

Settlement Council of Australia

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Media Release

SCOA comment on the 2012-13 Federal budget

The 2012-13 Federal Budget has highlighted the ongoing importance of migration to Australia, in particular with a focus on regional migration with an allocation of 16,000 places reserved for the regional sponsored migration scheme (skilled). While this allocation to support filling skills gaps is welcomed, Cedric Manen, the Chair of the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA), commented that 'migrants often need support in finding employment, particularly in the early phases of settlement'. Consultation with SCOA members has highlighted access to employment as a key issue across the country. With an increase in focus on settlement in regional areas a corresponding increase in provision of funding to settlement services in regional areas is required. It is also important that funding covers the full range of visa holders who may be settling in an area (including those on temporary work visas). Resources for service development for programs in areas such as families, children or youth also need to be equitably distributed to include services that specialise in supporting new and emerging communities.

The modest increase in family places from 58,600 to 60,185 is also welcomed by SCOA. Settlement agencies see first-hand the benefits of family reunion on social ties and quality of life.

SCOA welcomes the ongoing commitment to refugee protection, represented in the allocation of 13,750 places in the humanitarian program. The measures in the budget to fund welfare and supervision support for Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors are also welcomed, this group of minors are particularly vulnerable. The Settlement Council of Australia endorses reforms in the budget aimed at lower income families and the tax reforms adopted as being of benefit to communities settling in Australia.

SCOA looks forward to gaining a greater understanding of the detail behind the savings projected in the \$13.1 million over four years savings in Humanitarian Settlement Services through bridging visas for Irregular Maritime Arrivals. People living on bridging visas in the community do need support, particularly in relation to negotiating settlement services and supports to fast track their independence of government concessions. Bridging visa holders are not eligible for most settlement services, so it is unclear what level of support people may have already received.

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