



**MULTICULTURAL  
AUSTRALIA**  
*it's who we are*

**Migration, Pathway to Nation Building**

**2023**

13 February 2023

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**By email: [migration@aph.gov.au](mailto:migration@aph.gov.au)**

Dear Committee,

**Re: Migration, Pathway to Nation Building**

Multicultural Australia welcomes the convening of this inquiry into permanent migration as a pathway to nation building. We consider that the findings of this inquiry will make an important contribution to the Government's broad and on-going review of Australia's migration system, and we are grateful for the opportunity to contribute a submission to this inquiry. We appreciate the significant role that migration policy has played in shaping Australia's prosperity and growth and recognise that the legislative and policy response to this review will be instrumental in shaping our nation in the future.

We appreciate that nation building is a collective project that may be informed and driven by different approaches over time. However, we strongly believe that there are certain constants, including recognition and respect for the unique and significant contributions made by our First Australians and by waves of migrants. Our submission is informed by the voices and insights of migrants and other new arrivals, which are often not heard in conversations in relation to nation building yet have a vital role to play.

Multicultural Australia exists to create a welcoming and inclusive community for all new arrivals to Queensland. As a major settlement provider for migrants and refugees in metropolitan and regional Queensland, we have been welcoming refugees, migrants, people seeking asylum, international students, and other new arrivals since 1997. We strive to create a fairer, more prosperous society for all Queenslanders. We work closely with diverse multicultural communities in Queensland, from new and emerging communities to more established communities.

Multicultural Australia has a strong commitment to nation building in our own work. The three pillars underpinning our strategic plan – create belonging, change the conversation, and fit for the future – not only shape our own work, but provide a template for nation building. For

Multicultural Australia, creating belonging involves creating a safe environment, where people feel connected to their community and are empowered to realise their aspirations. Changing the conversation involves amplifying the voices of people with lived experience to shape and create diverse, inclusive, and welcoming communities. Fit for the future means we share a collective responsibility to proactively work towards a just and sustainable future, ensuring opportunities for leaders and change-makers from diverse backgrounds to drive this vision. Multicultural Australia's work is about migration, ensuring that the benefits of migration are shared collectively and inform nation building and development.

Multicultural Australia has developed this submission based on our work with clients and communities. We highly value and prioritise the direct inclusion of community voice in consultations such as these and would be happy to facilitate this at the Committee's request.

Please do not hesitate to contact Rose Dash, Multicultural Australia's Chief Client Officer, on 0448 085 531 or [RoseD@mcaus.org.au](mailto:RoseD@mcaus.org.au).

Yours sincerely,



Christine Castley  
CEO, Multicultural Australia

## Introduction

Since 1998, Multicultural Australia has worked to advance multiculturalism in Australia and build communities where everyone belongs. Multicultural Australia has welcomed tens of thousands of individuals from refugee, asylum seeker, international student, and migrant backgrounds in Queensland, with the goal of creating a more equitable and prosperous society.

Multicultural Australia helps new Queenslanders settle into their new lives, build connections in their communities, find work and study opportunities, learn new skills, and feel at home. Multicultural Australia also works with individuals, communities, business, and government to contribute to building a more welcoming Queensland through advocacy, cultural training, and community events. These initiatives serve to bring people together, foster understanding, and recognise the valuable contribution that new arrivals and migrants make to Queensland.

Multicultural Australia provides a range of settlement services for new Queenslanders, including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, to provide them with the support and services they need to settle into their new home.

We centre our work around the lived experiences of the clients and communities we serve. To ensure our authenticity in this regard, we have established several mechanisms, including:

- **Client Voice Reference Group:** This group was established in 2020, as a mechanism for persons with lived experience as a refugee or migrant to act as Advisors to our organization in areas such as our case management, employment advisors, housing workers and others, and provide consultation and input into the design and delivery of our services and community development work. The Terms of Reference for the group specify that it is to include a diverse cross-section of ten to twelve representatives of the communities we support.
- **Future Leaders Advocacy Group (FLAG):** FLAG comprises a driven group of young leaders who offer valuable insight and advice. Council members ensure the voice of newly arrived young people, their families, and community are heard through contributing to program design and delivery.
- **Community Leaders' Gatherings:** we host regular Community Leaders' Gatherings as opportunities for training, information sharing and collaboration.

Multicultural Australia is committed to creating and fostering a flourishing multicultural society in which people from diverse backgrounds have opportunities to thrive and contribute. To this end, we consider that a program of welcome and support at the initial phase, following by appropriate and tailored ongoing settlement supports, is fundamental to the creation of successful settlement outcomes for all migrants.

Multicultural Australia considers that the Australian migration program should prioritise the wellbeing of migrants, recognising that wellbeing is a nuanced concept with emotional, physical, economic, social, cultural, intellectual, spiritual, and environmental dimensions. Multicultural Australia believes that this commitment to the wellbeing of migrants should extend to all new arrivals, irrespective of their mode of arrival. Moreover, the migration program must be structured around norms of natural justice, transparency, fairness, and human rights.

Multicultural Australia submits that Australia's migration policy should include the following key objectives:

- To continue to meet Australia's commitments to human rights at an international level, including by increasing Australia's humanitarian intake;
- To ensure that the migrant intake promotes national development and stimulates shared national prosperity;
- To ensure that the rights and entitlements attached to different visa categories are clear, simple and equitable;
- To ensure that the migration policy settings:
  - support equitable access to migration across different communities and cultural groups;
  - encompass transparent, fair and equitable selection processes, which provide applicants with access to natural justice, including the right to a fair hearing and to have their application decided fairly, without prejudice or bias; and
  - are underpinned by a transparent, simple and accessible administrative framework;
- To protect the human rights of all migrants and refugees, including their rights to family reunification, and to protections that are in the best interests of their children;
- To facilitate equitable and accessible pathways to permanent residency and citizenship for migrants seeking to remain in Australia; and

- To facilitate the inclusion of migrants in Australia's economy, culture and society; promoting social cohesion.

There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the wide-ranging social, cultural and economic benefits of migration at a national level. Historically, migration has played a critical role in Australia's growth and development, and it has the potential to remain a key driver in this regard.

As discussed further below, Multicultural Australia considers that expanding Australia's migration program will have multifaceted benefits, including supporting our national economic interests and development, meeting our international humanitarian obligations, and facilitating social inclusion and cultural development.

Multicultural Australia submits that the Government should take a long-term view of migration, that aligns with and supports realization of Australia's long-term interests. To ameliorate the significant impacts of the border closures and other pandemic-related restrictions, Multicultural Australia submits that there should be a strong, purposeful investment in building the migration program over the coming years.

