
Chapter Seven: Settlement Planning

The National Integrated Settlement Strategy (NISS), which was established in 1991, was intended to foster coordination and cooperation across levels of government in meeting migrant service needs and to address access and equity and service integration issues within the Commonwealth.

Commentary to the review has confirmed that the role envisaged for the NISS remains valid, but that much of the early impetus, focus and energy have dissipated. There is no shared understanding of the objectives of NISS and the stated national priorities are of limited assistance. The NISS framework should focus more strategically on services of particular relevance to DIMIA's settlement services target group. Objectives should be clarified and should more directly reflect directions under the Migration and Humanitarian Programs such as supporting regional settlement. They should be pursued through the most effective mechanisms available. In some instances, this may be through existing Settlement Planning Committees, but in other cases, alternative regional or national mechanisms may be more appropriate.

There is also a need for a more focused, regionally-based, needs-based planning process for DIMIA-funded settlement services, which is supported by improved data analysis capacity and more open communication and consultative arrangements. Such a planning process would support more proactive and accurate targeting of DIMIA-funded services through grants advertisements and would facilitate the increased settlement of humanitarian entrants in regional locations offering appropriate employment opportunities.

Introduction

The successful settlement of migrants and humanitarian entrants in Australia depends to a significant extent on their ability to access a wide range of Commonwealth, State/Territory, local government and community sector programs. Historically, when migrants have encountered service gaps or barriers, they have tended to turn to the immigration portfolio for solutions. For this reason, DIMIA has for many years played a role in helping mainstream organisations to plan for the provision of services to migrant and humanitarian intakes. This role extends to raising issues with mainstream service providers about access and equity and about the integration of various services. This chapter examines that role. It also focuses on the need for improved planning for the delivery and integration of DIMIA's own settlement services.

The history of settlement planning

As outlined in chapter one of this report - The Policy Context, Australian governments have long recognised that specialist settlement services provide only some of the support that migrants and humanitarian entrants will require throughout their lives in Australia. Like other members of the Australian community, their service needs should be met primarily by mainstream services funded and delivered by Commonwealth, State/Territory and local governments and by the community sector. In order to help mainstream services to plan to meet the needs of arriving migrants, DIMIA has accepted a role in fostering cooperation and coordination across levels of government and within the Commonwealth.

As early as 1946, the Commonwealth and States/Territories were negotiating on their respective responsibilities in the provision of settlement services. The Premiers' Conference of that year, for example, agreed that the Commonwealth would be responsible for employment and the States/Territories for accommodation and support. However, when the Commonwealth Government decided, a year later, to take large numbers of displaced persons from Europe, it began to provide accommodation, education and orientation services in its own migrant hostels.¹

As the size and diversity of the migrant population increased over the years, the importance of inter-governmental cooperation grew. By 1978, the Galbally report found that coordination and consultative mechanisms needed to be strengthened 'if needs are to be effectively met and gaps and duplication are to be avoided.' Closer consultation was required between levels of government and the community sector and there was a need for:

...far more clearly defined channels of communication through which community groups and voluntary service providers can make government more aware of the changing needs and priorities of migrants, and through which government can, in turn, keep migrants informed and involved in policy and program initiatives.²

The Galbally report found that coordination was particularly necessary at the Commonwealth level because it appeared that 'many welfare programs affecting migrants have been developed and delivered in the absence of any clear knowledge or real understanding of, or concern for migrants' needs.'³ It also recommended that DIMIA take on responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of Commonwealth services used by migrants, noting that departments would need to maintain comprehensive data on the

participation of migrants in their programs.

The history of the development of access and equity and mainstreaming policies, as outlined in chapters one and six of this report, parallels developments in inter-governmental cooperation. Perhaps the most significant development for settlement planning following Galbally, was the formal adoption, in 1985, of the Access and Equity Strategy, clearly requiring mainstream agencies to provide appropriate services for their migrant clients.

By 1990, the Commonwealth/State coordinating committees that had begun to be established by Galbally's time, were taking on a stronger planning focus.⁴ They undertook (via the annual meeting of the Commonwealth and State Officials for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs) to work 'towards the development of state-wide settlement plans, specifying the contribution of various Commonwealth/State/Territory/local government, and non-government agencies towards meeting the needs of recently-arrived migrants.'⁵

The National Integrated Settlement Strategy

In 1991, the Minister for Immigration obtained government agreement to the development of the NISS. The major social issue confronting the government at that time

¹ H Adelman, A Borowski, M Burstein & L Foster (eds), *Immigration and Refugee Policy: Australia and Canada Compared*, volume 2, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 350.

² Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services to Migrants (Chairman F Galbally), *Migrant Services and Programs*, AGPS, Canberra, 1978, p. 117.

³ Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services to Migrants, *Migrant Services and Programs*, p. 119.

⁴ Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services to Migrants, *Migrant Services and Programs*, p. 120.

⁵ Adelman, Borowski, Burstein & Foster, *Immigration and Refugee Policy*, p. 351.

was high unemployment. The first of what was to become an annual process of public consultations by the Minister for Immigration had revealed the disproportionate impact of unemployment on post-World War II migrants. Many of these migrants had never learned English sufficiently well to pursue alternative employment following retrenchments arising from industry restructuring. The Minister argued that a more cooperative national approach to settlement planning and service delivery was required in order to address the needs revealed by his consultations and to ensure that the settlement needs of future intakes were appropriately addressed. The strategy's main objectives were to facilitate improved coordination of services, better targeting of priority needs, and more efficient and effective use of existing resources. For the first time there was a whole-of-Commonwealth policy on settlement, binding all Commonwealth departments. State/Territory governments also committed to the NISS, via undertakings from Premiers to the Commonwealth and involvement in NISS mechanisms.

The mechanisms and structure developed to support the NISS concept sought in the first instance to enhance existing committees for coordinating settlement activities at the three levels of government. These committees were known as Settlement Planning Committees (SPCs). A senior-officials committee and a ministerial committee were established at the Commonwealth level, as well as a community-based advisory body to continue to provide community advice directly to the Minister for Immigration. The pre-existing Commonwealth/State/Territory Ministerial Council for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (MIMA) was to oversee the development of NISS. These mechanisms are discussed in more detail below.

Early successes for NISS were announced as part of the 1992-93 Budget process.

Resources for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs increased from \$114.5 million to \$142 million and lines of responsibility and coordination were improved, with the Department of Education, Science and Training assuming responsibility for English tuition for job seekers, and DIMIA retaining responsibility for tuition for new arrivals.

DIMIA's contribution to NISS

DIMIA's contribution to NISS was twofold:

- DIMIA would continue to provide specialist settlement services, to those most in need, in the early years after their arrival; and
- in relation to other needs, particularly those of longer-term residents, DIMIA would assume a stronger advocacy role, through the NISS framework, preparing mainstream agencies to acknowledge their responsibilities.⁶

Internally, DIMIA focused on developing a needs-based approach to planning for the provision of its settlement services, investing in improvements to the Settlement Database (SDB) and requiring State/Territory offices to develop operational plans for DIMIA-funded services. These plans, which specified how AMEP, TIS, community grants and on-arrival services for humanitarian entrants would be delivered, were in effect subsets of the SPC-generated, multi-agency, State/Territory settlement plan. The DIMIA operational plans are no longer produced.

The 1996 NISS evaluation

In 1996, DIMIA conducted a formal evaluation of the NISS. It found that NISS had been successful in bringing together key players across the three levels of government with a view to improving service planning and

⁶ Adelman, Borowski, Bursten & Foster, *Immigration and Refugee Policy*, p. 368.

coordination among service providers.⁷ However, it also noted that more concerted central direction and engagement was required if stakeholders were to remain involved and objectives achieved. The evaluation also found that:

- NISS had contributed to the development of improved programs and services to assist in the settlement of migrants;
- the commitment of agencies to NISS was variable, reflecting differing perceptions of its usefulness in achieving outcomes for their clients;
- NISS could be better known and understood in participating agencies and the community;
- optimal use was not being made of the Commonwealth senior officials and ministerial groups in policy development and coordination of government activity;
- links between NISS and other planning and policy development processes needed to be improved;
- the strategy needed to take account of the growing importance of regional and local government-level planning;
- opportunities for community participation in NISS varied between States/Territories; and
- the community-based ministerial advisory body (the Settlement Advisory Council) had played an effective advocacy role but could be better known and used more effectively within the community.⁸

The evaluation's recommendations included: developing a sharper focus on existing and emerging priorities and achievable outcomes; a stronger project focus; increased community participation; and improved links between NISS and other planning mechanisms, including at a regional and local level.⁹

The 1998 SPC terms of reference review

In 1998, the terms of reference for SPCs were reviewed, under the auspices of the MIMA. The review reiterated findings of the 1996 evaluation relating to SPCs and noted the need for stronger commitment by NISS participants. The review resulted in the re-articulation of the role of SPCs through a new mission statement and introduced 'National Settlement Projects' through which national level issues were to be pursued.

