Review of Humanitarian Outcomes
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

By email: humanitarianoutcomes@pmc.gov.au

Review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants

Following our meeting on 14 December 2018, the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) welcomes the opportunity to provide further input into Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet’s review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants.

SCoA represents over 100 agencies in the settlement sector across Australia, which comprise the vast majority of agencies providing settlement support to recently arrived migrants, including those from a refugee background.

Our members work directly with a wide range of new arrivals from diverse backgrounds, as well as the mainstream Australian community and various government and private stakeholders. The sector’s mission is to provide effective and efficient settlement services which assist newly arrived migrants to achieve the best possible settlement outcomes.

SCoA believes that Australia should be proud of the settlement services it provides. While there is always scope for improvement, Australia’s settlement services are dynamic, responsive and, on the whole, successful in assisting those most in need to create a prosperous and happy new life in Australia. For this reason, the hard work exhibited across the vast group of settlement service agencies, combined with the commitment by government to the sector, and of course the tenacity and resilience of migrants themselves, is a success story to be shared with the world.

Our members witness firsthand the true value of the contribution migrants make to Australia, but also the challenges those people face when attempting to settle in their new communities. Our members also see the importance of fostering and strengthening best practice across the sector to ensure best possible settlement outcomes are achieved.

Through this best practice, SCoA submits, the settlement sector is delivering state-of-the-art and world-leading settlement services that generate countless positive outcomes, for both migrants and the Australian community as a whole.

In order to assist the Review Panel, SCoA is pleased to present a number of recommendations that are drawn from our policy research and representation of the sector over recent years. While timing of this Review precluded a national member consultation, the recommendations listed below are informed by the experiences and feedback of SCoA members across the country.
The role of the settlement sector in promoting integration, employment and settlement outcomes

Research into the settlement sector’s role in promoting a cohesive multicultural society overwhelmingly concludes that the suite of settlement services funded through federal government programs have been crucial in facilitating Australian settlement, and therefore generating the best possible outcomes for inclusion.¹

Settlement service providers have developed strong community links and trust, as well as significant language capability and cultural competence to cater for a variety of ethno-specific cultural groups. They also have large volunteer programs which contribute to program outcomes and provide a practical way to foster social inclusion for newly arrived migrants.²

Well resourced, flexible and tailored settlement services are crucial to ensuring the lifetime wellbeing of refugees and their families settling in Australia. As a result, it is essential that funding for settlement services be maintained and increased as program levels increase.

SCoA’s member consultations point to a need to ensure greater flexibility in the funding of settlement services and associated support for refugees and their families settling in Australia. Flexibility, together with greater resourcing and a less output-driven model, can facilitate greater focus on infrastructure and access to crucial services.

### Recommendation 1

Owing to their sophisticated, culturally sensitive and specialised delivery models developed over decades of dedicated experience, members of the settlement sector are recognised as the best placed to provide responsive and flexible services to migrants and to assist them to reach their full potential in Australia across all identified settlement outcomes, including both social and economic.

Funding for settlement service providers should therefore be sufficiently flexible and adequate, particularly in line with any increases to client numbers, such that settlement service providers are empowered to deliver effective and tailored services to specific individual and community groups without being bound by a set of rigid, pre-determined outcomes.

A resounding theme in SCoA’s member consultations is that the time-limits imposed on the provision of funded settlement services are arbitrary and unhelpful and contrary to the government’s commitment to ensuring the lifetime wellbeing of new arrivals in Australia. SCoA members witness that settlement can take longer than five years for some clients, though not for all, and therefore requires a flexible funding model that does not result in clients in need being turned away due to the length of time they have been in Australia. Considerable research demonstrates that as families establish their lives in Australia, sometimes over generations, settlement issues can become exacerbated and the need for quick, targeted and early settlement intervention is crucial.³

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² Productivity Commission (2016), Migrant Intake into Australia, p279.
The provision of federally-funded settlement services should therefore be assessed based on needs and not the length of a migrant’s stay in Australia.

**Recommendation 2**

*While preserving funding for the successful, intensive, services provided to newly arrived humanitarian migrants, eligibility for federally funded settlement services under the Settlement Engagement Transition and Support program should be assessed on an individual needs basis irrespective of the length of time a person has resided in Australia.*

**Place-based settlement approaches and regional settlement**

New Australians from a refugee background can play a significant role in the economic and social fabric of their new home. This has special importance when considering a growing need to focus on population shortages in regional and rural Australia.