### **The role of permanent migration in nation building, cultural diversity, and social cohesion**

Australia is a 'nation of immigrants', with 27.6% of the population born overseas and a majority of the population descended from migrants.<sup>1</sup> Migration has played a significant, positive role in the economic, social and cultural development of Australia, a trend expected to continue. There is a direct correlation between Australia's rich and increasing cultural diversity and its migration policies,<sup>2</sup> with a sharp increase in cultural diversity recorded since 2006 in response to changes to Australia's immigration policy (including an increase in the intake of skilled migrants),<sup>3</sup> a trend that is likely to continue.

Affirming the focus of this inquiry on considering appropriate policy settings to ensure migration

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Cultural diversity of Australia: Information on country of birth, year of arrival, ancestry, language and religion*. 20 September 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/cultural-diversity-australia>

<sup>2</sup> Australia's post-war migration program that saw migrants from mainly European countries is now very different. From 2016 to 2021, the countries of birth [of migrants] with the largest decreases in number were European countries, mainly relating to those countries where high numbers migrated to Australia as part of Australia's post-war migration program. Australia's overseas-born population by country of birth reveals an increasing influence of Asian migration and the shift away from historical European migration. Vietnam, Malaysia and Sri Lanka now appear in the top-10 countries of birth of Australia's overseas born population: Australia's population by country of birth.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/australias-population-country-birth/latest-release>.

<sup>3</sup> Nearly every country from around the world was represented in Australia's population in 2021: ABS. (2021). *Australia's population by country of birth*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/australias-population-country-birth/latest-release>.

remains a key driver for Australia's prosperity and growth,<sup>4</sup> it is recognised in the research literature that the benefits of migration far outweigh the costs, especially in the longer term. There is a strong body of evidence supporting the view that migrants have and continue to make substantial contributions to Australia's human and social resources and productive capacity.<sup>5</sup> Research findings by Carrington and associates<sup>6</sup> suggest that Australia's world standing is, to a significant extent, attributable to our success as a multicultural nation.

A key role permanent migration plays in nation building is through labour market participation by migrants. Most migrants come to Australia to contribute to the economy through workforce participation, including to fill skill shortages and production, as well as contributing economically by paying tax (notwithstanding that policy settings can deny access to government services and infrastructure).<sup>7</sup> Migrants contribute to the productive diversity of Australia through the creation of businesses, different entrepreneurial activities, the introduction of new skills and the supply of diverse products. This drives economic prosperity and facilitates valuable cultural and business opportunities.<sup>8</sup> With increasing globalisation of labour markets, labour market segmentation, and internationalisation of economic activities comes an increasing imperative to adequately support and encourage migration pathways to Australia.

Research has also noted the contribution made by migrants to recreational and cultural diversity, and to community life.<sup>9</sup> Migration has positive benefits for language and education, arts and music, sport, and food, creating insight, inspiration, understanding, empathy, and curiosity.<sup>10</sup>

The boost to human capital stocks associated with migration is also recognised. Research documents the higher levels of general health of migrants as compared with the resident Australian population.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Parliament of Australia. Media Release: Migration. Pathway to Nation Building. 24 November 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Carrington, K., McIntosh, A., and Walmsley, J. (eds.) (2007). *The Social Costs and Benefits of Migration into Australia*. Commonwealth of Australia.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Hugo, G. (2005). *Migrants in society: diversity and cohesion*. National Centre for Social Applications of GIS. University of Adelaide; and Note 5, above.

<sup>8</sup> Note 5, above.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Maximising Migrants' Contribution to Society. (2021). *The positive impact of migrants in the sphere of culture*.

<sup>11</sup> The 'healthy immigrant effect' is often used to suggest that on initial arrival immigrants might be better off in terms of their health than native-born counterparts. This may be for a variety of reasons including voluntary positive selection and legal barriers to entry for those in poor health. However, care must be taken to understand there is significant diversity within immigrant groups and these findings may not translate across all groups. For example, *Jatrana et al* find in their study that foreign-born people from English speaking countries typically had a health advantage relative to native-born people, and foreign-born people from non-English speaking countries had a health disadvantage with respect to native-born people for all health outcomes. Jatrana S, Richardson K, Pasupuleti SSR. Investigating the Dynamics of Migration and Health in Australia: A Longitudinal Study. *Eur J Popul.* 2017 Aug 21;34(4):519-565. doi: 10.1007/s10680-017-9439-z. PMID: 30976253; PMCID: PMC6241155.

Underpinning Australia's multicultural achievement is our ability to develop and enhance our share of global bridging social capital<sup>12</sup> – a recognised driver for progress – as well as bonding capital,<sup>13</sup> with social and cultural integration supported by successive waves of migration from particular regions and cultural groups. The important role of new migrants in providing social capital to their networks in their country of origin is recognised, with social networks acknowledged as a key intermediary in new migrants' interaction with, and adjustment to, the host society as well as an essential element in the maintenance and operation of diaspora.<sup>14</sup> The social, psychological, cultural, religious, and economic functions of these networks are critical considerations for the development of migration policy.

Notwithstanding our multicultural achievements, Multicultural Australia considers that there are key policy issues that need to be addressed to ensure our future sustainability and success. Multicultural Australia considers that future policy settings should continue to focus on how migrants obtain social capital – relationships characterised by trust and reciprocity in intensive and extensive social networks. Social connections for refugees and migrants include multiple domains – social bonds, bridges, and links. Social bonds include connections with others with a shared sense of identity – this includes families (variously defined), ethnic and cultural groups, and associations. Social bridges are connections with people of a different background, and can include connections in various settings like local schools, places of learning, community groups, employment, sporting events, etc. Social links include connections with institutions, including settlement, community, and government services. We strongly believe that focusing on building social capital by addressing inequalities in the power hierarchy – including, importantly in work and community settings – is critical to supporting social cohesion. Strong and well-designed inclusion policies (supported by viable funding) are an important tool for supporting migrants' inclusion and social cohesion and also impact on positioning Australia as a desirable migrant destination.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional urgency to this inquiry, challenging us to question the long-term intent of our migration program and, importantly, shining a spotlight on the precarious situation of many temporary migrants in Australia. It is imperative that the inquiry

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'bridging social capital' refers to the social capital developed between disparate social, racial, class and religious groups: Van Staveren, I., & Knorringa, P. (2007). "Unpacking Social Capital in Economic Development: How Social Relations Matter." *Review of Social Economy* 65(1):107–35; Woolcock, M. (2001). "Microenterprise and Social Capital: A Framework for Theory, Research, and Policy." *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 30:193–98.

