

Settlement Council of Australia

2019 Federal Election Platform

About SCoA

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) represents approximately 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 newly arrived migrants and refugees, as well as the mainstream Australian community, governments and other stakeholders. Our sector's mission is to support newly arrived migrants to achieve the best possible settlement outcomes.

Australia should be proud of its settlement services. While there is always scope to improve, Australia's settlement services are dynamic, responsive and successful in assisting those most in need to create a prosperous and happy new life in Australia. Furthermore, our settlement services are widely regarded as world leading. For this reason, the successful settlement of refugees and migrants in Australia is a success story to be shared with the world.

SCoA's members witness firsthand the valuable contribution migrants make to Australia, but also the challenges these people face when attempting to settle in their new communities. Our members foster and strengthen best practice across the sector to ensure the best possible settlement outcomes are achieved.

The settlement sector's role in building social capital and economic integration

Independent research overwhelmingly concludes that the suite of settlement services funded through federal government programs, and delivered by the settlement sector, has been crucial in facilitating effective settlement outcomes for newly arrived Australians, and generating the best possible outcomes for inclusion.¹

Settlement service providers have developed strong community links and trust, significant language capability and cultural competence to support a wide variety of cultural groups. They have large volunteer programs which provide practical ways to foster social inclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees.²

In the lead up to the 2019 Federal election, SCoA recommends the following measures to capitalise on the strength and resourcefulness of the settlement sector in supporting newly arrived migrants and refugees to settle well and fully participate in Australian society.

¹ See for example: Hugo, G. (2011), *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants*, p257, as well as Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p274.

² Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p279.

1. Provide adequate, flexible funding for settlement services

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

Recommendation

Future funding of the settlement sector must:

- *Be **sufficient** to meet identified needs*
- *Be **flexible** to enable settlement agencies to achieve best possible outcomes*
- *Be **outcomes focused** - not tied to outputs*
- *Provide **longer-term security** for funded organisations*
- *Ensure there is an adequate **base component** to funding which is unlinked to the flow of clients, in order to enable organisational sustainability*

2. Improve employment outcomes for migrants and refugees

New Australians from a migrant or refugee background represent some of the most vulnerable job seekers, and as a result many encounter significant difficulty in entering the Australian labour market.

Engaging with the labour market is critical to successful settlement and is one of the most visible and important contributions that migrants make to Australia.³ Migrants and refugees pursue employment as a means of acquiring economic security for their families, and they welcome the opportunity to contribute to their new home.⁴

However, 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 settlement foundations. Government policy must reflect that this will take differing lengths of time depending on the personal circumstances of each individual and their families, and should therefore accept that different individuals should engage with employment services at different stages in their settlement journey.

Recommendation

SCoA recommends the establishment of a well-funded specialist employment service specifically to support newly arrived refugees and vulnerable migrants. This service would:

- *Ensure **culturally aware** service provision*
- *Deliver **person-centred**, multi-faceted employment pathways*
- *Focus on individuals' **strengths**, as well as their areas of **need***
- *Not require refugees to fit into a predetermined, mainstream service model.*

Under this approach, shortly after arriving in Australia each job seeker from a refugee background will be provided with an individually tailored employment support plan. This plan will be informed by their settlement service provider(s), and consider any specific assistance they need to achieve settlement foundations and job readiness, prior to commencing any mutual obligations.

³ Ott, E. (2013), *The Labour Market Integration of Resettled Refugees* (UNHCR), p3.

⁴ 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.

3. Improve English language learning

The ability to speak English is an important part of any migrant's settlement journey. However, SCoA notes that the capacity to speak English is not, and should not be, used as a benchmark of successful settlement.

Nevertheless, given the complexities of life in Australia - including dealing with government agencies, gaining employment and engaging with the broader community – migrants and refugees who arrive in Australia without a functional level of English benefit enormously from English-language training⁵

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 to entering the labour market.⁶ Further, migrants with lower English language skills are typically end up in lower-skilled employment with little upward mobility, irrespective of their level of pre-arrival skills and qualifications.⁷

For these reasons, SCoA applauds 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.⁸

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, 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 inflexible. Similarly, the obligations surrounding seeking a job - including job applications, attending jobactive interviews and undertaking courses - often conflict with English class schedules and force migrants to prioritise looking for work over their English language training long before they have achieved suitable levels of English, or completed their allocated hours.⁹

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

Recommendation

Access to English language learning must be prioritised for all new arrivals. English language learning must:

- *Be provided on an “**as needed**” basis*
- *Provide **sufficient class time** (and funding) to ensure each person can learn sufficient English for them to fully participate in society, employment and/or education*
- *Not require learners to juggle English language learning with other obligations (such as jobactive).*

⁵ Productivity Commission (2006), *Migration, Population and Productivity*, p170

⁶ See for example: Hugo, G. (2011), *A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants, Summary of Findings*, p34; SSI (2016), *Working It Out*, p14; and Migration Council of Australia (2015), *Migration in Focus: An Analysis of Recent Permanent Migration Census Data*, p22.

⁷ Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p178

⁸ For more information see: <https://www.education.gov.au/adult-migrant-english-program-0> and <https://www.education.gov.au/skills-education-and-employment>, accessed on 13 January 2017.

⁹ Refugee Council of Australia (2016) *Jobactive: refugee community and service provider concerns*.

4. Remove time limits and visa restrictions for accessing settlement services

A resounding theme in SCoA's member consultations has been that the time-limits imposed on the provision of funded settlement services are arbitrary and unhelpful, and are contrary to the government's commitment to ensuring the lifetime wellbeing of new arrivals in Australia. Settlement can take longer than five years for some clients, though not for all. 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 is required. 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 beneficial.¹⁰

Federally funded settlement services should therefore be available based on need, and not the length of time a migrant has lived in Australia.

Similarly, the percentage of migrants for whom intensive "on arrival" settlement services are funded is significantly small at just 8 per cent. This means the vast majority of migrants are excluded from crucial orientation and settlement services. Recent studies, including the Productivity Commission's 2016 report *Australia's Migrant Intake*, confirmed the view that in addition to migrants on humanitarian visas, some other migrants may also need assistance to settle successfully.¹¹

While not every migrant will require the full suite of settlement services, moving to a needs-based model will ensure that crucial services are available to those who need them most, irrespective of the visa they arrived in Australia on. This has the potential to further enhance the settlement outcomes of all migrants, without necessarily resulting in a significant budgetary increase.

The provision of federally-funded settlement services should therefore be assessed based on needs and not the visa held by a migrant.

A key characteristic of the settlement sector is the willingness of service providers to assist clients without the specific funding to do so. This includes providing services that are not specifically resourced, and assisting clients who are not the primary target of funded services (for example skilled and family visa holders and migrants from a refugee background who have been in Australia beyond five years). This arises largely because these providers are well-known for the services they provide and, as a result, become a central hub for migrants and a trusted source of information and assistance. It is clearly not palatable to these agencies to turn away those in need and so services are provided effectively in a volunteer capacity without reward or recognition.

A more inclusive approach to settlement services can be implemented, so that the needs of all migrants can be assessed and any migrant who needs assistance in some aspect of their settlement - whether it be orientation to Australia, assistance to access employment or being empowered to engage with their new community - can be supported and the best possible settlement outcomes achieved.

¹⁰ Hugo, G. (2011), *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants*, p241.

¹¹ Productivity Commission (2016), *Migrant Intake into Australia*, p277.

Recommendation

To improve the settlement outcomes for newly arrived refugees and migrants, the Federal Government must:

- *Continue funding the successful, intensive services provided to newly arrived humanitarian migrants through the **Humanitarian Support Program (HSP)***
- **Broaden the eligibility** for the federally funded *Settlement Engagement Transition and Support (SETS)* program so that services are provided on an individual needs' basis, irrespective of the length of time a person has lived in Australia
- *Broaden the eligibility for HSP and SETS to include all migrants irrespective of the visa they hold, assessed on an **individual needs' basis***

5. Provide place-based settlement services and support regional settlement

Migrants and refugees can play a significant role in the economic and social fabric of their new home. This has particular importance when considering a growing need to address population shortages in regional and rural Australia.

SCoA supports the adoption of a place-based settlement policy that adequately addresses the social and economic needs of migrants and refugees in regional Australia. It is crucial that consideration be given to the capabilities of any given location to facilitate settlement. In order to properly assess this, SCoA recommends that the nine priority areas outlined in the National Settlement Framework and SCoA's National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards be used as a basis for providing a detailed "roadmap" for assessing whether the foundations of settlement are able to be met.

When using a place-based approach to settlement, some key considerations include:

- how to build social capital that can drive economic integration in a 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 eight key factors influencing the selection of successful placement communities for refugees.¹² Following consultation with its members across Australia, and noting the work that has been done by government on these issues,¹³ SCoA has adapted this approach to identifying the factors that lead to successful regional settlement in Australia, as set out in Table 1:

¹² UNHCR, *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, Geneva (2002); adapted from Levine, N., *Placement strategies to enhance effective integration of resettled refugees* (2001), paper presented to the International Conference for the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees.

¹³ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Process for Establishing New Regional Humanitarian Settlement Locations* (2013).

Table 1: Critical Factors for successful regional settlement

Factor	Considerations
Availability of Settlement Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of at least one SSP that is prepared to support the settlement process of migrants and refugees. • Adequate funding for SSPs to deliver the services required. • Willingness of government and local community to commit to a steady flow of migrants and refugees to ensure viability of the SSP.
Appropriateness of infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of suitable infrastructure to resettle sufficient numbers of migrants and refugees to make the site viable in both social and economic terms.
Capacity for economic integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial employment opportunities and capacity for growth. • Existence of sufficient housing (with reference to affordability, size and suitability). • Appropriate education facilities for both children and adult migrants and refugees.
Willingness of community to engage with migrant and refugee populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated commitment in community to welcome migrants and refugees and a respect for religious and cultural diversity. • Existence of local leaders willing to serve as advocates for resettlement. • Existence of social and community events. • Existence of, or capacity to settle, sufficient numbers of migrant and refugee arrivals to ensure capacity to develop cultural and social networks.
<p>Recommendation</p> <p>The Federal Government, SCoA and the settlement sector must work together to develop and implement a coordinated whole-of-government strategy for regional settlement. As part of this approach, SCoA recommends that government engage with regional communities to assess the best possible locations for regional settlement, with particular reference to the critical factors outlined in <i>Table 1</i> above.</p>	

6. Collect data for measuring settlement success

There are significant limitations on the collection and availability of data, both relating to the experiences of new Australians 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 and best practice.

There is an absence of dedicated funding for data collection, and the current contractual reporting requirements do not adequately reflect settlement experiences or capture the true nature of the work of the sector.

S-CoA has commenced work to facilitate greater sharing of innovative practices and outcomes, including developing an online Policy Hub and Innovation Centre,¹⁴ and through organising meetings, forums and conferences. However, this is not sufficiently resourced to provide a comprehensive data set about settlement services and their outcomes.

With additional funding, the sector could enhance data collection, ensuring service provision is targeted to achieve the best possible settlement outcomes.

Recommendation

The Federal Government should commence a funded program for measuring the success of its settlement services and strategies through the collection of appropriate and timely statistics, data *and case studies* concerning the settlement outcomes of refugees, including regional settlement.

Conclusion

S-CoA celebrates and commends the work done by its passionate, hard-working members. We acknowledge that the success of the settlement sector relies heavily on ongoing support from the Federal government. Most importantly, S-CoA pays tribute to the resilient and enthusiastic migrants and refugees who have made Australia home, and who are committed to building their lives here.

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.

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 refugees, and will continue to reap countless benefits for Australia.

¹⁴ Available on S-CoA's website: <http://www.scoa.org.au>