



A FORGOTTEN ADVANTAGE

Enabling Australia's Asian-Australian
and Diaspora Communities

Asia Taskforce is an initiative of



Knowledge partners





BACKGROUND

This Discussion Paper has been prepared as part of a series of short reports on specific topics identified by the Asia Taskforce (Taskforce) - an initiative of the Business Council of Australia and Asia Society Australia together with knowledge partners PwC Australia and the University of Sydney Business School - to supplement the findings and recommendations contained in the Interim Report and final report (due out in late 2020). One of the objectives of the Taskforce was to identify issues critical to business success in Asia. Our Asia-capable Asian-Australian and diaspora communities were identified as a critical national asset that requires ongoing investment by business and government.

The paper is intended to contribute to a discussion about how Australia can better engage its Asian-Australian and diaspora communities and talent more effectively in pursuing economic engagement with Asia.

Key points:

- Increase representation and utilisation of the national assets at Australia's disposal and recognise the importance of the Asia skills and capabilities to make an immediate impact and long-term contribution to Australia's prosperity.
- Through Asian-Australians, the Asian diaspora in Australia and Australian diaspora in the region, establish new context in Australia's Asia capabilities and bring these diverse aspects together in driving long-term engagement with Asia
- Provide recommendations for business and government to better recognise, utilise and enable Australia's Asian-Australian and Diaspora communities to deliver their full potential to support Australia's aspirations to engage, connect and succeed in Asia

Key Definitions

- This Discussion Paper refers '**Asian-Australians**' as Australian-born descendants of Asian heritage (including those of mixed heritage and ancestries) and those born in Asia but who are now Australian citizens or permanent residents in Australia.
- The '**Asian diaspora**' refers to temporary residents from Asia in Australia for work or study.
- The '**Australian diaspora**' refers to Australian citizens from all ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds who have had significant experience in Asia and those currently living and working or studying in Asia.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The richness of Australia is not just in our minerals and resources but the diversity of our people.”

For Australia to succeed in a post-COVID world, adjust to the new norm and identify paths to economic recovery, governments, businesses, industries and individuals will need to adapt and think differently, establish new partnerships and seek opportunities beyond our borders.

With most Asian economies expected to rebound strongly, many Australian businesses this means a greater focus on doing business with Asia. To maximise such opportunities, leaders on boards and in C-suite management teams will need to develop a tailored business case for greater engagement in Asia. This involves setting the right tone with their shareholders on why doing business with Asia matters to their businesses, how different skill sets support the business strategy, and how their plans are fully aligned to their organisational culture, lived values and leadership practices, behaviours and competencies.

As recommended in the Interim Report of Asia Taskforce, one way to increase the chance of success in Asia involves better use of Australia’s diaspora communities overseas, Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora in Australia. The richness of Australia is not just in our minerals and resources but the diversity of our people. Australia has an active and entrepreneurial Asian-Australian and Asian diaspora community within Australia and a talented Australian diaspora community overseas with deep knowledge of Asian business cultures and extensive connections with the region.

The Australian diaspora is growing with PwC Australia’s 2016 report Our diaspora’s got talent predicting by 2030 there will be 450,000 Australians living and working abroad in Asia, representing one third of Australia’s total diaspora community overseas.¹ While the COVID-19 pandemic restricts international travel in the short-term, Asia’s growing relative economic weight will mean more Australians are expected to live and work in the region in the long-term. According to the 2016 Census, 28 per cent of those counted were born overseas, and another 20 per cent have at least

one overseas-born parent – with an ever-increasing proportion of migrants coming from Asia, more now than from Europe. Australia has more overseas-born than Canada (22 per cent), and double the percentage in the United States. Of languages other than English spoken in Australia, five out of the top ten are Asian: Chinese Mandarin, Chinese Cantonese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Hindi.

As identified in the 2016 report, and still relevant today, Australia does have the talent to succeed in Asia, but we are not doing enough to foster, prepare and deploy this talent in our region.² The people we have, under the right support platforms and policies, can get Asia right for Australia. Australia as a nation needs to activate and utilise the full potential of our Asian-Australian and Asian diaspora talent pool, and give cultural diversity the same policy priority gender equity now enjoys.