<sup>13</sup> In which migrants from particular ethnic groups also act as bonding agents for the next wave, assisting their cultural and economic integration in a multitude of ways that are immeasurable and hence largely invisible.

<sup>14</sup> Hugo, G. (2005). *Migrants in society: diversity and cohesion*. National Centre for Social Applications of GIS, University of Adelaide.



consider that, while temporary migration brings benefits across various sectors (education, agriculture, business), it does not always ensure the protection and wellbeing of temporary migrants in Australia. The costs are significant, both for the people and communities impacted, as well as for Australia in terms of reputational damage. Moving beyond the immediate impacts of the pandemic will require us to consider the long-term attractiveness of Australia as a settlement destination and our skills needs and labour market requirements into the future.

#### **Multicultural Australia's work to support social integration for new arrivals**

Multicultural Australia prioritises the creation of deliberate and purposeful connections for new arrivals with communities (spiritual, ethnic, cultural) and places (community centres, sporting clubs, libraries, etc.) of interest, to support their social integration. We have developed individual and group programs to create opportunities for participation in activities within the community, including in key events and through sport.

We support and foster community networks and associations, including Community Leaders' Gatherings. We also run programs supporting specific target cohorts to engage with the broader community, for example:

- The **Migrant Youth Vision Project** links young people to education, training, employment, and sport;
- The **Queensland Student Hub** supports international students in partnership with Trade and Investment Queensland;
- The **Connecting through Sports Program** provides pathways into sport and physical activity for refugees and immigrants. This program builds on our partnerships with Brisbane Lions and AFL Queensland, expanding into multi-sports including, AFL, Football, Netball and Tennis and engaging over 20 sports clubs across South East Queensland. It is intended to deliver a suite of sports inclusion programs for refugees and migrants, to increase their sense of belonging, as well as to work with sports clubs to champion diversity and inclusion.

Multicultural Australia established and manages the **Redbank Plains Community Centre**, developed as an initiative of Ipswich City Council and Queensland Government. The Centre has a vision of creating a welcoming, safe, and inclusive space for the community. This is achieved by maintaining a diverse volunteer pool that is equipped to engage with and respond to the growing and diverse region to address psychosocial barriers for residents through

frontline individual and group responses, address service access issues, and positively impact the social cohesion and sentiments towards diversity within the local community<sup>15</sup>.

We also collaborate with **Welcome Hubs** (local community organisations which welcome new arrivals) across Brisbane to support community conversations and cultural connection events. Multicultural Australia's Welcome Hub model recognises the importance of Community Neighbourhood Centres in building and strengthening community relationships and considers them key to addressing issues of social isolation and loneliness in local communities. Multicultural Australia currently partners with 18 Welcome Hubs across South-East Queensland.

## **Immigration as a strategic enabler of vibrant economies and socially sustainable communities in our cities and regional hubs**

Multicultural Australia notes that there is now significant recognition of migration as a positive driver of sustainable development. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the benefits that migration brings in the form of investment, skills, cultural diversity, and the ability to impact change in communities of migrants' origin through the transfer of skills and resources.<sup>16</sup>

Numerous examples highlight the role of migration in enabling local regions, economies and communities to thrive. Multicultural Australia notes in particular the significant contribution made by migrants to regional Australia, including to the local workforce and economy. The trend towards internal migration from Australian capital cities to regional cities has increased in recent years,<sup>17</sup> with migrants helping to address recognized labour force shortages in non-metropolitan areas.<sup>18</sup> Migrants and refugees have made significant contributions to their own local refugee as

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<sup>15</sup> Redbank Plains Community Centre | Shape Your Ipswich

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.iom.int/migration-sustainable-development-and-2030-agenda#:~:text=Migrants%20can%20transfer%20valuable%20knowledge,factor%20to%20achieve%20sustainable%20development>.

<sup>17</sup> In 2021, the largest quarterly net loss from internal migration from capital cities to regional locations was recorded: ABS. (2021). <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-internal-migration-estimates-provisional/latest-release>.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Government. Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2011). *A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants*.

well as cosmopolitan Australian local communities.<sup>19</sup> This contribution also extends to the second and subsequent generations of migrants.<sup>20</sup>

The case study of Nhill provides insights into the economic and social benefits to regional resettlement. The staged recruitment and resettlement of Karen refugees into Nhill brought significant economic impact (estimated over five years at \$41.5 million in net present value terms) and also provided noticeable positive social impacts in addressing regional population decline, revitalising local services and increasing social capital across both communities.<sup>21</sup>

In Multicultural Australia's own experience, regional resettlement has assisted in the creation of many vibrant local communities. The following example of Rockhampton is provided to illustrate this.

#### **Regional resettlement**

Rockhampton has long been a secondary settlement location. The voluntary relocation of humanitarian entrants to Rockhampton began over 10 years ago due to critical labour shortages in regional areas. Many humanitarian entrants were highly mobile and willing to work in jobs that many Australian workers would tend to avoid. An internal Multicultural Australia (then MDA) survey found that 64% of recent arrivals were willing to engage in labouring jobs in Australia regardless of their pre-arrival employment skills and experiences. Being more motivated to sustain their employment led to higher labour retention for employers and a high level of social participation in local communities. In 2010-11 around 350 individuals, (mostly single male Tamil, Rohingya and Sudanese humanitarian entrants), relocated to Rockhampton to work in the local abattoirs. Since then, many hundreds of humanitarian entrants and migrants have travelled from capital cities to Rockhampton to secure employment. The location has already become a success story of regional settlement. In addition to the strong drivers for work, there are other key ingredients that have contributed to the successful settlement outcomes in Rockhampton. Rockhampton has a long history of welcoming migrant workers to the region. Local services, communities, businesses and individuals have positively embraced migrants that have chosen to relocate in Rockhampton. Information about work opportunities is readily shared across national

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Collins, J., Watson, K. and Krivokapic-Skoko, B. (2017). *From Boats to Businesses: The Remarkable Journey of Hazara Refugee Entrepreneurs in Adelaide: Full Report*. Centre for Business and Social Innovation, UTS Business School: Sydney.

<sup>20</sup> See for example: Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2011). *A Significant Contribution: The Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First- and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants*.