SCoA supports the adoption of a place-based settlement policy that adequately anticipates the intersection between social cohesion and economic outcomes and considers the full range of experiences facing refugees in regional areas. Given an increasing dialogue calling for the exploration of new settlement locations, including in regional Australia, SCoA believes that it is crucial that consideration be given to the capabilities of any given location to facilitate settlement. In order to properly assess this, SCoA suggests that the nine priority areas for settlement services, as outlined in the National Settlement Framework and SCoA’s National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards, provide a detailed roadmap for assessing whether the foundations of settlement are able to be met.

A number of key settlement indicators can be ensured through the lens of place-based settlement including:

- how to ensure economic integration in any given location;
- how to achieve social cohesion and provide “welcome” in each location;
- ensuring adequate access to services and infrastructure;
- whether additional support is needed in regional and/or rural locations.

In its 2002 publication *An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, the UNHCR identified 8 key factors as influencing the selection of placement communities in which successful resettlement of refugees was more likely to occur. Following consultation with its members across Australia, and noting the work that has been done by government on these issues, SCoA has adapted the approach for the purposes of identifying the factors that lead to successful regional settlement in certain locations in Australia, as set out in Table 1:

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### Table 1: Critical Factors for successful regional settlement

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<th>Factor</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Settlement Services</td>
<td>• Existence of at least one SSP that is prepared to support the settlement process of migrants and refugees.</td>
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<td>• Adequate funding for SSPs to deliver the services required.</td>
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<td>• Willingness of government and local community to commit to a steady flow of migrants and refugees to ensure viability of the SSP.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of infrastructure and services</td>
<td>• Existence of suitable infrastructure to resettle sufficient numbers of migrants and refugees to make the site viable in both social and economic terms.</td>
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<td>Capacity for economic integration</td>
<td>• Initial employment opportunities and capacity for growth.</td>
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<td>• Existence of sufficient housing (with reference to affordability, size and suitability).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Appropriate education facilities for both children and adult migrants and refugees.</td>
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<td>Willingness of community to engage with migrant and refugee populations</td>
<td>• Demonstrated commitment in community to welcome migrants and refugees and a respect for religious and cultural diversity.</td>
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<td>• Existence of local leaders willing to serve as advocates for resettlement.</td>
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<td>• Existence of social and community events.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Existence of, or capacity to settle, sufficient numbers of migrant and refugee arrivals to ensure capacity to develop cultural and social networks.</td>
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Collection of data for measuring settlement success

At present, there are significant limitations on the collection and availability of data, both relating to the experiences of new Australians themselves and the services provided to them. This includes both large-scale research on settlement outcomes, and the collection of statistics, experiences and case studies that illustrate the settlement process and promote innovation.

The reason for this is largely an absence of dedicated funding and the often-repeated concerns that current reporting requirements, imposed contractually, do not adequately reflect settlement experiences nor capture the true nature of the work of the sector.

SCoA has commenced work to facilitate greater sharing of innovative practices and their outcomes, including by developing an online Policy Hub and Innovation Centre, and through the organisation of meetings, forums and conferences, however this is not sufficiently resourced to provide a comprehensive set of data about settlement services and their outcomes.

With limited further coordination, the sector could enhance data collection, enabling Australia to be better informed to ensure service provision is targeted to achieve the best possible settlement outcomes.

English language education

It is well accepted that English language ability is an important part of any migrant’s settlement journey. SCoA notes, however, that the capacity to speak English is not, and should not be, used as a benchmark of successful settlement. This would be unnecessary given the commitment of settlement service providers and, increasingly, some government services, to cater for culturally and linguistically diverse clients through providing translated information, interpreters and, often, staff fluent in community languages.

Nevertheless, given the complexities of life in Australia, including dealing with government bodies such as Centrelink, gaining employment and the need to engage with the broader community, a new

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Australian without at least a functional level of English will benefit enormously from the provision of English-language training.

The impact of English language skills on a migrant’s potential for labour market participation is particularly relevant, with lack of English language proficiency commonly cited as a major barrier, especially to new Australians from a refugee background, to entering the labour market. Further, migrants with lower English language skills are typically funnelled into lower-skilled employment with little upward mobility, irrespective of their level of pre-arrival skill.

