

27 September 2019

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT

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### **Inquiry into migration in regional Australia**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to government and the broader community. FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of various cohorts of Australia's CALD population are heard by policy and decision makers, as well as the broader public. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

FECCA commends the Joint Standing Committee on Migration for the opportunity to provide comment on this inquiry. FECCA would welcome the opportunity to expand on this submission as required. For enquiries, please contact FECCA CEO Mohammad Al-Khafaji on [ceo@fecca.org.au](mailto:ceo@fecca.org.au) or on (02) 6282 5755.

FECCA believes that settling in a regional area can benefit both the established communities and new arrivals to Australia (humanitarian entrants and skilled migrants). Migrant and refugee groups have great potential and can contribute with a range of skills to the growth of a region or industry.

FECCA has a dedicated Rural and Regional Advisory Committee to provide advice and grassroots feedback on the distinct circumstances and needs of migrant and refugee communities living in rural and regional locations. Through this committee, FECCA aims to promote a greater understanding of these issues to government, business and the general community, increase representation of multicultural regional communities at a national level and provide a national forum for information exchange, discussion and consultation on regional settlement.

FECCA also has rural and regional members across Australia including:

- Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council
- Diversitat (Geelong Ethnic Communities' Council)
- Ethnic Council of Shepparton & District
- Gippsland Ethnic Communities' Council

- Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities' Council
- North East Multicultural Association
- Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities' Council Inc
- Multicultural Communities' Council of the Gold Coast
- Ethnic Communities Council of Logan INC
- Multicultural Communities' Council of Illawarra
- Multicultural Council of Griffith
- Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga
- Young & District Multicultural Association
- Hunter Multicultural Communities Inc

## **Recommendations**

- Recognise that all regional and rural town and areas are different and have different needs and strengths.
- Ensure adequate and appropriate funding to settlement services, including services for skilled migrants and their families.
- Ensure adequate and appropriate funding for local and regional CALD and ethno specific organisations and associations as these often serve as a bridge between new arrivals, established community and government.
- Ensure a bottom-up approach in welcoming and supporting refugees and migrants where rural and regional towns are consulted with and included in the process of settling migrants and refugees in their areas.
- Ensure adequate and appropriate access to English language training and translation/interpreter services.
- Reduce the barriers to employment of migrants by supporting employers with the skills needed to manage diverse workplaces including cultural competence training; support to increase understanding and confidence in overseas qualifications and English language assessments; support in designing Multicultural Access and Equity Plans and inclusive workplace policies.

## **Discussion**

For migration to regional Australia to be successful, it must be sustainable and beneficial for both the local community and for the migrants themselves. Ensuring that migrants enjoy a quality of life that encourages them to stay in regional areas should be an important policy goal. Employment is a critical aspect for the sustainability of regional migration, but it cannot be viewed in isolation and should not be the sole focus of regional migration policy. Simply being employed in regional Australia is not enough to ensure the success and viability of regional migration.

Based on FECCA's experience with regional migration issues, there are a range of factors which need to be considered and in place for migration to small and mid-sized communities to be successful. These factors increase the likelihood that migrants can successfully put down roots in regional communities which is ultimately beneficial for the local community, for employers and for the individuals involved. These factors also necessitate consideration of, and investment in, both infrastructure and services.

FECCA emphasise the need to involve the broader community in the planning and welcoming of new migrants. Support from the established community is essential for a successful welcome and retaining of new arrivals. This includes a two-way information provision. While new arrivals should have as much information as possible about their new community, it is

also important to remember that community members and local service providers also benefit from knowing more about the background of their new arrivals.

### **National and international best practice strategies to encourage people to settle and stay in regional areas**

Rural and regional areas can derive enormous benefit from well-managed migrant and humanitarian settlement. Family connections, job opportunities and lifestyle are three major reasons given by migrants for settling in regional and rural areas. It is critical that regional settlement for migrants is underpinned by adequate planning and funding for rural development.

Encouraging skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants to move to regional Australia is dependent on the ability of the regions to cater for their specific needs and facilitate their settlement in an environment free of discrimination or racism. Adequate settlement services, including for skilled migrants, access to cultural appropriate support mechanisms, and improved infrastructure are just a few key issues to be factored into the policy design and planning process. Further, FECCA recommends there are agreed mechanisms for coordination of settlement and other services. Collaboration between services, settlement and others, must be facilitated and encouraged.

Some of the specific challenges faced by people from CALD backgrounds that need addressing to encourage settlement in rural and regional Australia include:

- limited knowledge about services available
- limited information on how to access services
- settlement and other services are poorly structured to cater to the diversity of migrants
- limited education opportunities
- unemployment (particularly of young people) and underemployment
- difficulty accessing housing especially in the private rental market
- racism and discrimination.