For a start, this paper recommends that the Australian Government should take a lead in introducing legislation for non-public sector employers to collect, disclose and report on cultural diversity in the same way as they are required to do for gender equity. Relevant professional and industry bodies



should elevate Asia capabilities in their existing accreditation and education programmes.

The average Asia capability scores for board members and senior executives in the ASX 200 are 13.8 per cent and 13.5 per cent respectively. Importantly, only seven per cent of board members and senior executives would qualify as Asia-capable (that is, have a score greater than 50 per cent). This means that over 90 per cent of senior leaders (board members and senior executives) in the ASX 200 would not qualify as Asia-capable.³

Companies and businesses should develop talent management plans which leverage on senior Asian-Australians and Asian diaspora in leadership positions to drive stronger engagement and understanding of Asia. These plans should include strategies, timelines, policies and procedures across all human capital areas such as recruitment, retention, and promotion. Upon obtaining more accessible and accurate data, company and business leaders should monitor progress on enhancing their pipeline of Asian-Australians and Asian diaspora in C-suite positions against measurable targets. To sustain these changes, these plans must be embraced by both boards and management and become fully part of corporate cultures and lived values.

As for the Australian diaspora working and living in the region and across the world, our priority is to ensure they remain an integral part of ‘Team Australia’

and play a leadership role in driving long-term engagement in the region and prosperity for Australia. To bring all of this together, we recommend that the Australian Government introduce and develop a national Australia Diaspora policy.

Australia does have the right resources and talent in the form of the Australian diaspora in the region, Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora in Australia to support our businesses to succeed in Asia. Their immediate advantage is their cultural knowledge, personal networks, mobility experiences and language skills. If we are serious about accelerating business engagement with Asia, we need to lift the contribution of this cohort well beyond anything that has been achieved before and provide them with the right opportunities to play a meaningful role to give Australian businesses a greater chance of success in the region.

The purpose of this Discussion Paper developed by the Asian-Australian and Diaspora Sub-Committee appointed by the Asia Taskforce is to provide a critical and comprehensive examination of the role Asian-Australians, the Asian diaspora in Australia and the Australian diaspora overseas can play increasing Australia’s economic presence and success in Asia. The paper provides a series of recommendations to business and government on the fifth theme Diaspora and Talent identified in the [Interim Report](#) of the Asia Taskforce. The position paper is divided into two parts:

Part one:

- Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora in Australia: Australia’s competitive advantage.

Part two:

- Australia’s Diaspora Policy: Advancing “Team Australia” in Asia and the world.



PART ONE

Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora in Australia: Australia's competitive advantage

In recent years Australia's economic success with Asia, and with China in particular, has been strengthened by entrepreneurial individuals of Asian origin and heritage in Australia. Through their cultural knowledge, linguistic abilities and networks of people-to-people and business-to-business links, Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora are a source of Australia's business opportunities, entrepreneurialism and innovation in Asia.

The 2019 Australia's International Business Survey (AIBS) found a significant share - between 28 to 40 percent - of firms making their highest revenues in ASEAN, Hong Kong, China, Japan and India reporting that multicultural communities are essential or very important to international market development. These results suggest that Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora, with their established international networks, direct channels, language and cultural skills, do assist Australian firms through active trade intermediation and support of international market development for Australian goods and services.⁴ If their contribution and potential are properly recognised, valued and nurtured, Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora are a rich and versatile resource that can

play a major role in advancing Australia's comparative advantage in Asia.

As emphasised in the Asia Taskforce Discussion Paper No. 01, **Spotlight, Secure, Scale-up and Strategise: Reimagining Australia's Asia Engagement Capability**, a balanced approach that recognises the long-term value of Asian studies research excellence while also promoting general student exposure to Asian languages and cultures through broader curriculum offerings may be the way forward.

