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Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
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Settlement Council of Australia: Submission to Inquiry into the issues facing diaspora communities in Australia

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee's Inquiry into Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia.

SCoA is the peak body representing the majority of settlement services across Australia providing direct services to people of refugee and migrant backgrounds. Our members include organisations, large and small, who are committed to the successful settlement of refugees and migrants across the country.

Settlement services have a significant positive role to play in supporting diaspora communities as they establish their life in Australia. In this submission, SCoA identifies what positive settlement outcomes are, the role of settlement agencies in facilitating these outcomes specifically with regard to diaspora communities, and some of the barriers to providing this support.

The key barrier is that settlement services are not adequately empowered to address the settlement needs of the full breadth of refugees and migrants in diaspora communities. This submission therefore makes the following single recommendation to the committee:

Recommendation: Expand the funding and eligibility criteria for SETS-client services and move to a more needs based model of service.

Positive settlement outcomes

Settlement is a two-way process of refugees and migrants adjusting to a new life in Australia, and Australia welcoming refugees and migrants. Effective settlement enables migrants and refugees to achieve full participation in their new society. This process is represented in the figure below.

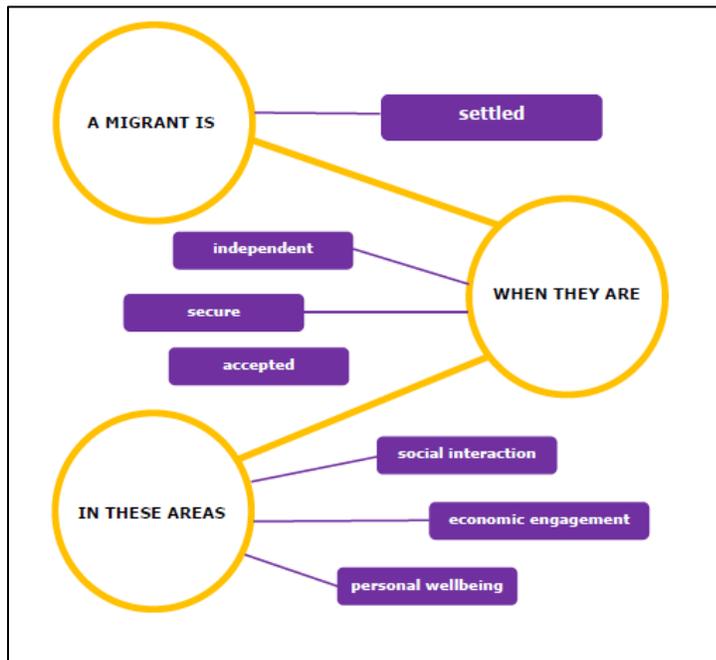


Figure 1: Fundamentals of effective settlement

According to the National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards (NSSOS), effective settlement includes migrants and refugees being able to achieve positive outcomes across the following nine areas:¹

1. education;
2. employment;
3. health and wellbeing;
4. housing;
5. language services;
6. transport;
7. civic participation;
8. family and social support; and
9. justice.

¹ Settlement Council of Australia, June 2015, *National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards*, accessed at: http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/SCoA-National-Settlement-Services-Outcomes-Standards-2016_.pdf

When refugees and migrants are independent, secure and accepted and demonstrate positive outcomes across these nine areas, they can be said to have 'settled.'

When refugees and migrants are settled well, both they and the host community reap significant economic and social benefits. For example, research by Deloitte Access Economics shows that increasing the humanitarian intake alone has the potential to increase the size of the Australian economy by \$37.7 billion in net present value terms over a fifty year period.² In terms of social benefits, successful settlement results in higher levels of volunteering and social cohesion. When refugees and migrants are settled in regional areas, successful settlement can revitalise regional areas in need of population growth.³

The role of settlement services in supporting diaspora communities

Settlement services play a significant role in supporting the successful settlement of diaspora communities.

This support is provided across a range of programs; including the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) for refugee and other humanitarian entrants, the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS), and a number of smaller programs and initiatives.