Since then, national settlement projects have:

- disseminated the *Community Input Guide* (showing communities how to address settlement issues locally and, where necessary, how to raise them for resolution through the NISS framework);
- promoted settlement information on DIMIA's *Settling in Australia* web site and State/Territory specific *Settlement Information Kits* - each of which bring together information about a wide range of specialist and mainstream services delivered by all levels of government and the community; and
- contributed to the development and implementation of strategies to address the pressing settlement needs of refugee youth.

Current arrangements

This chapter will now turn to examining current arrangements for 'settlement planning' and consider how well they are working. While this discussion focuses on the various structures and mechanisms that have been set up to achieve settlement planning

⁷ Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), *NISS Evaluation Report*, DIMA, Canberra, 1996, p. 6.

⁸ DIMA, *NISS Evaluation Report*, p. 6.

⁹ DIMA, *NISS Evaluation Report*, pp. 8-9.

objectives, it is important in the first instance to recognise the range of tasks for DIMIA which were originally envisaged as falling within the scope of settlement planning. They were:

- helping mainstream service providers to identify, understand and plan to meet the needs of the annual intake of migrants and humanitarian entrants; and
- planning for the delivery of DIMIA-funded settlement services, including for integration between DIMIA's different service types.

The 'settlement planning' task comprises service planning, improvement, integration and coordination tasks, as well as internal DIMIA and mainstream inter-governmental dimensions.

Commentary in public consultations and submissions to this review about the NISS has indicated that many of the shortcomings identified in earlier evaluations remain. Similarly, the broad problem that inter-governmental coordination has sought to address has not gone away. Many of the findings in relation to mainstream services, in chapter six of this report, reflect deficiencies in consultation, design, delivery and data collections of mainstream programs leading to inadequate service provision for migrants and humanitarian entrants.

[I]t appears that there is a need to develop formal documents (MOUs) between Commonwealth and State to address their roles and responsibilities in Migrant and Humanitarian Entrant Settlement process. Additionally, [the] role of Local Government could be further explored in relation to settlement planning and possible service provision particularly related to social participation and community harmony and capacity building.

Submission from the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, NSW

...the Commonwealth is not able to obtain full cooperation from within the 3 levels of government with regard to the implementation of NISS.

Submission from the Multicultural Development Association, QLD

Further, comments on the allocation of resources, and the targeting and distribution of DIMIA-funded services have indicated that DIMIA needs to do more to plan effectively for the delivery and integration of its services. For example, some commentators suggested that the various services that comprise the IHSS are poorly integrated and that IHSS providers and organisations delivering CSSS-funded services do not always complement each other.

The NISS framework

Descriptions of the NISS tend to focus on the structures or mechanisms that exist to progress its aims. A brief overview of these structures provides background to the discussion that follows below.

SPCs were initially established in each State/Territory to develop annual settlement plans identifying settlement needs, the strategies for addressing them, and the agencies which accepted responsibility for action. Regional SPCs were established in some areas and DIMIA subsequently required MRCs to establish regional-level SPCs or networks to feed into State/Territory level settlement planning processes.

A senior-level officials working group, known as the Inter-Departmental Working Group on migrant settlement and other planning issues (IDWG), was established at the Commonwealth level to progress issues requiring cross-portfolio coordination or policy development. The IDWG was active in progressing issues arising from the 1991

consultations, in the reform and restructure of ESL programs and in managing the transfer of torture and trauma services from DIMIA to the Department of Health and Ageing. However, once the initial impetus had passed, the IDWG fell into disuse. It has not been convened since 1997.

A Commonwealth Ministerial Group comprising Ministers for major service-providing portfolios was also established and was active in the lead up to the 1992-93 Budget. Again, once the initial impetus for broad cross-portfolio action had passed, Ministers tended to raise specific issues with their colleagues bilaterally.

The Settlement Advisory Council was established to provide community advice directly to the Minister. This role, with a stronger focus on settlement of humanitarian entrants, is now undertaken by the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC).

The pre-existing MIMA and its associated Officials body, known as SCIMA, continue to play an overarching monitoring role on NISS developments.

A shared understanding of NISS objectives

Comments to the review have suggested that those who know about NISS are aware of the framework's structures, particularly SPCs, but that there is no shared understanding of NISS objectives. The NISS mission statement and description of the framework indicate what the framework is for and why it exists, but they provide little guidance about current priorities for action.

