

Community Perspectives on Settlement Issues Affecting New and Emerging Communities in Rural and Regional Australia

A case study of the Iraqi, Afghan, Congolese and Sudanese communities in Shepparton, Victoria

About FECCA

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the peak, national body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We work to promote fairness and responsiveness to our constituency in the delivery and design of government policies and programs.

At the heart of FECCA's work is promoting multiculturalism, embodied in equitable policies and non-discriminatory practices for all Australians, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, racial or religious backgrounds. Towards this end, FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of various cohorts of Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse population are heard by policy and decisions makers, as well as the broader public.

Introduction

The rural and regional settlement of refugees and other humanitarian entrants has been discussed by a series of reports and papers analysing the social or economic benefits of such programs, as well as the challenges and opportunities that they present for the local communities and the families settled in those areas. One of the most recent analyses of rural and regional settlement was produced by Deloitte Access Economics and AMES, in March 2015. *Small towns. Big returns—Economic and social impact of the Karen resettlement in Nhill*¹ provides a fresh insight into the economic and social value of refugee settlement in regional or rural Australia by looking at the success story of the Karen community settled in Nhill, Victoria.

Previous FECCA reports, submissions and issues papers have discussed the opportunities and barriers to sustainable rural and regional settlement faced by migrants, refugees and the wider community. Migrants and refugees settled in rural and regional areas can address sparse population issues, maintain economies, foster innovation and contribute with a wide range of skills to the growth of a region or industry.

Attracting and retaining migrant and refugee communities in rural and regional Australia requires adequate policy frameworks, appropriate support systems and the coordinated action and commitment of local communities, local government and businesses.

The settlement of new arrivals in rural or regional location can raise certain challenges. FECCA has recognised that some of these challenges, including limited availability or lower

¹ AMES and Deloitte Access Economics(2015), *Small towns. Big returns – Economic and social impact of the Karen resettlement in Nhill*, March 2015, available at <https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/Research/19933%20AMES%20Nhill%20Report%20LR.pdf>

quality of services, poorer infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, and social and cultural isolation, are faced by all people living in rural and regional locations in Australia, but for new and emerging communities, these issues can be exacerbated due to specific circumstances. Some of these factors include low English proficiency, limited access to cultural and religious institutions, experience of torture or trauma, racism, labelling and stereotyping. All of these factors have a great impact on effective settlement and social cohesion. As FECCA has previously noted on several occasions, adverse reactions towards immigrants or humanitarian entrants settling in rural and regional areas can create tensions amongst community members and destabilise community harmony. The negative effects can be seen not only on the levels of social cohesion in a location, but they can also adversely impact productivity and economic development.²

FECCA believes that these barriers can be mitigated through adequate settlement services, access to culturally appropriate support mechanisms and improved infrastructure. Coordinated and effective service delivery is also key to ensuring that community needs and expectations can be catered for, in conjunction with strategies to promote community harmony and improve social cohesion, particularly in regions where local attitudes towards new immigrants and cultural diversity tend to be predominantly negative.

This case study aims to make a contribution to the discussion on rural and regional settlement by providing community perspectives on how access to government services and community attitudes impact new and emerging communities' economic participation, social integration, sense of belonging and settlement outcomes. The study draws on feedback gathered during FECCA's Access and Equity consultation in Shepparton, held in March 2015. The focus of the consultation was to assess the effectiveness and availability of government services accessed by members of new and emerging communities, as well as to explore the impact of services on their economic participation and social cohesion in a rural and regional context.

Several sessions were hosted in Shepparton across two different days. On the first day FECCA met with local service providers and stakeholders including representatives of the Shepparton Police, Red Cross, Department of Human Services, Kildonan Uniting Care, GOTAFE, Primary Care Connect and many others to explore their perspectives on the barriers that local new and emerging communities were facing in accessing their services. The second day was dedicated to four separate consultation sessions with members of the most preeminent ethnic communities in Shepparton: the Iraqi, Sudanese, Congolese and Afghan communities.

Both days of consultations generated substantive discussions on a broad range of issues, including employment, education and training, Centrelink, housing and translating and interpreting services. The case study that follows summarises some of the key feedback received from the local new and emerging communities on these issues.

FECCA thanks the Ethnic Communities Councils of Shepparton and District and FECCA Rural and Regional Advisory Committee for the generous assistance provided in hosting FECCA's Shepparton consultation. We also thank the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) for assisting with the translation of flyers for promotion of these consultations.

² FECCA Submission on the Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia, August 2014, available at <http://www.fecca.org.au/images/submissions/fecca%20submission%20on%20the%20green%20paper%20on%20developing%20northern%20australia.pdf>

Shepparton—a brief profile

Shepparton was chosen as a case study due to its significant influx of refugees and humanitarian entrants in the recent years as well as reported high unemployment rates and socio-economic disadvantage. Shepparton is one of the top 20% most disadvantaged localities in Australia³ with a score of 951.9 on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Disadvantage that measures the level of socio-economic disadvantage based on low income, low education attainment, unemployment and the availability of jobs in unskilled occupations.⁴

Unemployment in Shepparton is at a high 6.6%, one percent above the national average. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data the main employing industries in Shepparton are the health care and social assistance – 4.2%, retail trade – 12.7% and manufacturing 12.4%. The industry with the largest number of businesses is agriculture, forestry and fishing, with a total of 1449 businesses.⁵

New and emerging communities in numbers

- The total population of City of Greater Shepparton in 2011-2012 was 62,352 people of which a total of 19.2% were born overseas.⁶
- 10% of the population in 2011 was from a non-English speaking background (an increase from 7.7% in 2006)⁷ and 12.5% spoke a language other than English at home⁸.
- Shepparton has a larger proportion of recent overseas arrivals (those who arrived between 2006 and 2011) compared to other localities in regional Victoria—27.0% arrived during or after 2006, compared to 15.8% for regional Victoria.⁹
- Shepparton has been a pilot site for the Regional Humanitarian Settlement program which started in the region with the settlement of ten families from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2011, there were a total of 1,090 refugee and humanitarian entrants living in the area.¹⁰
- Of the total number overseas born population in Shepparton, 1.8% were born in North Africa and the Middle East, 0.8% were born in South East Asia, 0.4% in North East Asia, 2.6 in Southern and Central Asia and 0.6 in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan feature as the most prominent countries of origin for members of new and emerging communities in Shepparton; the largest changes in numbers between 2006-2011 for members from new and emerging communities were for those coming from Afghanistan (+436 persons) and Sudan (+140 persons).

