



Civic Participation

Settlement Council of Australia Discussion Paper – October 2018

The Settlement Council of Australia recognizes the successful active civic participation of new Australians from a refugee or migrant background, especially given the significant barriers in place that can limit the active citizenship of new arrivals.

In 2016 SCoA launched the National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards (NSSOS) which provide a basis from which settlement services can strive for the best possible settlement outcomes across nine key areas. Each of these areas is interdependent and thus special attention must be given to ensuring holistic settlement solutions.

The theme of our October 2018 newsletter is civic participation – one of the nine foundations identified in our NSSOS. Active civic participation occurs when newly arrived communities are able to effectively engage in the Australian community and exercise their individual and collective rights under the law. This outcome standard recognises the role that settlement service providers play in engaging and supporting migrant and new arrival communities to achieve a level of independence that facilitates effective civic participation. It encompasses efforts that promote cultural and national identity, encourage civic participation and foster contributions to the broader Australian society.

The purpose of this paper is to identify some of the most pressing barriers to civic participation and identify how to overcome them. There have been extensive studies which focus on youth civic participation¹, though far fewer resources describing and analyzing how active citizenship occurs in older age groups. This paper will aim to expand thinking about civic participation to cover all age groups and will conclude by making recommendations that aim to enhance opportunities for all new Australians.

¹ See examples:

Correa-Velez I , Gifford S , Barnett A, 2010, “Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia,” Social Science & Medicine, Elsevier publishers.

MYAN, 2016 National Youth Settlement Framework: A national framework for supporting the settlement of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia, March 2016, Australia.

http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN_Youth_Settlement_Framework_April.pdf

The State of civic participation for new Australians

The state of civic participation of refugees and migrants has been described by the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network as “the formal and informal ways that young people engage and contribute to the community and broader society.”² This particular statement does focus on youth but can equally apply to all age groups.

Moving to a new country and adjusting to a new life is a challenge for most migrants and is particularly so for humanitarian entrants.³ Many humanitarian migrants may have lived in refugee camps or arrive in Australia as a result of other difficult circumstances which, in many cases, have lasted for many years. As a result their ability to start engaging with their new community immediately on arrival can be limited due to a range of possible circumstances, including disrupted education, which may result for some in limited literacy and numeracy, and they may have had limited opportunities to work.⁴

Building a New Life in Australia is a longitudinal study which collects data about a wide variety of topics relevant to the background and settlement experiences of 1,509 humanitarian migrating units who arrived in Australia or had their permanent visas granted in the six months between May and December 2013. It gathers annual responses to a range of questions intended to gauge the settlement journeys of respondents. The survey has highlighted that interaction with the Australian community becomes easier over time.⁵ This was echoed by research conducted by the former Department of Immigration and Citizenship which found “time lived in Australia affects a number of aspects of settlement, such as better language skills and increased education and employment.”⁶ This means that as refugees become more settled into their new country, they tend to participate more in communities.

The BNLA study shows that cultural activities, such as festivals and the celebration of special days, had the highest level of participation followed by participation in school activities. Proportions of respondents participating in each type of activity were higher for respondents in wave 3, some three years after arrival.⁷ BNLA also asked respondents how comfortable they felt interacting with the general

² MYAN, 2016 National Youth Settlement Framework: A national framework for supporting the settlement of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia, March 2016, Australia. http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/MYAN_Youth_Settlement_Framework_April.pdf

³ Department of Social Services, Welcomed and Supported: Australia’s approach to the settlement and integration of new migrants, Australian Government, p.9

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2018/welcomed_and_supported_-_final_2.pdf

⁴ Department of Social Services, Welcomed and Supported: Australia’s approach to the settlement and integration of new migrants, Australian Government, p.9

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2018/welcomed_and_supported_-_final_2.pdf

⁵ Department of Social Services, 2017, Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants, Australian Government, Canberra, p.6