Descriptions of the NISS framework generally reiterate the aims ascribed to it at its announcement in 1991, namely that it aims to:

- clarify who is responsible for providing services;

- encourage coordination of service delivery;
- better target resources to avoid gaps and duplication; and
- achieve better outcomes for migrants and humanitarian entrants in the form of targeted and accessible services.

The mission statement says that:

Commonwealth, State/Territory and local government agencies, and community organisations, will work together to provide migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants with services essential to their settlement and to help them to access those services when they need them so that they become independent, productive members of the community as quickly as possible.

A list of national priorities indicates some key areas of settlement service provision but provides no guidance about the objectives to be achieved within those areas. The national priorities are: English language training; access to the labour market; settlement information; access to housing; translating and interpreting services; enhancing support for sponsors of migrants and humanitarian entrants; integrating services for humanitarian entrants; and enhancing support provided for the ethnic aged. There is no clear or regular process for modifying the list, although it has been modified to reflect particular emphases of settlement policy from time to time.

When NISS was first introduced, the priorities for action clearly related to addressing the impact of industry restructuring and consequent labour market disadvantage for longer-resident migrants. They also related to establishing services that would seek to prevent or minimise such differential impacts for migrant communities in the future. The focus today is less clear, and the stated national priorities are of limited assistance. Articulation

of national priorities within an inter-governmental planning framework must, of necessity, provide sufficient flexibility for action in response to variations at State/Territory and regional levels (reflecting, for example, differences in demography, service environments and labour markets). Nevertheless, clearer articulation of settlement policy objectives is essential if the NISS is to deliver any truly national outcomes.

Settlement policy objectives should more directly reflect directions under the Migration and Humanitarian Programs together with priorities for broader social policy. For example, the development of mechanisms within the Migration Program to respond to demands for greater regional dispersal of new arrivals suggests that NISS should give priority to supporting settlement in regional Australia in order to relieve population pressure in metropolitan areas and to improve the sustainability of regional areas. While some SPCs have recognised regional settlement as a priority in their settlement plans, national objectives have not been clearly articulated or promulgated.

NISS could be more effective if the STATE and Territory Settlement Planning Committee (STSPC) such as Qld. Migrant SPC will include broader participation from the regional and rural DIMIA funded settlement services which cater direct settlement services for migrants and humanitarian entrants.

Submission from Mackay Regional Council for Social Development, QLD

The scope of NISS interests

One of the difficulties in setting objectives within the NISS framework is the potential breadth of scope of stakeholder interests,

encompassing the cradle-to-grave experiences of diverse migrant communities, and ranging across all government and non-government programs and services. In practice, NISS activity has tended to focus on services of relatively direct relevance to the settlement task but some committees have devoted considerable attention to issues that relate more broadly to service provision in a multicultural society. There would be value in more tightly defining the general scope for consideration of issues within the NISS framework and in focusing more specifically on clients with the highest settlement needs. Service planning, access, delivery and coordination issues outside this more tightly defined scope should be addressed in the context of the obligations of agencies under the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*.

Recommendation 20

That DIMIA, in consultation with National Integrated Settlement Strategy stakeholders, seek to focus the National Integrated Settlement Strategy on services of particular significance in achieving early settlement outcomes for clients in the settlement services target group.

Recommendation 21

That DIMIA, in consultation with National Integrated Settlement Strategy stakeholders, establish a process for identifying and articulating clear, outcomes-focused, priorities for action within the National Integrated Settlement Strategy framework that are consistent with Migration Program and Humanitarian Program policies and with broader national social policies.

Settlement Planning Committees

SPCs in each State/Territory provide the backbone to the NISS structure. Each committee comprises representatives from government service-providing agencies at Commonwealth, State/Territory, and local government levels, and at the community level. SPCs provide a forum for discussion and resolution of settlement planning and service delivery issues. Each SPC is expected to produce a plan setting out the priority settlement needs in its geographic region (State/Territory, or local region, depending on the committee), describing the strategies to be implemented to meet those needs, and identifying the commitments of participating agencies.

DIMIA undertakes a lead agency role in State/Territory-level SPCs and in some regional SPCs. Where they exist, MRCs/MSAs are expected to convene local or regional level SPCs or planning networks. At all levels, planning committees are expected to resolve local issues locally and to refer other issues (for example, requiring policy development nationally) to other mechanisms within the NISS structure, including central offices of relevant Commonwealth agencies.