Underrepresentation in leadership

In 2016, the Australian Human Rights Commission launched *Leading for Change: A blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership*, followed by a revised document in 2018. The report found that the ethnic and cultural default leadership remains Anglo-Celtic and that Australian society may not be making the most of its ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds and talents. After first examining the cultural backgrounds of chief executive officers of ASX200 companies, federal government ministers, heads of federal and state government departments and vice-chancellors of universities, the Commission found that just 1.6 per cent of them were Asian-Australians, although this group constituted 12 per cent of the overall Australian population. When the analysis was broadened out to cover leadership positions one level below this - group executives of

ASX companies, elected members of the Commonwealth Parliament, deputy heads of government departments and deputy vice-chancellors - it showed the proportion of Asian-Australians to be still only 3.3 per cent.⁵

In an attempt to address this gap and elevate the issue of greater Asian-Australian representation in senior leadership positions on the public agenda, PwC Australia, Asialink at the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University (ANU) co-initiated and co-convened the inaugural Asian-Australian Leadership Summit on 12-13 September 2019. Summit participants from Asian-Australian backgrounds and non-Asian-Australian backgrounds confirmed such a gap and urged government and business leaders to take immediate action and implement action plans to increase Asian-Australian leadership. A number of senior leaders on the Summit's panels and in the audience acknowledged the lack of focus on leveraging Asian-Australian talent, despite the economic imperative for Australia to do so as a means to securing its future sustainability and prosperity within the Asian region.

The presence of Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora gives Australian businesses access to a large pool of talent available and able to skilfully navigate the challenges and opportunities of doing business in Asia. Through their familiarity with and knowledge of Asian cultures and languages, Asian-Australians



and the Asian diaspora should be empowered and encouraged to foster these important skills and talents, and further contribute their knowledge and experiences to our developing shared culture and increasingly diverse global workplaces. The challenge for the senior leadership within private and public institutions is to create a healthy culture throughout their organisations to support and empower Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora to fully leverage their skills and talents.

Data collection and reporting

It is not easy to extract precise data on the ethnic or cultural composition of Australia's whole population. However, on the basis of the Census data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on place of birth, languages spoken at home and self-identified ancestry, the best current estimates – in recent reports from both the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in 2018 and PwC-Asialink-Institute of Managers in 2017 – are that Asian-Australians now constitute 12 per cent of the Australian population.⁶ Recent research conducted by the ANU estimated that some 14.7 per cent of Australian adults identify as Asian-Australian – of those who did identify as Asian-Australian, 30.5 per cent were born in Australia.⁷

The introduction of the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 and the establishment of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) led to the increasing recognition of gender inequality and the impact it has on our society. WGEA's focus on data collection has enabled organisations to identify where the gaps are, design evidence-based responses, identify policy solutions and introduce action plans. The availability of data has



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led to organisational change within workplaces and increase employer action on gender equality with solid growth in the number of women moving into management roles (39.1 per cent) with increases in the representation of women in all manager categories. According to WGEA, more than seven in ten employers have either a strategy or policy in place to support gender equality.⁸

Achievements on gender equality are proof that leadership from the government is an effective path to positive progress.

It is recommended that the Australian Government introduce legislation to require non-public sector employers and corporates with 100 or more employees to define, collect, disclose and report data on the ethnic and cultural composition within their businesses and companies. The absence of accurate data and better statistics is an obstacle to achieving more diverse workplaces and leadership teams. Obtaining such data is a necessary prelude to setting realistic targets and timelines for increasing the number of Asian-Australians and Asian diaspora in leadership positions. This work needs to be undertaken on a sector by sector basis and identify the kind of detailed strategies and programs

that are going to change mindsets, and ensure that targets are established and implemented.

Targets

As detailed and recognised by the Australian Human Rights Commission in its Leading for Change report, the use of targets has supported improvements in gender equity. Unlike quotas, which are mandated goals imposed by an external body, targets are voluntary goals that allow organisations to set their own strategies and timelines to achieve them. As such, we recommend that businesses and corporations identify and adopt carefully thought out measurable targets of having the representation of Asian-Australian leaders across senior executive management, director and board levels to reflect their share of the overall Australian population.

