For equality of life.

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
PO BOX 6021
Parliament House
27 October 2026

Dear Secretariat,

Settlement Services International (SSI) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security inquiry into the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia.

SSI is a national not-for-profit that has been around for more than 25 years. We started life as a refugee resettlement provider. Over time, our expertise in working with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds served as the foundation for a gradual broadening into other social services. Now, as well as those on humanitarian visas, we work with a wider group of migrants, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, children, families, people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the LGBTIQA+ communities. In 2024–25, we supported more than 53,000 people through almost 60 programs and community-based services nationally. That work has given us deep experience building trust and connecting people with mainstream institutions, services and opportunities that help them thrive. So from a very practical perspective we see the things that help people feel they belong, but also the barriers that can leave people feeling excluded.

SSI recognises that responding to radicalisation requires consideration of specific pathways and drivers of violent extremism, including the role of technology and the environments in which extremist ideas can develop and spread. However, our expertise lies not in specialist deradicalisation interventions, but in the broader preventative conditions that strengthen social cohesion and collective belonging and can help prevent division, alienation and vulnerability to extremist narratives.This reflects SSI's established position that Australia needs a holistic, prevention-led and whole-of-society approach to social cohesion.

Preventing violent extremism requires more than identifying and intervening with individuals already on a pathway towards violence. It also requires sustained investment in the conditions that strengthen social resilience, including belonging, equality of opportunity, intercultural connection, community participation and trust in institutions. These measures are not substitutes for targeted counter-extremism interventions, but important complements to them.
Collective belonging is central to this approach. In our May 2026 submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, SSI argued that social cohesion should be understood as collective belonging: a shared sense that everyone is recognised as part of Australia's national story and has an equal opportunity to participate in economic, social, civic and cultural life. Belonging is not simply an individual responsibility to fit in. It requires institutions and systems that actively enable inclusion and participation.

Community organisations, migrant resource centres, multicultural peak bodies, faith networks and grassroots leaders form an important part of this social infrastructure by supporting participation, building relationships across difference and connecting communities with institutions. Governments should recognise and invest in this infrastructure as part of a broader preventative approach, supporting locally led initiatives that build trust, strengthen intercultural connections and provide meaningful opportunities for communities to shape decisions affecting them.

Equality of opportunity is another important component of a preventative approach. Social cohesion is strengthened when people have meaningful opportunities to participate in education, employment and community life and believe they have a fair opportunity to build a good life regardless of their background or socio-economic circumstances. SSI's previous policy work has identified structural barriers including access to education and training, skills recognition, employment pathways, childcare, transport, digital inclusion and discrimination in employment.

Targeted investment in young people should also form part of this preventative approach. Initiatives that strengthen young people's sense of belonging, connection and participation, particularly for those experiencing racism, exclusion or disconnection, can help build social resilience. This should include accessible opportunities for young people to participate in community and civic life, build relationships across difference, and have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them.

Addressing barriers to participation can contribute to stronger trust, belonging and social resilience. However, social or economic disadvantage should not be treated as a direct predictor of radicalisation. Pathways towards violent extremism are complex, and people experiencing exclusion or disadvantage should not be presumed to present a security risk.

Intercultural connection is equally important. Australia's cultural diversity should be approached as a national strength, with people from different backgrounds able to participate in a shared democratic and civic life while maintaining their cultural identities. Building relationships and trust across communities and between communities and institutions contributes to a more inclusive and resilient society. SSI has previously described social cohesion not as a static condition to be maintained, but as an ongoing process of nation-building grounded in recognition, mutuality and reciprocity.

Importantly, public policy must avoid narrow or racialised understandings of radicalisation. Violent extremism is not confined to any particular religion, ethnicity or cultural background. White supremacist, neo-Nazi and other far-right extremist ideologies must be recognised and addressed alongside religiously motivated and other forms of violent extremism. This distinction matters for both community safety and social cohesion. Policies and public narratives that disproportionately scrutinise or stigmatise particular communities risk reinforcing exclusion, undermining trust in institutions and weakening the relationships essential to effective prevention. Counter-radicalisation efforts should be evidence-based, proportionate and applied consistently across different forms of violent extremism, with a clear distinction between extremist violence and the peaceful expression of religious, cultural or political beliefs.

A preventative approach should therefore be careful not to undermine social cohesion in the process of attempting to strengthen community safety. Australia's approach should strengthen the relationships, institutions and opportunities that enable Australians from different backgrounds to see themselves as equal participants in a shared national future.

SSI encourages the Committee to recognise investment in social cohesion and collective belonging as an important component of Australia's broader response to radicalisation. This should include strengthening the social infrastructure that enables belonging; expanding equality of opportunity and economic participation; supporting sustained intercultural connections; preventing racism and exclusion; strengthening relationships between communities and institutions; and ensuring that policy responses recognise the full range of extremist ideologies without stigmatising particular cultural, religious, migrant or refugee communities.

Online environments and the spread of misinformation, disinformation and dehumanising narratives also warrant attention. Digital platforms can amplify hatred, reinforce social divisions and expose individuals to extremist content. A preventative approach should therefore include efforts to strengthen digital literacy, counter harmful narratives and build community resilience to online hate and extremist recruitment, alongside appropriate measures to address the spread of violent extremist material.

Addressing specific pathways towards violent extremism remains important. However, these measures should sit within a broader prevention framework that strengthens the conditions in which individuals and communities can participate, belong and contribute. Building a society in which people feel safe, respected, heard and able to participate fully in national life is not separate from prevention. It is an important part of creating the resilient and cohesive society that prevention ultimately seeks to protect.

SSI would welcome the opportunity to provide further information or discuss these issues with the Committee.

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