EXPLORING OPTIONS FOR **REGIONAL SETTLEMENT**

SCoA POLICY PAPER

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Much of the discourse around Australia's immigration policy focusses on the number of migrants granted permission to enter the country each year. This is increasingly contentious in relation to Australia's refugee and humanitarian programme, where numbers remain at the forefront of public debate. Also contentious is the make-up of the programme itself: the skills, origins, health and character of migrants and the way in which they are selected. A vital element that remains absent from the majority of debate, however, is the distribution of those migrants on their arrival in Australia.

Traditionally, migrants, whether arriving in Australia under the skilled, family or humanitarian streams, are highly concentrated in Australia's capital cities and coastal areas, while regional Australia has received only a very small portion of Australia's migrant intake. In more recent years, Australian migration policy has started to leverage regional settlement as a viable and beneficial settlement option for migrants. In 2011 the proportion of humanitarian entrants settling in regional areas increased to one-in-five from one-in-twenty in 2001[1] and statistics show that one in six permanent arrivals were settled in regional areas in 2010.[2] This growth in numbers of migrants settling regionally has been driven by a range of government policies designed to address population decline and labour shortages in regional areas. They further contribute to offsetting the pressures placed on infrastructure and services in metropolitan areas.

Despite a limited number of localised exceptions, it is largely the case that regional communities have faced a significant decline in recent years.[3] Population growth is seen as a key driver to bolster regional economic development and it is commonly accepted that both skilled and unskilled labour is crucial to realise the economic potential of specific regions.[4] For this reason, migrants of all types should be welcomed in regional Australia.

The social benefits of regional settlement are also clear. While many regional areas of Australia can be miscast as insular, there is a growing willingness to welcome new people into regional communities, and much to be gained in doing so, increasing the social capital and richness of a particular community.

There are clearly a number of advantages for migrants and refugees who settle regionally. These can include smaller, tight-knit communities, a more relaxed lifestyle, less competition for employment and lower costs of living. Overall, regional settlement provides obvious benefits both for regional development and for migrants and refugees settling in Australia.

Understanding the factors responsible for the attraction and retention of migrants and refugees in regional areas is essential to implementing effective, sustainable solutions that contribute to the revitalisation of regional communities, as well as the ongoing well-being of migrants and refugees living in those areas.

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[1] Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, *Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: a case study of the Limestone Coast* (2014), 7.

[2] Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Sustainable Australia – *Sustainable Communities: A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia* (2011), 23.

[3] Regional Australia Institute, *Population Dynamics in Regional Australia* (2015), 27.

[4] Ibid.

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) recommends that the government continue to support the regional settlement of migrants and refugees. In doing so, the government must adopt a holistic approach that considers the full range of experiences facing migrants and refugees in regional areas, including both economic and social dimensions. This approach should be clearly articulated in a publicly available whole-of-government regional settlement strategy developed in consultation with the settlement sector and other relevant stakeholders.

This paper explores regional settlement challenges and offers recommendations for creating sustainable outcomes. SCoA has identified the following key areas for consideration within regional settlement discourse and policy development:

Achieving Mutual Economic Prosperity:

An increased emphasis on regional settlement provides a unique opportunity to achieve mutual long-term benefits for the communities, migrants and Australia as a whole. Considered in light of the government's commitment to facilitating growth across regional Australia, it is clear that an increased population of willing workers can assist to bring economic vibrancy back to regional Australia.

For this to succeed, services and infrastructure in regional areas must be adequate to support increased populations. It is generally accepted that regional communities have a lower standard or provision of key infrastructure than metropolitan areas. Addressing this issue needs to be considered as part of the government's broader population and regional Australia strategies and is largely beyond the scope of this paper.

It is apparent, however, that migrants and refugees are likely to face greater challenges than other members of regional communities and, as a result, require specific services to ensure they are able to participate actively in the regional economy. Access and availability of employment, housing and education, as well as healthcare services and transport are essential for both the attraction and retention of migrants and refugees in regional areas.

Social Cohesion and Multicultural Communities:

The importance of a sense of belonging in the settlement process is often dismissed in favour of economic considerations. It is, however, an equally critical factor in regional settlement. Research indicates that regional communities can provide an extra challenge for the engagement of migrants and refugees, where community attitudes may be less favourable than metropolitan centres. This must be taken into account when selecting regional locations for resettlement. Additionally, focus must be given to helping migrants and refugees maintain family connections, build social networks and engage with their community in order to help facilitate integration and the successful settlement of migrants and refugees.

The role of Settlement Service Providers:

Settlement Service Providers (SSP) providing services in regional areas are in the best position to deliver a range of services that assist migrants and refugees in establishing their lives in these locations. Providers in regional areas are crucial in helping migrants and refugees to overcome the obstacles that threaten successful settlement. To that extent, they are required to play a more active role in the lives of new arrivals in regional areas, where existing migrant communities are less likely to be established, and certain infrastructure and services may be less developed than in metropolitan centres. Adequately funding service providers is therefore crucial. So too, is maintaining consistent flows of clients, supporting organisational capacity and coordinating nationwide approaches to settlement.

Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services. Driving Program participants proudly show their driving plates.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning for Regional Settlement:

1. SCoA recommends that the government work with the settlement sector to develop and implement a coordinated and whole-of-government regional settlement strategy. The strategy should recognise the role that migrants and refugees can play in helping to revitalise regional Australia but must also adopt a holistic approach which considers the full range of experiences facing migrants and refugees in regional areas, including both economic and social challenges to successful settlement.

2. SCoA recommends that government engage with regional communities to assess the best possible locations for regional settlement, with particular references to the *Critical Factors for successful regional settlement* identified by SCoA in **Table 1**.

3. SCoA recommends that work must continue in the locations identified in **Table 2** to ensure their readiness to receive and assist newly arrived humanitarian entrants.

4. SCoA recommends that research be undertaken which surveys the reasons why migrants and refugees move away from regional locations and that the findings inform policies that aim to improve long-term retention in these areas.

5. SCoA recommends that the government commence a programme for measuring the success of its regional settlement strategies through the collection of appropriate and timely statistics and data.

Achieving Mutual Economic Prosperity:

General Services and Infrastructure:

6. SCoA recommends greater government investment in regional development with a focus on sustainability and community-building.

Employment opportunities for new arrivals:

7. SCoA recommends that job service providers in regional areas work closely with settlement service providers and local employers to identify industry needs and create more opportunities for appropriate and sustainable employment for migrants and refugees.

8. SCoA recommends that research which connects Australia's labour market to settlement trends is made readily available to inform settlement programs and location viability.

9. SCoA acknowledges entrepreneurship programs currently in place around Australia and recommends their expansion to regional areas.

10. SCoA calls for the government to allocate more funding to programs that support refugees and migrants to become job ready such as such as the SEE programme, with a focus on expanding these programs to regional Australia.

The importance of housing in the settlement process:

11. SCoA recommends greater government investment and commitment to generating affordable housing in regional communities, including through the National Rental Affordability Scheme and that settlement service agencies and housing providers are empowered to inform refugees and migrants on low incomes on how to access affordable housing.