Recognition of home-grown capabilities and the sharpening of skills

Asia-minded leaders in business, academia and government constantly agonise about the insufficiency of Asian-language teaching and Asia-related learning in our schools and universities. However this often happens without recognition – and this is a conspicuous omission in the 2012 Asian Century White Paper – that Australia already has a significant pool of native Asian-language speakers. For example, there are more than 900,000 fluent speakers in Chinese dialects alone, and a million more speaking other Asian languages. This pool also possesses relevant understanding of Asian cultures largely developed through the members' personal



and family upbringing. This is not properly measured, and does not seem to be valued by some senior leaders. To develop, sustain and take business and working relationships in Asia to a new level, finding commonality through shared interests and cultural values is important as it makes the relationship more genuine and less transactional.

As identified by the 2017 Asialink-PwC-Institute of Managers and Leaders report Match Fit: Shaping Asia capable leaders, Asia capabilities are a combination of skills, knowledge and experience. Such skills include a sophisticated knowledge of Asian markets, extensive experience operating in Asia, long-term trusted relationships in the region, ability to adapt behaviour to Asian cultural contexts, capacity to deal with government and useful levels of language proficiency.⁹

One way to better recognise and highlight Asian capabilities and Asian literacy in all their diverse forms is for employers to include such skills and knowledge as key selection criteria in relevant position descriptions and job advertisements during recruitment processes for roles ranging all the way from entry to senior executive management, director and board levels. These skills should also be recorded and maintained through employee skills and talent databases within workplaces.

To drive stronger engagement and understanding of Asia, it is recommended that Asia-focused businesses develop talent management plans with an emphasis on recruitment, retention and promotion to boost Asian-Australian leadership and engage in further efforts to provide opportunities to enable Asian-

Australians and the Asian diaspora to showcase their untapped Asia capabilities and Asian literacy skills. Senior leaders at the C-suite and board directors' level should commit to help emerging Asian-Australian leaders break through via mentoring and sponsoring partnerships, and have a fair share of culturally diverse and Asian-Australian candidates as part of recruitment processes and promotion opportunities.

Professional accreditation and industry bodies like the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) and Chartered Accountants Australia & New Zealand (CAANZ) need to reflect these changing leadership practices through the inclusion of Asia-focused and Asia capabilities models in existing development programs. Finally, to sustain these changes, these plans must be embraced by both boards and management and become fully part of corporate cultures and lived values.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To fully leverage the capabilities of Asian-Australians and the Asian diaspora will require a coordinated effort by all stakeholders – governments, industry and professional bodies, companies and businesses, and key individuals within them – to drive long term sustainable change. Consistent with the 2018 Australian Human Rights Commission Leading for Change: A blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership revisited report in the areas of leadership, systems, and culture, we recommend the following:

Government

1. Introduce legislation to require non-public sector employers and corporate organisations with 100 or more employees to define, collect, disclose and report data on cultural diversity which will allow a comprehensive understanding of the ethnic and cultural composition of Australian companies and businesses.

Professional and industry bodies

2. Elevate Asia capabilities by introducing them into professional accreditation and

education programmes such as those run by the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) and professional bodies like CPA Australia and Chartered Accountants Australia & New Zealand.

3. Develop industry based and sector specific ‘Champions of Change’ networks comprising senior leaders who regularly share learnings and experiences on making improvements in cultural diversity.

Businesses

4. Businesses should develop talent management plans which help senior Asian-Australians and Asian diaspora members into leadership positions to drive stronger engagement and understanding of Asia. These plans should include strategies, timelines and policies and procedures across all human capital areas (i.e. recruitment, retention, and promotion). These plans should be aligned with learning and development plans (to develop greater Asia capability) and communication strategies (for example, profiling role models, sharing stories and experiences). Such strategies and policies would include:

- **Recruitment** – Ensure all recruitment and succession planning processes include a diverse slate of candidates (including culturally diverse candidates) for all roles.
- **Retention** – Ensure culturally diverse candidates are given

equal opportunities for sponsorship/mentoring by senior leaders, and stretch assignments including secondments.

