

Settlement Council of Australia

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SCOA response to “The Settlement Journey”

SCOA commends DIAC on a clear policy statement on settlement as articulated in the paper “The Settlement Journey”. The focus on social inclusion, access and equity and supporting participation for migrants and refugees is welcomed. The language of the policy is accessible to all, which will be helpful in promoting greater understanding of settlement across the community. The paper is naturally a high level document, taking an aspirational, macro level approach to settlement. The case studies provide a necessary connection to lived experience which adds to the paper.

The settlement journey (the pdf flow chart) and the conceptual framework for settlement outcomes are clearly presented, which will be of benefit in more detailed conversations and discussions about multifaceted cohorts of visa holders and the impact of this on effective settlement. The document has a strong focus on the settlement journey culminating in citizenship, however the links from the day of arrival in Australia for all visas and the journey from then on to becoming a citizen are not as clear. The linkages that need to be refined include:

- Streamlining the Refugee and asylum seeker settlement pathways and settlement responsibilities
- Connections to health for different visa holders
- Connections to DHS and specifically Centrelink for all relevant visa holders
- Pathways to Job Services Australia for all relevant visa holders

Settlement services operate in a complex network of relationships and services, and are at their strongest and most effective where these relationships are robust. Referencing this network (without necessarily mapping the complexity of relationships) will add weight to the settlement sector’s efforts to foster and maintain these relationships.

The settlement sector is seeing a lack of consistency and in some instances a lack of transparency for responsibility and resources across settlement and allied agencies and between the commonwealth and states, which leads to different levels of settlement outcomes, due to differing levels of support and resources. Articulating more clearly the relationships between federally funded services and state services would make these relationships clearer. Regional experiences also show that sustainability requires funding of SGP for longer than 5 years.

Provision of settlement support is mentioned (for five years), however it may also be useful to discuss the unique individual nature of the settlement journey as well as location-specific circumstances in the regional context and the impact this has on needs as people progress through life stages and who is responsible for this. With changes in the age groups of humanitarian and other entrants, the settlement sector is receiving a larger number of clients over 45 years of age.

Coupled with the ageing population, which includes ageing migrants and humanitarian entrants within new and emerging communities, many settlement agencies have had to branch out into aged care services, as our recent settlement mapping has highlighted. Migrants and refugee communities are ageing faster, as well as younger than the mainstream community in Australia. In particular older refugee background people face accelerated ageing from the combination of pre-arrival experiences, post-arrival resettlement issues and the usual challenges of ageing in a new country. It would be useful for the document to reflect this reality and the need for these developing relationships with a range of federal, state and local government departments.

The “Settlement Journey” includes a brief mention of mainstreaming however this is an area that would benefit from greater articulation. As the Australian population diversifies it will be increasingly important for all agencies and services to provide services to all, including for example aged migrants who may have not learnt English, and require cultural support. Identifying who and how this support will be provided would provide needed clarity for the settlement sector. Cultural support is an area many settlement agencies naturally address, and it is also a clear example where services are not confined to the first 5 years of settlement.

Currently there is no clear nexus between DIAC funded programs and ongoing community support and integrated job employment services particularly but not exclusively funded by FaHCSIA and DEEWR. Humanitarian entrants face higher levels of unemployment and underemployment and lower participation rates than for the mainstream community. The settlement sector has not featured as a major FaHCSIA or DEEWR partner with respect to NGO funding and the Job Services Australia (JSA) network. This is problematic for large settlement agencies who could play a very valuable role in bringing cultural competence to mainstream agendas. Migration has a positive impact on the Australian economy and society through increasing labour market participation, maintaining skills levels and offsetting the ageing trend in the workforce. As importantly, the notion of mainstreaming within a social inclusion agenda needs to be clearly identified and understood as ensuring access and equity, that should translate into choice for marginalised groups rather than the *one size fits all* approach. This approach is usually the end result of forcing humanitarian entrants specifically, but also other migrants into mainstream services without providing them with alternative points of culturally competent linkages and access.

The Settlement Framework needs to be innovative in terms of a clear direction in capturing the onshore transitional and settlement pathway for both offshore and onshore arrivals and for all visas of clients with similar needs for settlement services. Currently the official settlement sector has the capacity to work with all visa holders, providing pre-arrival, on arrival and ongoing settlement and participation for a wide range of visa holders and according to individual case need. DIAC needs to capitalise on this expertise and experience of currently funded HSS and SGP providers in order to maximise the full gambit of commonwealth settlement resources and optimise funding, rather than dissipating these as is currently the case.

Further the current procurement process is seen as lacking transparency and has left the sector confused and concerned about divisions and competition between agencies and the service gaps and overlaps this situation may cause. The settlement framework cannot continue to be piecemeal, lacking in integrity with respect to procurement transparency and the continuous upheavals this creates due to ever changing and competing interests.

SCOA urges a coordinated and integrated approach rather than an approach that is compartmentalised. This coordinated approach will provide a framework for the settlement sector to strengthen its linkages with government, the corporate sector and other NGOs and to expand its capacity to provide services to all newly arrived migrants whatever their visa according to their need, thus creating an equitable settlement pathway for all cohorts of current and future new arrivals.

SCOA endorses the needs based orientation of service provision. The settlement sector's experience has highlighted that this can and does extend to provision of settlement support services to migrants other than humanitarian entrants. The forthcoming changes to the SGP need to urgently address this issue and to also address ongoing funding in order that settlement services can develop long term strategic plans, while working in partnership with DIAC and State and Territory governments to take into consideration settlement and locality fluctuations.