<sup>21</sup> Small Town Big Returns: Economic and Social Impact of the Karen resettlement in Nhill. A Joint AMES and Deloitte Access Economics Report. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-small-towns-big-returns-nhill-resettlement-270415.pdf>.

networks of newly arrived refugees. It has been through these networks that word has spread of the positive work experiences and the acceptance of the Rockhampton community.<sup>22</sup>

Piper notes that research into regional settlement and specific case studies show that if managed well, regional settlement can be beneficial for all relevant stakeholders.<sup>23</sup> Benefits flow for all parties, including:

- Humanitarian entrants, in the form of affordable accommodation, employment opportunities, inclusion into a welcoming community, and ease of access to services;
- Refugee communities, by the creation of settlement pathways for community members, community understanding and acceptance, dispersion and integration;
- The host community, through economic growth, addressing labour shortages, enriching local culture, supporting meaningful engagement of locals and migrants from diverse backgrounds; and
- Agencies supporting refugees into regional areas.

However, the research notes that these benefits are location-specific and cannot occur without some form of intervention.

Piper notes the following two common features of regional centres where humanitarian entrants have settled successfully:<sup>24</sup>

- The region has been able to offer the things that attract humanitarian entrants and/or contribute to them remaining there; and
- The community has wanted the humanitarian entrants to come and/or has embraced them when they arrived.

Multicultural Australia considers that these considerations are also relevant for skilled and family migrants.

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<sup>22</sup> Multicultural Australia. *Settlement Works: Stories from Rockhampton*. Internal Multicultural Australia Report.

<sup>23</sup> Piper, M. (2017). *Refugee Settlement in Regional Areas: Evidence-based good practice*. Published by the Department of Premier and Cabinet 4.0 Australia.

<sup>24</sup> Piper, M. (2017). *Refugee Settlement in Regional Areas: Evidence-based good practice*. Published by the Department of Premier and Cabinet 4.0 Australia.

### **Ezidi settlement in Toowoomba – government, community and business collaborating and tailoring service design and delivery to support inclusion and social cohesion**

Toowoomba, a large regional city on the Darling Downs in Queensland, is known for its long history of successfully settling diverse migrant communities and its welcoming character. Through the committed leadership of the Mayor, Councillors and Toowoomba Regional Council it is one of Australia's Refugee Welcome Zones and a Model City of Peace, showcasing how a peaceful community can be nurtured and encouraged.

Toowoomba is a success story for regional settlement, largely due to the willingness of the community, education, government, business, social enterprise, and not-for-profit sectors to participate in creating a welcoming, safe and inclusive community. Various sectors employ bicultural staff to liaise with and coordinate the unique needs of refugee clients accessing their services, ensuring their services are accessible and inclusive (e.g., Queensland Police Service, Toowoomba Base Hospital, schools, etc.). In addition, many faith and community groups around Toowoomba provide additional services including English conversation classes, craft groups, play groups and interest specific groups to create inclusion and belonging for the refugee and wider communities.

These strong, diverse and interconnected networks, underpinned by the welcoming and nurturing approach taken to receiving new arrivals, have been instrumental in supporting the successful settlement of the Yazidi (Ezidi) community, a small, closed community who speak a unique dialect (Kurdish Kurmanji) rarely spoken by others from different cultural groups. Many Ezidi arrived without proficient literacy or language skills and without the support of previously arrived and established community members who have developed life-skills through their own resettlement experience. The significant individual and collective trauma experienced by the Ezidi community (who were targeted and persecuted, leading to their effective exile from Northern Iraq) has been recognised as increasing the complexity of settlement for this cohort. Services and groups continue to collaborate and at time, require leadership from settlement providers at different points in time to complement their initiatives and foster inclusion and full participation of the Ezidi and the broader migrant community in all aspects of life in the region.

Multicultural Australia understands that settlement is not linear and is uniquely impacted by a person's pre-arrival experiences and their refugee journey, including trauma sustained, level of education and literacy in their first language, and intersectional disadvantage. Ongoing commitment and engagement from all parts of the community is integral to supporting the

continued development of strong relationships, connections and solidarity among and between communities.

Another important consideration in this discussion is the experience of migrants themselves, beyond any consideration of the impacts on the regions where they settle. There is a significant push towards a regionalisation of Australia's migration program and an acknowledgment of the contribution that migrants and refugees can make to local economies and regional locations. This is demonstrated in the recent trends towards regional resettlement of refugees and towards attracting migrant workers to regional areas. However, Boese and Moran argue that what is less clear is *how migrants themselves experience the outcomes of regional migration*. This is an important consideration for our migration policies, as it is directly implicated in the retention of migrants in regional areas. There are limitations to a *purely instrumental view of migrants as agents of regional development*, and the *sustainability of regional migration policies will depend on recognising ... migrants' hopes, needs and aspirations as well as their rights...*<sup>25</sup>

#### **New research to understand opportunities and challenges of regional settlement**

Multicultural Australia is committed to understanding humanitarian settlement across different regional sites in Australia. Towards this, we are Industry Partners in an ARC-Linkage Project - 'Settling well: a longitudinal study of refugees in regional Australia'.<sup>26</sup> The project will provide the first longitudinal assessment of the impacts of regional settlement, within Australia, for humanitarian entrants and destination communities. It is expected the research will generate new knowledge of the opportunities and challenges for sustainable regional settlement and improve community, organisational and government decision-making capacity relating to regional settlement of humanitarian migrants within Australia. This evidence-based research will be key to informing our own service delivery, ensuring settlement success of humanitarian entrants across diverse locations in Queensland, as well as supporting host and receiving communities and locations in Queensland.

<sup>25</sup> Boese M., & Moran A. (2021). "The Regional Migration-Development Nexus in Australia: What Migration? Whose Development?" *Front. Sociol.* 6:602487. doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2021.602487.

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.uow.edu.au/the-arts-social-sciences-humanities/research/access/research/nes/settling-well/?mc\\_cid=1860725086&mc\\_eid=5381838b69#d.en.212665](https://www.uow.edu.au/the-arts-social-sciences-humanities/research/access/research/nes/settling-well/?mc_cid=1860725086&mc_eid=5381838b69#d.en.212665).

## Attraction and retention strategies for working migrants to Australia

Multicultural Australia notes the need for considered planning around welcoming new migrants to Australia. There is considerable change and uncertainty facing Australia over the coming decades, resulting from complex and inter-related economic, strategic, and social challenges and opportunities, as well as from the impacts of climate change.<sup>27</sup>

These changes bring risks and opportunities and will have a significant impact on migration into Australia. The 2021 Intergenerational Report, projecting an outlook for the Australian economy over the next 40 years, highlights the importance of considering the effects of migration on Australia's economy, fiscal sustainability, environment and planning, and social cohesion. It also notes the importance of considering the non-economic benefits of migration. For example, while the Family stream and Humanitarian program may initially deliver lower economic and fiscal dividends, significant social benefits, including family reunion and increased cultural diversity, are noted, as well as the benefit of fulfilling international obligations by providing resettlement for people who have experienced persecution, harm, or discrimination.<sup>28</sup>

While we support a targeted approach to filling specific skill shortages in our domestic labour market, which may be aided by the creation and promotion of specific migration opportunities and incentives, we propose a flexible, expansive, and equitable approach to the work rights attached to visas, which we consider to be in the best interests of migrants and of Australia.