- **Promotion** – Monitor effectiveness of pipeline management through data analytics with a cultural diversity lens at business unit level.
5. Business leaders should monitor progress on increasing their pipeline of Asian-Australians and Asian diaspora members in senior leadership positions (Chief Executive, C-Suite, and executive board levels) against measurable targets. To ensure accountability for cultural diversity, they should introduce appropriate measurable metrics for business units.
 6. To sustain these changes, companies and businesses should ensure that these plans are embraced by both boards and management and be fully aligned to their corporate cultures and lived values. To further support the roll out of their plans, companies and businesses should introduce external advisory committees; encourage networks which support greater cultural diversity and cultivate a community of interest in Asia; and maintain employee skills and talent databases within workplaces to better recognise, value and utilise Asia capabilities and Asian literacy skills.



PART TWO

Australia Diaspora Policy: Advancing ‘Team Australia’ in Asia and the world

The Asia Taskforce Asian-Australian and Diaspora Sub-Committee recognises there is an opportunity for the Australian Government to develop a comprehensive national policy to implement programs and initiatives to elevate the role of the Australian diaspora to enable its members to better contribute to Australia’s global vision and national prosperity. The proposed policy’s objective is to empower and better engage Australian diaspora members while living and working overseas, and ensure more recognition of their skills and experiences upon their return to Australia.

Why an Australia Diaspora Policy?

As Australia looks towards the post-COVID-19 world, increasing trade and investment in the region is not just an opportunity, but a necessity. To succeed in engaging Asia effectively, maximising opportunities and capitalising on Australia’s already fortunate geographical position, we must better leverage the skills and expertise of Australia’s diverse diaspora while living and working in the region and on their return to Australia. These groups are a national asset and competitive advantage that remains underused, underdeveloped and often unappreciated.

Members of the Sub-Committee recognise the challenges involved in maintaining consistent engagement with Australian diaspora members during their time overseas. While there are organisations and trusted platforms such as our diplomatic missions, Advance.org, the business chambers and university alumni programs that connect the Australian diaspora in various locations, the extent to which Australian diaspora members engage with them differs between locations and over time. The fact that the majority of the Australian diaspora work for non-Australian companies also presents a challenge. Subcommittee members note these diaspora members may be uninterested and see little value in maintaining ties with Australia-focused organisations.

What is required is a more deliberate and targeted engagement, led by the Australian Government in partnership with Advance.org, business chambers in the region, businesses, universities and industry bodies to ensure that the skills, knowledge and experience of the Australian diaspora make a greater contribution to Australia’s long-term interests in the region. The development and implementation of an Australia Diaspora Policy would be an important step in improving how Australia connects with its diaspora abroad, promotes opportunities for those returning to Australia, and generates more support and interest among the

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The joint report by Advance.org and Indeed [They Still Call Australia Home](#) found 85 per cent of returned expatriates reported having trouble finding work, while 83 per cent of local recruiters said they were cautious about recommending expatriates.¹⁰ Feedback from interview participants reflect these findings: lack of recognition and the barriers from some Australian employers led to some expressing regret about coming back to Australia and choosing to return overseas because their international experience is not valued. Interview participants argued barriers existing within Australian employers and recruiters are a result of perceived perceptions around the description and term ‘expatriate’. Replacing the term with ‘diaspora’ may further establish the importance of the relationship between Australia and those Australians living and working overseas by reinforcing Australian shared identity and creating a sense of unity and belonging.