As a result, after a brief period in a rural location, these migrants move to metropolitan areas where they can access a greater range of services and support including larger communities of people with whom they share a language or cultural heritage.

FECCA supports the work of Welcoming Cities and Regional Australia Institute in their efforts to ensure a successful settlement process. The Welcoming Cities initiative supports local councils to consider, commit to, communicate, plan for, build and sustain a welcoming community'.<sup>1</sup> The Welcoming Cities Standard establishes a framework for local councils to 'benchmark their cultural diversity and inclusion policies [...], identify where and how further efforts should be directed, and assess progress over time'.<sup>2</sup>

The Regional Australia Institute's '*Steps to Settlement Success: A Toolkit for rural and regional communities*' was developed to respond to the needs of regional communities in the process of settling new migrants and refugees. The toolkit explores seven stages of the settlement process and identifies action points for each stage. The seven stages are: initiating a settlement strategy, organising and consulting local community, welcoming and hosting new migrants, securing employment for new migrants, securing housing for new migrants, fostering community cohesion, and considering culture, customs and environment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://welcomingcities.org.au/what/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://welcomingcities.org.au/the-standard/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MigrationToolkit\\_v6.pdf](http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MigrationToolkit_v6.pdf)

There are two case studies of successful regional settlement as follows:

#### Case study: Nhill, Victoria

In 2015 AMES Australia and Deloitte Access Economics published a case study on the resettlement of Karen community members in Nhill, Victoria (Small towns, Big returns, March 2015). The report provides insights into the economic and social value that can flow from the resettlement of migrants and refugees in regional Australia and identifies the factors that contribute to the success of such resettlement. The case study identifies the following factors as contributors to regional resettlement success:

- Employment—jobs available for the new settlers
- Initial (short term) accommodation for new settlers
- Settling and providing support for families
- Host community prepared for new settlers
- Strong leadership in the host community
- Potential settlers well prepared
- Strong leadership within the settling community
- Degree and complexity of 'cultural adjustment' on both sides considered and managed.

#### Case Study: Shepparton, Victoria

FECCA published '*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*' in June 2015. The settlement of new and emerging communities in Shepparton is regarded as a success story and the benefits it generated for both the local communities and those settled in the area are widely recognised. FECCA's report highlights the need to create adequate support infrastructure, developing targeted policies and strengthening social cohesion in the region. The report can be accessed [online](#).

The correlation between skilled migrants, employment and associated benefits such as economic development and community prosperity is clear and has been reflected historically.

The findings from both reports continue to be of importance and essential in the settlement process of migrants and refugees in regional Australia: employment, housing, and adequate support infrastructure, including for the whole family.

Recent FECCA consultations with various communities in regional Australia emphasised how people enjoyed staying in a regional area due to safety, less people, and less traffic: 'Geelong is a quiet city with good schools and supportive community and the crime is low. Living on the coast is beautiful and calm. People enjoy living in a town with smiling people, their family and their friends'.

At FECCA consultations, people have noted the importance of developing trust between host community and new arrivals. People FECCA speak with highlight the difficulties finding employment and how this can lead to people moving back to the big cities. Factors impacting on people's chances to find employment included existing networks in the area and lack of prior Australian work experience. People often find that members of their community move back to the cities to be closer to friends and family, to have easier access to employment and to have more opportunities for their children.

## **Strategies to develop regional skilled and humanitarian migration**

FECCA's own consultations have highlighted that Australia's current political and immigration environment is perceived by some new migrants and hostile and unwelcoming. The Scanlon Foundation found that the reported experience of discrimination on the basis of 'skin colour, ethnic origin or religion' has significantly increased from 15 percent in 2015 to 20 percent in 2017<sup>4</sup>. To attract migrants to regional Australia, programs must be in place to challenge the perception, and reality, of racism and the reality of an increase in anti-migrant sentiment. Politicians' voices and rhetoric are influential and should be used to offer welcome and demonstrate acceptance in Australia.

Family connections, job opportunities and lifestyle are three major reasons given by migrants for settling in regional and rural areas. Successful retention of migrants requires close collaboration of all stakeholders and the sharing of best practice models between regional areas, government and agencies to cater to the needs of skilled migrants and their families. Migrants are attracted and retained in regional and rural areas by factors such as:

- presence of family or friends and a welcoming community. For example, places of worship, and access to familiar consumer goods
- local community and culturally appropriate support mechanisms and settlement services
- appropriate employment opportunities free from exploitation
- service providers with culturally competent information regarding worker rights
- information on access to services such as health care
- cost of living and access to transport
- social cohesion and an environment free of discrimination or racism
- pathways to permanency for all visa types.