Multicultural Australia proposes that the Australian migration strategy should be designed to respond to the impact of relevant megatrends and economic outlooks, while maintaining flexibility to manage the inevitable uncertainties. For example, understanding the predicted significant wave of climate-driven global migration in coming decades is important in anticipating likely demand and potential legal and policy impediments. Similarly, awareness of the trend of an ageing population can anticipate possible implications for the labour market, identifying potential skill shortages that may be met by skilled migrants. Finally, it is important in the context of considering challenges and opportunities for Australia, of adopting a broad perspective that acknowledges both the immediate and intergenerational impacts of migration.

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<sup>27</sup> For example, CSIRO's global megatrends report maps key megatrends likely to impact Australia (and our organisations) over the next 20 years. It highlights challenges around a changing climate; the need for innovation and resourcing to address escalating pressures on finite resources (food, water, mineral and energy); an ageing population; new health challenges; emerging geopolitical shifts relating to science, technology, trade, supply chains and defence strategy; rapid adoption of digital and data technologies; ongoing scientific breakthroughs in artificial intelligence (AI) and global investments in technology-driven research and development (R&D); and the influence of human perspectives and experiences on future community, business, technology and policy decisions [ CSIRO. Our Future World. <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/technology-space/data/our-future-world>.

<sup>28</sup> 2021 International Report <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/2021-intergenerational-report>.

Multicultural Australia considers that attraction and retention strategies for working migrants to Australia should include:

1. **A tailored approach to the support needs of new arrivals/migrants into Australia:** provide a low intensity stream of initial settlement support to all migrants and international students on a voluntary basis, to fast-track and improve migration outcomes to ensure participation in Australia's economy and society. These can include the creation of hubs, provision of orientation support, and information and referral pathways, with a view to fostering social inclusion and development of life skills necessary to effectively integrate into Australian society. It is critical that we create a safe, welcoming, and inclusive society that fosters good outcomes for migrants.
2. **Simplification of visa types and processes:** ensuring greater flexibility across the work, study, and family streams, with fewer constraints on travel and other conditions.
3. **Addressing racism and discrimination:** We submit that the Government should prioritise the development of inclusion policies. Instances of active discrimination and exclusion within communities, institutions and public spaces impede the development of belonging and connection and harm nation building. We note that the Queensland Human Rights Commission's report following its recent review of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) focused strongly on addressing intersectionality and creating belonging. We recommend that the federal legislative and policy reform agenda reflects this recognition and movement. We also note the difficulties flowing from the individual complaint-based anti-discrimination mechanisms at both state and federal levels in Australia and welcome the recommendations by the Queensland Human Rights Commission to introduce standing for community organisations to bring complaints on behalf of individuals and communities in relation to, among other things, racism in the workplace, and to focus on a proactive and preventative, rather than reactive, regulatory model. If implemented, this would require organisations to take reasonable and proportionate steps to prevent discrimination and include affirmative measures as a means of promoting and realising substantive equality.<sup>29</sup>
4. **Addressing exploitation of migrant workers:** There is growing evidence that temporary migrants and international students are vulnerable to exploitation in employment. Worker rights exploitation can take various forms like, wage theft, underpayment of wages and

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<sup>29</sup> Queensland Human Rights Commission. (2022). *Building belonging: Review of Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*. <https://www.qhrc.qld.gov.au/about-us/law-reform>



entitlement, unfair dismissals, workplace health and safety issues and insecure work<sup>30</sup>. This issue is compounded by barriers to reporting and seeking assistance to address these violations.<sup>31</sup> Significant reform is required in this space, including permitting work rights across all visa types; providing information and support to migrants and international students on work rights and responsibilities and channels to report abuse or exploitation; ensuring language support; and assistance to link with support services. These supports should be equally available in regional and remote locations, as well as in metropolitan areas.

#### **Partnering to secure Worker Rights in Queensland**

Multicultural Australia is supporting a focus on vulnerable migrant workers in Queensland through a targeted program of supports aimed at reducing (migrant) worker vulnerability by supporting workers to understand their rights at work and develop confidence in seeking rectification of issues in the workplace.

Funded by the Queensland Government and delivered as a joint project with the Queensland Community Alliance and the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma, the Worker Rights project will seek to strengthen community-based support for workers experiencing workplace issues, abuses, or mistreatment; and grow and promote equitable access to safe and secure employment for migrant and refugee workers in Queensland.

- 5. Reform and simplification of the process for recognition of skills and experiences of migrants:** skilled migrants arrive with prior skills that are usually assessed as matching local Australian standards. However, downgraded cultural capital on migration, whereby the qualifications acquired in one country are not automatically recognized as equally valuable in another, is a common experience, and represents a significant barrier to labour market participation of skilled migrants. The lack of a consistent, national approach to recognizing skills and qualifications obtained overseas is also a significant barrier for many migrants in

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Berg, Laurie and Farbenblum, Bassina (2017). *Wage Theft in Australia: Findings of the National Temporary Migrant Work Survey*. University of Technology Sydney, University of NSW Law, and the Migrant Worker Justice Initiative, November 2017

<sup>31</sup> Recent research documents the relatively low help-seeking behaviours of international students in response to workplace exploitation, harassment and other workplace abuses and violations, with particularly low rates of help-seeking in relation to accessing online information and support from Australian government agencies or websites and from other formal channels of support. See Farbenblum, B. and L. Berg (2020). *International students and wage theft in Australia*. Sydney

the temporary, family, or humanitarian streams. Streamlining and simplifying processes of recognition of qualifications attained prior to migration to Australia would benefit migrants and the Australian economy and society. Recent research has highlighted the cost, in terms of foregone wages, of failing to recognize overseas qualifications of skilled migrants.<sup>32</sup> There is an imperative to improve skilled migration outcomes as Australia emerges from the border closures associated with the pandemic, to address critical shortages of skilled migrants. Multicultural Australia endorses the proposals advanced by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia to facilitate this:<sup>33</sup>

- a) establishing a government-regulated online skills-matching jobs platform;
- b) comprehensively updating the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations Codes (ANZSCO) to ensure migrants with vital and cutting-edge skills can migrate to Australia;
- c) increasing transparency from the Federal Government about the data and methods used to assess what occupations are in demand and included on the skilled occupation lists; and
- d) reducing the Newly Arrived Resident's Waiting Period for unemployment benefits from four years to six months.