³ Andrew Markus (2013), *Mapping Social Cohesion Local Areas Report 2013*, available at <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/mapping-social-cohesion-local-areas-report-2013.pdf>

⁴ City of Greater Shepparton – Community profile, available at <http://profile.id.com.au/shepparton/seifa-disadvantage>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011, Greater Shepparton (LGA) available at http://stat.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary®ion=22830&dataset=ABS_NRP9_LGA&geoconcept=REGION&datasetASGS=ABS_NRP9_ASGS&datasetLGA=ABS_NRP9_LGA®ionLGA=REGION®ionASGS=REGION

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ City of Greater Shepparton – Community profile, available at <http://profile.id.com.au/shepparton>

⁸ ABS, 2011

⁹ City of Greater Shepparton – Community profile

¹⁰ Andrew Markus, Op. cit.

Birthplace - ranked by size

City of Greater Shepparton Birthplace	2011		2006		Change
	Number	%	Number	%	2006 to 2011
Afghanistan	557	0.9	121	0.2	+436
Iraq	389	0.6	343	0.6	+46
Sudan	147	0.2	7	0.0	+140
Pakistan	63	0.1	11	0.0	+52
Congo, Democratic Republic of	62	0.1	18	0.0	+44

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2011*. Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.¹¹

- In general the number of people speaking another language at home increased by 33.9% between 2006 and 2011, while some of the largest changes in the spoken languages of the population included people speaking Persian/Dari (+530 persons) and Arabic (+321 persons).
- The proportion of people who spoke another language and English not well or not at all increased from 2.3% in 2006 to 2.9% in 2011.

Proficiency in English

City of Greater Shepparton-Total persons English proficiency	2011		2006		Change
	Number	%	Number	%	2006 to 2011
Speaks English only	49,700	82.2	48,685	85.3	+1,015
Speaks another language, and English well or very well	5,936	9.8	4,360	7.6	+1,576
Speaks another language, and English not well or not at all	1,743	2.9	1,313	2.3	+430
Not stated	3,062	5.1	2,726	4.8	+336

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2011*. Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.¹²

Social cohesion in Shepparton

According to the Scanlon Foundation *2013 Mapping Social Cohesion Local Areas Report*, negative sentiments against immigration and cultural diversity in Shepparton are above the national average. Of the respondents to the social cohesion survey in Shepparton, 52% considered the current immigration intake to be 'too high', 67% disagreed with government funding of minority national or ethnic groups 'to maintain their customs and traditions', 31% have explicit negative sentiments towards immigrants from Iraq, while 33% have negative attitudes towards Muslims. By contrast, 66% of the respondents in Shepparton agree that multiculturalism benefits economic development.

¹¹ City of Greater Shepparton – Community profile, Country of Birth data from 2011, available at <http://profile.id.com.au/shepparton/birthplace?WebId=10>

¹² Ibid.

Table 26: Selected questions, immigration and cultural diversity (percentage)

	National	Shepparton	Murray Bridge	Atherton Tablelands	Mirrabooka	Logan
Disagree with government funding to ethnic minorities for cultural maintenance	56	67	65	74	51	63
Immigration from many different countries does not make Australia stronger	29	31	31	48	29	36
Immigration is too high	42	52	47	59	47	58
Negative towards immigrants from Iraq	22	31	30	42	29	37
Negative attitude to Muslims	N/A*	33	38	45	28	39
Average	37	43	42	54	37	47

* Question not asked in the 2013 National survey

Source: Andrew Markus, 2013, *Mapping Social Cohesion Local Areas Report 2013*

Settlement issues faced by new and emerging communities in Shepparton

Employment

The availability of employment opportunities as well as adequate access to support services are paramount to the successful regional settlement of new and emerging communities. In view of this, the prospects of readily available opportunities in unskilled work in agriculture and food processing industries in Shepparton have attracted a large number of members from new and emerging communities in the area. During FECCA's consultation with the local communities it became apparent that employment was one of the key settlement problems for these communities. The decline in the local food processing industry, closing of businesses and downsizing of workforce, combined with biased attitudes towards migrants and refugee jobseekers and general high unemployment rates have generated a mix of barriers to employment for newly arrived migrants and refugees in the region. Many consultation participants noted that despite the fact that food production and processing make up more than 50% of the local economy, they were still struggling to access employment in those industries.

Prejudice and discrimination

Some community members expressed their frustration that so many migrant and refugees permanently settled in Shepparton were struggling to find any type of employment while many of the jobs in the region were taken by temporary migrants who were transiting the area for short periods up to a maximum of six months. Many of the jobs occupied by seasonal migrants did not require English language skills and could easily be accessed by the migrant and refugee communities permanently established in those areas. Many consultation participants believed that some businesses preferred to employ seasonal migrant workers because they were more willing to accept lower pay rates and cash in hand. These allegations have not been verified.