⁶ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), 2011, “Settlement outcomes of new arrivals”, 2011

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/settlement-outcomes-new-arrival_access.pdf

⁷ Department of Social Services, 2017, Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants, Australian Government, Canberra, p.82

Australian community, measuring both wave 1 and wave 3. Higher proportions of respondents felt comfortable interacting within the Australian community in wave 3.⁸

In many studies such as BNLA it has been shown that newly arrived refugees and migrants will face barriers of civic participation at higher rates than refugees and migrants who have been in Australia for a longer duration of time. It is therefore clear that there is a need to address and identify the barriers in which refugees and migrants face in the initial post-arrival period and to enhance outcomes that promote quick and effective engagement with the broader community.

This paper will consider why refugees and migrants are limited in their ability to participate in Australia (in terms of social, economic and cultural participation) and will explore the issues that are stopping new Australians from participating in wider communities.

Barriers to civic participation

Settlement can be viewed as a personal transition for migrants as they develop a sense of belonging in their new community. A study commissioned by the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), "Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals," identified this as the key aspect of settlement, and suggested that the level of comfort felt by a migrant following their arrival in Australia is perhaps the most crucial component of their settlement outcomes.⁹ SCoA members experience first-hand the many different ways in which this process manifests itself for their clients. Based on these experiences it is abundantly clear that settlement is a personal experience, individual to each migrant and is not a linear process that can be distilled down to a single concept.

With this in mind, each individual settlement journey may involve overcoming a range of barriers that limit the ability of new Australians to participate in civic engagement such as access to education, unemployment, financial hardships and belonging.

Education and English Language

In Australia, meaningful resettlement¹⁰ for our newest residents can be described in terms of settling well, that is, 'living comfortably'¹¹, and can be measured against a set of indicators of integration¹², including opportunities to access education and training. This indicates that one of the keys of successful

⁸ Department of Social Services, 2017, Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants, Australian Government p.84

⁹ Australian Survey Research Group Pty Ltd, 2011, *Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals* (Study for Department of Immigration and Citizenship, April 2011), p1.

¹⁰ Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) 2006, *Settling in: Exploring good settlement for refugee young people in Australia*, CMYI, Melbourne.

¹¹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) 2011, "Settlement outcomes of new arrivals", Australian Government, p.1

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/settlement-outcomes-new-arrival_access.pdf

¹² Ager, A & Strang, A 2008, 'Understanding integration: a conceptual framework', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol.21, no.2, pp.167—91.

settlement for refugees and migrants is the levels of access to and participation in education and training in their new home.

Data show that adults who have attained higher levels of education are generally more likely than those with lower levels of educational attainment to report stronger civic engagement, in terms of voting, volunteering, political interest, and interpersonal trust.¹³

An important precursor to accessing education in Australia is the need to provide language education for people from a non-English speaking background.¹⁴ There are various programmes across Australia that deliver English language classes to refugees and migrants.

Australian Migrant English Program (AMEP)

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides up to 510 hours of English language tuition to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants.¹⁵ AMEP is funded by the Australian government and aims to enhance settlement outcomes through facilitating social and economic participation by assisting participants to learn foundation English language and settlement skills.¹⁶

AMEP is designed for adult migrants and humanitarian entrants who speak limited or no English.¹⁷ To be eligible for the programme, the participant must hold either a permanent visa or an eligible temporary visa.¹⁸ AMEP classes are run by qualified English language providers, and occur on either a full-time or part-time basis.¹⁹ Some classes also provide child care for the duration of the class.²⁰

In December 2017 the Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes was published. Numerous submitters commented on possible barriers for migrants wanting to participate in the AMEP including: eligibility restrictions and time limits, competing priorities and the realistic levels of English language proficiency attained through AMEP.²¹ Some of the barriers that were stated in the inquiry report included:

- gaps in the AMEP service as 'not all migrants in all visa categories are eligible for all services.'²²
- 'AMEP can be restrictive in terms of eligibility, attendance and assessment.'²³