We support the proposal to enact comprehensive national legislation on skill recognition.<sup>34</sup> We also note the importance of systems reform and provision of appropriate, individualised support to overcome other barriers to skill recognition (including to navigate the system, obtain key identification documents and meet the costs of the IELTS exam). By way of example, we note the fairness commissioner model introduced in Ontario.<sup>35</sup> In this context, we highlight the significant digital divide experienced by migrants and humanitarian entrants and seek investment in fostering digital literacy and digital access as a core component of settlement support for all new arrivals.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Approximately 23% of permanent skilled migrants in Australia were working in a job beneath their skill level between 2013-2018, costing \$1.25 billion in lost wages: Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). (2021). *A good match: Optimising Australia's permanent skilled migration*.

<sup>33</sup> Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA). (2021). *A good match: Optimising Australia's permanent skilled migration*.

<sup>34</sup> For example, the German Recognition Act: OECD (2017). *Making Integration Work: Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*. Making Integration Work, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278271-en>; Settlement Council of Australia. (2022). Submission: Employment White Paper.

<sup>35</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. (2017). *Making Integration Work: Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*.

<sup>36</sup> Settlement Council of Australia & Good Things Foundation Australia. (2020). Supporting the digital inclusion of new migrants and refugees.

**Broadening recognition of the value of workers:** Historically, there has been a strong focus in OECD nations on skill and talent in migrant selection. However, demographic and economic changes have created a growing demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers.<sup>37</sup> It is important to review immigration policies focused on attracting particular skillsets, particularly from the long-term perspective of the contributions second and subsequent generations of migrants will make.

## Policy settings to strengthen skilled migrant pathways to permanent residency

Multicultural Australia considers that, in an increasingly competitive global market, Australia's attraction as a migration destination will depend, to a significant extent, on our migration policy settings, as well as the longer-term benefits offered to migrants.

To develop an effective, sustainable and humane migration policy that positions us well within the global community, it is imperative that Australia's migration policy response is not shaped by short-term considerations but informed by long-term planning and evidence-based forecasts (in this regard, we note the discussion above of the outlook and trends impacting migration).

Strengthening pathways for migration to Australia requires collaboration between all levels of government, employers and industry groups, universities and the VET sector, community services and community groups.

Multicultural Australia highlights the following key policy settings that we consider could be redesigned to strengthen skilled migrant pathways to permanent residency:

- **Eligibility, temporal and other settings relating to residency policy:** Multicultural Australia submits there is a need for the redesign of policy settings to embed clear, transparent, and timely pathways from temporary to permanent residency, with strong safeguards to prevent 'permanently temporary' migrants in Australia. This is integral to providing certainty, security and well-being and supporting people to develop place-based social and cultural connections and engage in their community and ultimately to promote belonging.<sup>38</sup> We submit that there is a need to simplify the visa system,

<sup>37</sup> Hugo, G. (2005). *Migrants in society: diversity and cohesion*. National Centre for Social Applications of GIS, University of Adelaide.

<sup>38</sup> For migrants seeking to make a permanent life in Australia, uncertainties around visa processing and entitlements can affect wellbeing in the community and impact on their ability to contribute fully to the community. Multicultural Australia works with many such individuals living the community and looking to take the next step towards full social, economic, cultural and civic participation. There are many individuals on Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) as well as the Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) who have lived, worked and contributed to our communities for many years – yet, have no prospects to permanent residency or citizenship in Australia (or even a right to family reunification).

allowing greater flexibility across the work, study and family streams, with fewer constraints on travel and other conditions, is necessary to reflect the work and study activities of different family members. While Multicultural Australia considers that protecting the spaces for our humanitarian program intake is a central tenet of our commitment to global human rights, it is important to recognise that people from a refugee background also work, study, holiday, and have families. The constraints imposed by Australia's migration system impose unnecessary limitations that are not conducive to nation building. Simplification of visa categories would also result in reduced administrative and compliance costs and resources. We consider that a significantly simplified system of visa categories would also be instrumental in promoting social cohesion.

- **Entitlements attached to permanent residency:** In redesigning our migration program to meet current and forecast labour market need, it is imperative that sufficient consideration is afforded to the rights of migrants, in key domains including:
  - The security of their status, including opportunities to obtain permanent residency and Australian citizenship;
  - Rights protections, including recognition of culture and cultural and linguistic rights, and protection from discrimination;
  - The entitlements they are offered, including in relation to:
    - family reunion and family formation;
    - travel rights;
    - health, education, employment, and social security policies; and
    - rights attached to labour market mobility;
    - voting rights<sup>39</sup>.
  - The settlement supports provided to support successful inclusion and belonging in Australian society.

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<sup>39</sup> Multicultural Australia submits that the Government should explore ways of extending voting rights to permanent residents. There is recognition around incorporating resident non-citizens into civil and social rights regimes in various ways, with many countries approving some form of foreign citizen voting rights (especially in local elections). Some arguments suggest that permanent migrants and long-term temporary residents have deep connections to the country through family, friends, work and a sense of belonging (social membership of the Australian community) - and this forms the basis for membership of a political community (voting rights) as well: <https://theconversation.com/why-permanent-residents-and-long-term-temporary-visa-holders-should-be-able-to-vote-in-federal-elections-192593>

- **Strengthening migration infrastructure:** Multicultural Australia submits there is a need to develop appropriate, transparent policy settings regulating the role of key actors in the migration and settlement system.<sup>40</sup> In Australia, the strong policy focus on severely restricting humanitarian entrants to Australia, often founded on anecdotal evidence, racism, self-interest and fear, has led to significant flaws in the immigration infrastructure. There is an urgent imperative to establish a regulated, professional, committed and responsive bureaucracy operating under transparent processes to assist policy makers in the development of sound policy and implementation of that policy.
- **Appropriate recognition of overseas obtained skills and qualifications:** As noted above, appropriate skills recognition and opportunities for local work experience is essential to supporting pathways to permanent residency. We submit that there is a need for a redesign of policy settings to support timely, effective and accessible recognition of overseas acquired skills and experiences.
- **Targeted settlement supports:** Multicultural Australia submits that there is the need to redesign policy settings in relation to the eligibility, scope and breadth of settlement supports. Targeted supports provided to migrants in early settlement can make a significant difference to both short and long-term settlement outcomes. Given the strong body of evidence that entry to the labour market and successful settlement is facilitated by acquisition of local language,<sup>41</sup> we emphasise the importance of providing language support, especially in the initial settlement period. There is a need for the development of institutional structures at a national, state and local level to facilitate settlement and integration of migrants, international students and humanitarian entrants, including strengthening partnerships and adequately funding organisations that provide settlement supports. Through our work we understand that international students in Queensland seek connections and more support around understanding Australian systems as well as to meet and become friends with locals. For most new migrants, settlement stressors and isolation can compound feelings of home sickness and impact their wellbeing. The recent COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the isolation and vulnerability of international students and temporary migrants in Australia, exacerbated by their exclusion from settlement supports. Multicultural Australia submits that there

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<sup>40</sup> Hugo, G. (2005). *Migrants in society: diversity and cohesion*. National Centre for Social Applications of GIS. University of Adelaide.

