

Settlement
Council
of Australia



Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Inquiry into Migration in Regional Australia

26 September 2019

About the Settlement Council of Australia

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is the national peak body for Australia's dynamic settlement services sector. SCoA represents approximately 100 agencies in the settlement sector that offer settlement support to recently arrived migrants, including those from a refugee background.

SCoA members work directly with a wide range of new arrivals from diverse backgrounds, as well as the mainstream Australian community and other stakeholders.

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Introduction

The Settlement Council of Australia would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission on its *Inquiry into Migration in Regional Australia*.

SCoA is the peak body that represents services that support recently arrived humanitarian entrants and other migrants to settle into the Australian community. SCoA has approximately 100 member organisations that work to support humanitarian and migrant settlement, by promoting multiculturalism and developing social cohesion.

SCoA supports Government policy to encourage regional settlement. Regional settlement has considerable benefits¹, with the right supports and structures.

- Effective regional settlement policies and programs can reverse the economic downturn and population decline that comes from regional labour shortages.
- Communities benefit from the skills, experience and culture that new migrants bring.
- Regional settlement benefits the many migrants who have originated from rural areas and/or prefer the more relaxed lifestyle of smaller communities to cities, with less competition for employment, and lower costs of living – especially housing.

The Government and relevant services, must take whole of community approach to regional settlement, across government, the business sector, the settlement sector, and other community sector organisations. Engaging regional communities in the planning and choice of location for regional migration, leads to successful settlement.² Matching migrants to regions is necessary to attract and retain new arrivals, and facilitate a smooth integration into the community.

Some migrants may be better suited to a rural community than others. This includes humanitarian entrants or migrants who are from regional areas overseas, and those who are settled with their families or cultural groups.

Settling families or ethnic community groups together can lessen feelings of isolation and increase the likelihood that migrants will stay in a region.

¹ Department of Immigration and Border Protection. "Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors." 2014.

² Department of Immigration and Border Protection. "Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors." 2014.

A critical factor for successful regional settlement is recognising and addressing barriers and system gaps. The main barriers to migrants settling well in any community are lack of infrastructure, such as housing and transport, and lack of services and supports, both from within the local community and where there are no formal settlement services. Families and family groups need access to education, including tertiary education, for long term settlement.

Settlement services, with extensive experience supporting their clients to settle throughout Australia, and SCoA as their peak body, will continue to be integral to the continuing success of regional settlement.

Recommendations

1. The settlement services sector should be involved in all aspects of co-designing and delivering services for humanitarian entrants and other migrants in regional Australia.

To achieve this, SCoA recommends that Commonwealth Government work closely with the settlement sector to develop and implement a regional settlement strategy as a foundation to the future success of regional migration, including growth of secondary migration.

2. The reason for (secondary) migration to cities needs to be better understood. The Government should commission research to find out why people are returning to cities, and how regional settlement might be made more attractive.

Professionalism in settlement services

Australia has internationally acclaimed settlement services. These services provide necessary support for newly arrived humanitarian entrants and other migrants. As well as offering case management to help migrants contribute to the social and economic success of their communities, they are vital in supporting local services. They identify client needs and system gaps, enabling collaboration and partnerships. There is a direct link between well-resourced settlement programs that are able to understand the needs of their clients and adapt their services to those needs, and successful settlement and integration of migrants into their new communities.³

³ Department of Immigration and Border Protection. "Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors." 2014.

To support successful migration and guide effective settlement services, SCoA has developed the National Settlement Services Outcome Standards (The Standards). The Standards demonstrate nine indicators of successful settlement. All are necessary for successful regional settlement and all are delivered by SCoA's members.⁴

They are:

- education
- employment
- health and wellbeing
- housing
- language services
- transport
- civic participation
- family and social support
- justice.

Employment

The first step for regional settlement is employment. Where regional settlement has been successful, there have been one or more major employers in the area, with a need to increase their labour force.

Migration has been particularly successful in areas where there is an existing source of employment. Once a migrant community is established, further growth in employment opportunities follow.

Access partnership with Teys

Settlement service provider Access Community Services Ltd (Access) formed a strong partnership with key regional employer Teys Bros Abattoirs (Tey's). Humanitarian entrants and other migrants (singles and families) were supported into regional work opportunities in Biloela (Queensland), Wagga Wagga (NSW) and Tamworth (NSW).

Together, Access and Teys developed a package to facilitate successful regional settlement outcomes for those who relocated to rural Australia.

⁴ Settlement Council of Australia. "Exploring Options for Regional Settlement." 2016

In many cases, settlement services have initiated relationships with local employers, identifying their needs, matching them to the skills of migrants, and helping employers understand how to best support and integrate their new employees. Settlement services have also provided a safeguard to make sure that migrant employees are not underpaid or exploited in other ways.

Regional employment success*

SS and AZ, of Karen background, arrived in Mount Gambier, regional South Australia, as humanitarian entrants. Mount Gambier Migrant Resource Centre, through its partnership with Group Training Employment (GTE), arranged trade apprenticeships for SS and AZ.

With strong work ethics, skills and commitment, both SS and AZ were awarded Apprentice of the Year in 2018, and are on track for successful careers and contributions to their local community.

*Case studies are typified and do not relate to an identifiable/specific person or people.

Infrastructure

Adequate services and infrastructure are necessary for successful settlement of migrants in regional Australia.⁵ All levels of government must consider transport systems, educational facilities, housing and the cultural appropriateness of services.

Transport

Without transport, newly arrived migrants are at risk of isolation and struggle to access employment and services, including health care. Regional areas, by their nature of having smaller population bases, tend to have few transport options.

⁵ Department of Immigration and Border Protection. "Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors." 2014.

Transport initiatives

The Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT) offers the “Passport to Drive” program, helping newly arrived humanitarian entrants to become safe and competent drivers through education, training and mentoring. The program supports participants to attain their drivers licences quickly and cost-efficiently.

At the same time, few newly arrived migrants can afford the expenses associated with qualifying for a drivers licence, let alone afford a car. This means that other transport options need to be available. In many establishing regional communities, settlement service providers drive their clients to appointments, while developing programs and harnessing community volunteers to help their clients get licences and cars.

Housing

Migrants cannot be expected to settle in any regional area that does not have immediate housing options that are affordable, appropriate and stable.⁶ Regional communities that want to welcome humanitarian entrants and other migrants need to overcome housing barriers, including ensuring suitable accommodation

Housing partnerships

The Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga (MCWW) has developed close relationships with local real estate agents and the NSW Department of Housing.

Work with real estate agents has focused on identifying issues of discrimination towards migrants from some local agencies. MCWW has educated agencies on challenges faced by new migrants, and provided information on discrimination within the housing sector.

Through the collaboration with local real estate agents and the Department of Housing, vacant Department of Housing properties were sourced for humanitarian entrants who worked in an abattoir nearby. This provided suitable housing and ease of transport to and from work.

for different demographics (for example large families, single men and/or single women), competition – and sometimes racism – in the rental market, and accessibility to transport, employment and health and other services.⁷

Humanitarian entrants report greater difficulty in paying rent or mortgages than the general Australian population.⁸ The cost of housing in regional Australia must be considered for new migrants to be able to secure stable long-term housing. Lower accommodation costs reduces unnecessary financial strain, stress and risk of homelessness for new migrants. Innovative thinking and collaboration between services is often needed to meet the housing needs of humanitarian entrants and other migrant in regional communities.⁹

Case management within settlement services needs to be adequately resourced, and housing related services (real estate agents, government and other social housing providers) need to be available to help humanitarian entrants and other migrants.

Education

With every wave of migration to Australia, entrants envisage better lives for their children, through education. This ambition continues with humanitarian entrants – wherever their origin. And, there are many cultures where there is an expectation that families continue to live in close proximity to each other, across generations. This means that, for many families, their children's access to primary, secondary and tertiary education is an important factor on whether they will settle well in a regional community, or return to larger centres or cities as soon as they are able.

This needs to be understood and addressed by governments (at all levels), communities and service providers. Many families with children will settle better in regional communities where there is a university and/or TAFE, while others will be satisfied if they are within commuting distance or remote/online options are available.

⁷ Settlement Council of Australia. "The Effects of Discrimination on Refugee and Migrant Housing Needs." 2019.

⁸ Department of Social Services. "Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants – Findings from the first three waves." Canberra, 2017.