The SETS program in particular provides support to a range of eligible migrants and refugees, including those in diaspora communities. There are two components of the SETS program: Community Capacity Building (CCB) and Client Services. Both of these programs support diaspora communities by supporting community connection and successful settlement outcomes. We elaborate on these below.

Community Capacity Building

Many SCoA members deliver the Community Capacity Building (CCB) component of SETS. The CCB supports new and emerging community groups.

The aim of the CCB is to support communities to collectively increase their social participation, as well as the 'economic and personal well-being of community members, to ensure that positive settlement outcomes are sustained in the long term.'⁴ Some of the support provided includes support to develop ethno-specific associations, development of leadership and governance skills, linkages to the broader community, interaction with government and local stakeholders, and

²Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia (2019), 'Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake, 'accessed at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-social-impact-increasing-australias-humanitarian-intake-280819.pdf>, p. vi.

³ Ibid, p. vii.

⁴ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs (2020), 'Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) - Community Capacity Building', accessed at: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/sets-program/sets-community-capacity-building>

access to resources and facilities.⁵ Examples of the innovative programs developed to support communities, including diaspora communities, can be found at SCoA's innovation hub.⁶

The CCB program plays a significant role in supporting community connection for diaspora communities. It supports people within diaspora communities to connect with each other, which can be a vital part of refugees and migrants support structures, as well as a critical source of learning how to adapt to their new country.

Client Services

The Client Services component of SETS provides settlement support to a range of eligible permanent residents who have arrived in Australia in the last five years, and some temporary residents and their dependents.⁷ Under SETS- Client Services, settlement agencies provide settlement-related information, advice, advocacy, and assistance to access mainstream and other relevant services, across a range of key areas, including those identified in the nine priority areas of settlement outlined in the NSSOS (see above).⁸

Funding to support diaspora communities through SETS is however limited by visa type and conditions on time settled in Australia. Further, many people on temporary visas eventually go on to become Australian citizens, but are unable to access settlement support during the early years which are critical to their settlement journey, due to their initial status as temporary migrants.

While most of our members offer additional support to bridge this gap, such support is usually reliant on smaller grants, ad-hoc funding, philanthropic support, or volunteer efforts. This means access to settlement support is not universal for a large proportion of diaspora communities, and there are many individuals who fall through the gaps.

Our members have described to us countless situations where members of diaspora communities find themselves in urgent need of assistance, however they are ineligible for assistance due to the rigid eligibility criteria for SETS-client services, and the absence of other suitable settlement services. Such providers are placed in the difficult position of either turning clients away, or going above and beyond their funding on a daily basis to meet the needs of those clients as best they can.

This gap also means those members of diaspora communities who do not meet the eligibility criteria for SETS-client services will have less access to support to successfully settle in Australia, meaning their settlement journey could take longer

⁵ Ibid.

⁶The case studies can be accessed at: <http://scoa.org.au/category/settlement-best-practice/best-practice-case-studies-innovation-centre/>

⁷ For more information on SETS – Client Services eligibility, visit:

<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/sets-program/sets-client-services>

⁸ Settlement Council of Australia, 2016. 'National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards'

than necessary. This in turn, means the economic and social benefits of settlement may take longer to accrue than if settlement services were empowered to assist all members of diaspora communities.

Accordingly, the Settlement Council of Australia advocates for increased funding for SETS-client services and a review of the eligibility criteria to ensure the program can meet the settlement needs of a larger proportion of diaspora communities.

Recommendation: Expand the funding and eligibility criteria for SETS-client services and move to a more needs based model of service.

Conclusion

Settlement services have a significant positive role to play in supporting diaspora communities as they establish their life in Australia. This is achieved through a range of programs and initiatives that support diaspora communities and individuals. One of the main and largest programs, the SETS program, does this for a significant proportion of refugees and migrants in diaspora communities. However, there are many in diaspora communities that are ineligible for client services through SETS due to the eligibility criteria. Greater access to settlement support would facilitate improved and quicker settlement outcomes for a greater breadth of diaspora communities, leading to a quicker realisation of economic and social benefits for both diaspora communities and host communities.