Settlement agencies are seeing increasing calls for support from migrants and people on shorter term working visas. The expectation that people migrating to Australia will be able to support themselves through the settlement journey is often but not always borne out in reality. SCOA strongly urges that short term working visas are provided with opportunities to settle and to access permanency without the current encumbrances. Temporary employer sponsored visa holders, most of them semi – skilled workers require settlement support extra to that provided within employer contracts. These temporary workers share the space with other migrants including humanitarian entrants and should not be excluded from having access to settlement services especially in regional areas. Many SCOA members are currently providing services to this group for various reasons, not the least because it is impossible to discriminate against and turn away new arrivals seeking assistance because they are holders of one type of visa, while at the same time agencies service other visa holders within the same local community and or ethnic group.

Elements that are needed to refine the document include:

- Employment participation and links to employment should be a clearly identified settlement support need (for migrants and refugees alike). The focus in the paper on participation is admirable, however SCOA is seeing significant client needs for employment services (from humanitarian entrants and migrants) which are not always being addressed. Employment is a key theme of the forthcoming SCOA conference in June. Considerable past experience has shown that the settlement sector cannot rely on the goodwill of the JSA network to develop partnerships which would net a fee for service for settlement agencies who find employment for clients. Rather the Innovations Program or other relevant programs within DEEWR should be refined and opened up to settlement services with the possibility of Employment Advocacy/Liaison positions being established within larger settlement agencies and funded by DEEWR to carry out this task. Employment outcomes for clients employed through this process can easily be measured by DEEWR .
- The distinction between service types between asylum seekers and humanitarian entrants is articulated on pg 7, however is absent from the flowchart. It may be useful to include this group of entrants on the flow chart also. How is the settlement framework going to deal with a plethora of visa entrants, including permanent and temporary eg bridging, 457 visas who now receive varying levels of settlement support ranging from barely any to very

comprehensive. SCOA urges that resources to be more thoughtfully organised, directed and streamlined towards a suite of services to a specialist settlement sector. This would support the sector to maximise its resources through ongoing funding and diminished competitiveness by sharing its knowledge, expertise and experience through the national settlement peak. In such a policy environment, the settlement sector can efficiently provide a suite of services to all migrants according to their need, to achieve the desired settlement outcomes for productive diversity.

- Access and equity policy is mentioned at a macro level, however member consultations and recent SCOA submissions on government policy and practice in access and equity have highlighted the need to bridge the gap between policy statement and service provision at a service delivery level. For example on page 10 participation is highlighted as a cornerstone to successful settlement, with particular reference to education and employment. Providing greater detail on the links of the settlement sector to the education and employment sectors could be useful here. Gaining citizenship is essential to social inclusion and participation. However the current citizenship process is protracted and arguably discriminatory to and not inclusive of aspiring candidates from countries of origin of a non-English speaking background and/or humanitarian entrants.
- Greater detail is recommended on what settlement support, and what ongoing services post this DIAC support actually means. This clarity will enable the access and equity agenda at the government and through SCOA at the NGO levels to work with relevant departments to ensure necessary services through multifaceted models, are provided to vulnerable and other migrants including humanitarian entrants. *What and how* the linkages and connections to mainstream services for migrants and humanitarian entrants are to happen has been the biggest stumbling block for settlement services competing for resources with mainstream agencies. Very often, settlement services are providing the same service on a volunteer basis for which the commonwealth provides considerable funding to mainstream agencies. Examples of this can be found in FaHCSIA, DEEWR and DOHA Programs. The Settlement Framework and Access and Equity Review need to ensure that they engage commonwealth departments to utilise the expertise of the settlement sector in their provision of funding to NGOs for ongoing service support to vulnerable clients and their communities beyond the first few years of settlement. This would assist the social inclusion agenda to ensure service cultural competence within mainstream government and non government agencies. Recently arrived migrants and refugees expect and have the right to culturally appropriate and responsive services. This more formal sharing of the space and resources between the settlement sector and mainstream agencies would support better linkages, collaboration, partnerships and more effective service delivery and optimised outcomes for our mutual client groups.
- Elements of the paper refer to community participation, from both the perspective of new arrivals and the community welcoming them. Indigenous Australians and traditional owners should be actively included within and contribute to formal welcoming ceremonies for new arrivals. Settlement sector mapping has highlighted increased pressures on community capacity building funding which may have an impact on this important area. The recent SGP

funding outcomes have highlighted the requirement for DIAC to address broader community capacity building and to articulate *how and to whom* its settlement resources will be distributed in the future so that that client groups understand what can and cannot be resourced through settlement funding. Additionally it is imperative for the three tiers of government to develop a common understanding of how new and emerging communities may be resourced through strategic and targeted funding, and communicate this to new and emerging communities eg funding for multicultural sports or cultural festivals, or through support in kind, eg community or recreation space. For migrants and refugees, these social participation activities encourage cross-cultural respect, understanding and cooperation, foster skills development, and promote a sense of identity and belonging.

I look forward to DIAC's consideration of our submission and look forward to working with DIAC to further clarify and to translate our suggested strategies for the Settlement Framework into a service delivery model. Importantly SCOA is also keen to assist the Access and Equity review to ensure ownership of services to new and emerging communities and to specific groups within these communities.

Yours sincerely,

Cedric Manen
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