### Family and Community

Family reunion is important to the wellbeing of migrants and is a fundamental human right. Parents of skilled migrants often assist with childcare enabling the skilled migrant to enter the workforce more readily—especially important in regional areas. The current wait of up to 30 years for the granting of Parent (non-contributory) visas<sup>5</sup> must be addressed to ensure long term settlement. In 2016 over half of permanent migrants were secondary skilled visa applicants (spouse and children) highlighting the importance for all settlement, employment and language services to be inclusive of all migrants including spouses and parents to ensure successful settlement and maximum economic contribution.

The ability to speak and understand the language at the place of migration is key to a successful settlement process, to belonging and community cohesion. FECCA recommends there are adequate and appropriate access to English language learning for the whole family in order to ensure a connection between new arrivals and the established community. The various needs, skills and background for migrants and humanitarian entrants must be acknowledged and responded to accordingly.

Further, FECCA recommends that the Government ensures access to timely and appropriate services such as translation and interpretation services, mental health, transport, maternity health and general health and access to specialist services. People integrate better into a

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<sup>4</sup> Scanlon Foundation, Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2017 (2017)

<sup>5</sup> 'Parent Visa Queue', <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/brin/fami/capping-and-queuing/parent-visa-queue> (accessed 05 October 2018).

society that is welcoming and supporting and where they have an opportunity to participate and contribute.

### Employment

Targeted migration programs can address issues such as sparse population and skill shortages by encouraging and assisting settlement in the region of migrants and refugees who can contribute with the much-needed experience and skills. The Australian government has a history of regionalising immigration policy through various initiatives and visa pathways, as well as by focusing on the relocation of unemployed workers from areas of high unemployment to areas experiencing skills shortages. This is beneficial to rural and regional communities where settlement services and the appropriate infrastructure and support systems are in place.

One of the most effective ways of ensuring migrants to Australia are empowered and included in the community is through meaningful, legal and sustainable employment. Beyond the obvious financial benefits, employment is linked to improved social cohesion, self-confidence, independence, English language skills, and the physical and mental health of individuals and families. These positive outcomes support the participation and inclusion of CALD communities from the immediate settlement period and throughout their life in Australia.<sup>6</sup>

The 2016 census data shows 31 per cent of recent migrants who have had a job in Australia reported experiencing some difficulty finding their first job. The most common perceived difficulties in finding work were:

- a lack of Australian work experience or references (65 per cent)
- a lack of local contacts or networks (31 per cent)
- language difficulties (25 per cent)<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, research from the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) notes there are 46,250 job vacancies in regional Australia in March 2019, this is 12% higher than in March 2017.<sup>8</sup> There are challenges with regards to professional qualification and a tendency for some employment service providers to ignore their client's previous skills and not provide information about formal recognition of qualifications to enable appropriate employment. The OECD has recognised Australia's administrative complexities including decentralisation and overlap as barriers to formal recognition.<sup>9</sup> To assist migrants with overseas skills and qualifications enter the job market, the capacity of employment services to provide information on the qualification assessments options for other skill recognition should be prioritised.

Employment services should aim to overcome hiring bias using advocacy with employers to build their confidence in overseas skill accreditation and English language tests. The opportunity for employers to fill vacant positions with skilled migrants should be communicated to increase skill matching in areas of skill shortage. Employers need assistance when facing policy and practical challenges in employment of migrant workers, including valuing overseas qualifications, English language skill level, and overseas work experience when recruiting migrant workers, complying with complex administrative processes, managing relations in multicultural workplaces and assuring training and workplace protection in multilingual contexts. Greater implementation of cultural competence training for all employers and staff can help to promote systemic changes and build confidence in the positive impact of migrants on economic performance of an organisation.

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<sup>6</sup> FECCA 2011, Settlement is a Life-Long Process, FECCA, Canberra

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6250.0>

<sup>8</sup> Regional Australia Institute, Regional Jobs Update March 2019, <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-jobs-update-march-2019/>

<sup>9</sup> Migrant intake into Australia 2016

FECCA recommends there are appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure skills recognition for all humanitarian entrants and secondary visa holders and employment fitting skilled migrants before they are encouraged to move to a rural or regional area.

Many people from a CALD background are employed in insecure work, which is often low paid, unsustainable, dangerous and isolating. FECCA recommends there are adequate culturally and linguistically appropriate information on worker's rights and responsibilities for both new arrivals and employers in regional Australia.

