elders.

However, some community members, especially some of the older women, felt that legal approaches and service interventions to address family violence were based on an understanding of 'family' that was not relevant or appropriate to new communities.

Further, it was felt that in some instances these interventions exacerbated the issue within communities and contributed to family breakdown.

Some African Australians said that they felt uncertain about reporting family violence because of a fear of police and law enforcement agencies, as well as a fear that children or women may be removed from the family home.

It was also suggested that there were very few options available for men who wanted assistance to address violent behaviour, including a lack of bilingual counsellors or support workers.

The majority of respondents expressed the view that African specific organisations should be equipped to play a more significant role in preventing family violence:

Issues around family violence are issues that the community is trying to openly address, but wanting to do it in a way that is culturally appropriate.
Community focus group, Tasmania

Information to build legal understanding on the issue should be targeted to specific communities, rather than treating African Australian communities as "if we were all the same".

In addition, people delivering information about family violence and prevention should be "well known, credible, trustworthy and a member of the targeted group", such as community or religious leaders.

Other factors that were seen as critical in developing effective programs to address family violence included:

- ensuring communities do not feel they are being targeted as 'problem' communities
- recognising pre-arrival experiences, including torture and trauma, and its impact on family violence
- incorporate culturally relevant notions of 'family'
- building trust in government and policing organisations
- adopting a whole-of-community approach, which involves the participation of both women and men in the communities.

Community education was viewed as being the most effective approach for preventing family violence, while collaboration between mainstream providers and ethnic community representatives was seen as essential to developing effective, culturally appropriate programs.

Good practice initiatives

For a full list of good practice initiatives taking place around the country to build promote greater understanding of and access to the justice system for African Australians, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/justice/ and www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/regional/

Emerging issues

During the community consultations and through the submission process, African Australians raised a number of other issues that were seen as crucial in supporting the settlement and integration of newly-arrived communities, strengthening families and promoting social inclusion.

Some of the emerging issues that communities identified included the importance of:

- respecting and maintaining culture, heritage and values
- building positive gender relations
- addressing intergenerational issues
- countering media stereotypes
- ensuring access to transport
- using sport to enhance social inclusion.

Respecting and maintaining culture, heritage and values

African Australians said that the preservation of their cultural diversity and cultural heritage were vital to their successful settlement and inclusion into the Australian community.

Africa has a massive diversity of ethnic groups and roughly about 2,000 different languages spoken in 53 countries. This diversity is very much reflected here in Australia.

Community consultation,
Victoria

Newly-arrived African Australians bring many experiences, qualities and skills to this country and were eager to contribute to Australia's multicultural society. As the 'lifeblood' of their communities, they said their cultures and religion were assets that could be shared with the broader Australian community.

African Australian parents said they wanted to maintain and share their cultural values with their children. These values were seen as a key factor in bringing families together and keeping them strong, healthy and resilient, especially during the settlement period.

For the overwhelming majority, intergenerational conflict and family breakdown were seen to stem from inadequate or inappropriate services and interventions that undermined traditional family values and promoted more 'individualist' approaches.

Community participants also understood that African Australian young people face significant pressures to conform to western cultural norms, creating internal conflict in young people and conflict within families.

Several respondents expressed the view that young people who retain the most important elements of their culture, while developing the skills to adapt to their new country, appear to cope best in their psycho-social adjustment.

Language was seen to be intrinsic to the expression of culture. African Australians said that maintaining their first languages should be encouraged and supported, especially through community-based initiatives.

Religion was also an important point of connection for many African Australians, especially those who arrived in the country without other family members. However, African Muslim women, particularly those who wore the hijab, reported experiences of discrimination:

My religion is important to me and as long as I don't do anything to hurt anyone, why do people think they can tell me it's not right, or to take it off. I am just trying to be good to my religion.

Community focus group

While culture and cultural values should be protected, African Australians also recognised that some cultural practices sanctioned by tradition could conflict with human rights. Participants said it was important for communities to take ownership of these issues and develop effective strategies to respond to them.

Promoting the creative arts – through music, song, dance, story-telling and other mediums – was seen as vital in

maintaining and strengthening African cultures, as well as for engaging community members in activities that helped to reduce social isolation.

Good practice initiatives

For a full list of good practice initiatives taking place around the country to promote and strengthen the cultures of African Australian communities, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/emerging_issues/

Building positive gender relations

Negotiating gender relations was raised on numerous occasions throughout the consultations. However, much of the feedback provided related to other themes, and so features in different sections of this document and the project compendium.

While the project sought to gather the specific experiences and suggestions of African Australian women and men on a range of key themes, an important issue to emerge during the consultations was the need to support women and men build positive gender relations.

Community members said that the ‘culture shock’ experienced by newly-arrived African Australian men was of particular concern, while a number of men expressed the view that their traditional position as ‘family provider’ had been undermined by the many changes they encountered after arriving in the country:

We come here and we find we can't get a job and then I am not helping my family but my wife is getting a job. It is not good to show myself to the community when it is like this.

Community focus group

There was significant discussion about the changing household roles of women and men and the expectations of life in Australia, as well as the stress and tension of trying to maintain traditional African cultural practices while also adjusting to the values of a new society.

This can present a number of challenges for maintaining strong, healthy and positive family relationships.

Community members expressed the view that the impact of all these changes posed a growing problem, especially among newer arrivals, and there was an urgent need to work with African Australian communities to address the issue.



Some examples of good practice initiatives identified during the consultations included the **Bridges for African Men and Families Program** (Relationships Australia, Hobart); the **Men and Family Relationship Program** (Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre, Melbourne); and the **African Men's Group** (Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Perth).

Good practice initiatives

To find out more about these good practice initiatives that are building positive gender relations, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/emerging_issues/

Addressing intergenerational issues

African Australian young people often adapt more quickly than their parents to life in Australia, including developing strong English-language skills.

A number of African Australian parents said that they often relied on their children to interpret for them

in various situations. This had a significant factor in changing family dynamics, as well as undermining the parents' feelings of self esteem.

Certain programs and services for young people – such as the payment of Youth Allowance through Centrelink – was seen as undermining the authority of parents and weakening their role to provide for, care for and discipline their children.

Another issue raised during consultations was the specific challenges for young African Australians to reconcile their traditional cultures and values with an alternate set of expectations held by other young Australians.

This can lead to feelings of confusion and isolation, as well as difficulties with cultural integration. Community leaders also expressed concern that they were 'losing' their young people:

Our young people are becoming lost to us. They are not listening to their families and their elders, and they are getting mixed up with problems, drugs, and police.

Community focus group, Victoria

To address these issues, the Somali Women's Group received a grant from the Australian Council for Arts to run the **Poetry Jam Arts Project**, which seeks to improve links and communication between young people and elders in their community through traditional poetry and hip hop music.

Countering negative media stereotypes

We come from terrible places and think this will be somewhere to call home, and all I hear now in the newspapers is that we are criminals and that we are gangs and we should go home. Politicians should be very careful about what they say because they are very powerful.

Community focus group

Concern about the way mainstream media perpetuated negative stereotypes and perceptions of African Australians was a feature of many community consultations.

It was seen as a major hurdle to acceptance and integration with the broader Australian community, as well as a 'trigger' for incidents of physical and verbal abuse of African Australians.

My religion is important to me and as long as I don't do anything to hurt anyone, why do people think they can tell me it's not right, or to take it off. I am just trying to be good to my religion.

Community focus group

The impact of media reporting of different events, especially controversial comments made by public figures, was seen to negatively stereotype African Australian young people as either “gang members, criminals or terrorists” or as communities who were unable to settle into Australian society:

It makes me get very angry and I just then don't feel like it's worth me trying to do anything to get ahead because I will just get pulled down again.

Community focus group

Several community leaders stressed the need for African Australians to become better informed about how the Australian media works and to engage with it constructively. A key focus was to promote the many positive contributions that African Australians make to the social, economic and cultural life of the nation.

New Australia Media was nominated as a good practice example in helping young people from new and emerging communities develop media and journalism skills. A new project run by the organisation sees professional journalists volunteer their time to mentor young people and assist them to prepare news articles, which are then published to a website hosted by the State Library of Victoria.

Good practice initiatives

For more good practice initiatives taking place around the country to counter negative media stereotypes, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/emerging_issues/

Access to transport

Transport was identified by some community participants as a key issue for successful settlement and integration, particularly for newly-arrived African Australians.

Transport contributes to social inclusion by providing access to work, education, healthcare and grocery shopping, as well as allowing people to participate in social, cultural and sporting activities.

However, African Australians faced a range of barriers when using public transport, including:

- lack of knowledge of the system
- a fear of crime and personal safety, especially for women
- experiences of discrimination and racism, from transport operators and other passengers.

Without proper access to transport, you can't get to a job interview, you can't get to inspect any houses for living in and you end up feeling very lost and isolated.

Community consultation

Young people who use public transport regularly to get to school, training or work said the cost of public transport created financial difficulties for them.

Transport was also a major issue for the growing number of newly-arrived families who had been settled in regional and rural locations.

Many said that the limited transport options in these centres meant that a car was a necessity, especially for employment, although this was very expensive to purchase and the cost of obtaining a driver's licence and receiving driving lessons were prohibitive.

People who participated in the consultations said that community-managed transport services, supported by government, would help address these barriers. **Free learn-to-drive programs** operated by local associations in regional areas were also praised as good practice examples.

Using sport to promote social inclusion

Sport featured prominently in many consultations, especially in focus groups with young African Australians. It was seen by both young women and young men as a way to promote social inclusion and build new relationships.

Many young African Australians were enthusiastic about participating in sport, especially soccer, Australian Rules, cricket and basketball.

When I first came to Australia I did not have any friends. When I started playing football I met a lot of people and some of them are now my friends.

Youth focus group

They said participating in organised sport helped them build a sense of belonging, form friendships, develop new skills, learn from older role models and access other forms of support, such as homework assistance.

The African Soccer Tournament, sponsored by the **Australian Centre for Languages**, was identified as an example of a successful initiative to break the social isolation of newly-arrived refugee young people in Western Sydney, bringing them together around a shared passion.

Other 'good practice' programs included the **AFL Multicultural Football Program**, the **ZimVic Social Sports Club** and **Out of Africa and into Soccer** (VicHealth).

Sport was also seen as an extremely effective tool for building positive relationships between young African Australians and the police:

In Sudan, if the police come to talk to you, you're in trouble. But here I am playing football with them and even beating them.

Youth focus group

For example, a successful project established by the **Rosehill Local Area Command** in NSW, included sporting, social and workshop events to build bridges with young African Australians, provide information and address issues around anti-social behaviour.

Despite their enthusiasm, African Australian young people identified a number of barriers to their participation in sport and recreation, including limited knowledge of sporting opportunities available to them and the costs of sporting equipment and joining clubs.

Experiences of racism and discrimination also deterred a number of young people from continuing their participation in the sport.

Community and stakeholder representatives identified a number of government and non-government initiatives to address these barriers including: **Queensland Roars Against Racism** (Multicultural Affairs Queensland); **Bouncing racism out of sport** (Cricket Victoria, Football Victoria, Netball Victoria and the Department of Victorian Communities); and **Sudanese use basketball to counter racism** (a national basketball tournament organised by young Sudanese Australians).

Good practice initiatives

For a full list of good practice initiatives taking place around the country that use sport to promote social inclusion, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/compendium/emerging_issues/

Ways forward

After hearing directly from African Australians through *In our own words*, the Commission has identified a number of ways to move forward.

The First Voice

Throughout this project, the Commission has observed that respect and commitment to **The First Voice** of communities is critical.

It is clear that initiatives such as this cannot be done ‘to communities’ – they need to be done in partnership with communities, from the beginning. The methodology behind *In our own words* used an innovative and inclusive model from the outset.

African Australians participated as partners in an advisory capacity in both the Steering Committee and national Community Reference Group. Throughout the project both groups were asked to provide their input and advice, which was then fed into final decisions. For example:

- The Steering Committee planned a way to engage more community representatives in the project. A national Community Reference Group was established in 2008.
- Meetings with the Community Reference Group were held across Australia in 2008. These meetings were facilitated by the African Australian community and service provider representatives of the Steering Committee, with support from the Project Manager.
- In 2008 the project methodology was refined in light of community advice received through the meetings.
- The Community Reference Group provided advice on the draft discussion paper and draft project review prior to the release of both documents.
- The Steering Committee decided that community representatives on the Steering Committee should work more closely with Myriad Consultants in both the organisation and facilitation of the national community consultations. Their work with communities over the years contributed towards increased willingness of many community members, including hard-to-reach groups, to participate in the project.

The Commission sees this collaborative model as one that can be replicated by other agencies who are seeking to work more successfully with migrant communities, including new and emerging communities. The model encourages ‘ownership’ by communities that is both empowering and a basis for change.

Citizen-driven change and policy

As is evident from the commitment to **The First Voice** of communities, the project has been community-led and driven from the start.

While it is acknowledged that the national consultations did not reach all African Australians, the project was designed to include a fair representation across communities. The number of African Australians involved in the project was significant. Over 2,500 African Australians were active participants in the project.

Initiating and implementing this project has illustrated that employing the principles of citizen-driven change and policy has produced an enhanced project and final resources.

A solid evidence-base

In our own words is the result of three years of work with African Australian communities, partner agencies and other stakeholders. It is apparent that a commitment of time and resources is required to gather data to produce and establish a solid body of evidence.

The Commission is not a service delivery organisation, but it does have a responsibility to administer a range of federal anti-discrimination and human rights laws. The Commission can also play a key role in undertaking research and building an evidence base for its stakeholders.

The methodology of this project, as with the overall design of the Commission’s Community Partnerships for Human Rights program was based on a population health approach, which recognises partnerships have multiplier effects and add quality assurance. The program design reflected literature that confirmed the most effective community and community education programs are multifaceted and include partnerships, multiple activities that are sustainable (where possible), and promote and repeat the messages in different settings and in different ways, over time^{8,9,10}. This approach is therefore likely to support citizen-driven change and policy.

The creation of a reliable evidence base enables policy makers across government and non-government spheres to develop more responsive policy and programs and properly target service delivery models.

A focus on best practice

Multiculturalism has sometimes been criticised as a deficit model but it should not be. As recently stated by

Gathering information about initiatives that have worked well and understanding the success factors has been a central part of this project. **The Commission commends the raft of innovative good practice that is happening across Australia and encourages its continuation.**

the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council¹¹ it is an asset for an entire community. People from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities contribute to Australia in social, economic and cultural terms. Multiculturalism supports the notion that culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities add value to the community at large, through the diversity 'dividend', that is, all people will benefit both directly and indirectly. This 'dividend' applies to innovation, trade and diplomatic relationships; the rich skill sets, life experiences and different knowledge that are implicit to multiculturalism; and improved service access and quality. Multiculturalism, through the diversity 'dividend' positions Australia as a more competitive, cosmopolitan country and a better global citizen.

Gathering information about initiatives that have worked well and understanding the success factors has been a central part of this project. The Commission commends the raft of innovative good practice that is happening across Australia and encourages its continuation.

Priority areas of action

In our own words has heard from African Australians who have identified areas that require urgent action, these include:

- racism and discrimination
- child protection and family violence
- increasing legal 'literacy', particularly in and around family law.

African Australians have indicated that they have strategies and thinking that may assist in reaching a solution. However, they require support to develop initiatives to address these areas of concern. The Commission also recognises that partnership approaches are necessary to address these issues.

Holistic and integrated response

An integrated approach to issues that cut across portfolio responsibilities, across government and non-government sectors is needed. Similar to the **Close the Gap** initiative, which seeks health equality for Indigenous Australians, the Commission sees that **collective responsiveness** lies at the heart of progressing issues for African Australians.

Collective responsiveness involves working collegially to develop integrated strategies and solutions that stretch across defined boundaries. An overall strategy is required to respond to issues and achieve whole-of-government outcomes. A collective responsive approach can seek to develop individual-focused policy, programs and service with better outcomes for citizens.

Learning from the National Human Rights Consultation Report

As indicated in the *National Human Rights Consultation Report* released in late 2009, there is a lack of human rights awareness among Australian community members and across the Australian Public Service.

In the Commission's view, there is a critical need to improve cross-cultural competence and awareness for all Australians. A logical place to begin is with public servants, who can then lead by example.

However, building cross-cultural competence and awareness across the Australian Public Service is not simply about up-skilling public servants.

It is important that we are able to measure progress in this area. In practical terms, this means organising or gathering baseline data, developing cultural diversity indicators, establishing auditing processes and relevant benchmarks. Once such a framework is in operation, policy makers are better positioned to continuously improve policy development, with enhanced outcomes for citizens.

Culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities such as African Australians would then be supported by enhanced programs and services that are more culturally-appropriate and responsive to their needs.

Learning from the past

The project highlights both the unique concerns and experiences of African Australians, but also universal experiences of culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities in Australia – both positive and negative.

All waves of migrants through Australia’s history, including African communities, have experienced both direct and indirect racial discrimination and everyday forms of racism. We need to learn from the past and commit to combating racism and discrimination head on. The Commission plays an important role on this front and a collaborative approach is required.

It would be difficult to move forward without:

- bipartisan commitment to the principles of multiculturalism
- coherence across the major social policy frameworks such as the Social Inclusion Agenda and the pending federal multicultural policy
- a coordinated, long-term and properly-resourced national approach to anti-racism.

Future work of the Commission

The Commission currently has two priority focus areas which, along with its core activities, will form the basis of its future activities:

- violence, harassment and bullying in the community
- know your rights: promoting community understanding of human rights and responsibilities

These priority focus areas, along with the Commission’s five strategic goals of leadership, empowerment, education, monitoring, innovation, will act as a guide to future work.

Project review

As indicated in the project’s Discussion Paper, the Commission committed to a project review.

The Commission will invite input from African Australian communities to assess the progress that has been made since the release of this document. It is hoped that within 12 months after the release of *In our own words*, the Commission will report back to the Australian Government.



Dealing with discrimination

The Australian Human Rights Commission is an independent organisation that investigates complaints about discrimination, harassment and unfair treatment on the basis of race, colour, descent, racial hatred, sex, disability, age and other grounds.

For free advice on discrimination and your rights, or to make a complaint, call our **Complaints Information Line** on 02 9284 9888, 1300 656 419 (local call) or TTY 1800 620 241.

Free interpretation and translation services are available by contacting 13 14 50 and asking for the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Information about making or responding to a complaint is available at www.humanrights.gov.au
You can also email us at complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au

Appendix: Steering Committee and Community Reference Group members

Steering Committee members

Name	Organisation
Abeselom Nega	Immediate Past Chair Federation of African Communities Council (FACC)
Samia Baho	Executive Director Centre for African Australian Women's Issues
Cath Scarth	General Manager Community and Policy Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES)
Kym McConnell	Director Volunteering Policy and Planning Section, Community Investment Branch Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
Dr Steve Francis	National Manager Movement Relations and Advocacy Australian Red Cross
Georgia Zogalis	National Program Manager Multicultural Mental Health Australia on behalf of Diversity Health Institute
Priya SaratChandran	Senior Policy Officer, Sex and Age Discrimination Unit Australian Human Rights Commission <i>Representative from September 2009</i>
Somali Cerise	Senior Policy Officer, Sex and Age Discrimination Unit Australian Human Rights Commission <i>Representative until September 2009</i>
Eugenia Tsoulis OAM	Chief Executive Officer Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia Executive Committee Member Settlement Council of Australia
Amy Lamoin	Assistant Director, Race and Cultural Diversity Unit Australian Human Rights Commission
Conrad Gershevitch	Director, Race and Cultural Diversity Unit Australian Human Rights Commission
Claire Nield	National Projects Manager, Race and Cultural Diversity Unit Australian Human Rights Commission

Community Reference Group members

Australian Capital Territory

Dr Kidane Belay
Mr (David) Mukii Gachugu
Mr Eskender Abebe
Mr Gus Mpofu
Dr Melissa Parsons
Dr Joyce Adu
Mr Charles M Njora
Dr Berhanu Woldekidan
Dr Ashenafi Tessema
Mr Kabu Okai-davies
Ms Alice Omaji
Mr Ahmed Nur
Ms Azeza Taher
Mr Taklow

New South Wales

Mr John Osifo
Mr Makka Krubally
Ms Grace Land
Ms Juliana Nkrumah
Mr Ajang Biar
Mr Yirgu Beyene-Chassa
Mr Clement Meru
Ms Imme Tom
Mr Girma Andarge
Ms Abeba Belay
Mr Mesfin Tessema
Mr Geoffrey Mangwi Mugi
Mr Adje Da Silveira
Mr Varmah Dulleh
Mr Ahmed Mohammed
Ms Mereline Murimwa-Rarami

Queensland

Mr Johnson Oyelodi
Ms Gloria Sowah
Mr Tewdros Fekadu
Mr Bobby Whitfield
Mr Daniel Zingifuaboro
Mr Tamba Thomas
Mr Berhani Mehari
Ms Esther Kabamba
Ms Odette Tewfik