<sup>41</sup> Hugo, G. (2005). *Migrants in society: diversity and cohesion*. National Centre for Social Applications of GIS. University of Adelaide.

is a need for provision of settlement support for non-humanitarian migrants in these streams.

Policy can promote social cohesion by reducing the variety of constraints on visa categories that limit social participation, particularly through employment. Appropriate policy settings and settlement support for permanent migration is also integral to creating social cohesion. In the context of increasing diversification of migrants' backgrounds globally, the impact of migration and diversity on social cohesion is an important consideration.<sup>42</sup> Research has noted the important role communities and local authorities play in creating inclusion and belonging for migrants. It further notes that, while the impact of migration and diversity on social cohesion is not clear, inclusion of migrants and social cohesion are closely related, with inclusion of migrants within their neighbourhoods, cities and communities, in areas including education, health, employment, housing, civic and political involvement, are vital for social cohesion.<sup>43</sup> This process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live is highly individualised and subject to the experiences, skills and characteristics of the individuals.

#### **The importance of status security to building belonging**

Research on temporary settlement in the regions indicates that while temporary residents may develop feelings of place-based belonging grounded in social relations and shared cultural affiliations as well as the efforts of local stakeholders keen to retain migrants in the location, the rights restrictions associated with temporary visas tend to diminish such feelings of belonging and further exacerbate settlement stressors and feelings of tenuous belonging for those migrants who are lacking place-based social or cultural connections.<sup>44</sup>

### **Strengthening labour market participation and the economic and social contribution of migrants, including family and humanitarian migrants and the partners of working migrants**

Multicultural Australia welcomes the recognition of the economic and social contribution of migrants, including family and humanitarian migrants and partners of working migrants. We support a redesign and reframing of the migration program that reduces the delineation

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<sup>42</sup> Bauloz, C, Vathi, Z., & Acosta, D. (Nov 2019). *World Migration Report 2020*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18356/0095ab48-en> . Nov 2019.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Migrants in Regional Australia. *Migration, Mobility, & Displacement* 3 (1): 51-69.

319298274\_ 'Half\_of\_Myself\_Belongs\_to\_this\_Town'\_ Conditional\_Belongings\_of\_Temporary\_Migrants\_in\_Regional\_Australia.pdf (researchgate.net)

between skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants. We consider that compartmentalizing new arrivals into categories based on an assessment of their contribution to the labour market on arrival, and tailoring their rights and entitlements accordingly, is inequitable and artificial. It fails to properly recognize and reflect the significant contribution skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants alike make to the labour market – not only by filling skill gaps, but by establishing new businesses that ultimately create employment and economic growth and developing economic linkages with their countries of origin – as well as many other facets of society.

Many new arrivals to Australia experience unemployment and underemployment. A recent report by CEDA notes that, notwithstanding the apparent success of the permanent skilled migration program, nearly a quarter (about 23%) of permanent skilled migrants in Australia are working in a job beneath their skill level. The cost of this skills mismatch among permanent skilled migrants is significant.<sup>45</sup> There are also broader economic costs, including lost productivity and innovation for companies unable to access the critical skills in key occupations.<sup>46</sup>

Likewise, research into skills underutilisation amongst skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants in Queensland found that, of the more than 80,000 skilled migrants and refugees who settled in Queensland over a 10-year period, almost half (49%) were not fully utilising their skills and experience in the labour force.<sup>47</sup> The research identified multiple drivers for this. In some circumstances, formal skill recognition was not strictly required to utilise relevant skills or qualifications. In other circumstances, the lack of recognition of overseas professional experience represented a barrier to employment. Concerningly, those in the category not utilising their highest level of skills and experience are more likely to be female (58%), aged between the ages of 25 to 34 years (45%), and have skills in management and commerce (36%). The Deloitte report identifies several interacting challenges contributing to this underutilisation including transparency, coordination and fairness; system navigation; and local networks and experience. The system around seeking recognition of overseas qualifications and skills is complicated, fragmented across a number of stakeholders (government, industry bodies etc), and no single body has oversight of this process. Cultural and language barriers can further hinder the process of navigating the full process of skills recognition, professional registration

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<sup>45</sup> It was estimated to be at least \$1.25 billion of wages foregone for permanent skilled migrants who have experienced skills mismatch between 2013 and 2018.

<sup>46</sup> A good match: Optimising Australia's permanent skilled migration. CEDA 2021 <https://www.ceda.com.au/Admin/getmedia/150315bf-cceb-4536-862d-1a3054197cd7/CEDA-Migration-report-26-March-2021-final.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Deloitte Economics (2018). *Seizing the opportunity: Making the most of the skills and experience of migrants and refugees*. A research report for Multicultural Affairs Queensland

and job seeking in Australia. Importantly, that skill recognition is also not synonymous with skill utilisation in Australia. The Deloitte report notes that employer hiring practises that favour local references and experience, and disadvantage those without an Australian network, is another barrier to finding a skilled job in Australia.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the barriers noted above, other issues like racism, stigma, visa insecurity, lack of an Australian drivers' license, lack of transport, lack of childcare (including the lack of access to childcare subsidies associated with certain Visa types) and barriers to workplace socialization affect migrant and refugee job seekers in Australia. This is particularly true for the participation of refugee and migrant women in our communities. This intersectional disadvantage is particularly disempowering and requires a strong policy response to strengthen labour market participation.

#### **Barriers facing migrant women in the labour market**

In Multicultural Australia's experience, many women are not able to engage with equality in the labour market, as they may not have the social capital and networks associated with achieving employment outcomes.

They may face other psychosocial factors such as the lack of, or disruption of, education or lack of English language skills; digital exclusion (based on access, affordability and ability); cultural gender assumptions; care responsibilities; and cultural differences. These factors are all significant in limiting their employment opportunities.

Additionally, structural and systemic barriers including racism, discrimination and sexual harassment can impact the continuum of the sphere of employment, including by negatively influencing hiring practices and impacting treatment within the workplace. It can also significantly impact the recourse and support available to address workplace issues.