¹³ Education Indicators in Focus – 2013/01 (January) OECD Study

¹⁴ Department of Social Services, Building a New Life in Australia, Australian Government, Canberra, p.34

¹⁵ Department of Education and Training, 'Australian Migrant English Program', Australian Government, accessed on 15 October 2018, <https://www.education.gov.au/adult-migrant-english-program>

¹⁶ Department of Social Services, 2017, Building a New Life in Australia, Australian Government, Canberra, p.34

¹⁷ Department of Education and Training, 'Australian Migrant English Program', Australian Government, accessed on 15 October 2017, <https://www.education.gov.au/adult-migrant-english-program-0>

¹⁸ Department of Social Services, 2017, Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants, Australian Government, Canberra, p.34

¹⁹ Ibid, p.34

²⁰ Ibid, p.34

²¹ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2017, Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, p.51

²² Ms Catherine Scarth, Chief Executive Officer, AMES Australia, Transcript, 22 February 2017, p. 13.

²³ Victorian Multicultural Commission, Submission 44, p. 11.

- AMEP lacks flexibility and that ‘eligibility timeframes do not factor in people’s employment, personal and family caring commitments during initial resettlement.’²⁴ It is suggested that this inflexibility results in migrants not being able to capitalise on the full number of allocated hours.²⁵
- settlement is an ongoing process and takes more than five years. Respondents recommended providing access to programs beyond the five year time limit ‘or for ... second-generation children born in Australia to recently arrived refugee communities.’²⁶

These barriers are contributing factors which hold back the active civic participation of refugees and migrants and previous work by SCoA and other stakeholders has identified opportunities to improve English language acquisition through the AMEP program and other methods.

In addition to the AMEP program there are also many other English language classes available which are provided by a variety of settlement service providers and other NGOs community groups or volunteers across Australia. These classes tend to be in a casual, informal setting and cater for people who have exhausted their AMEP hours or aren’t eligible for the AMEP program. The barriers for these types of classes include many of the same barriers as those experienced by people who undertake AMEP classes.

There needs to be more flexibility in the delivery of English language support that takes into account that students are still adjusting to their new country and may have conflicting commitments outside of the class. In addition, the uncertainty of class availability is high due to challenges around finding resources, suitable classrooms and volunteers willing to dedicate their time to teaching. This creates inconsistency and unpredictability for refugees and migrants who wish to undertake English language classes.

Recommendation 1

English language training must be prioritised for all new arrivals, on an as needs basis, such that sufficient time is given, and funding provided, to ensure each person can learn English sufficient for them to participate in society, schooling and employment (as relevant) without being subject to the pressure of balancing English training with other obligations.

Employment

Gaining secure employment is a key settlement outcome for new Australians.²⁷ Migrants pursue employment as a means of acquiring economic security for their families and welcome the opportunity to contribute to their new home.²⁸ Obtaining employment is not only important in terms of economic

²⁴ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Submission 90, p. 26

²⁵ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Submission 90, p. 26

²⁶ Dr Emma Campbell, Director, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, Transcript, 16 August 2017, p. 3

²⁷ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, 2017, p.77

²⁸ Hugo, G. (2011), A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants, Summary of Findings (DIAC, 2011), p34.

wellbeing but also leads to greater participation in communities, better self-esteem and protects and enhances mental health.²⁹

The Joint Standing Committee received evidence in 2017, that new Australians face a number of barriers in finding employment in Australia such as proficiency in English and literacy, a lack of understanding of cultural norms and common employment processes, problems with skills recognition, working in low-skilled roles, and discrimination.³⁰ Employment is integral to empowering migrants to participate in civic society; it unequivocally forms a crucial foundation of civic participation. If a recently arrived Australian faces barriers in looking for employment, he/she may then find limitations on their ability to participate in other aspects of society such as language classes, community gatherings, social gatherings and others. It is well accepted, therefore, that unemployment contributes to the greater depth of barriers that migrants, and especially those from a refugee background, face when trying to participate in community.