Perceptions about the effectiveness of SPCs are variable. Many comments to the review have reiterated concerns evident in earlier examinations of the NISS framework. Broadly, concerns have related to committee composition; the authority of members to commit to resources and action; adequacy of community consultation and communication about SPC activity. A more thorough examination of individual SPCs and their activities would be required to properly assess these concerns. Nevertheless, the following broad observations can be made:

- SPCs seem to be most effective developing local solutions to local problems in the context of specific projects, generally progressed by working groups;
- SPCs covering smaller geographic regions seem to have more success than SPCs in

larger States in engaging all the relevant key players;

- a high proportion of SPC activity is essentially reactive, responding to issues identified by migrant populations and within existing services;
- information sharing consumes a considerable amount of meeting time for some SPCs, possibly in the absence of clear objectives for action and decision making authority;
- communication and community consultation about SPC activity is generally perceived to be inadequate; and
- there is no sense that SPCs are contributing to a broader national strategy or outcomes.

[Settlement planning] committees in each State vary considerably... In some States they are seen to be well connected to what is happening on the ground and to be making a relevant and constructive contribution... The following are key elements of good State planning committees: those attending are senior policy makers with a sound knowledge of relevant sections within their own department and an ability to influence departmental policies and practices; there is continuity in the representation from the various agencies; there is representation from the community sector on all committees and subcommittees; all members of the committee, not just the community representatives, commit to consulting with the community sector and client groups on a regular basis; there are good lines of communication between the committee and those providing settlement services; there are clearly defined (and well utilised) identified mechanisms for people to bring issues to the committee's attention.

Submission from the Refugee Council of Australia

As in previous examinations of SPCs, a range of recommendations could be made in an attempt to improve the functioning of existing SPCs. However, given the efforts that have been made over the years to reinvigorate some of these committees, it seems appropriate to reconsider the centrality of SPCs to the settlement planning process. Efforts to improve the effectiveness of some SPCs might be more productively employed in more clearly articulating and progressing NISS objectives through alternative channels. SPCs that are operating effectively provide a single, convenient, purpose-designed structure for settlement planning, and these should continue to be supported and utilised by DIMIA. Some States/Territories may, however, need to consider: establishing more regionally-based structures; making better use of other planning and inter-agency structures; convening single-issue working groups; and/or pursuing solutions to issues bilaterally or multilaterally.

SPCs and other mechanisms within the NISS framework were established to solve problems, whether they be service-planning, access and equity, or service-coordination and integration problems. As in any problem-solving endeavour, proper definition of the problem in the first place is critical - then the most appropriate mechanisms for solving the particular problem can be utilised. While this is clearly a simplistic description of the issues put to the review, it seems appropriate to reinforce the conclusions leading to recommendations 20 and 21 above. That is, that the scope and specific objectives of State/Territory and regional settlement planning activity need to be clarified and then the strategies for addressing those objectives should be pursued through the most appropriate mechanisms available. There will be variation in local or regional level objectives and in the approaches to resolving them.

Within this framework, there needs to be timely and adequate consultation and communication with the range of community stakeholders on NISS activity, regardless of the type of mechanism or forum utilised at the State/Territory level. Similarly, there needs to be a clearly visible process through which local or regional-level service providers, SPCs, and inter-agency networks can raise issues that cannot be resolved locally.

The compulsory production of settlement plans by SPCs under the current NISS framework appears, in some instances, to have become an impediment to forward planning and timely action to address emerging issues. The production of plans agreed by all participating agencies can provide a useful tool for agencies as well as a way of communicating with external stakeholders. Consideration should also be given, however, to more flexible and timely planning outputs, such as more frequent publication of agreements to joint action, perhaps on the web sites of participating agencies.

Recommendation 22

That the National Integrated Settlement Strategy have a stronger focus on outcomes with greater attention being paid to articulating and pursuing objectives through the most appropriate and effective mechanisms available, including regional committees and networks.

Regional committees and networks

While State/Territory-level SPCs are the most visible element of the NISS structure, the range of issues impacting on migrant settlement fall within the responsibilities of the three levels of government as well as the community sector. It is, therefore, crucial that issues can be raised for resolution at each of

...participation in networks such as NERSIN (North Eastern Region Settlement Issues Network), in addition to the Hume and Moreland Settlement Issues networks ... [provide] invaluable opportunities to identify regional trends, keep abreast of issues as they arise, information sharing and service promotion. We also find these networks excellent forums to identify service gaps, to collaborate for joint partnerships and other local and regional issues.