In a regional town such as Shepparton where socio-economic disadvantage and unemployment are high, competition for jobs is fierce and not having access to the right networks and knowing the right people can significantly lower one's chances of finding employment. Some community members in Shepparton noted that discrimination and racism

were also factors at play. Misconceptions about migrant and refugee jobseekers' ability to do a job add a different layer of barriers. Participants at the consultation noted that local employers didn't tend to employ people from migrant and refugee backgrounds despite labour shortages and high demand for unskilled workers.

The lack of engagement and trust between employers and jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds translates into the reluctance of small businesses in Shepparton to employ jobseekers outside of their personal networks. A participant at the consultation highlighted the need for personal connections to find employment:

If you are white Australian you will get a job. For anything that you need to do here you need to be connected with someone. It is not really racism, but maybe when you go for the interview they put in their mind that you don't have any experience or anything. So they are worried that they if they would give me the job then I would not do the job right. It is not about racism but the trust. (Sudanese woman)

One participant explained that there was a large cannery factory in Shepparton that had the potential to employ many of the community members. However, only a small percentage of the members of new and emerging communities in the area were working in this factory. Some consultation participants suggested that this might be because employment agencies and employers lacked an understanding of people's backgrounds, their skills and how to communicate with them so they were reluctant to hire them because they assumed there were too many challenges involved.

Some community members identified instances of direct discrimination and prejudice against them in gaining or maintaining employment. As an instance, one community participant in Shepparton felt that his accent was used as an excuse to end his employment after his probationary period, despite having performed well in the role. Consultation participants agreed that prejudice and discriminatory behaviour is prevalent in Shepparton especially within small businesses that are not owned by people from migrant backgrounds or those familiar with the migrant experience.

I think there is bias and prejudice existing, we need to acknowledge that, but also people might be uncomfortable, they might not be familiar with having somebody on board who speaks English as a second language, and therefore is too hard, they might feel like they might offend somebody if they say the wrong thing. If people are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the cross-cultural engagement then that can be a challenge for people as well. They might not want to be prejudiced or biased but they are afraid that they might be in their unfamiliarity. (Service provider)

Members of the Congolese and Sudanese communities in Shepparton noted that service providers and employers in Shepparton made a lot of assumptions about jobseekers from African backgrounds, including about their skills and the circumstances they are coming from. They noted that because of their portrayal in the media, African jobseekers were perceived as less likely to be able to meet the roles and responsibilities of a job and were facing misconceptions about their previous work experiences and life circumstances. As an instance, a Congolese male highlighted:

It is understandable that employment is such an issue for Africans. What people see on the TV about Africa is wars, people in refugee camps drinking murky waters, it is Ebola. So you bring an African to work in a factory he doesn't have the positive story about where they are coming from. And that makes it harder for the employer to give that person responsibilities. There is misconception. (Congolese man)

Skills recognition

The expectation that all the members of the community will access unskilled work in agriculture and food processing industries fails to recognise the diversity of skills, experiences and career interests that new and emerging communities bring with them. The ability to find employment that matches one's skillset was noted as a key issue during our consultations. The type of employment provided in Shepparton's canneries, orchards or farms might not fit with people's skills and career objectives, while skilled work opportunities are very limited. The lack of employment prospects in areas other than the food processing and farms impacts the sustainability of a critical mass of migrants and refugees in the region, as many are driven out to seek opportunities in the main metropolitan locations.

The Iraqi community members participating in the consultation noted that the majority of Iraqis in Shepparton came as educated migrants or refugees, some of them having high school diplomas and degrees. The majority of them came from urban settings where they were working as carpenters, plasters, plumbers, or other trades or skills areas which could become a great asset for the Australian job market. However, the local labour market does not benefit from the expertise of these communities while qualified members of the community continue to face barriers in accessing employment that corresponds to their skills.

Most of the community members in Shepparton were not aware of the skills and trades recognition services. They noted that Centrelink, employment services providers or skills recognition services didn't promote these options to them and did not provide any information about how they can have their experiences and skills recognised so that they can benefit from it and work in areas that would fit those skills.

The biggest criticism was directed towards employment services providers and their responsibility to discuss with their clients the history of their work experiences and skills acquired in their home country. Community members in Shepparton noted that job seekers were normally asked by employment services provider about what certificates they had, ignoring the fact that they might still have certain skills without having them certified. Employment services providers should have cultural competency and understand that different countries have different certification systems or ways of recognising someone's skills without having a formal document. Many could have come from situations of displacement and refugee camps where they didn't have access to formal education, training or attestation of their skills despite having many years of experience in a specific trade.

The other problem is that the majority of these communities are refugees or migrant but not skilled migrants so they are not going to have this experience about recognising your degree or trades in order to get the visa. So we don't hear about it and there are no agencies specified to contact. They should promote it more through Centrelink or job services. Some people can have good experience like a carpenter for example but nobody is going to push them to have that experience or skill recognised. We have many in the community with experiences as mechanics, plumbers or plaster, etc but they never heard of the opportunity of having their skills recognised. (Iraqi man)

Another community participant noted that not having their skills from overseas recognised was a great issue along with not being able to find opportunities in their areas of expertise. Other community members commented that even if their previous skills were recognised and they managed to find a job in that area, they would likely be employed at an apprenticeship level and paid accordingly. One consultation participant cited an instance when he found a carpenter job advertised in a newspaper but when he called the employer he was informed

that despite having 10 years' experience as a carpenter in his country of origin, his wage would be less than the normal rates because he didn't have any experience in Australia.

Exploitation and work compensation entitlements

Accounts of alleged exploitation of migrants and refugees in Shepparton were discussed during the community consultation. Service providers noted that a number of migrant and refugee workers in the region were falling under the radar of government agencies such as Centrelink and Jobs Services Australia and worked in regional areas doing farm work for cash in hand. They explained that limited access to meaningful employment is something that puts people at risk of exploitation because they are willing to explore any informal means of accessing employment when all the others avenues have been exhausted.