Ms Ifrah Mohamed
Ms Leila Abukar
Ms Abebe Meles

South Australia and Northern Territory

Mr Ibrahim Jabateh
Mr Mohammed Teia
Mr Wilson Ndung'u
Mr Leonidas Nitereka
Mr Abdi Osman Abdalle
Ms Odette Mbuzukongira
Ms Frederica Gaskell
Mr McRoberts Agaa
Dr Joseph Masika
Mr Juma Abuyi
Mr Sidique Bah
Mr Reagan Bledde
Ms Brigitta Buntor
Mr Emmanuel Chubaka
Mr Mutanda Dan
Mr Issac Alung Daniel
Ms Zeleka Habtegoris
Ms Lidia Inarukundo
Mr Mabok Beng Mabok
Ms Khadija Mansour
Ms Assina Ntawumenya
Ms Lena Tear
Ms Sarah Tiong
Ms Carla Tongun

Tasmania

Mr Mangok Mangok
Ms Aminata Saccoh
Ms Besta Peters
Mr John Kamara
Mr Melvin Metzger
Ms Amira Reindorf
Ms Merhawit Tumzghi
Mr Christopher Kamara
Ms Louise Waquoi
Mr Gemechu Chiro Datu
Ms Faina Iligoga
Mr Donatien Ntikahavuye

Mr Alain Mpoyi
Mr Fawaz Ateem
Ms Fatmata Fofanah
Ms Hirut Seboka
Mr Kiros Hiruy
Ms Deborah van Velzen

Victoria

Ms Shukri Abdi
Ms Theresa Sengaaga Ssali
Mr Kassahun Seboqa Negewo
Ms Fatma Moussa
Mr Binyam Woldmichael
Ms Melika Yassin Sheik-Eldin
Mr Luel Fesseha
Mr Solomon Alemu
Mr William Abur
Ms Mmaskepe Sejoe
Mr Solomon Kebede
Ms Negiat Taher
Ms Zeinab Mohamud
Ms Mmapelo Malatji
Mr Berhan Ahmed
Ms Idil Jama
Ms Maryam Osman
Mr Ahmed Yusuf
Mr Abdulkadir Muse
Ms Meseret Abebe
Mr Clement Anguei Deng
Mr Yousif Mohamed
Ms Nyaddl Nyoun
Mr Ahmed Ahmed
Ms Ajak Nyariel

Western Australia

Mr Abdulla Adam
Mr Eli Manyol
Ms Ruqiya Ali
Ms Maria Osman
Mr Gemechu Dembali
Dr Casta Tunganraza
Ms Olivia Mensah-Kamara
Ms Ruth Sims

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census: People Born in Africa*.
- 2 For the list of members see the Appendix.
- 3 For the list of members see the Appendix.
- 4 A Galla, 'The First Voice in Heritage Conservation', (2008) 3 *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* p 1.
- 5 Experiences of racism in schools have been validated in recent research, such as the *The Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians* (2009) by Professor Fethi Mansouri et al for the Foundation for Young Australians.
- 6 There is increasing recognition that racism has serious health, social and economic consequences for affected individuals and their families. New research about the economic costs of racism in the Australian context is currently being undertaken, including the work of Dr Yin Paradies and Dr Naomi Priest.
- 7 In Australia, Western models of diagnosis and understanding are used to categorise illness, including mental health. For example, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychiatric Association, provides a common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders. However this may not necessarily be compatible with the definition of mental illness as understood by, for example, an African Australian humanitarian entrant.
- 8 J Cockburn, *Summary of the evidence to inform the design and implementation of appropriate community education and public health strategies for Quality use of Medicines in the Australian Community* (2002). National Prescribing Service Ltd.
- 9 A Milat, TE Carroll and JJ Taylor, 'Culturally and linguistically diverse population health social marketing campaigns in Australia: a consideration of evidence and related evaluation issues', (2005) 16(1) *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* p 20.
- 10 Worthington Di Marzio & Cultural Partners, *Access to information about government services among culturally and linguistically diverse audiences*, Study No 00/10/2817, Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet (October 2001).
- 11 Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, *The People of Australia*, Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2010). At www.immi.gov.au/about/stakeholder-engagement/national/advisory/amac/ (viewed 24 May 2010).

Further information

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