⁹ CatholicCare, St Vincent's Health Australia & St Vincent's Care Services. "Eltham Refugee Housing and Support Project: Synopsis Evaluation Report." 2019.

Culturally appropriate services

Perhaps the most pervasive issue for settlement is the cultural appropriateness of services. Research indicates that attitudes towards migration and multiculturalism are less favourable in regional Australia than city centres.¹⁰ Historically, many rural and regional communities have had far less exposure to cultural diversity than those in capital cities.

This means that structures and adequate resources need to be in place for using interpreters, specialist services (for example, the Adult Migrant English Program) and mainstream services and supports. Those mainstream services, including schools, health and mental health services, and housing providers, need to be culturally-aware.

Libraries Tasmania

Settlement service provider Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) has partnered with Libraries Tasmania to deliver a culturally appropriate computer class and conversation club. Through the collaboration, libraries have access to support from a bicultural worker employed by MRC and appropriate digital resources.

Developing cultural associations, shops, events, and places of worship, are vital to retaining migrants in regional Australia. Environments that are accommodating to settlement benefit both migrants and receiving communities.¹¹

Communities benefit from cultural diversity when migrants feel at home and secure.

¹⁰ The Scanlon Foundation. "Multiculturalism Discussion Paper." 2016.

¹¹ Department of Immigration and Border Protection. "Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors." 2014.

Engagement

Many rural and regional areas are welcoming humanitarian entrants and other migrants to their communities, recognising the economic and social benefits they bring. Those communities have grown in their appreciation and valuing of

Engagement through sport

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Gippsland is using sport as a tool to engagement and include young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the social fabric of the community. The program has successfully enabled young people from diverse cultural backgrounds to feel included and valued through their sporting abilities.

cultural diversity, and actively support successful settlement.

Engagement through cultural events, sports and other social cohesion initiatives help new arrivals to feel accepted, valued, and secure in their new communities.¹² Receiving communities that are accepting, welcoming and eager to learn from their new neighbours, will thrive and grow in cultural richness and economically, as their populations develop and migrants are less likely to move away. Openness to migration from receiving communities also gives them an opportunity to share the customs and traditions of their community with new arrivals, promoting effective integration of all cultures.

Volunteers can help to offer a “welcoming community” for regionally settled humanitarian entrants and other migrants, and are an important part of settlement in regional Australia.

Whether volunteering with settlement services, as part of a mainstream

Engagement by partnerships

Settlement provider AMES Australia has partnered with Rotary Australia in supporting the settlement of refugees in regional areas. At Nhill (Western Victoria) the local Rotary Club has been supporting Karen refugees to get involved in local activities; such as sport, volunteering and community events. A similar partnership is also being developed with Rotary in Bendigo.

community organisation, or as an individual, people need training, support and breaks/ rotations. Settlement service providers can work and collaborate with mainstream organisations to promote engagement, participation and social cohesion. Those providers can also support those organisations and their volunteers to better understand the needs of new arrivals and how they can best support them, in culturally appropriate ways.

There will always be a need for the settlement sector and other community organisations to support new arrivals in a community, both in collaboration and as complementary services. And, while volunteers in both sectors will always need support, that support is not always adequate. For example, A National Survey on Volunteering and Settlement in Australia, found two-thirds of settlement services did not have the resources to adequately train, support and coordinate volunteers in their organisations to adequately support migrants and refugees during the complex settlement process.¹³

Conclusion

Regional settlement is the future, offering an opportunity to not only stimulate the economy in regional areas, but also to share the diversity and cultural richness that migration brings to Australia. Just as settlement has enriched Australia's capital cities economically and socially, it will drive regional areas to not only survive but thrive.

An intersectorial approach, across all levels of government, business, settlement services, local services, communities and volunteers, is needed for whole communities to work together to achieve success. This means:

- drawing on the expertise of settlement services, both in planning and delivery
- making sure the infrastructure is in place to support humanitarian entrants and other migrants
- making sure services and community engagement are culturally appropriate
- collaborating and coordinating services to reap social and economic benefits for both migrants and their new communities

¹³ Volunteering Australia & Settlement Council of Australia. "Volunteering and Settlement in Australia: A Snapshot." 2019.

- understanding the factors that motivate migrants (to return) to live in cities and how those factors can be addressed.

Recommendations

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