The risk of exploitation is exacerbated by the fact that a number of migrants and refugees are not registered with Centrelink or any other Government agency and therefore they are not receiving any support. Some of the factors that make this group of job seekers vulnerable to exploitation in addition to a lack of job opportunities and support are a lack of work entitlements, lack of understanding and awareness of their rights under the Australian workplace relations system and language difficulties.

FECCA is aware that the Fair Work Ombudsman plays an important role in educating culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds about their workplace rights and entitlements. However, our community consultations revealed that newly arrived migrants and refugees in the Shepparton area were not aware of the role of the Ombudsman and how they could access support. The alleged prevalence of exploitation happening in Shepparton and other regional areas is extremely concerning and indicates that the engagement strategy adopted by the Fair Work Ombudsman might not be effective in this area and is not reaching out to these communities.

Similar concerns were raised in relation to migrant and refugee workers' awareness of workers compensation entitlements. Community perspectives noted that many people with physical injuries from migrant and refugee communities were not aware of their right to access workers compensation in case of injury and were not familiar with what was considered unsafe working conditions.

I've seen a lot of people with various physical injuries as a result of working in agriculture. And they haven't been able to access work cover, even though they were being paid and paying tax, they were not familiar with the work cover process. They have long lasting injuries that makes it difficult for them to find work now because of ongoing body pain. They didn't access work cover because they didn't have any idea about it. And it's too late now. (Service provider)

Provision of employment services

Employment services play an essential role in addressing the above mentioned issues and other barriers such as language proficiency, work experience and familiarity with Australian workplace cultures and employment systems. The effectiveness of service delivery depends on agency's ability to adequately engage with its diverse client base and to provide a tailored response to their needs.

New and emerging communities in Shepparton have expressed significant frustration in relation to the local provision of employment services. Criticism was noted in relation to employment agencies' lack of understanding of their client base, including the backgrounds they were coming from, their circumstances, what skills they brought with them and what

their migration journey meant for them and their ability to find employment. A lack of consideration of the impact that refugee-like experiences could have on someone's ability to access employment is reportedly hindering employment agencies' ability to provide a tailored service, personalise their engagement and deliver adequate employment outcomes for their clients.

This lack of awareness and cultural competence is translating into client dissatisfaction with the service and inadequate support. Consultation participants noted that employment agencies were treating them as if they had been born in Australia and were not provided with additional support, despite presenting complex issues, including language barriers, experiences of trauma, mental health issues, disruptions in their education and employment history due to protracted displacement, and lack of familiarity with Australian workplace culture and systems, including the process of looking for a job and attending an interview.

Community members cited instances where jobseekers with poor English skills and illiterate in their own language were simply directed to a web search engine or newspaper to look for employment opportunities. They explained that this happened despite the service provider being aware of the client's language barriers which became apparent from the difficulties they were having communicating in English with the services providers themselves. Reading written information such as job adverts and understanding the requirements was a significant challenge and considerably decreased the chances of jobseekers to achieve a positive employment outcome.

When you go to the reception I talk my language because I don't know English, we can't communicate. So communication at the reception is the first issue. Now I need to go and look for a job. They will put a newspaper on the table and tell you these are the types of jobs that are available, go and look for them. But I have a problem to communicate with them, how am I going to know what is here? But I am under pressure, I have to do it. (Sudanese man)

In addition to limited cultural competence, employment services in Shepparton were criticised for their lack of flexibility and ability to adopt a tailored and creative approach to service provision so that a client's previous experiences, skills, background and personal circumstances can be considered in a holistic way. Community perspectives indicated that employment services were generally not client centred and therefore not effective in identifying and responding to their diverse pool of clients. Feedback indicated that employment services were driven by the service rules and what the service provider wanted to prioritise and deliver, instead of being driven by consumers and their expressed needs.

Many community members commented that the current design of the employment services did not cater for newly arrived migrants and refugees because of rigid rules, operating guidelines and structure which were most suitable for people who were born or have lived for most of their life in Australia, had good command of English, a general awareness of the local workplace cultures and systems and perhaps local work experience. Because of this streamlined focus, employment agencies do not have the tools to adopt a more tailored and innovative approach and develop an understanding of the diverse backgrounds of their clients and the support they need. Community views noted that this was reflected in the inadequate support provided by employment providers to migrant and refugee jobseekers and on the low job placement rates for this group.

[T]hey will not understand the background of that person, how to communicate with them, what's their abilities and skills, what is the background they came from? How to work for that person? Is he a refugee? Did he come from Iraq? How much do you

know about their country? Maybe that person has a diploma in something or a degree and is not just a refugee coming from the desert. (Iraqi man)

A strong sense of disillusionment was shared by most of the consultation participants who explained that they didn't trust that employment agencies would help them access employment, and the only reason why they continued to access these services was because they were constrained to do so by their Centrelink requirements and they were accessing them as a 'tick-box' exercise. Some community members reported that they had been accessing employment services for 4-5 years without any positive outcome.

We don't receive much help from the employment services providers. I've been here for 8 years and they only helped me to find a job on a farm where I worked for 2 years. But after that, for 6 years, nothing. Always calling me for the next appointment but nothing. No suggestions. Sometimes they help me fill in the application but I always get rejected. And I have my experience and my certificate 3 but still no job. The employment services are just telling me to keep applying. (Congolesse man)

Employment is one of the biggest problems in Shepparton and around the area and many access the employment services despite not having good English skills and knowing that they won't be able to find a job. They continue to access the services but they feel lost because they don't know how to find a job. (Iraqi man)

Reflecting on their frustration with the service, some community members suggested that the Government should actively monitor how well employment agencies were performing in relation to newly arrived migrant and refugees and they should review the number of migrant and refugee jobseekers that mainstream employment services have successfully placed in employment over the last several years. The results of such review should be able to identify the gaps in delivery and the design of services, as well as recommend actions for redress.

Members of new and emerging communities noted that in a small regional location like Shepparton, word of mouth and community connections are particularly important when accessing employment. Many consultation participants explained that the few employment opportunities they were able to find were through their own means and with assistance from their communities and not through employment agencies.

The effectiveness of employment services in addressing barriers to employment for migrants and refugee jobseekers is negatively affected by their lack of creativity and proactive approach to identifying issues and addressing them. Members of new and emerging communities in Shepparton provided feedback about the lack of viable options put forward to them by the employment agencies. Many of them reported that they were trapped in a cycle whereby they are referred to the job agency by Centrelink but they are unable to speak English so the employment agency will refer them to English classes. However they have large families to support and have to work, so learning English without getting a job is not a suitable option for many of them.

It's hard to find a job even if you speak a bit of English. The government is pushing them to work but they can't speak English. Then the Government is pushing them to go and study English but they have families to support so they have to work, so what can you do? (Sudanese man)

Local community members believed that breaking this cycle required a creative approach. They suggested that English language barriers could be addressed in a more suitable way by providing people with more support to learn the language and other skills on the job rather than solely in a classroom environment. This could address other challenges such as

the risk of losing work skills while studying and it will allow them to build some work experience and earn a living while learning. This solution could work as an arrangement between the employment services provider and the employer that would allow jobseekers to be placed in employment while continuing to receive support to develop their language and professional skills on the job. Such a program could produce better results in terms of language and skills development than class-based training and would also encourage businesses to adopt a more positive approach to cultural diversity in the workplace and combat discrimination.

A different perspective on English language proficiency and access to employment was provided in relation to the type of work mostly available in Shepparton. Both service providers and community members commented that the local job market did not present too many challenges in terms of English skills because the language requirements for working in orchards, farms or canneries were not as stringent. The type of work required in those industries did not involve much communication in English other than the basic language and employees tended to work alongside members of their communities, which meant that they were able to speak their own language and missed the opportunity to practice English.

Service providers have warned that the easy access to this type of employment and the comfortable environment of this type of work for new arrivals could create issues for this group of jobseekers further down the track though. Lacking opportunities for learning or practicing English can get people stuck in a cycle whereby working in farms and orchards is the only employment they can get because they didn't learn the language and they did not develop their skills so that they can work in the areas they are interested in.

[T]he problem is that they end up staying in that type of employment rather than trying to find other employment because it is what they can do and what they feel comfortable with. They are not pushed to do something else. And I think that because of that there is only a relatively small number of new and emerging communities that are accessing employment services. They use other community members to find farm work or there are some contractors set up here to provide workforce. (Service provider)

Working in partnership with local businesses

Drawing on the above discussions, consultation participants have agreed that employment agencies should play a bigger role in brokering better understanding and relationship between employers and jobseekers, as well in helping to break misconceptions about migrants and refugee jobseekers in the workplace. Both service providers and community members have highlighted that employment agencies cannot deliver outcomes without involving the employers in the process and without investing time and resources in getting to know a client's abilities and interests and act as an advocate on their behalf to the employer.

Local businesses might not have access to the same level of information about the local job market as employment agencies have and therefore they might not be aware of local workforce issues. This lack of awareness does not allow them to contribute to the communities in which they operate by developing strategies to address workforce issues. Employment agencies should take up the responsibility of educating employers about the barriers and needs of employees and job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities as well as the benefits of having a culturally diverse workforce. Employment agencies should demonstrate better leadership in promoting the skills of their culturally diverse client base and work towards breaking the stigma, building trust and preventing discrimination.

FECCA is aware of good practice examples where such partnerships between employment agencies and businesses have delivered excellent employment opportunities and outcomes for newly arrived migrant and refugee jobseekers and agrees that such models could benefit the local new and emerging communities in Shepparton.¹³

Adopting a more engaging role as a liaison between jobseekers and employers, also means that employment agencies need to maintain their responsibility over a client's wellbeing after they are placed on the job to ensure that they receive adequate support to fulfil the roles of the job, including skills and language training and the provision of information about workplace rights and responsibilities. A two way engagement should also facilitate clear understanding between employers and jobseekers about the expectations on the job, including the support that was needed to ensure the best employment outcomes.

Self-employment

Consultation participants commented that there was a lot of entrepreneurial interest amongst new and emerging communities in Shepparton but that members of these communities lacked access to adequate support and information about how to set up businesses.

Some consultation participants quoted the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) program as an excellent initiative for helping jobseekers to set up and run their own business while still receiving the equivalent of a Centrelink payment. General feedback received about the program was very positive, with participants noting that it was generally quite successful and had positive outcomes for its beneficiaries, but that there is a need for increased promotion of the program to the local communities and provision of information about setting up small businesses. A Congolese community participant noted that he had benefited from the support of the NEIS program when he tried to set up his own IT business and suggested that employment services should focus on promoting better awareness about this option.

Some service providers explained that the program had been a great success in Shepparton and provided a great employment alternative for migrants and refugee that had certain skills, but that it didn't seem to be running in the area anymore. They too noted that there was a need for greater dissemination of information on this because the process of setting up their own business was seen as very complex by the local migrant and refugee communities and they needed more support to understand the requirements and regulations around setting up a business.

A Service provider in Shepparton reported that some local communities had attempted to provide childcare services by starting and running family day cares. They noted that some Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) misled many new and emerging community members into enrolling in bogus childcare courses and the local market was now saturated with people who hold qualifications in home-based childcare. Some of them tried to set up their own business without being aware that their newly acquired status of self-employed meant that they were no longer eligible for Centrelink payments. Without Centrelink support and without the knowledge of how to run a business these people are at great risk of financial difficulties. Many of them didn't know what their reporting requirements were to Centrelink, how to do profit and loss statements and how to declare their income. According to local service providers, many community members had to cease their home-based childcare services as they were not lucrative and they struggled to manage them.

¹³ Such examples include Accor's *Job Ready Program for migrants* - a partnership between AMES, Department of Employment and the Accor hotels and the *Bright Employment* program in partnership with Salvation Army and other employment services providers, (more information on this program available at <http://www.brightemployment.com.au/index.html>)

Volunteering and work experience

Feedback from community members in Shepparton reiterated that lack of local work experience was a major barrier for many jobseekers from new and emerging communities. For many their migration history could include significant periods of time spent in situations of displacement and therefore disrupted employment history. Reengaging with the labour market can take a longer period of time even for those who come to Australia with previous qualifications and skills. Volunteering has been at times suggested as a means to address these gaps in experience and become familiar with the Australian workplace culture.

Service providers in Shepparton noted that a particular issue in the area in terms of volunteering opportunities was that not many local businesses or organisations were either willing or had the necessary resources to support someone in a volunteering role. Placement of migrant and refugee jobseekers in volunteering positions relevant to their qualifications and interests required an adequate organisational infrastructure and some investment on behalf of the host organisation in order to be able to manage volunteers. Addressing language and cultural barriers for volunteers from migrant or refugee backgrounds would require one-on-one support and therefore the ability to employ adequate human resources to coordinate this support. Without incentives or financial support from the government, many organisations are reluctant to engage in volunteering programs with people from non-English speaking backgrounds because of the perceived costs and because they don't feel comfortable with the challenges that the person might face.

Shepparton was a trial area for the *Work for the Dole* program so some community members were able to provide their views on the effectiveness of the program. Some of them commented that the 'work for the dole' placements should be developed into real jobs instead of being volunteering opportunities or at least should involve experiences that are real employment pathways and are connected to a person's skills and professional interests. One Sudanese male in Shepparton noted that sometimes the opportunities provided required them to work in charity shops or cleaning the toilets at the train station which might not be the most suitable or helpful work experience for the type of jobs they were pursuing.

Education and Training

Feedback received about education and training from new and emerging communities in Shepparton covered a wide range of issues, including English language training, school education, and skills training. General comments about English language programs were consistent with feedback received by FECCA on a regular basis about the insufficient number of hours provided under the Adult Migrant English Program and the lack of flexibility around teaching methods that would take into consideration that some people might be illiterate in their own language or they might have not experienced a formal educational setting previously. A lack of focus on teaching English to prepare people for employment and equip them with language terms related to their career interests and skills was also raised in relation to English language courses.

More practical teaching methods or ways of delivering language training were suggested as potentially providing better outcomes. Some community members believed that it would be much more productive for them if they could learn English while engaged in skills training or employment. This method would allow them to learn language relevant to their area of expertise and increase their chances to access meaningful employment.

The potential of training programs to constitute a career pathway was also discussed by new and emerging communities in Shepparton. Limited variety of training and study courses delivered is an issue common to many rural and regional localities and was highlighted in Shepparton. Community members in Shepparton noted that there was a mismatch between the courses on offer at various training providers and the reality of the local job market. They suggested that training and education providers should seek to better integrate their courses with the diverse backgrounds and skills of their prospective students from new and emerging communities as well with the local demand for skills and employment prospects. One community member for instance explained that training programs should constitute employment pathways and should equip them with the necessary skills required for performing a job:

Some of courses that I've seen in TAFE were introductory courses. If I want to join a mechanic course and you just give me introduction to mechanics, it is not going to solve my problem. Nobody is going to employ me with an introductory course in mechanics, so there should be a full course that will give you a full qualification and then get a job. (Congolese man)

A particular issue raised in Shepparton was the alleged exploitation of new and emerging communities by some RTOs. Local communities have reported that some RTOs provided with financial subsidies by the government based on the number of people they have enrolled in their courses, have tried to attract people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, new arrivals in particular, to register in their courses.

The RTOs have reportedly targeted rural and regional communities and new arrivals in particular and provided them with various material incentives in order to convince them to enrol. Community members reported that prospective students were not provided with adequate information about the real prospects of getting a job upon completion of a qualification as well as the language requirements for working in certain industries. Consultation participants explained that that large number of community members in Shepparton ended up enrolling in childcare courses with the expectation that they would be able to open family day care business at the end of it.

The result was that the local market was saturated with people studying for, or qualified in childcare services, without real employment prospects or the ability to run a private business. Because the courses provided but these RTOs are government subsidised, that means that those who enrol in these courses become ineligible for any other government subsidised training programs and therefore can forfeit their opportunity to choose a different career path and pursue a different qualification.

Further concerns were expressed in relation to the education of children in a school environment. Many community members were dissatisfied with the quality of education provided in the local public schools and noted that their children were not getting the level of support required to perform well. One community member noted that there was a striking difference between the level of education and the support provided in public schools in metropolitan areas to children from migrant and refugee backgrounds and what was available in the rural and regional schools. Some community members noted that that there was a lot of pressure on parents to fill in the educational gaps and complement the education their children were getting at school. One Iraqi man noted:

[A]ll my children are going to primary school. They don't get good support. My children were in year 5 and 6 and they didn't know how to do calculations but they learned. Some of the things I had to teach them myself. Some parents complained that if their children were not good at maths for example then the teachers would say

ok then you go and do something else. They should persist and get them at the same level as the rest of the children. We want teachers to follow up. They should be given the opportunity to do as much exercise as possible. (Iraqi man)

Instances of discrimination and bullying in schools were also discussed. A female community member explained that one of her children had become victim of racism in their school but that she had not been able to receive the support of the school principal to find a resolution for her issue. She noted that the school management had failed to adequately address the incident.

New and emerging communities in Shepparton have reported a lack of enthusiasm within the local schools structure to follow up on migrant and refugee students' progress in relation to English language skills or to promote a climate of social inclusion and free from bullying and discrimination.

Engaging with Centrelink

Consultation participants discussed Centrelink's engagement with new and emerging communities in the region. Some of the feedback referred to the availability of face-to-face engagement and issues associated with the self-service model adopted by the Department of Human Services. Members of new and emerging communities have identified that the automated service delivery and the focus on self-service through internet or over the phone creates numerous challenges for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and cannot accommodate their language barriers and limited familiarity with government service provision. The self-service option for new arrivals that don't speak English is not efficient because it doesn't offer language options, so people cannot do their Centrelink business online in their own language.

If you come from Africa using the phone and talking to an interpreter is very very hard. Our language includes a lot of signs and makes conversation on the phone difficult. It doesn't work. (Congolese woman)

Local communities in Shepparton highlighted that many new arrivals could be illiterate, lack computer skills and not have access to the internet which would significantly hinder their ability to access online information or the self service system. Language barriers and lack of familiarity with the Centrelink system and entitlements constitute additional challenges. Most of the community members, especially new arrivals, feel that they get better results and are more confident if they can talk to a person face-to-face and they can provide the full details of their circumstances. Face-to-face interaction allows the service to demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness as they can explore the different factors that generate a person's problem and can identify together with the client the best workable solution.

The focus on self-service through internet, online or over the phone is not an ideal way for new arrivals to access service regardless of their language level. The nuance when you have a face-to-face conversation with someone who knows nothing about Centrelink as government service and what they do, the body language, the eye contact are so important and so critical. (Service provider)

Face-to-face engagement can also generate difficulties if the right interpreters or bicultural workers are not available. One community member noted instances when he had attended the Centrelink office but there was no interpreter available for his language or dialect so he had to go home and reschedule his visit. With transport being a significant issue in rural and regional locations, having to reschedule a visit to the Centrelink office can be very

inconvenient and costly for members of new and emerging communities. Another member of the community noted that the availability of bicultural workers at the Centrelink office in Shepparton did not reflect the local ethnic diversity. He reported that the office had Iraqi and Afghan workers but they had no one from an African background to provide assistance to the local Sudanese or Congolese communities.

Some other community members reported that they struggle to understand the correspondence received from Centrelink because it is written in English, the information is complex or they might be illiterate. Others reported difficulties with understanding their entitlements and the complex regulations of the welfare system. Getting clear, timely and helpful information about their Centrelink entitlements and responsibilities was an issue for many community members. A female participant in Shepparton noted that she had received confusing and contradicting information from different people in Centrelink.

[T]he problem with Centrelink is that we never receive the same information about an issue. Everybody is saying something different about the same thing. For example when I asked about the disability pension and how many hours the person is entitled to work, everybody was saying something different. I can't get to the right answer. (Iraqi woman)

The lack of feedback provided by Centrelink about why applications for certain benefits had been rejected was another issue flagged. Community members noted that many of them were struggling to understand their entitlements and they would benefit from receiving feedback from Centrelink about why their applications were not successful. One consultation participant explained that he had filed an application for a disability pension and submitted numerous reports from the doctor but his application was not accepted and he hadn't been given a reason or explanation for the decision.

In other instances community members commented that they were not receiving timely notifications from Centrelink about irregularities with their benefits and reporting requirements and had their payments stopped without warning and without providing an opportunity to redress the issue. Community members suggested that Centrelink should be encouraged to adopt a more problem solving attitude and ensure that the client was given a chance to explain the situation and fix the issue before their benefits are stopped.

[I]f there is an error with the payment or the benefit or the application they don't notify the applicant straight away. Sometimes it takes ages to notify them. Because of that long period of notification, it creates more complications in the case. (Iraqi woman)

Another community member noted that Centrelink should better coordinate its services with other agencies involved in managing someone's case, particularly in a small location like Shepparton where agencies are in close proximity of each other. He cited an instance when he submitted a medical certificate to TAFE to justify his absence from classes because he was sick, and despite that, Centrelink stopped his benefit payment because his illness didn't show up in their records.

Service providers have noted that Centrelink was addressing some of these issues through targeted community information sessions and through ensuring that bicultural workers and interpreters were readily available on site or via the Centrelink multicultural phone line. However service providers themselves noted that engagement at the grassroots levels and targeting the right members of some communities can be difficult and can be a slow process if community members are not familiar and confident enough to engage with government representatives.

Translating and Interpreting

The availability of translating and interpreting services in rural and regional areas has been discussed in more detail in FECCA's Issues paper, *Use of Language Services in Rural and Regional Areas*, developed in May 2014. With regards to Shepparton, members of new and emerging communities noted that there was a significant shortage of interpreters in the region and communities were relying heavily for their language needs on the few community interpreters that were available in the region. This was putting a lot of strain on the community interpreters who were struggling to meet the demands for their service.

FECCA has been made aware of concerning reports that some health practitioners were refusing to access professional interpreters when engaging with people with low English proficiency and were requesting patients to rely on their family members or friends to convey the information to them. Some consultation participants noted that health practitioners refused to register with the free interpreting service because of the additional time required to spend with a patient if an interpreter was to be engaged. FECCA is concerned that not engaging professional interpreters can result in significantly poor health outcomes for the patients and should be immediately addressed.

Most of the interpreters are usually members of the family for when they go to the doctor or the dentist. There is TIS which is Melbourne based and the Goulbourn Valley health is contacting them whenever is needed via phone. I am aware that there is one locally she only comes one day a week and works with the GVhealth. But apart from that it is a scarce phenomenon and there is no agency in Shepparton. (Service provider)

For specialist appointments which can be difficult to get into because of long waiting lists, if you have a client that turns up to the appointment and the specialist does not have an interpreter means there will be very poor health outcomes. I had experiences with specialists refusing to use interpreters and demanding the patient to be bringing their own. The specialist was concerned about liability that the interpreter wouldn't interpret properly. So then he would expect the client to bring their own family member. (Service provider)

The scarce availability of interpreters in Shepparton was also affecting the local law enforcement agency's ability to adequately deal with community issues. Reliance on community interpreters was at times significant because accessing telephone interpreting services was not always possible through the station if the police officers were attending a reported incident in the field.

In the case of family and domestic violence, consultation participants identified that the use of community interpreters in a small town like Shepparton is not always adequate because of the tight community connections, possible conflict of interests and confidentiality issues. Domestic violence can be a sensitive issue not only for the family itself but also for the wider community. Having a community interpreter can affect the objective perspective of the interpretation and can negatively affect the outcome of the law enforcement intervention for the victim. Consultation participants also identified instances when community interpreters utilised on a domestic violence incident have in fact taken part in the domestic conflict and altered the interpretation of testimonies. In another instance the interpreter happened to be offender, without the police being able to identify that was the case because the interpretation had been twisted and turned against the victim. These cases have created significant problems for the victim and for the resolution of the case itself.

Encouraging more community interpreters to undertake professional training and pursue NAATI accreditation had been proposed as a solution to addressing the scarcity of interpreters in the region. One community members commented that in addition to all the other new and emerging languages, Arabic interpreters were still in high demand in the area and more opportunities should be made available to them to pursue interpreting training and qualifications.

Housing

Feedback received in relation to housing highlighted challenges faced by newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants in accessing the private rental market and biased attitudes towards new arrivals in the region. Community members explained that their migration background, lack of community connections, referrals and reliance on Centrelink payments are major barriers to accessing housing. The lack of trust on behalf of real estate agents and landlords means that new arrivals are faced with misconceptions and negative attitudes towards their ability to be a good tenant. Some consultation participants suggested that government, as part of the settlement services provided to new arrivals, should develop better partnerships with the real estate agents and mitigate some of the barriers that new arrivals face, including the lack of a tenancy record in Australia and references.

Every time we were putting an application for the house that we can afford the rent for, we keep receiving a rejection letter saying that the house was not available anymore. And after two weeks if you look on the internet the house is still on the market available for renting. So the question is what kind of people are they looking for? They say no because you are not working, you are new to Australia, they are asking for references. I am not working but I am always paying my rent on time with the money that I get from Centrelink. (Congolese man)

[...] they are available for renting but this town is having the first migrant experience and they don't want to rent to new arrivals. You go to the real estate agent and say look I am very interested in putting an application for this house. And in couple of hours they will call and say it is gone that someone else came. And in a week we still see that the place is available. (Sudanese man)

An additional issue identified was the lack of information about tenant's rights and responsibilities. Community members explained that many of them were not aware of the beginning about their rights and responsibilities and didn't know that once they move into a new house they should check that everything was in good order and record any irregularities. One female community member cited an instance where she had moved in a house where the carpet was damaged but she didn't consider reporting it to the real estate agent. As a consequence the real estate agent placed the blame for the damage on her and compiled a report on the situation which was filed to her tenancy record. The report worked against her when trying to access the rental market again.

[W]hen we came here we didn't know that we had to check if something was bad in the house. And then when the landlord came they said that we damaged the carpet here and damaged that there. But that was the way we found it. The discussion had no solution. And they made a report about it and when we looked for another house we wouldn't get the house because of that report of previously damaging a house. We weren't given a chance to explain that we didn't damage the house and that they found it like that. (Congolese woman)

Another community member noted that he was not informed by the real estate agent or the settlement service provider that he had the responsibility of mowing the grass around the house that he was renting. The same lack of information was noted in relation to their responsibility to hire professional cleaners when moving out of the property.

In Africa we don't use lawn mowers and for 6 months here I didn't know what to do with the grass. I didn't know what to cut it with. We need to learn so many things. Also we didn't know about what is expected of us in terms of cleaning. The carpets that we have in Africa you can just remove go outside and clean them. So we didn't know that after 6 months we need to call a professional cleaner. (Congolese man)

Conclusion

Despite the many challenges that new and emerging communities in Shepparton continue to face, their settlement in the region is still regarded as a success story and the benefits it generated for both the local communities and those coming from a migrant and humanitarian background are widely recognised. However, community feedback revealed that creating an adequate support infrastructure, developing targeted policies and strengthening social cohesion required further work. Drawing on community feedback, FECCA recommends the following overarching principles and general observations that should drive collective efforts to improve the settlement outcomes of new and emerging communities in Shepparton:

- The design of policy responses should start with the recognition of the particular challenges faced by new and emerging communities in rural and regional areas including social cohesion issues.
- Policy responses addressing the settlement challenges faced by new and emerging communities in Shepparton should tap into the existing resources in the community, be inclusive of the target communities and work in collaboration with them.
- Discrimination, accessibility and equitability are cross-cutting issues that affect service delivery, employment, educational and housing outcomes and the general wellbeing of new and emerging communities in Shepparton.
- Employment remains the biggest settlement issue and for many is the prerequisite for successful settlement. The type of barriers that new and emerging communities in Shepparton face in accessing employment require innovative approaches and should involve partnerships and better coordination amongst local businesses, government services and local communities.
- Social cohesion issues in Shepparton require the development of strategies to foster positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and community harmony. It is important that targeted and coordinated strategies to tackle discrimination and racism are developed at community, government and private sector level and are implemented through community education and culturally competent service delivery.
- Community engagement and targeted information provision are a prerequisite for ensuring that new and emerging communities are safe, can make informed decisions about their options and have a clear understanding of their rights, entitlements and responsibilities.