Submission from the Consumer and Tenant Advice Service Northern, VIC

these levels. DIMIA has for some time encouraged MRCs/MSAs and other funded organisations to contribute to settlement planning activity at a local level. There is some evidence that local-level committees and networks, where they exist, work well, enabling local solutions to local problems grounded in a solid understanding of the local demography and service environment. It should be noted, however, that:

- the spread of local or regional planning mechanisms is patchy;
- pathways for progressing issues that cannot be resolved locally are not always clear;
- communication and consultation with others in the local environment is sometimes perceived to be inadequate; and
- DIMIA has not made use of these mechanisms for needs analysis and planning for the provision of its own services.

A stronger regional-planning focus would enable identification of local settlement needs and facilitate cooperation in the delivery and integration of service strategies within regions.

Appropriate mechanisms, where possible building on existing local government, inter-agency or service coordination bodies, such as Area Consultative Committees, should be identified locally. These mechanisms would need to be supported by improved planning data and analysis, and pathways for referral of issues would need to be clear.

Numerous submissions to the review have sought greater involvement of local government in the NISS process. While local government is represented on State/Territory SPCs through the State/Territory Association, individual local governments can make particularly valuable contributions in regional level forums.

Pursuing solutions nationally

Some stakeholders have called for the resurrection of the Commonwealth Ministerial Group and the IDWG for pursuing solutions requiring cross-portfolio consideration at the Commonwealth level or requiring inter-government coordination nationally. While it is clear that regional and State/Territory-level planning mechanisms must have access to avenues for raising issues of this nature, it is not clear that resurrecting these original NISS structures provides an appropriate solution. In the same way that SPCs may not always provide the best mechanism for resolving State/Territory-level coordination issues, large standing committees at the Commonwealth level are probably not the most effective way of progressing complex Commonwealth/national issues.

The Ministerial Group and IDWG provided an effective mechanism in the early 1990s for examining the whole-of-government impact of a range of recession-related effects and policies on Australia's migrant population. However, most of the issues raised through the NISS framework since that time tend to relate more narrowly to only one or to a small number of portfolios. In such cases, bilateral discussions and use of issue-specific

interdepartmental committees (IDCs) are likely to be more effective, not least because the issues are raised with the responsible policy area rather than through a more general access and equity or coordination contact point. Consequently, resurrection of a standing Ministerial Group or IDC is not necessary, although either may be appropriate from time to time.

MIMA and SCIMA have acted primarily as a forum for reporting progress on NISS developments. Few, if any, settlement planning issues have been referred to those committees for action. This is because the nature of NISS work would generally see issues arising in mainstream portfolios. Consequently, issues requiring coordination within mainstream agencies may, from time to time, make use of other Commonwealth/State/Territory Ministerial forums within those portfolios.

There is a range of ways in which State/Territory SPCs can raise issues for Commonwealth consideration. Usually the most appropriate mechanism, at least in the first instance, is for the Commonwealth representative of the most appropriate portfolio to raise such issues with their central policy unit. Where this is not possible, DIMIA representatives can raise issues through DIMIA's Settlement Branch. In these instances, DIMIA's Settlement Branch will, as it has to date, identify the most appropriate avenues for pursuing a policy or program response. There is a need for better communication about the outcomes of such work.

Following the 1998 terms of reference review, national settlement projects were introduced to facilitate national action. While the outcomes of these projects have been useful, they have all been very DIMIA-focused and have not pursued systemic policy or program changes as originally envisaged. Community feedback specifically on these projects, and on the concept generally, would assist in determining the on-going value of annual national settlement projects.

The 1996 evaluation of NISS found, in relation to two early and significant NISS successes, that the impetus for action already existed and that it was, therefore, difficult to conclude whether the NISS framework aided in these successes or whether they would have occurred anyway. In some senses the real lesson from this is to recognise that significant systemic policy change occurs when the right opportunities present, for example, when there is a coalition of interests across portfolios. While such opportunities can sometimes be fostered, no planning or coordination framework will succeed in generating change if the environment is not right. Sometimes stakeholders have argued that NISS has failed when the only solution that they considered to be acceptable ran counter to unambiguous government policy.

It is clear from the submissions to the review that there needs to be better communication with the community sector about these issues and about the outcomes of national level negotiations and policy development. The RRAC publication, the *Community Input Guide*, provides a description of some of the processes currently available for advancing service delivery issues on behalf of migrant communities. DIMIA could complement the *Guide* by publishing regular progress reports on settlement planning objectives, activity and outcomes nationally. Communication issues are discussed further below.

Planning for DIMIA-funded services

As indicated above, the inception of NISS saw a stronger focus on the development of needs-based planning for the provision of DIMIA's own settlement services. The principal mechanism was to be the development of State/Territory-based operational or program management plans grounded in State/Territory needs analysis. However, this mechanism, vulnerable to changes in program management and timing of reform processes, has not survived over time.

Needs-based planning for DIMIA's settlement programs is currently piecemeal, varying between programs and, often, between State/Territory offices. Even when the data collection effort and analysis is substantial, the processes tend not to be transparent. Similarly, approaches to community consultation vary significantly. While such variations may reflect an appropriate response to differing local environments, there is a strong argument for a more thorough, consistent, transparent, consultative and regionally-focused needs-based planning process for DIMIA-funded services.

Mainstream service providers also require accurate data about the characteristics and distribution of new arrivals if they are to effectively plan and provide services for this element of their client group.

DIMIA's SDB provides a solid basis for the collection, analysis and distribution of data on new arrivals. However, enhancements are required to ensure that changes to business processes for grant of permanent and provisional visas do not degrade the accuracy or timeliness of data capture. The online provision of SDB data has facilitated access by settlement service providers and the community to a range of useful, locally tailored tables. However, greater flexibility, more detail and specific tailoring of data may be required to support the proposed new regional planning arrangements. Options for improving the development and distribution of regionally- focused data and for supporting appropriate analysis of that data should be further explored.

A wide range of other data sources and qualitative research complement the data available from the SDB. In developing a stronger needs-based planning process, DIMIA should improve its data analysis capacity and consider avenues for more strategic dissemination of these resources.

Analysis of data sources should be complemented by regular, focused and meaningful consultation with relevant communities in order to develop a thorough and well-considered needs analysis for a given region. Resourced with better quality planning data, and a sound understanding of the service environment, the regional planning mechanisms referred to above should initiate and manage community consultation about the settlement needs of the area.

The resulting needs analysis would provide a sound basis for local-level action and, together with analysis from other regions, would contribute to a more comprehensive and grounded national picture of settlement need. This national picture would then provide a basis for more proactive and accurate targeting of DIMIA-funded services as well as those of mainstream agencies. In particular, DIMIA would be able to invite grants applications to address clearly identified needs. Advertisements for grants applications would identify the geographic regions, client groups and needs to be addressed. The national picture developed from the regional planning network would provide a more comprehensive and consistent basis from which to judge relative priorities.

Recommendation 23

That DIMIA develop an improvement plan for the Settlement Database, including development of options for facilitating greater regional-level use of this resource.

Properly constructed data collection methodologies and market research strategies should be implemented. Needs-oriented analysis of research, service and other data must be regularly undertaken to address

variables such as changing demographics.

Submission from the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

This approach to needs-based planning should be complemented by more proactive planning, at least in relation to humanitarian entrants, driven by knowledge of the annual intake and anticipated geographic dispersal, including direction of unlinked refugees to regional areas. Most settlement planning work responds to the needs of known migrant populations. However, DIMIA does have some capacity through the Humanitarian Program to direct humanitarian entrants to particular locations. Availability of appropriate regional employment opportunities and access to both specialist and mainstream services are important considerations in this process. A more proactive planning approach would enable the establishment of specialist services, for example, through IHSS, in a more timely way, as well as the development of stronger links and protocols between these services and existing mainstream services.

As indicated above, a number of submissions to the review have highlighted inadequate integration between DIMIA-funded services as well as between DIMIA and mainstream services. A stronger and broader regional planning framework would enable better consideration and resolution of service integration issues than at present, because decisions would be grounded in a better understanding of local needs and of the various elements of the local service environment. Decisions about the management and location of DIMIA-funded services would also be better informed by regional service integration issues. This would enable, for example, a more thorough assessment of the extent to which CSSS grant applicants have incorporated appropriate

service integration considerations into their project proposals.

Recommendation 24

That DIMIA develop and implement, by October 2004, a more proactive, thorough, consistent, transparent, consultative and regional needs-based planning process for its own services and to inform the planning of mainstream agencies.

Recommendation 25

That the needs-based planning process support the direction of humanitarian entrants to regional locations offering appropriate employment opportunities and access to specialist and mainstream services.

Recommendation 26

That the needs-based planning process enable DIMIA to:

- assess client needs on a geographic and demographic basis (and make this analysis publicly available); and
- advertise and assess CSSS grants on the basis of this analysis.

Funding Advisory Committees

The CSSS funding process currently utilises Funding Advisory Committees (FACs) to help identify applications that are proposing services to address needs that more appropriately fall within the responsibilities of portfolios other than DIMIA. FACs were originally conceived as a way of linking DIMIA's settlement planning role with service provision through CSSS. The FAC was intended to provide an avenue through which needs identified in the CSSS application process could be brought to the attention of

relevant mainstream agencies. The mainstream agency could then make an assessment about the extent of the need, whether it was already being addressed through existing services, and/or whether alternative service strategies might be warranted. In relatively rare instances an appropriate response to such a need might have been to fund the CSSS application under a different grants program. However, it was never the intention that the FAC process would look to secure alternative funding for grants applicants.

In general, the intention of the FAC process has not been well understood. Over time, a general misconception has developed that the process has failed because it has not identified alternative funding for unsuccessful CSSS applications. Consequently, the FAC process has tended to add a relatively unproductive step to an already resource-intensive and time-pressured grants assessment process. As with the other mechanisms discussed in this chapter, DIMIA offices should retain FACs where they are seen to add value commensurate with the effort required to support them but otherwise to pursue alternative mechanisms for assessing and responding to perceptions of unmet need identified in CSSS applications.

Communication and community consultation

As already indicated, input to the review has indicated that the NISS framework suffers from inadequate communication and consultation with the community sector.

Unfortunately, the current DIMIA planning structures appear to provide limited opportunities for wider community participation in service planning. Consequently, it would seem important to review the many aspects of existing communication channels and processes within the current

Departmental planning structures in terms of their transparency and consultation components. Underpinning this Review, important issues and questions to be asked should include the extent to which the community is presently informed; how much community representation currently exists; what mechanisms are in place to disseminate the information about planning discussions and those decisions made in the Department's Committees and Forums, which have an impact upon service development and services delivery. We urge that these processes be as open as possible to relevant community based organisations.

Submission from Auburn Council, NSW

Approaches to community consultation include varying levels of community representation on SPCs, public consultation on settlement plans, and working group consultation on specific elements of plans. Communication between SPCs and community stakeholders, including service providers, is variable. Some SPCs issue regular newsletters on their activities, while others rely on their community representatives or occasional consultative forums for communicating updates.

Settlement plans provide another avenue for communicating settlement planning developments to stakeholders outside SPCs. However, plans are released only periodically and they generally provide, at best, a summary of some of the key issues that committee members intend to progress jointly. They rarely contain information suggesting that a thorough needs analysis has been undertaken and they tend not to report on the services, within existing programs, that are of most significance in the settlement process.

Consequently they generally do not provide a very meaningful picture of settlement needs and services in a given area.

A more regionally-based planning model should facilitate greater involvement of a wider range of stakeholders in consultation processes and improve the ease of communication at the regional level. However, communication issues between the various levels of the framework also need to be strengthened. A new communication and consultation strategy is required, facilitating meaningful consultation, timely feedback, and efficiently targeted information sharing. This strategy should be developed in consultation with settlement-planning stakeholders, including contributors to the review.

Recommendation 27

That DIMIA develop a communication and consultation strategy for settlement planning, incorporating regionally-based communication mechanisms as well as feedback on issues progressed at State/Territory, Commonwealth and national levels.

RRAC plays a valuable role in providing community perspectives on settlement issues directly to the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. RRAC's work plan will

incorporate issues arising from this review and could usefully include the Council's involvement in developing the recommended communication and consultation strategy for settlement planning.

Conclusion

The key findings of the review in relation to DIMIA's settlement planning role are that the original NISS concept was extremely ambitious and has never been fully realised. The current scope of issues that potentially fall within the framework is so broad as to make objective and priority setting extremely difficult. In any event, many of the issues that relate to service delivery in a multicultural society are more appropriately taken up in the context of the *Charter* obligations of agencies. There is a need for much clearer objective setting and greater flexibility in the mechanisms that are used to pursue settlement planning ends. A stronger regional planning focus is also required. Regional level planning mechanisms, improvements to DIMIA's settlement planning data collection and analysis capacity, and more meaningful regional-level community consultation would provide the basis for better settlement needs analysis. This would inform DIMIA's own settlement service provision as well as its role in helping mainstream agencies to plan for the provision of services to migrant and humanitarian entrant intakes.