It is true that “the longer humanitarian migrants spend in Australia, the more likely they are to find employment. Despite some improvements, many still struggle to obtain work in Australia commensurate with their previous skills and qualifications. This is also a problem in other resettlement countries such as Canada and Sweden.”³¹ In response to these issues, there are programs that the Australian government is piloting such as the Careers Pathways Pilot for Humanitarian Entrants.³² “The Career Pathways Pilot is a new initiative to help newly arrived humanitarian entrants to use their professional or trade skills and qualifications in Australia.”³³

This Pilot is in its infancy and demonstrates the need for a cohesive and nationwide effort focusing on how to create pathways for any refugee or migrant who is not able to find their first job. SCoA suggests this targeted support must commence within the early days of arrival and continue until meaningful, sustainable employment is achieved.

In the BNLA report, the specific experiences of job seeking for new arrivals from a humanitarian background was explored. The respondents were interviewed in waves 1, 2 and 3 in relation to their employment experience. It was discovered that participants experienced a four-fold increase of paid

²⁹ Parsons, R. 2013, *Assessing the Economic Contribution of Refugees in Australia* (MDA Ltd)

³⁰ Joint Standing Committee on Migration, *Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, 2017, p.80

³¹ Rioseco P & De Maio J, 2017 “Three charts on: job prospects for refugees in Australia,” *The Conversation*, published 1 November 2017.

<https://theconversation.com/three-charts-on-job-prospects-for-refugees-in-australia-83724>

³² Department of Social Services, *Career Pathways Pilot for Humanitarian Entrants*, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed on 16 October 2018.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-services-programs-policy-settlement-services/career-pathways-pilot-for-humanitarian-entrants>

³³ *Ibid*, 2018

employment between the first and third waves.³⁴ This demonstrates that the need for targeted, early support is crucial.

Another aspect of employment that requires dedicated attention relates to the economic engagement of migrant women. The BNLA report showed a figure on paid employment by gender and wave, per cent. The figure showed the migrant women were much less likely to be working than men at each wave.³⁵ From this it can be concluded that there needs to be more innovative thinking in how the settlement sector can open pathways for women who do want employment within an early stage of arrival into Australia.

Moreover, the BNLA study found an increasing trend among humanitarian migrants in Australia towards entrepreneurship, showing higher-than-average engagement in small and medium-sized business.³⁶ This is another area that can be improved so that refugees and migrants have the skills and support to run businesses, enabling new Australians to thrive economically and actively participate by being entrepreneurs.

Other barriers that were identified in BNLA included lack of Australian experience and ongoing discrimination against certain ethnic groups in the labour market. For example, research has shown that African and Middle Eastern refugees had poorer employment outcomes than other waves of migrants despite having similar levels of knowledge, skills and qualifications.³⁷ From this finding, a suggestion was indicated that educating employers on the skills of humanitarian migrants may be worthwhile.

Although there are many barriers when it comes to applying for jobs and securing the right type of job, there are also a number of excellent initiatives, programs and projects designed to overcome such barriers. To move forward is to ensure that all new Australians from refugee and migrant backgrounds have the chance to be employed, as early as possible following arrival.

Recommendation 2

Employment service providers must be required to undertake cultural awareness training and be adequately funded to provide in-language support where necessary. There should be more activities and seminars for employers on the benefits of cultural diversity to overcome cultural stereotypes and misunderstandings.

³⁴ Department of Social Services, Career Pathways Pilot for Humanitarian Entrants, Australian Government, Canberra, accessed on 16 October 2018.
<https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-services-programs-policy-settlement-services/career-pathways-pilot-for-humanitarian-entrants>

³⁵ Department of Social Services, Building a New Life in Australia, Australian Government, Canberra, p.38
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2017/17385_dss_-_bnla_report-web-v2.pdf

³⁶ Rioseco P & De Maio J, 2017 "Three charts on: job prospects for refugees in Australia," The Conversation, published 1 November 2017.

<https://theconversation.com/three-charts-on-job-prospects-for-refugees-in-australia-83724>

³⁷ Ibid, 2017

Recommendation 3

Any arbitrary time limit for newly arrived Australians to commence their relationship with jobactive should be abolished. Instead, early in their settlement journey, each job seeker should be provided with an individually tailored plan for entry into employment services which is informed by the their settlement service provider (if any) and which takes into account the specific assistance they need to achieve their settlement foundations and broader job readiness, prior to commencing mutual obligations.

Recommendation 4

Urgent review of Australia's overseas skills recognition system must be undertaken and a process implemented for a transparent, fair and accessible pathway for overseas trained professionals and para-professionals to translate their skills into relevant employment in Australia.

Financial Hardship

Many humanitarian entrants in need of protection come to Australia with few financial resources. They have to rebuild their lives with little money and many may not be familiar with financial activities such as budgeting, insurance, loans and contracts which can eventually lead to large debts and can affect settlement prospects. These people are also vulnerable to exploitation because they may not fully understand financial and contractual arrangements in Australia.³⁸

Data about issues of financial hardship is rarely collected and while anecdotal reports point to significant financial stress among new arrivals, the realities are often much harder to categorise.

Instances of financial hardship in Australia have been measured using four different longitudinal surveys funded by the Federal Government, all of which have been conducted over recent years (though some for much longer than others):

- Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) study, which collected data from a random sample of Australian households;
- Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is a cohort study of Australian families with children in urban and regional households;
- Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) is a cohort study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in urban, regional and remote households; and
- Building a New Life in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants (BNLA).³⁹

³⁸ Refugee Council of Australia, 2011, "Financial Issues", 1 April 2011.

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/settlement/livinghere/financial-issues/>

³⁹ Department of Social Services, Building a New Life in Australia, Australian Government, Canberra

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2017/17385_dss_-_bnla_report-web-v2.pdf

The responses collected in 2013-2014 revealed that newly arrived migrants, along with families responding to the LSIC survey, experienced significantly greater instances of financial hardship when compared to the broader Australian population (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Financial Hardship across Longitudinal Studies (2013-14)

Experience of Financial Hardship	HILDA	LSAC	LSIC	BNLA
Respondent faces no financial hardship	80%	83%	55%	60%
Respondent faces one type of financial hardship	12%	9%	18%	18%
Respondent faces multiple types of financial hardship	8%	8%	27%	22%

The above results for respondents in the BNLA Survey can be compared with the third wave of responses collected in the year 2015-2016, which reveals a reduction of respondents experiencing no or only one type, of financial hardship, and an increase of respondents reporting that they experience multiple types of financial hardship. The financial hardship data points that refugees and migrants are susceptible to falling into multiple types of finance barriers when newly arriving into Australia and that this issue is likely to be exacerbated over time.

There is growing consensus that Australians experiencing financial hardship are more likely to suffer additional barriers preventing their participation in civil society and their own communities.⁴⁰ Given the high prevalence of financial hardship among new Australians, the inference can be drawn that this is likely to pose a real barrier to active citizenship. Economic engagement for refugees and migrants is a vital key factor for them to be able to fully participate in the Australian society. The support needed to solve such complex issues is in dire need of further dedicated research and consultation

Economic engagement and the ability to secure meaningful employment directly impacts migrants' abilities to earn an income, buy services and engage in other dimensions of society. The OECD notes that having a sustainable employment or economic security is fundamental for economic and social integration of Humanitarian migrants.

Recommendation 5

Urgent research and data collection is necessary to explore the financial hardship experienced among new Australians. Such research needs to identify the causes of financial hardship and its consequences, as well as identifying methods for overcoming this pervasive issue.

⁴⁰ See example:

Relationships Australia, 2018, Is Australia experiencing an epidemic of loneliness?: Findings from 16 waves of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) Survey (Study), Working Paper, September 2018. <https://www.relationships.org.au/what-we-do/research/is-australia-experiencing-an-epidemic-of-loneliness>

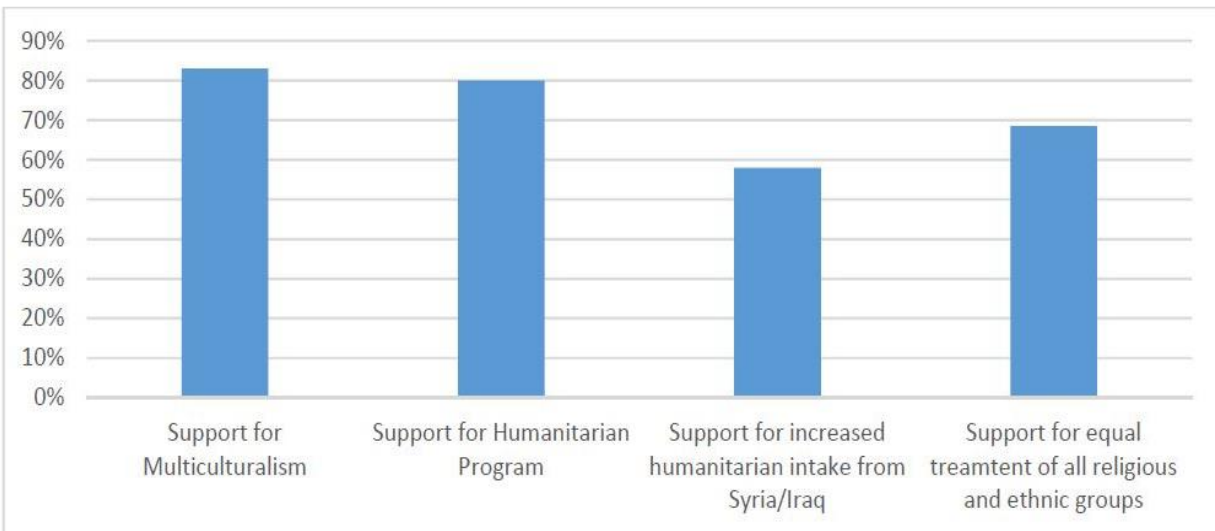
Sense of belonging

Another major reason as to why new Australians may not feel a sense of belonging, occurs as a result of a lack of community acceptance. Acceptance requires freedom from racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination,⁴¹ as well as initiatives that welcome migrants and include them in all aspects of society.

“Since 2013, the Scanlon Foundation surveys asked for response to the proposition that ‘multiculturalism has been good for Australia.’ Agreement has been consistent, in the range 83%-86%, with an increase in the proportion indicating ‘strong agreement,’ from 32% in 2013 to 41%-43% in 2015-17.”⁴²

The 2016 Mapping Social Cohesion Report demonstrates continuing high levels of support nationally for multiculturalism (83%⁴³), a clear indication that Australia is largely welcoming and supportive of the diverse mixture of cultures it currently enjoys. Similarly, Australians exhibit strong support for our immigration programme. The report notes the lowest levels of concern in its history,⁴⁴ ranking Australia globally as the nation most supportive of its immigration intake.⁴⁵

There is also very strong support for Australia’s humanitarian program (80%⁴⁶) and a majority (58%) of Australians support the government’s plan to bring refugees from the Syrian conflict to Australia,⁴⁷ and almost 70% support the view that there should be equal consideration for refugees of all religious and ethnic groups.



(Source: Markus, A. (2016), *Mapping Social Cohesion*.)

⁴¹ McKinsey Global Institute (2016) *People on the Move: Global migration’s impact and opportunity*, p83.

⁴² Markus, A. 2016, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, page 64

⁴³ Markus, A. 2016, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, page 54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.2

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.40

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.49

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 49

These statistics paint a very positive view of the general population's acceptance of immigration and the country's welcoming approach to migrants, and while discrimination and racism remain as issues for further attention, they indicate that Australia is well-placed to continue its highly successful migration program.

The feeling of acceptance in Australia and feeling part of the community is a two-way process and while respondents may have some choice over when and how they engage with the wider community, the behaviour of the community in which they live will also influence their sense of belonging. The BNLA report indicated that overall, respondents reported that interaction with the Australian community became easier over time. Trust in people in the neighborhood was higher in wave 3 at 67.3 per cent compared with wave 1 (55.4 per cent). The results could be due to an initial unfamiliarity with the community and surroundings.⁴⁸

In addition, a major survey by the Scanlon Foundation titled 'Australians today' surveyed both Australian-born and immigrant Australians to collect their perceptions of social cohesion and found that most Australians hold positive views towards migrants and that there are widely shared values that bind our communities.⁴⁹ However, there is also a negative side to this story.

'Australians today' found that many barriers to belonging are instigated by racism and discrimination. Australians Today found that members of Muslim and African communities report high levels of discrimination. The report found that 23% of South Sudanese surveyed said they're unemployed, and 77%, the highest of any group surveyed, said they had experienced discrimination.⁵⁰

The data from both the BNLA report and the Australians Today survey shows how significant the barriers are for refugees and migrants to have a sense of belonging in the Australian community. In order to have a socially inclusive and welcoming society, new Australians will also need to feel a sense of belonging in their new home, which will no doubt lead to a greater chance of them participating in communities.

Recommendation 6

Initiatives that enhance community harmony and social cohesion are crucial to promote the settlement of new arrivals in Australia. This requires an understanding that integration is a two way process and as much focus must be given to educating the general public as is given to training recent arrivals. With this in mind, grants targeted at social cohesion should be increased, and efforts made to encourage a greater number of activities and initiatives that promote multiculturalism in Australia.

⁴⁸ Department of Social Services, Building a New Life in Australia, Australian Government, Canberra, p.82
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2017/17385_dss_-_bnla_report-web-v2.pdf

⁴⁹ Jones O & Sarwal A, 2016, "Migrants have a strong sense of belonging to Australia, says study," SBS Australia, 25 August 2016, accessed on 11 October 2018.
<https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/hindi/en/audiotrack/migrants-have-strong-sense-belonging-australia-says-study>

⁵⁰ Ibid, 2016

A way forward

The Settlement Council of Australia recognizes the incredible successful active civic participation of refugees and migrants, despite the many barriers they face, particularly in the immediate period following arrival. The role of settlement service providers in engaging and supporting migrant and new arrival communities to achieve a level of independence facilitates effective civic participation. It also encompasses efforts that promote cultural and national identity, encourage civic participation and foster contributions to the broader Australian society.

The purpose of this paper has been to identify some of the most pressing barriers to civic participation and give recommendation to some of the barriers. The most pressing barriers that were identified for refugees and migrants to participate in civic society were access to education, unemployment, financial hardships and the need to foster a sense of belonging.

As there have been extensive studies which focus on the civic participation of youth, this paper drew from those studies and expanded consideration to all age groups, for a more holistic understanding of this complex issue.

The active civic participation of refugees and migrants is vital for a successful multicultural country. The above barriers will need to be overcome if new Australians are to achieve full participation in their new home. In order to achieve this, the NSSOS provides a framework against which settlement services and policy can empower new arrivals to achieve the independence, security and acceptance needed to foster successful settlement and, in turn, active civic participation.

Refugees and migrants come to Australia with an array of experiences, skills and wisdom. They are multilingual, multicultural and have international social networks which are a great asset for the Australian community. It is therefore clear that Australia stands to gain the most through initiatives that actively support new Australians as they seek to participate in civic society.