### **Key local, state and federal initiatives for successful regional settlement outcomes**

Some refugees and humanitarian entrants come from rural or inland communities that are like the environment in rural Australia. Encouraging their settlement in rural areas may therefore not only provide suitable settlement options to them but would also benefit the rural society and economy in which they settle, help to maintain populations and economies, and foster innovation. The international experience that migrant workers bring is valuable to regions that seek to develop ties with markets beyond Australian borders. To develop the agriculture sector in regional Australia, migrants and refugees can contribute new ideas and methods of operation to revitalise agriculture while also contributing to other industries.

Migrant groups in the agriculture industry have been identified as a significant part of the seasonal agricultural workforce. Temporary skilled migrants could also contribute to the further development of the agriculture industry, contributing expertise and diverse skills. Most often, temporary skilled migrants will go on to become permanent residents and citizens. The skills that they bring subsequently remain in Australia and can further contribute to the industries that they are working in. FECCA emphasises that ensuring that all visas have a pathway to permanency is crucial in attracting migrants to rural and regional Australia.

#### Ethno specific organisations

FECCA strongly recommends the Federal Government acknowledges that regional settlement must be a bottom-up process where the communities and host towns are involved throughout the process. Local communities must be supported and FECCA recommends the Federal Government ensures support and resources for new arrivals to form associations and work on behalf of their members. The ability to self-advocate is essential for new arrivals and here must be adequate resources and an investment into for capacity building and allowing newly arrived migrants and refugees to form associations to advocate on behalf of their own community.

Local CALD and ethno specific services serve as a bridge between government and community and require adequate funding and resources to be able to continue their important job of welcoming, supporting and connecting with new arrivals. This includes facilities to meet, plan and host events. FECCA recommends that there are adequate and appropriate resources to assisting migrants and their families to build sustainable, prosperous and successful lives in regional areas, including through the establishment of new multicultural centres. This include ensuring a commitment to continuous funding to regional Ethnic Communities Councils and Multicultural Communities Councils to assist in settlement of new migrants to provide crucial settlement services on arrival.

Further, it is essential to invest in community organisations, including volunteers and local community leaders, to allow them to continue to build social cohesion and foster welcoming communities. Building, supporting and celebrating the role of volunteers in rural and regional Australia, and in general, takes time, resources and collaboration. It is essential that local

volunteers are to be acknowledged and supported for the work they are doing and as the bridge between established and new communities.

### **Related infrastructure and other matters**

In regional and rural Australia public transport within and between towns are limited and costly. Decreased access to public transport in regional areas increase the dependence on private vehicles<sup>10</sup> to participate in employment, health care, community and social opportunities which all increase social cohesion. Access to targeted CALD driver programs are essential for migrants to understanding road rules, insurance, buying a car, and dealing with police. Culturally and linguistically sensitive driver program should be accessible for all migrants and include information about driving in Australia and driver practice.

One area where skilled migration programs particularly affect Australians of CALD background is in the area of ageing. Almost one in three older Australians were born overseas, with a significant number of these coming from CALD backgrounds. Almost 40 per cent of all migrants from non-English speaking countries are aged 50 years and over, compared to 32.4 per cent of Australia's total population aged 50+ years<sup>11</sup>. While the ageing population of Australia is increasingly diverse and many elderly people, as a result of dementia and other illnesses, lose their acquired languages (of concern is the loss of English language skills). There is a high, and increasing, need for aged care workers who can care for CALD elderly in culturally sensitive ways and in their preferred language. Overseas migrants are the only way that Australia will be able to meet the needs of our growing elderly populations from CALD backgrounds. This is a concern in regional communities where the ageing post World War II migrant populations require increasing culturally appropriate and in-language care but where there is difficulty recruiting and retaining trained staff. Efforts must be made to ensure that this sector offers rewarding jobs, with appropriate compensation, security, prospects for promotion and development.

FECCA acknowledges the importance of secure and safe housing for all Australians. For new arrivals in regional areas, there must be a promise of appropriate and sufficient housing available. Families come in different sizes and with different needs when it comes to housing and resources must be allocated to ensure they find housing fitting their family needs.

A welcoming community and the opportunity to build networks, connections, gain employment and have access to appropriate services is essential in developing a sense of belonging and community cohesion in rural and regional towns. People are keen to put down roots and establish their families in their new place. This include being able to plan for a future that is safe and secure. FECCA strongly recommends the Government facilitates pathways to permanency by ruling out any changes to Commonwealth legislation that makes it more difficult for temporary visa holders to become permanent residents (for example the introduction of English language testing) or that increase barriers to permanent residents becoming Australian Citizens (for example, extended waiting periods or English language testing). It is essential that skilled migrants are not treated as a commodity, but rather welcomed and included in the community via support mechanisms and experiences of opportunity and permanency.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1381.0main+features2002013>

<sup>11</sup> FECCA, Review of Australian Research on Older People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds