
Chapter Fourteen: Investing in Settlement

Australia's immigration program aims for an intake that has the capacity to contribute to Australia's economic objectives, recognises the value of family migration and meets Australia's humanitarian commitments. It also makes an important contribution to Australia's population future. The ageing of the Australian population and the increasing ratio of dependants to working population make it essential that all members of the Australian community, including new arrivals, are equipped to participate fully in the economic and social life of the community.

While settlement outcomes for most migrants are generally improving, there is a need for earlier, more focused, whole-of-government intervention to improve settlement outcomes for the settlement services target group (especially for newly-arriving humanitarian entrants) and to support community harmony over the longer-term. In the light of community concerns about the welfare of children and young people from the settlement services target group, the report makes a number of recommendations to enhance education, employment and other relevant mainstream services.

Introduction

The previous chapters of this report have made a number of recommendations designed to enhance the effectiveness of DIMIA-funded settlement services. They have also identified strategies for improving integration between settlement and mainstream services and for enhancing the responsiveness of mainstream agencies to migrant clients. Commonwealth Government policy is that all of the services available to new migrants, both DIMIA-funded and mainstream, should foster equitable participation in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival. This chapter draws attention to the need for earlier, more focused intervention to improve outcomes for the settlement services target group and to support community harmony over the longer-term.

Settlement services and the national interest

Effective settlement of new arrivals is clearly in the national interest. Australia operates a highly selective immigration program designed to meet its national objectives and its

international obligations. The program aims for an intake that:

- delivers broad-based skills with the capacity to contribute to Australia's economic objectives;
- recognises the value and importance of family migration to Australia's social and economic goals; and
- meets Australia's humanitarian commitments.

The immigration program also represents an important contribution to Australia's population future. In common with other developed countries, the Australian population is ageing. The median age of the Australian population is rising and fertility rates are falling and are expected to fall further. The net effect of these factors is that the ratio of dependants to the working population is increasing. These two factors make it essential that all members of the Australian community are equipped to participate fully in the economic and social life of the community. Where settlement services foster early and equitable

participation by new arrivals, they help Australia to maximise the benefits of its immigration program.

The current mix of a selective immigration program and strategically targeted settlement services is already producing good results for Australia. According to data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA), the most recent skilled stream migrants are enjoying improved employment levels and higher incomes and are less dependent on welfare benefits than their earlier counterparts. They are increasingly likely to have high-level English language skills and to be able to negotiate Australia's social and economic systems relatively quickly. They are also younger, enjoying better health and experiencing more satisfaction with their decision to migrate to Australia. Research undertaken by Access Economics has shown that skilled migration is also having a net positive effect on Commonwealth and State/Territory budgets. Similarly, most family stream migrants are experiencing better outcomes on a number of key indicators and are also exerting some positive economic effects.¹

Humanitarian entrants

Within this positive picture overall, it is notable that, with recent changes within source countries for the Humanitarian Program, humanitarian entrants are experiencing increasing difficulties in making progress against settlement indicators. More needs to be done to support the early participation of these new arrivals in the social and economic life of the Australian community.

Humanitarian entrants have strengths on which government policy can and should build. While acknowledging the difficulties these entrants are experiencing, it is important to avoid adopting a 'deficit' model of humanitarian settlement that focuses only on the disadvantages of entrants rather than on their potential to contribute to Australia. Data from the LSIA suggests that humanitarian entrants report relatively high satisfaction with

life in Australia and the highest rate of Australian citizenship intentions of all new arrivals. It also suggests that they experience significant success in learning English in the early settlement period. The fact that they have survived their pre-migration experience demonstrates their resourcefulness and resilience. They generally enter Australia with a strong determination to rebuild their lives, become productive members of the community and 'give back' to the country that has provided them with protection and refuge. Humanitarian entrants have historically been an important source of intellectual, social and cultural capital in Australia, enriching this country as a society as well as making a significant economic contribution.

Social capital is created when people join organizations, volunteer, socialize with friends and family, participate in learning activities or develop trust with their neighbour. These and similar activities represent social networks that produce norms of reciprocity, that is the inclination to act positively towards others... the settlement services of DIMIA could well be spoken about in terms of building the social capital of migrants and Humanitarian Program entrants. This in turn helps to build the social capital of the whole Australian community.

Submission from Dr Andrew Lohrey

¹ Access Economics, *The Impact of Permanent Migrants on the Commonwealth Budget*, summary report prepared for DIMIA, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2001, p. iv and *The Impact of Permanent Migrants on the State and Territory Budgets*, prepared for DIMIA on behalf of the Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, May 2002, p. ii.

In the process of assisting new arrivals with the highest needs, settlement services can help to build social capital within Australia. Social capital has become an important notion in Australian policy. This development reflects increasing interest in the ways in which the building of relationships characterised by trust and expectations of reciprocal support can support community cohesion and reduce disconnection and its associated costs.² Some submissions to the review have promoted a greater awareness of this concept in relation to DIMIA-funded services.

Similarly, where social capital is diminished, there is greater risk of isolation, social dislocation and the costs imposed by anti-social behaviour. Without early, effective intervention, there is a risk that the initial disadvantages of humanitarian entrants and some of the more 'at risk' family arrivals could become entrenched. Over the longer-term, a combination of interrelated problems such as unemployment, continuing reliance on income support, health issues and physical and social isolation can create a cumulative effect of social and economic exclusion from mainstream Australian society.

Such cumulative effects could exercise an impact beyond the first generation of these entrants. The broader welfare reform process in Australia has drawn attention to the potential impact of inter-generational joblessness and welfare dependence on the Australian population. Research conducted by the Department of Family and Community Services has noted that young people from income support recipient families are more likely to leave school early, to experience unemployment and to receive income support themselves.³ Throughout the review process, stakeholders have expressed concerns about signs of social dislocation among particular groups of second-generation young people.

Agencies like the Vietnamese Community of Australia (Victoria Chapter) are asking a fundamental question: How well have our young Victorian born community members settled? Where most second-generation Italian and Greek young people were born into and spent their youth in a stable economic boom period during the late 1950's to 1970's, our young Vietnamese Victorians did not. Further, their family's refugee settlement experiences were very different to that of these earlier migrant settlers... CMYI and the Vietnamese Community Australia believe that failed settlement experiences for this group may have impacted on the high number of young Vietnamese represented in the Juvenile Justice System. Further, similar experiences of settlement are currently impacting on young men from the Horn of Africa with consequent over-representation in juvenile justice.

Submission from the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, VIC

Without carefully targeted and considered action to support their participation, Australia risks the entrenchment of early disadvantage among the settlement services target group and the development of a potential threat to community harmony. These arrivals require focused, early intervention to improve their settlement outcomes. A cross-portfolio, whole-

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Social Capital and Social Wellbeing*, discussion paper, Commonwealth of Australia, August 2002, pp. 1,4.

³ F Mcoull & J Pech, 'Trans-generational income support dependence in Australia: Early Evidence', in P Saunders (ed), *Reforming the Australian Welfare State*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 2000, p. 111.

⁴ B Birrell & V Rapson, 'Two Australias: Migrant Settlement at the End of the 20th Century', *People and Place*, Vol 10(1), 2002.

of-government focus on improving participation among these arrivals is needed to support them and to support community harmony over the longer-term. The previous chapters of this report have made a number of recommendations that would require this kind of approach. In the light of concerns about the welfare of young people from the settlement services target group, recommendations in relation to employment and education services have a particular urgency.

Longer-resident migrants

The importance of early and proactive intervention to ensure the participation of migrants from the settlement services target group has been highlighted by the many issues raised in the course of the review in relation to longer-resident migrants. Stakeholders have repeatedly raised concerns about the needs of longer-resident migrants, particularly of older and unskilled migrants with low English proficiency. Many of these migrants settled reasonably successfully in earlier decades and made a substantial economic, social and cultural contribution to Australia. However, their economic participation rested on the relatively high demand for unskilled or low skilled industrial labour within the Australian economy and the existence of jobs where high level English proficiency was not required. The restructuring of the Australian economy has led to relatively high unemployment and welfare dependency rates among some longer-resident migrant communities, particularly those with low English proficiency. The difficult position of these migrants in the contemporary labour market has drawn attention to the longer-term impact of limited opportunities in earlier decades to address early settlement needs such as English tuition and broader social participation.

The solution for these longer-resident migrants cannot lie in DIMIA-funded settlement services, which are targeted

towards new arrivals. As reflected in the recommendations in relation to mainstream agencies, there exists some scope for DIMIA to work with these agencies to address the concerns raised in the context of the review.

Regional settlement

Australian governments should also be paying more attention to strategies for dispersing new arrivals more evenly throughout Australia, and especially to promote settlement in rural and regional Australia. Recent research has shown the extent to which new arrivals are settling in Sydney and Melbourne. Bob Birrell and Virginia Rapson have suggested that the cultural composition of these cities and the rest of Australia is diverging to the point of creating a cultural chasm within Australia.⁴ While this assertion is contentious, current settlement patterns of new arrivals are increasing economic and social pressures on Sydney in particular. At the same time, the regions in States such as South Australia and Tasmania are struggling to retain their new arrivals despite the welcome boost that they provide to the population.

The Commonwealth Government is already making significant efforts in this direction. In consultation with State/Territory governments, the Commonwealth has been developing and implementing mechanisms to attract new arrivals to the regions through migration regulations. It is currently participating in bilateral discussions with the New South Wales Government on strategies for dispersing skilled stream migrants more evenly throughout New South Wales.

DIMIA-funded settlement services can play a role in this process. In particular, unlinked refugees present one opportunity to disperse new arrivals to the regions. This could have significant flow-on effects due to the tendency for these entrants to become proposers of other entrants in their turn. Efforts to direct unlinked entrants to regional areas must be

tempered by the need to ensure that there are employment opportunities and appropriate services available to them. Nevertheless, it may be that more effective planning and integration mechanisms, more innovative use of volunteers and proactive development of community support for humanitarian settlement recommended in this report could assist in greater dispersal of the refugee and subsequent migrant intake to regional areas.

Conclusion

This review has focused on the need for earlier, more focused intervention to improve settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants and for family stream migrants with low English proficiency. It has also emphasised the importance of strategies to disperse new arrivals more evenly throughout Australia. For such interventions to be successful, a cross-portfolio, whole-of-government approach will be necessary. Such an approach would improve overall outcomes, make downstream savings by reducing later expenditure on social problems, build social capital and help to maintain a successful and harmonious multicultural Australia.

The way ahead

This report of the *Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* will form the basis for further, more focused consultations with both settlement service stakeholders and mainstream agencies on how best to implement the findings of the review.

The improvements to both DIMIA-funded and mainstream services proposed in this report would constitute an investment that would maximise the benefits of Australia's immigration program. Some of the recommendations have financial implications that will need to be considered by the Commonwealth Government in the context of its overall budget commitments.

The review has benefited from extensive community involvement in the form of public consultations, submissions to the review and the cooperation of a number of mainstream government agencies. It has also been assisted by a steering group of senior DIMIA officials, the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Committee, the Council for Multicultural Australia, and officers from a range of Commonwealth mainstream service providing agencies.

DIMIA wishes to thank all contributors to the review and recognises that implementing the findings of this report will require further consultation and ongoing partnerships with stakeholders. DIMIA looks forward to working together with the community for the benefit of migrants and humanitarian entrants.

Correspondence in relation to the review and to this report can be directed to DIMIA at:

Email: settlement.review@immi.gov.au

Postal: The Director
Settlement Review Section
Aqua 5
Department of Immigration and
Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 25, BELCONNENACT 2616