12. SCoA recommends that strong working relationships are established between settlement service agencies and housing providers to support the best housing outcomes for recent arrivals.

Access to education for migrants and refugees:

13. SCoA recommends the government fund and support bilingual multicultural aides for regional schools with significant CALD populations. Aides may be members of the refugee and migrant communities.

14. SCoA recommends that migrant and refugee access to distance learning in English language and other education programs be assessed areas and adjustments made to ensure adequate access in regional areas.

15. SCoA recommends the government fund regional schools to provide intensive language education to youth in order to bridge learning gaps and offset the impacts of smaller numbers of students in these areas.

Social Cohesion and Multicultural Communities:

Enhancing community acceptance of multiculturalism

16. SCoA recommends that the IOM and DSS collaborate to provide detailed briefing information about refugees to new host communities in regional areas.

17. SCoA recommends that resources such as "Building Social Cohesion in our Communities" be promoted widely to regional local governments to assist in the creation of social inclusion activities, promote cultural diversity and eliminate racism.

18. SCoA recommends that community leaders and community groups and settlement agencies work together to provide the host community with cultural awareness to ensure they understand the histories and cultures of the incoming refugees and migrants.

19. SCoA recommends the Diversity and Social Cohesion Grants program be assessed to ensure regional settlement areas are financially supported to hold cultural events and activities that facilitate social connections across heterogeneous cultural groups as a means of promoting intercultural understanding and embedding multiculturalism within the community.

Achieving social inclusion through civic participation

20. SCoA recommends that the local communities and settlement agencies work together to engage and support new arrivals to achieve civic participation by taking measures to actively involve new arrivals into community decision making.

Engaging with Social Networks:

21. SCoA recommends that local councils support the cultural needs of the ethnic groups within their community through establishing dedicated centres and/or events to celebrate multiculturalism.

Family connections:

22. SCoA recommends that family reunion, including parent reunion, be given high priority in government policies, and that efforts be implemented to ensure the close proximity of extended families on settlement, as a means of strengthening community building in regional areas.

23. SCoA recommends research to determine whether targeted support for families experiencing intergenerational conflict and family and domestic violence is available in regional areas, and initiatives are implemented if these programs are not accessible.

The role of Settlement Service Providers

24. SCoA recommends that the government recognise the role of Settlement Service Providers in regional Australia to meet a significant and varied range of needs of new arrivals, beyond those typically experienced in metropolitan centres, and that SSPs operating in regional Australia be offered flexible funding structures that include viable project, grant and contract funding.

25. SCoA recommends that settlement services are implemented in regional areas in such a way that takes into account the greater potential for social isolation in these communities for refugees and migrants and emphasises a holistic approach to government settlement policy across both economic and social areas.

26. SCoA recommends that government agencies are familiarised with SCoA's National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards as a sector-led framework to guide their planning and policy making.

27. SCoA recommends that regional SSPs conduct place-based and needs-based assessments in order to develop initiatives that respond directly to the specific challenges and needs of clients in regional areas.

28. SCoA recommends that government policy continues to support the direction of unlinked humanitarian entrants to regional locations to ensure that SSPs maintain a critical mass of client referrals.

GLOSSARY

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CCS	Complex Case Support
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DHS	Department of Human Services
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DSS	Department of Social Services
HSP	Humanitarian Settlement Program
HSS	Humanitarian Settlement Services
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MCWW	Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga
RSMS	Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme
SCoA	Settlement Council of Australia
SEE	Skills for Education and Employment
SGP	Settlement Grants Program
SHEV	Safe Haven Enterprise Visa
SSI	Settlement Services International
SSP	Settlement Service Provider
SSRM	State Specific Regional Migration scheme
STARTTS	Services for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

INTRODUCTION

This policy paper has been prepared by the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA). Its purpose is to lead and guide the enhancement of settlement policies for refugees and migrants in regional Australia and highlight some of the main issues surrounding this increasingly relevant topic.

The future of Australia's diverse regional communities relies on the commitment by governments at the federal, state and local levels to ensuring growth in those communities. Given the historical role that immigration has played in building Australia, it is clear that it will need to play a role in any effort to rejuvenate regional Australia. As a result, SCoA believes it is crucial to commence a constructive dialogue around how best to facilitate successful settlement in regional areas in Australia.

The Federal Government has committed significant funding to regional Australia through investment in business, training and infrastructure.[5] The focus of this new investment is on growth and it is therefore sensible that migrant populations be considered as a key component of achieving that growth.

In order for migrant and refugee communities to provide a worthwhile contribution to regional Australia, consideration must be given to the factors that contribute to refugees and migrants moving to and staying in regional areas. This is something DIBP has recently reflected on in its report: "Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors" (2014). The report examines the success factors found to be influential for the long-term retention of migrants in regional areas.[6] The Select Council on Immigration and Settlement, established by COAG, has been developing a National Settlement Framework that intends to provide guiding principles to strengthen the delivery and coordination of services within the settlement sector.[7] This work demonstrates a continuation of the commitment by governments to address regional migration dating back to the mid-1990s when a State Specific and Regional Migration scheme (SSRM) was developed at a meeting of Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers.[8]

Outside of government, there is a push for greater policy to address the hurdles to successful regional settlement within the refugee and migrant sector.[9]

SCoA considers that a greater focus on regional settlement for migrants and refugees can have significant benefits for regional communities and Australia as a whole, as well as for the migrants themselves, as this paper will discuss. However, in order for regional settlement to achieve these benefits, focus must be given to ensuring successful settlement in both economic and social terms and special attention must be paid to the different challenges posed by regional settlement. This paper draws on and engages with the research and conversations in these areas, with the aim of discussing a potential policy response that ensures a holistic approach to regional settlement for the benefit of all.

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[5] Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Regional Jobs and Investment Package* (2016), accessible at: http://regional.gov.au/regional/regional-jobs-investment-package/.

[6] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors* (2014).

[7] Select Council on Immigration and Settlement (forthcoming), The National Settlement Framework: Delivering improved settlement outcomes for migrants in Australia through enhanced inter-governmental collaboration and coordination, Council of Australian Governments.

[8] Regional Australia Institute, *Population Dynamics in Regional Australia* (2015), 74.

[9] See for example: Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, *Community Perspectives on Settlement Issues Affecting Emerging Communities in Rural and Regional Australia* (2015) and note that the Refugee Council of Australia are currently conducting research and consultations on the subject.

Trends in Regional Settlement

Regional Australia continues to experience population decline,[10] and suffers an ongoing "brain drain" as young people increasingly migrate to metropolitan centres to pursue greater educational and economic opportunities.[11] This internal migration has resulted in skill gaps and labour shortages in regional areas, and threatens the long term sustainability of these communities.[12] As a result, regional growth remains a high priority for governments at all levels across Australia.

Refugees and migrants have been settling in regional locations for decades.[13] Initially, this was largely due to spontaneous relocation as a result of either secondary migration from a metropolitan area or a desire of new arrivals to settle nearby to their families in regional areas.[14] Recent trends in government settlement policy, however, have seen these numbers increasing through planned efforts to direct settlement to regional locations. While there is a paucity of data available regarding regional settlement trends of refugees and migrants, it is reported that the proportion of humanitarian entrants settling in regional areas had increased from one-in-twenty in 2001 to one-in-five in 2011.[15] More broadly, the ABS reported in 2011 that approximately 10% of all recent arrivals to Australia[16] lived in regional Australia,[17] while approximately 5% of people in regional Australia spoke a language other than English at home (compared to around 25% in the Major cities).[18]

SCoA recognises that it is not possible to simply drive regional settlement as an option without addressing the challenges faced by migrants and refugees in regional communities and ensuring the careful selection of regional communities that will benefit from the introduction of migrants and refugees while at the same time providing a welcoming and accepting environment for them to settle into. Additionally, thought must be given to selecting locations that will have suitable employment opportunities as well as the resources and services, both specific and general, appropriate to receive and settle migrants and refugees. Finally, consideration must be given to, insofar as possible, co-locating communities in order to ensure a suitably sized cohort of migrants and refugees are in close proximity to ensure they are able to develop necessary support networks and community groups.

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[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth, Australia 2014-15*, accessible at: **http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/ Latestproducts/3218.0Main%20Features152014-15?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3218.0&issue=2014-15&num=&view.**

[11] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors* (2014), 4.

[12] Ibid.

[13] There are a number of regional settlement locations around the country which have been receiving migrants and humanitarian entrants for a number of years, including Shepparton and Swan Hill in Victoria and Young in NSW. See: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Shepparton Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot* (2007), report prepared by Margaret Piper and Associates; and Victorian Health, *Refugee Resettlement in Rural and regional Victoria: Impacts and Policy Issues* (2008).

[14] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Shepparton Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilot* (2007), p4.

[15] Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, *Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: a case study of the Limestone Coast* (2014).

[16] Persons who were usually resident outside Australia at the time of the 2006 Census.

[17] Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Yearbook 2015: *Progress in Australian Regions* (2015), 192.

[18] Ibid., 228.

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.[19] This approach has been adopted by the government when considering new regional settlement locations.[20] 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**:

Table 1: Critical Factors for successful regional settlement

Factor	Considerations
Availability of Settlement Services	• 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	• 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	• 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	• 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.

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[19] 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.

[20] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, (2013).

Current Government Policy – attraction of migrants to regional Australia

Since the mid-1990s regional settlement of migrants and refugees has taken on an increasingly important role for Australian governments in addressing population change and driving economic prosperity in regional areas.[21] This has been demonstrated through a number of visa schemes which have been put in place to facilitate regional migration. The visa schemes currently in place include:

- the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS);

- the Save Haven Enterprise visa (SHEV);

- the Skilled Regional (Provisional) visa; and

- the 457 temporary skilled worker scheme and short-term visas such as the 417 and 462 work and holiday visas.

While these visa streams have been somewhat successful in directing migrants and refugees to regional areas their capacity to retain them has not been optimal. For humanitarian entrants specifically, the SHEV is only relatively recent and as a result statistics do not yet exist which give any indication of its success. One possible limitation that is immediately apparent, however, is that the SHEV does not guarantee permanent residency for humanitarian entrants. This is likely to impact the long-term success of the SHEV as a policy to boost regional resettlement.

The **RSMS** visa was developed to encourage employers in regional areas to sponsor skilled migrants in accordance with skill shortages.[22] The RSMS grants permanent residency to skilled workers who can apply under three streams: temporary residence transition stream, direct entry stream and agreement stream. Each of these streams rely on the willingness of an employer to nominate the skilled worker to be employed within their organisation. According to the 2011 Sustainable Population Strategy, initiatives such as this have been successful in contributing to growth and development in regional communities with an approximate 70% increase in regional settlement in the last decade.[23]

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[21] Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, *Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: a case study of the Limestone Coast* (2014), 2.

[22] Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities: A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia* (2011), 23.

[23] Ibid.

The **SHEV** was established in September 2014 as a mechanism for asylum seekers to obtain temporary residency. To be eligible for a SHEV, asylum seekers must agree to settle in an approved regional location, meet health, security and character requirements and work and/or study full-time whilst accessing minimal income support. The visa is valid for a five year period.[24] As at October 2016, NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, the ACT and Tasmania have all opted-in to the SHEV scheme. In each of NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia, certain locations are excluded (existing large population centres). At this stage figures have not been released about the take-up of SHEV visas, however SCoA has received feedback that the threshold for applying for SHEV is extremely high, making it difficult to meet the requirements to apply.

AMES Australia: Employment SLPET Program with Australia Post, December 2015.

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[24] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Information for Safe Haven Enterprise visa holders* (2016), accessible at:
http://www.ima.border.gov.au/en/After-your-application-is-decided/Information-for-Safe-Haven-Enterprise-visa-holders.

Current Government Policy – settlement services in regional Australia

Encouraging refugees and migrants to resettle in regional areas has many benefits, as has been mentioned earlier, however the key to successful settlement is having adequate support. Government-funded settlement services are delivered through a network of local community organisations across Australia. The main programme, Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) is delivered in 23 regions across Australia by 16 service providers. Since its inception in April 2011 to December 2014, 26,019 cases (representing 55,187 clients) accessed HSS services.[25] HSS is supplemented by Complex Case Support (CCS), which targets a much more limited number of clients who are assessed as having exceptional needs. Delivered by a panel of 33 organisations, the CCS programme delivered services to 482 cases from January 2012 to December 2014.[26]

Settlement agencies also secure funding for other related programs from a variety of sources including federal, state and local government grants, and philanthropic sources. These additional programs supplement the initial settlement support provided, adding to the scope and range of settlement agencies, and are a key way settlement agencies contribute to building community cohesion.

In August 2016, the Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs, Senator Zed Seselja, announced a redesign of Australia's settlement services with a focus on "better language and employment outcomes for humanitarian entrants".[27] The redesign is a result of a significant evaluation study undertaken by Ernst & Young, released in June 2015, which, while finding that the HSS and CCS were largely "working well", made 10 recommendations for improvement.[28]

The redesign will see the combination of the HSS and CCS into a new program, the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). The HSP will be designed over the coming months, in a co-design process between the government and short-listed service providers, with a view to launching the new model in July 2017.

This new program has predetermined locations for the delivery of settlement services to humanitarian entrants and refugees, including a number in regional Australia.[29] The locations identified by the government are set out in Table 2. Work must continue in these locations to ensure their readiness to receive and assist newly arrived humanitarian entrants.

[24] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Information for Safe Haven Enterprise visa holders* (2016), accessible at:
http://www.ima.border.gov.au/en/After-your-application-is-decided/Information-for-Safe-Haven-Enterprise-visa-holders.

[25] Ernst & Young, *Evaluation of the humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support programmes* (2015), 8.

[26] Ibid., 12.

[27] Senator the Hon Zed Seselja, *Improving settlement outcomes for refugees* (2016), accessible at:
http://zedseselja.dss.gov.au/media-releases/improving-settlement-outcomes-refugees.

[28] Ernst & Young, *Evaluation of the humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support programmes* (2015).

[29] Department of Social Services, *Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) for the Humanitarian Settlement Program* (2016), 29.

Table 2: Locations identified for the delivery of the HSP
(Department of Social Services, *Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI)*
for the Humanitarian Settlement Program (2016))

Perth, Western Australia	Logan, Queensland	Canberra, ACT
Darwin, Northern Territory	Gold Coast, Queensland	Mildura, Victoria
Adelaide, South Australia	Coffs Harbour, NSW	Wodonga, Victoria
Mt Gambier, South Australia	Newcastle, NSW	Shepparton, Victoria
Cairns, Queensland	Sydney, NSW	Melbourne, Victoria
Townsville, Queensland	Wollongong, NSW	Geelong, Victoria
Toowoomba, Queensland	Wagga Wagga, NSW	Hobart, Tasmania
Brisbane, Queensland	Albury, NSW	Launceston, Tasmania

The importance of providing settlement services to humanitarian entrants in regional locations becomes more relevant in light of the Australian government's commitment to accept Syrian and Iraqi refugees. In September 2015 the government announced it would make an extra 12,000 permanent humanitarian places available for Syrian and Iraqi refugees,[30] with regional areas being an attractive option for resettlement.[31] The DSS has announced that these refugees will be settled across metropolitan and regional locations, in all states and territories which have settlement services.[32] It is as yet unclear how the proposed HSP, will affect the availability of these vital settlement services in regional Australia. Accordingly, the government has stated that for the 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi intake "regional settlement is not likely in the first six months because of the level of support that may be required…"[33] This highlights that in order for regional communities to be a viable option for initial resettlement, adequate infrastructure and support need to be implemented.

MDA Ltd, Luminous Parade 2016.

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30 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Australia's Response to the Syrian and Iraqi Humanitarian Crisis* (2015), accessible at: https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Refu/response-syrian-humanitarian-crisis.

31 ABC News, *Nationals MP calls for Syrian refugees to be resettled in regional towns* (2015), accessible at: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-17/nationals-mp-wants-syrian-refugees-resettled-in-regional-towns/6782880.

32 The Department of Social Services, *Refugee Settlement Media Hub*, accessible at: https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/syrian-and-iraqi-refugee-crisis/refugee-settlement-media-hub.

33 Department of Premiere and Cabinet, *Syrian/Iraqi Refugee Intake*, accessible at: https://www.dpc.wa.gov.au/ProjectsandSpecialEvents/Pages/syrian-iraqi-refugee-intake.aspx.

SCoA's position on a regional settlement policy

SCoA recommends that the government adopt a targeted strategy in order to commence a formal and concerted effort to attract migrants and refugees to regional areas. Such a strategy must include a holistic approach to regional settlement that not only encourages migrants and refugees to settle in regional communities but also ensures that adequate services are available to them when they do.

A close understanding of the factors that influence attraction and retention of migrants and refugees in regional areas is vital to delivering targeted services and policies. The majority of policy activity to date has focused on the factors that attract migrants or refugees to regional areas however far less has been carried out on long-term settlement and retention.[34] There is, however, a growing conversation surrounding retention as critical to building sustainable communities and developing regional areas.[35]

Unlike attraction, which can be influenced by policy and visa categories, the decision to remain in a regional location is often subject to the desires of the individual and their family. In the absence of sufficient services and infrastructure, or a sense of belonging in a community, the possibility of secondary migration away from regional areas in favour of larger metropolitan centres is far more likely. It should be noted, however, that this is not simply an issue that applies to migrants and refugees, but one which reflects the general trends of internal-migration in the wider Australian population.

Any regional settlement policy therefore requires specific focus on implementing strategies to ensure the retention of migrants and refugees after they arrive in regional communities. At the same time, the government must measure the success of those strategies through the collection of appropriate and timely statistics and data regarding the regional settlement of migrants and refugees.

Recommendations:

1. SCoA recommends that the government work with the settlement sector to develop and implement a coordinated and whole-of-government regional settlement strategy. The strategy should recognise the role that migrants and refugees can play in helping to revitalise regional Australia but must also adopt a holistic approach which considers the full range of experiences facing migrants and refugees in regional areas, including both economic and social challenges to successful settlement.

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[34] For studies on attracting migrants or refugees to regional areas, see: Hugo, Wulff, M. & Dharmalingam, A., 'Retaining Skilled Migrants in Regional Australia: The Role of Social Connectedness', *International Migration and Integration* (2008), 9: 149.

[35] This issue was repeatedly raised by members of SCoA in our most recent Member Consultation process.

2. SCoA recommends that government engage with regional communities to assess the best possible locations for regional settlement, with particular references to the *Critical Factors for successful regional settlement* identified by SCoA in **Table 1**.

3. SCoA recommends that work must continue in the locations identified in **Table 2** to ensure their readiness to receive and assist newly arrived humanitarian entrants.

4. SCoA recommends that research be undertaken which surveys the reasons why migrants and refugees move away from regional locations and that the findings inform policies that aim to improve long-term retention in these areas.

5. SCoA recommends that the government commence a programme for measuring the success of its regional settlement strategies through the collection of appropriate and timely statistics and data.

AMES Australia: Stakeholder Relations Heartlands Photography Project 'Picking Peppers' Barat Ali Batoor, June 2015.

ACHIEVING MUTUAL ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

As discussed above, SCoA believes that an increased focus on regional settlement for migrants and refugees can result in a three-fold benefit, as follows:

1. Regional communities

Suffering from a well-documented drain in population, resources and economic vitality, regional communities are in urgent need of growth. Subject to the selection of the communities most likely to be receptive to the introduction of new populations, this growth can be achieved by the settlement of migrants and refugees who bring with them skills, experience and willingness to contribute. Recent research conducted by the government-funded Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation confirms the view that migrants and refugees can add considerably to the agricultural sector, for example, in regional Australia, increasing productivity and re-energising regional and rural towns.[36]

2. Migrants and Refugees

Provided that they receive adequate support, the economic opportunities for migrants and humanitarian entrants in regional Australia are numerous. Regional locations often have less competition for employment and a lower cost of living, and provide opportunities to participate in industry and agriculture, two sectors which are traditionally welcoming of migrants and refugees.[37]

3. Australia

The Australian economy would receive a much-needed boost through an increase in economic activity across regional communities.[38]

For these reasons, SCoA believes that it is time for a regional settlement strategy for migrants and refugees that highlights the economic opportunities and potential for greater prosperity. In order to achieve this, however, SCoA has identified key areas where government attention is urgently required. These are discussed below.

Access Community Services: Drivers education, June 2016

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[36] Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, *New Immigrants Improving Productivity in Australian Agriculture* (2016)

[37] Ibid.

[38] In a recent speech to the Regional Australia City Deals Forum the Hon Angus Taylor MP, Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation recalled research completed by the Regional Australia Institute that "for every 100,000 Australians who choose to live in growing small cities … an additional $50 billion will be released into the economy…" accessible at: http://ministers.dpmc.gov.au/taylor/2016/regional-australia-institute-city-deals-forum.

General Services and Infrastructure

The availability and accessibility of services and infrastructure has a significant impact on the successful settlement of migrants and refugees in regional areas. This includes the creation of jobs, investment in construction, enhanced education, ensuring adequate healthcare services and providing reliable transportation.[39] Ready availability and ease of access to services and infrastructure increases the viability of long-term settlement in regional areas and enhances the capacity for regional areas to retain migrants.[40] Research provides consistent evidence of the importance of these factors in the settlement process across different regional locations.[41] It must be noted that these issues are not isolated to the migrant or refugee experience and pertain also to the wider Australian population. However, due to the nature of migrant and refugee experiences, the effects of these factors may be experienced more acutely. It is therefore crucial that, prior to addressing specific issues that impact migrants and refugees, attention be directed generally to the adequacy of services and infrastructure across regional Australia.

Recommendation:

6. SCoA recommends greater government investment in regional development with a focus on sustainability and community-building.

Kildonan UnitingCare's: New Arrival Support Services Community Garden.

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[39] Due to the large amount of research that has already dealt in depth with the availability and accessibility of services and infrastructure in regional Australia, some of these factors will not be discussed here.

[40] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors* (2014).

[41] Ibid.

Employment opportunities for new arrivals

Employment is repeatedly cited as the most important factor for ensuring long-term settlement and successful integration into a community for newly arrived migrants and refugees.[42] Obtaining employment is crucial for people from refugee backgrounds to achieve a sense of independence, as well as creating a secure living environment and giving them an opportunity to contribute to their communities.[43] This in turn leads to greater prospects of achieving retention in regional communities. Permanent, full-time work can also enable greater access to other critical services, such as quality housing and a vehicle for transport.

Initially, however, issues such as trauma and limited English language skills may postpone employment in the early stages of settlement. With the right support services, refugees and migrants can overcome this trauma and transition smoothly into sustainable employment.

This takes on added importance in regional Australia where suitable employment opportunities may be limited.[44] Difficulties experienced by migrants and refugees in this respect can include high rates of unemployment in some regional areas which can be compounded by a lack of relevant work experience, unrecognised educational qualifications, a lack of satisfactory levels of English language skills and discrimination in the workplace.[45] Youth and aged people in particular face greater obstacles to obtaining employment.[46] It is important that government policies focus on addressing access to employment, and facilitate cooperation between settlement agencies, job service providers and local employers to increase employment opportunities available to migrants and refugees and address industry needs.

Over time, it is important for migrants and refugees to have access to opportunities for career advancement, which can allow for a deepened sense of meaning and achievement. Upward mobility in the workplace may be achieved through further training, professional development or promotions. Limited access to these opportunities may result in decreased retention in regional areas.[47] Entrepreneurship initiatives, such as SSI's Ignite program,[48] which support migrants and refugees to launch their own businesses through training and development programs, can assist migrants and refugees to exercise their skill sets while contributing a sense of empowerment to their lives.

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[42] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Regional Settlement in Australia: research into the settlement experience of humanitarian entrants in regional Australia* (2006/7), report prepared by Christine Shepley, 10.

[43] Settlement Services International, *Working it out* Occasional Paper 1 (2016), 5.

[44] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors* (2014), 14.

[45] AMES, *Regional Settlement: an analysis of four settlement locations in Victoria* (2011), prepared by AMES Research and Policy Unit, 5; and Hugo, G., *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants* (2011), 133.

[46] Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Making it Work: Refugee Young People and Employment* (2014).

[47] Ibid., 15.

[48] Settlement Services International, *Ignite Small Business Start-Ups*, accessible at: **http://www.ssi.org.au/services/ignite.**

Recommendations:

7. SCoA recommends that job service providers in regional areas work closely with settlement service providers and local employers to identify industry needs and create more opportunities for appropriate and sustainable employment for migrants and refugees.

8. SCoA recommends that research which connects Australia's labour market to settlement trends is made readily available to inform settlement programs and location viability.

9. SCoA acknowledges entrepreneurship programs currently in place around Australia and recommends their expansion to regional areas.

10. SCoA calls for the government to allocate more funding to programs that support refugees and migrants to become job ready such as such as the SEE programme, with a focus on expanding these programs to regional Australia.

Karen Refugees in Nhill, Victoria[49]

Since 2010, over 160 Karen refugees have settled in Nhill, a small regional town in Victoria's central north-west. Like many other regional towns in Australia, Nhill has been faced with a declining and ageing population which has detrimentally impacted the economic and social prosperity of the area and threatened its long-term sustainability. In a collaborative effort between local business, Luv-a-Duk, and service provider, AMES Australia, an employment and settlement campaign to actively address the employee shortage was implemented. As part of this initiative Karen refugees were offered an opportunity to resettle in Nhill with secure employment. This initiative has seen a significant increase in the labour force of Nhill, adding 70.5 full time employment positions (approximately 3% of total employment across the region) and contributed an estimated $41.5 million into the Gross Regional Product to the town. This model settlement initiative has had an extremely positive impact, economically and in effect socially, on Nhill's regional population as well as on the Karen community.

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[49] AMES, *Small Towns, Big Returns: Economic and Social Impact of the Karen Resettlement in Nhill* (2015), accessible at: https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/Research/19933%20AMES%20Nhill%20Report%20LR.pdf.

The importance of housing in the settlement process

Finding suitable housing is important for establishing stability in the early stages of settlement and provides a secure foundation from which other needs can be addressed, including finding employment and enrolling children in schools. Satisfactory home environments also foster health and well-being which can significantly enhance the speed with which people from refugee backgrounds settle into their new communities.[50]

Migrants and refugees face a number of challenges when finding appropriate housing. These include financial hardships, understanding the procedures of a new housing market, competing in the rental market with limited rental history, lack of familiarity with the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, and finding suitably-sized properties for extended families.[51] While affordable housing may be more readily available in regional areas, these locations pose their own challenges, such as locating accommodation near transport and services.[52] Shortages of suitable homes may also exist in regional locations where rapid development has taken place or expanded industries have put pressure on community infrastructure.[53]

Recommendations:

11. SCoA recommends greater government investment and commitment to generating affordable housing in regional communities, including through the National Rental Affordability Scheme and that settlement service agencies and housing providers are empowered to inform refugees and migrants on low incomes on how to access affordable housing.

12. SCoA recommends that strong working relationships are established between settlement service agencies and housing providers to support the best housing outcomes for recent arrivals.

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[50] Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, *Refugee Resettlement in Regional and Rural Victoria: Impacts and Policy Issues* (2008), 25.

[51] Refugee Council of Australia, *Housing* (2011), accessible at: **http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/fact-sheets/settlement-issues/housing/.**

[52] Refugee Council of Australia, *The Home Stretch: Challenges and Alternatives in Sustainable Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers* (2014), 40.

[53] Standing Committee on Regional Development, *Attracting and Retaining Skilled People in Regional Australia*, Regional Development Council, Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2004), 4.

MCWW: Partnership with realestates.

Partnering with Real Estate Agents

The Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga (MCWW) have been building relationships with local real estate agents to better facilitate housing arrangements for migrants and refugees. They have been working closely with real estate agents to ensure that they are aware of the obstacles facing migrants and refugees as tenants. Highlighting these challenges has assisted in reducing discrimination held by real estate agents and landlords. Through acting as an inter-mediary between migrant and refugee families and housing agents, the MCWW has succeeded in securing housing arrangements for families. A particular success was working with real estate agents to allocate a block of vacant Department of Housing properties located near an abattoir where refugees were employed. This not only provided suitable housing but also eliminated issues sourcing transport to and from work.

Access to education for migrants and refugees

The availability of education services is a major component influencing decisions to move to and remain in regional areas. This is especially relevant to families with school-aged children; however it can also apply to adults seeking further educational and training opportunities. The majority of regional settlement locations are equipped with primary and high schools (both public and private) and at times a TAFE or university. Distance learning programs can also provide an opportunity for adult migrants and refugees living in regional areas to access a diverse range of education courses.[54]

The availability of education services, in itself, is not sufficient to address the range of issues that can impact the successful take-up of those services by people with refugee backgrounds. Recent arrivals may have experienced a disruption in their schooling which can create a significant learning gap between these children and local students.[55] It can also result in psychological and social limitations impacting their willingness to return to schooling, and necessitate specific care and attention when they do.

Regional areas have also been cited as lacking English as a Second Language courses for school-aged children. Without a sufficient understanding of English, children of migrant and refugee families may suffer serious setbacks in their education or can at times be grouped with students with learning or intellectual disabilities which can result in incorrect or misplaced services being provided. Due to the low numbers of migrant and refugee children located in regional areas, it is difficult for schools to reach the critical mass needed to run dedicated assistance programs for these students.[56] There are also fewer options available to adolescents past the age of post-compulsory education in regional areas and this may impact recent human-itarian arrivals who require additional education services outside of the school-age bracket.

Recommendations:

13. SCoA recommends the government fund and support bilingual multicultural aides for regional schools with significant CALD populations. Aides may be members of the refugee and migrant communities.

14. SCoA recommends that migrant and refugee access to distance learning in English language and other education programs be assessed areas and adjustments made to ensure adequate access in regional areas.

15. SCoA recommends the government fund regional schools to provide intensive language education to youth in order to bridge learning gaps and offset the impacts of smaller numbers of students in these areas.

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[54] Adult Migrant English Program , Distance Learning for the AMEP, accessible at: **http://amepdl.net.au/dlamep_more.**

[55] Refugee Council of Australia, *Finding the Right Time and Place: Exploring Post-Compulsory Education and Training Pathways for Young People from Refugee Backgrounds in NSW* (2010), 3.

[56] Ibid., 4.

SOCIAL COHESION AND MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Australia is often celebrated as being a multicultural country, with a rich and vibrant history of immigration that has contributed to the successful development of a society that is welcoming and multi-dimensional.

Multiculturalism is, however, far more prevalent and accepted in metropolitan areas than in regional Australia. Recent research indicates that there is a pattern of lower support for immigration generally, and on contentious issues such as the rights of asylum seekers, outside of the major metropolitan centres.[57] This does not mean that reactions to immigration in regional Australia are overwhelmingly negative or that all regional locations are the same in this regard, but nevertheless poses a further challenge for the successful regional settlement of migrants and refugees. Regional communities must be willing to accept people from different cultures and to embrace them as part of the community. The benefits of such social cohesion are well documented, and will lead to more socially active and vibrant communities.

Research on regional settlement has focused primarily on the availability and accessibility of services and infrastructure. The social dimension has, until recently, been a secondary focus to the more tangible issues, usually based in economic considerations. While these factors are crucial for easing the transition and enhancing lifestyle satisfaction, they are complemented and reinforced by enabling social interactions that bring a sense of meaning and belonging into the lives of newly-arrived migrants and refugees. Research into the regional settlement of humanitarian entrants indicates that social aspects, such as the presence of family and friends together with a welcoming and accepting community, were key factors in their decision to stay in their regional location.[58]

The settlement process must therefore take into account the importance of the social dimension, especially in regional areas. Promoting social inclusion through family connections, social networks and welcoming communities is crucial to the sustainable settlement and ongoing well-being of migrants and refugees. While these social dimensions are reflective of settlement in all geographical areas, not just regional, the effects are felt more acutely in smaller communities.

Core Multicultural Services: Iraqi Sook (Bazaar).

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[57] Markus, A., *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys* (2015), 52.

[58] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Regional Settlement in Australia: research into the settlement experience of humanitarian entrants in regional Australia* (2006/7), report prepared by Christine Shepley, 10.

Enhancing community openness to multiculturalism

The importance of a welcoming community is essential for the successful settlement of migrants and refugees in regional areas. It is important to recognise that settlement is a two-way process that requires proactivity from both the newcomers and the existing community.[59] Communities that are actively interested in and accepting of new migrants and refugees have higher rates of social cohesion and retention which is ultimately beneficial for all stakeholders.[60]

In the case of an unwelcoming community, migrants and refugees may be exposed to discrimination and prejudice which can pose a serious challenge to effective integration.[61] Experiences of prejudice can have impacts that extend beyond the social and psychological, and can affect capacity to access economic resources and employment. Both government and community initiatives that aim to eliminate racism and discrimination in regional areas are necessary to ensure a positive settlement experience for migrants and refugees.

As a country built on immigration, it is little surprise that attitudes across Australia are overwhelmingly in favour of multiculturalism.[62] However, research conducted by the Scanlon Foundation in recent years indicates that attitudes toward immigration and multiculturalism become less favourable in regional Australia compared to metropolitan centres.[63] In its 2016 publication, Australians Today, the Scanlon Foundation reports that strong negative responses to immigration are more prevalent in regional areas, especially where exposure to different cultures has been historically limited.[64]

The impact on migrants and refugees of a community having lower levels of ethnic and cultural understanding and acceptance has also been explored by the Scanlon Foundation which found that in regional areas of Victoria, as many as 96% of migrants from South Sudan had experienced discrimination.[65] Similarly, Scanlon Foundation found that, among overseas born residents, the number of respondents who were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with life in Australia was 13% lower in "outer regional" Australia, while the numbers of those "dissatisfied" or "strongly dissatisfied" was correspondingly higher.[66]

Despite these trends, SCoA is comforted by feedback from its member organisations that in communities where regional settlement is well-planned and proper services are in place, the

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[59] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors* (2014), 23.

[60] Ibid, 24.

[61] Ibid, 23.

[62] Scanlon Foundation, *Multiculturalism Discussion Paper* (2016), 10.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Markus, A., *Australians Today: The Australia@2015 Scanlon Foundation Survey* (2016), 56.

[65] Ibid p63

[66] Ibid p34

overwhelming response to multiculturalism remains positive and communities are largely welcoming of new arrivals.[67] SCoA also welcomes the Government's investment, as part of the 2016-17 Budget, in measures aimed at building social cohesion for recently arrived migrants, including increased funding for the National Community Hubs Programme in regional locations.[68]

A host community that is open to cross-cultural engagement and respectful of diversity is an important foundation of the settlement process.[69] Activities such as cultural celebrations and community activities (e.g. sports), can help to foster greater understanding and eliminate ignorance that can lead to prejudices against migrant and refugee communities. Research has shown that preparing communities for the arrival of new migrants and refugees through holding information, consultation and awareness-raising events increases the willingness of the community to welcome new migrants and refugees.[70] In this way, local governments have a responsibility to facilitate these initiatives in order to improve social cohesion within their communities.

Recommendations:

16. SCoA recommends that the IOM and DSS collaborate to provide detailed briefing information about refugees to new host communities in regional areas.

17. SCoA recommends that resources such as Building Social Cohesion in our Communities be promoted widely to regional local governments to assist in the creation of social inclusion activities, promote cultural diversity and eliminate racism.

18. SCoA recommends that community leaders and community groups and settlement agencies work together to provide the host community with cultural awareness to ensure they understand the histories and cultures of the incoming refugees and migrants.

19. SCoA recommends the Diversity and Social Cohesion Grants program be assessed to ensure regional settlement areas are financially supported to hold cultural events and activities that facilitate social connections across heterogeneous cultural groups as a means of promoting intercultural understanding and embedding multiculturalism within the community.

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[67] Settlement Council of Australia, *Reporting our Member Consultations* (2015), 4.3.

[68] Commonwealth of Australia, Budget 2016-17, accessible at: **http://www.budget.gov.au/2016-17/content/bp2_ expense-21.htm**

[69] Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, *Refugee Resettlement in Regional and Rural Victoria: Impacts and Policy Issues* (2008), 28.

[70] Ibid., 47.

[71] Australian Human Rights Commission, *Building Social Cohesion in our Communities*, accessible at: **www.acelg.org.au/socialcohesion**.

Kildonan Uniting Care volunteer Luis teaches soccer skills to new arrivals, siuch as Sajad.

Building Social Cohesion in our Communities

The Australian Human Rights Commission's 'Building Social Cohesion in our Communities' (2015) interactive online resource is designed to support local governments to build strong, socially cohesive communities. Local councils are critical nexus points between the government and the community and are key to promoting social cohesion. The resource draws on five fundamental elementals for social cohesion – get your local government ready; engage the community to understand the issues; build long term partnerships; take place-based, targeted action; and evaluate and share outcomes. It provides a range of tools and best practices which allow local governments to implement this initiative in their own area.

Achieving social inclusion through civic participation

The ability for refugees and migrants to be able to fully participate in society provides a sense of empowerment and belonging. It is fundamental for newly arrived members of community to engage effectively in the Australian community and exercise their individual and collective rights under the law. Civic participation promotes cultural and national identity, and fosters contributions to the broader Australian society through taking part in national decision-making.[72] Settlement service providers play a vital role in engaging and supporting migrant and new arrival communities to achieve a level of independence that facilitates effective civic participation.

Recommendation:

20. SCoA recommends that the local communities and settlement agencies work together to engage and support new arrivals to achieve civic participation by taking measures to actively involve new arrivals into community decision making.

Engaging with social networks

Central to civic participation is the ability to engage with social networks, which empower one to have the confidence and support structures to engage as an active citizen in society.

Regional areas often have closer social networks with a greater sense of community than metropolitan areas. This can be advantageous to new migrants and refugees as it can allow for increased social mobility and access to resources which may be more competitive in populated cities. The feeling of being embedded within a social network also contributes to a sense of belonging and well-being which can facilitate long term retention.[73]

While a sense of being connected to a wider social network in the community is an important element for integration, the creation of these networks can require significant time to form. Social networks may be comprised within and between different collectives, including religious, cultural, sporting and other community groups.[74] While a first instinct among

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[72] Settlement Council of Australia, *National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards* (2016), 9.

[73] Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Regional Retention of Migrants: Critical Success Factors* (2014), 22.

[74] Ibid.

migrants is to connect with other members of their own specific ethnic communities, over time participation will broaden to include general social networks.[75] These connections can provide a range of social, economic and cultural support and create greater ties to the community.[76] Participation in community groups and volunteering in activities is an effective means of developing trust with other residents and generating positive feelings of contributing something of value to the new host community. Research indicates that migrants and refugees are often active participants in these activities.[77] The availability of opportunities for community participation and engagement is therefore an important factor in building social cohesion.

Recommendation:

21. SCoA recommends that local councils support the cultural needs of the ethnic groups within their community through establishing dedicated centres and/or events to celebrate multiculturalism.

Local Council and Community Services coordinated approach to support Syrian refugees settle in Logan, QLD

The City of Logan is expected to receive some arrivals as part of the additional 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi intake announced by the Australian Government. In light of this expected intake, government and non-government agencies, along with community-based and faith-based are working together to develop a coordinated approach to support new arrivals settle in the region as smoothly as possible.

On 19 July 2016, more than 60 people attended a Local Area Coordination group meeting coordinated by Access Community Services to identify some of the key challenges facing Syrian refugees and discuss ways to coordinate and integrate support. Key areas include: employment opportunities; education; transport; and a sense of belonging and community cohesion.

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[75] AMES, *Regional Settlement: an analysis of four settlement locations in Victoria* (2011), prepared by AMES Research and Policy Unit, 5.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, *Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: a case study of the Limestone Coast* (2014), 29.

Family connections

The presence of family members in the settlement process can provide vital psychosocial support during the initial transition into regional Australian life.[78] These support structures can lead to long-term personal, social, community and economic benefits.[79] A study from the Limestone Coast region of South Australia found that migrants living in the region as families were more likely to contribute economically to their communities and settle long term. Family connections are therefore of benefit not only to migrants and refugees but also to their new host community. Regardless of this evidence recent changes to Australia's migration policy have created significant barriers to people of refugee backgrounds reuniting with their families such as increases in fees and the increased focus on temporary visas.[80]

The Australian government makes it a priority to settle humanitarian entrants in proximity to their family members and friends already living in Australia wherever possible. 'Linked' refugees (that have family or relatives in Australia) have the benefit of established family relationships prior to their settlement in their host community. This can provide them with faster access to social resources as they are able to draw on the knowledge and networks gained by their family members before their arrival.[81] In the absence of family members already residing in Australia, family reunion should be a priority as the absence of this can act as a barrier to integration within the community.[82]

As time passes, family connections offer greater opportunities for linkages with the wider community.[83] Families with school age children were found to have wider social networks, as the school community offers more points of contact and opportunities for interaction.[84]

While family connection is of utmost importance for successful resettlement, due to institutional and cultural factors, family and domestic violence can occur. Recent arrivals have suffered immense trauma upon their journey to Australia which, can impact heavily on individuals and families upon arrival.[85] This trauma and the transition into a new culture can cause heightened tensions and a result can be aggressive behaviours. The most significant factors that impact domestic and family violence among refugee and migrant families include

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[78] Refugee Council of Australia, *Family Reunion and Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program: A Discussion Paper* (2012), 1 and Settlement Council of Australia, Issues Paper: Refugee Family Reunion (2016).

[79] Settlement Council of Australia, Issues Paper: *Refugee Family Reunion* (2016), 1.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, *Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: a case study of the Limestone Coast* (2014), 20.

[82] Refugee Council of Australia, *Family Reunion and Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program: A Discussion Paper* (2012).

[83] Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, *Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: a case study of the Limestone Coast* (2014), 18.

[84] Ibid., 27.

[85] Victorian Health, *Refugee Resettlement and Wellbeing: Exploring Domestic Violence and Family Violence in refugee Communities*, 4.

[86] Settlement Council of Australia, Discussion Paper: *Domestic Violence* (2013) 1.

cultural and religious factors around disclosure, barriers to accessing information, social isolation, lack of awareness about services and access and lack of knowledge about the legal system.[86] The availability of targeted and culturally aware settlement services for families is especially critical in regional locations, where there can be a lack of support services, in order to prevent and address family and domestic violence.

Recommendations:

22. SCoA recommends that family reunion, including parent reunion, is given high priority in government policies, and that efforts be implemented to ensure the close proximity of extended families on settlement, as a means of strengthening community building in regional areas.

23. SCoA recommends research to determine whether targeted support for families experiencing intergenerational conflict and family and domestic violence is available in regional areas, and initiatives are implemented if these programs are not accessible.

AMES Australia: Stakeholder Relations Heartlands Photography Project 'Taking a breath' Conor Ashleigh, 2015.

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[86] Settlement Council of Australia, Discussion Paper: *Domestic Violence* (2013) 1.

STARTTS: Families in Cultural Transition.

Families in Cultural Transition (FICT)[87]

FICT is a group based psychosocial program offered through STARTTS in Sydney that aims to help refugees and people from refugee like backgrounds with their transition to life in Australia. The groups run for ten sessions and are facilitated by two trained and supported bicultural facilitators in the language of the community. The modules cover practical, conceptual and emotional topics that aim to strengthen family connections, parenting and relationship skills. Participants report that the discussion format provides vital support and enhances their knowledge and skills during settlement.

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[87] For more information, see: STARTTS, *Families in Cultural Transition*, accessible at: http://www.startts.org.au/services/community-services/fict/.

THE ROLE OF SETTLEMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

Given the unique challenges experienced by migrants and refugees settling in regional areas identified above, SCoA believes that SSPs located in those regions will be the best placed to meet the needs of those individuals and to fill the role that might otherwise be filled by the broader community in metropolitan areas.

There are a variety of SSPs located in regional areas who are prepared to support the settlement process of migrants and refugees. SSPs offer a range of services, including Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS), the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) and Complex Case Support (CCS),[88] and it is expected that their role will continue to be crucial under the new Humanitarian Support Program (HSP) which is set to take affect from 1 July 2017.[89] These programs assist migrants and refugees in finding suitable housing and employment, enhancing their language proficiency skills, providing psychological support and facilitating a range of services to support them settling into their host communities. SSPs must be supported so that they may continue to offer these crucial services. They must continually improve their service delivery to clients by strengthening capacity, ensuring consistency and building cooperation both within the sector and externally with other organisations and government bodies.

Regional SSPs are well-positioned to respond to the specific challenges faced by migrants and refugees settling regionally. They are a vital access point to economic resources, services and the broader community. Given the unique nature of regional communities, SCoA member organisations report that regional settlement areas offer an opportunity for innovative service models that best meet the needs of the new arrivals and the community.[90]

Despite this opportunity, the viability of many regional SSPs remains at risk.

The vast majority of SSPs rely on government funding in order to continue to provide their services. Secure and adequate funding is important to maintain the capacity of these organisations to provide quality services to migrants and refugees. Flexible funding is also important so that SSPs can explore innovative programs that are able to adapt to the particular needs of the community. Place-based and needs-based initiatives can also help to strengthen the capacity of SSPs to respond effectively to their clients' needs.

The capacity of service providers to deliver services to migrants and refugees in regional areas is also dependent largely on a consistent flow of clientele that require these services. Concerns regarding cohort size and the resulting viability of regional services is repeatedly raised by SCoA member organisations as an area for further consideration.[91] Given the relatively small overall intake of migrants and refugees into regional areas and in conjunction with changing migration policies, SSPs can experience low numbers of new clientele and have also reported receiving short notice of the impending arrival of new cohorts.[92] The result of this can be challenges for program viability, difficulties maintaining consistent funding and a loss of experienced and competent staff.

[88] Department of Social Services, *Settlement Services* (2014), accessible at: **https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/ settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services.**

[89] Senator the Hon Zed Seselja, *Improving settlement outcomes for refugees* (2016), accessible at: **http://zedseselja.dss.gov.au/media-releases/improving-settlement-outcomes-refugees.**

[90] Settlement Council of Australia, *Reporting our Member Consultations* (2015), 4.

[91] Settlement Council of Australia, *Reporting our Member Consultations* (2015), 4.

[92] Ibid.

Cooperation and coordination between different stakeholders and levels of government can help to reinforce and sustain the ongoing work of SSPs.[93] Local governments, community organisations and religious groups all have different perspectives and vital roles to play in the settlement process.

Recommendations:

24. SCoA recommends that the government recognise the role of Settlement Service Providers in regional Australia to meet a significant and varied range of needs of new arrivals, beyond those typically experienced in metropolitan centres, and that SSPs operating in regional Australia be offered flexible funding structures that include viable project, grant and contract funding.

25. SCoA recommends that settlement services are implemented in regional areas in such a way that takes into account the greater potential for social isolation in these communities for refugees and migrants and emphasises a holistic approach to government settlement policy across both economic and social areas.

26. SCoA recommends that government agencies are familiarised with SCoA's National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards as a sector-led framework to guide their planning and policy making.

27. SCoA recommends that regional SSPs conduct place-based and needs-based assessments in order to develop initiatives that respond directly to the specific challenges and needs of clients in regional areas.

28. SCoA recommends that government policy continues to support the direction of unlinked humanitarian entrants to regional locations to ensure that SSPs maintain a critical mass of client referrals.

Kildonan UnitingCare's: New Arrival Support Services - Multicultural Sewing Group.

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[93] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Regional settlement provides a viable settlement option for migrants and refugees arriving in Australia. Regional locations can offer:

- a greater sense of community;

- affordable housing;

- less competitive job markets; and

- a more relaxed lifestyle compared to metropolitan locations.

Importantly, SCoA strongly believes that the direction of migrants and refugees to regional Australia has the potential to reinvigorate regional communities and stimulate population growth.

It therefore has multiple advantages for all stakeholders and should be supported through government policy mechanisms and community-led initiatives.

At the outset, there must be a focussed effort by government to implement strategies that encourage regional settlement.

The long-term success of regional settlement, however, requires a holistic approach that considers both economic and social challenges facing regional communities.

An understanding of the interdependence and mutual reinforcement of these economic and social factors is crucial to ensuring effective settlement and long-term retention of migrants and refugees in regional locations.

Federal, state and local government, community organisations and SSPs share mutual responsibility in facilitating the settlement of migrants and refugees in regional areas. Cooperation and collaboration between these bodies will ensure this is realised. SSPs in particular are in the best positions to respond to the specific needs of migrant and refugee communities. They do, however, require the ongoing support of the government and community to ensure their capacity to provide crucial services in these regional areas. As regional settlement continues to gain momentum in settlement discourse, the necessity to support these organisations and engage with the challenges facing regional communities becomes increasingly essential.

Through a concerted focus of government policy, SCoA believes that Australia stands to benefit greatly from the regional settlement of migrants and refugees and that the long term benefits for the individuals, communities and the country as a whole justify any short-term cost in ensuring the proper services and infrastructure are in place to facilitate the smooth and successful settlement and retention of new arrivals in regional Australia.

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