For these reasons, SCoA supports the view that English language ability is crucial to a migrant’s long term settlement outcomes. We therefore applaud the government’s commitment to providing various language services aimed at enhancing the English language ability of recently arrived migrants through programs such as AMEP and SEE.

SCoA members report that while current levels of government-funded training through AMEP and SEE are appreciated, there are circumstances where they are insufficient, or their effectiveness is diminished. For example, there are suggestions that for some new arrivals, the allocated hours are insufficient to achieve independence through English language, and the rules determining eligibility for accessing classes are often insufficiently flexible. Further, the obligations surrounding seeking a job, including job applications, attending jobactive interviews and undertaking other courses, often conflict with English class schedules and force migrants to decline opportunities to further their English language training long before they have achieved suitable levels, or completed their allocated hours.

Many SCoA members provide additional language services, including conversation classes, on a volunteer basis. The ability to do so greatly varies from location to location, however, and demonstrates a clear need for a more uniform approach to this crucial service nationwide.

**Recommendation 5**

*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 outcomes and the effectiveness of jobactive**

New Australians from a migrant and/or refugee background represent some (though clearly not all) of the most vulnerable job seekers and as a result encounter significant difficulty in entering the Australian labour market.

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9 Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p178
Engaging with the labour market is pivotal to successful settlement and is one of the most visible and important contributions that migrants make to Australia.\textsuperscript{12} Migrants pursue employment as a means of acquiring economic security for their families and welcome the opportunity to contribute to their new home.\textsuperscript{13}

That said, the settlement process for new Australians is complex and variable. For employment outcomes to be truly sustainable, migrants must first be supported to achieve a range of individual settlement foundations. Policy must reflect that this will take different lengths of time depending on the personal circumstances of each individual and their families, and should therefore accept that different individuals can, and should, start their jobactive relationship at different stages in their settlement journey.

In our submission to the recent Senate Inquiry into jobactive, SCoA has made a number of recommendations that would improve the ability of employment services to meet the needs of new Australians in a flexible and responsive manner.

For the purposes of this review, we make the following recommendations.

**Recommendation 6**

An arbitrary time limit to commence mutual obligation requirements for newly arrived Australians should be abolished. Instead, early in their settlement journey, each job seeker from a refugee background should be provided with an individually tailored plan for entry into employment services which is informed by their settlement service provider and which takes into account the specific assistance they need to achieve settlement foundations and job readiness, prior to commencing more general mutual obligations.

**Recommendation 7**

SCoA recommends the establishment and adequate funding of a dedicated employment service for this vulnerable cohort of job seekers, thus ensuring culturally aware service provision which can deliver multifaceted employment pathways through a focus on individuals’ strengths, as well as their areas of need, without attempting to fit into a predetermined, mainstream service model.

**Conclusion**

Australia’s Humanitarian Program is designed to ensure Australia meets its obligations as a global citizen to contribute to the worldwide crisis of a growing refugee population. SCoA submits that the country’s commitment to significant numbers of humanitarian entrants each year is to be commended and demonstrates our compassion as a nation.

SCoA celebrates and commends the work done by its passionate, hard-working members. Further, we acknowledge that the success of the sector relies heavily on ongoing support from government. Most

\textsuperscript{12} Ott, E. (2013), *The Labour Market Integration of Resettled Refugees* (UNHCR), p3.

importantly, SCoA pays tribute to the resilient and enthusiastic group of migrants who make Australia home and who are committed to building their lives here.

SCoA believes that given the success of Australia’s settlement sector in delivering world-leading settlement services, Australia is in the enviable position of being able to support an even larger number of humanitarian entrants and to restructure its Humanitarian Program to ensure the most compassionate and effective response is provided to the most vulnerable.

SCoA is confident that a continued dedication to the provision of high-quality settlement services and the adoption of a more nuanced understanding of the settlement process across all levels of government will enhance the settlement of all migrants and will continue to reap countless benefits for Australia.

SCoA thanks the Department for considering this submission. If any further information is required please don’t hesitate to contact the SCOA National Office on (02) 6282 8515 or at info@scoa.org.au.

Sincerely

Dewani Bakkum
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Settlement Council of Australia