Countries such as India, China, the Philippines, Israel and Singapore are deeply conscious of their diaspora communities overseas and seek to capitalise on their links. Others, such as Ireland, have taken this one step further with the introduction of a diaspora policy in 2015. Ireland’s relationship with its diaspora is firmly entrenched in the country’s Constitution which states “the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage.”¹¹ To advance its interests, Ireland will be unveiling

a new policy in 2020. It will guide Ireland’s engagement and relationship with its diaspora – emigrants, citizens abroad, those of Irish heritage – and those who feel an affinity with Ireland around the world.¹² Kenya has also taken measures with its own diaspora policy, which outlines the objective to mainstream and empower Kenyans abroad by harnessing and maximising their potential to make a significant contribution to the development of the country’s evolution through a mutually beneficial and lasting partnership.¹³

To support the implementation of an Australian Diaspora Policy, the Government should create an Australia Diaspora Council supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade. The role of this council would be to bring together a list of relevant public and private sector stakeholders to implement a national diaspora strategy that addresses issues facing Australians abroad and upon their return. The strategy would help them integrate back into Australian society and find opportunities for them to make use of the skills and experiences they have developed abroad to help strengthen Australia’s ties and interests. The development of a clear, concise and consistent national policy to bring together the Australian diaspora would contribute to accelerating Australia’s trade, investment and collaboration with Asia which will be increasingly important to Australia’s recovery and future prosperity.



The policy

The proposed Australia Diaspora Policy should provide a comprehensive overview of the Australian Government’s engagement with the Australian diaspora, establish a vision to build a more connected global Australian community and recognise the important ongoing contribution they have made while aboard and upon their return home.

Such a policy would complement existing initiatives driven by Advance.org and support Australian public institutions and private corporations to better connect with global Australians in contributing to the societies in which they currently live, but also in adding value to the economic, social and cultural progress of Australia. It is recommended that the policy embrace the following themes:



Government

The Australian Government should aim to be a global leader in diaspora engagement and empowerment.



Empowerment

The object is for the Australian diaspora be supported and empowered, both when abroad and after returning home, contribute more substantially to the development of Australia’s global vision and long-term prosperity.



Better data

The proposed policy should include as a starting point for more accurate and comprehensive data and statistics on the size, location and demographic profile of our diaspora aboard and those who have returned home.



Talent pool

The policy should include provision for business and government to co-invest and co-develop a national program to nurture top 100 emerging Australian leaders with experience in Asia, to build a future leadership talent pool for our engagement with the region.



Mentoring

Support for returning Australian diaspora members should include the establishment of partnership and mentoring programs to create links with senior leaders to provide access to networks within the industry, and to enable those leaders to expand their knowledge of industry opportunities in Asia.



Diaspora identity

In describing Australians living and working overseas, the proposed policy should replace the description ‘expatriate’ with ‘diaspora’ to foster greater affinity, identity and connection with Australia.



Success stories

The policy should include active promotion of initiatives such as the Advance Awards initiated by Advance.org and the launching of a national campaign explaining why Australia needs to better leverage its diaspora to succeed in capitalising on the opportunities in Asia, and showcasing success stories of Australian diaspora in the region and the world.



Leadership

An Australia Diaspora Council should be created co-led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade, and Advance.org, with a membership comprising various overseas Australian Chambers of Commerce, universities and associations such as Business Council of Australia, Australian Institute of Company Directors, Asia Society Australia, Asialink at the University of Melbourne and other relevant professional bodies to support the implementation of the Australia Diaspora Policy.



New communities

The Australian Government should recognise that Australian diaspora is evolving and changing. In responding to this, a priority should be to connect with new diaspora communities overseas and support further research to better understand ongoing changes.



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In October 2019, the Business Council of Australia and Asia Society Australia together with knowledge partners PwC Australia and the University of Sydney Business School formed the Asia Taskforce of senior leaders from the business, education and government sectors to examine how Australian companies and organisations can increase their presence and position in Asia to ensure our continued prosperity and deliver progress for future generations.

While the Asian-Australian and Diaspora Sub-Committee Members named below have provided input into the discussion paper, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of any individual or the organisations they represent.

This report refers to Asia as the countries of South East Asia, South Asia and North East Asia.

This Discussion Paper and other publications by the Taskforce can be found at <https://asiasociety.org/australia/asia-business-taskforce>

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