Strengthening inclusion and participation in the Australian economy requires a careful consideration of ways to address these intersectional barriers. Multicultural Australia considers that dedicated programs to support and aid economic participation and employment can promote social inclusion as it brings about broader community interactions as well as financial independence. We note the success of targeted supports designed to foster the socio-economic contribution and labour market participation of migrants and refugees, including individual case

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



management and referrals, mentoring, work experience programs, career advice and planning, industry-related training, English language supports within the employment context, enterprise and business development support, job search, and post-employment supports.<sup>49</sup> We note the current, first principles review of Australia's employment services<sup>50</sup> and recommend that the review particularly look to supporting or strengthening the labour market participation of migrants.

#### **Multicultural Australia's Work and Welcome Program**

Multicultural Australia offers a bespoke employment program to address the structural barriers to employment. Since 2010, we have coordinated this program to support migrants and refugees address structural barriers to employment in Australia. The Work and Welcome Program provides participants with a 12-week paid internship with an organisation, with their wages funded through a workplace giving scheme (supported either by the organisation, by regular donations from employee wages or by fundraising). Our experience delivering demonstrates the broad benefits for the intern and the workplace and its staff. The intern is supported to develop skills and experience in an Australian workplace and gain insight into the work of a particular organisation. There has been a demonstrable success rate in interns securing employment following this placement, either at the workplace or in another organisation (with 80% of participants finding secure employment after their placement). Equally, host employers have felt enabled to access new customers, think and engage differently, and innovate new services and products. The organisation benefits from the experience of hiring a refugee, with employees given the opportunity to engage in a direct cross-cultural experience, which helps to break down cultural barriers and stereotypes and broaden perspectives. Over 40 organisations are now recognised as Work and Welcome partners with Multicultural Australia.

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<sup>49</sup> See for example, RCOA (2010). What works: employment strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/what-works-report/2/>.

<sup>50</sup> Parliament of Australia. Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Workforce\\_Australia\\_Employment\\_Services/WorkforceAustralia](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia).

## **The role of settlement services and vocational training in utilising migrant experiences, knowledge, and opportunities**

Settlement services are the first point of engagement for humanitarian entrants. For Multicultural Australia, successful settlement is mitigating barriers, supporting aspirations, building of social capital, meaningful engagement, navigating systems, and generating opportunities into pathways to further community, education, training, or employment. It includes connectedness with the wider community (as a two-way process, with the wider community actively supporting these connections) and the development of a genuine sense of belonging.

Multicultural Australia works to a comprehensive settlement and integration framework across multiple domains, supporting people in the development of independence, wellbeing, and belonging in the community. We support our clients and communities to build connections with the wider community – especially with a view to overcome any marginalisation and isolation within their community, and the wider Australian public. Through a range of programs, often in partnership with key services, corporate sector, and government, we promote the engagement of new arrivals, supporting them to develop peer networks and information supports. With several of these initiatives there is a reciprocal relationship with members of the broader community - through volunteering, cultural capability training, social media, and community events. The overall aim is to build social bonds and bridges to improve sentiments towards diversity and promote inclusion and belonging. In our experience, opportunities for building and strengthening connections with the wider community are around:

- Supporting meaningful community participation
- Increasing employment opportunities; and
- Anti-discrimination/racism and stigma interventions.

We recognise that individuals bring skills and resources to their own settlement, and we work alongside to facilitate this journey. At the same time, we work collectively with communities and stakeholders at structural and systemic levels to address issues that impact on individuals' levels of confidence in navigating their settlement pathways.

### **Informed by Client and Community Voice – Multicultural Australia's model**

Multicultural Australia's work is informed by a deep engagement with our clients and culturally and linguistically diverse communities to provide insight into what is important in settlement from those with lived experience. We have established mechanisms within our

organisation to ensure client and community voice is embedded. Our engagement with clients and communities highlights that they seek a sense of belonging in their local community.

A striking and consistent feature of our engagement with clients and communities is the reiteration of the importance of social connections, including connections with the broader Australian community. In our experience, social connection is likely to be prioritised above other factors, in some instances even employment.<sup>51</sup>

Multicultural Australia notes that there is currently scant Government-funded investment in a focussed approach to community engagement and development, especially for migrants, refugees, and humanitarian entrants. We recommend dedicated resourcing for:

- Community engagement and development work, led by migrant and refugee communities, in partnership with community and settlement organisations; and
- Creation of a specific platform for migrants and refugees to provide their own accounts of their experience, through which they can share their views and experiences and are afforded leadership roles.<sup>52</sup> This must be culturally safe and appropriate and trauma-informed and must ensure appropriate remuneration for participation of those with lived experience. We note that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds often experience exclusion and isolation, which can compound trauma related to their displacement. This impacts on their sense of self, identity, etc, and can be a formative experience in terms of their inclusion in Australian society more broadly. We submit that there is a need for a specific focus on youth voice and leadership.

## Other related matters

Multicultural Australia suggests that the following measures also require consideration with a view to enhancing belonging and social cohesion.

### Acquisition of citizenship

Multicultural Australia is aware that there is a strong appetite and respect for citizenship amongst people from refugee communities, who have experienced displacement from their country of origin, been denied citizenship, and/or been unable to exercise the rights of citizenship for protracted periods. In our experience, this creates a high degree of appreciation

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<sup>51</sup> The Living in Queensland Sensemaker Project. (2016) (internal Multicultural Australia research). Surveys with 315 clients using the Sensemarker® narrative research methodology to better understand their experiences of living in Queensland.

<sup>52</sup> We note the recommendations of CONREP to this effect: Comparative Network on Refugee Externalisation Policies (CONREP). (2022). *Combating Corrosive Narratives About Refugees*.

for citizenship, with the responsibilities of citizenship taken seriously. There are presently significant barriers precluding citizenship applications and determinations, especially relating to English language proficiency, confidence, and fear in relation to the assessment process.

We submit that there is a significant need in community for citizenship preparation support, targeted at addressing the barriers noted above.

### **Changing the conversation**

We note recent research emphasising the importance of language in shaping perceptions and treatment of refugees and calling for those with influence on public discourse – specifically political leaders and the media – to ensure that the presentation of policy and analysis about people seeking refugee protection is transparent, principled and accurate, and to refrain from engaging in harmful narratives and practices.<sup>53</sup> We endorse the following key recommendations of this research:

- Policies and laws should be developed and enacted in ways that uphold the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees;
- A national expert panel (of refugees, experts, lawyers, advocates, etc) should be established to regularly report on truth, transparency and accountability in policy and narratives to the public, including through an annual debate in Federal Parliament;
- Media reporting should adopt a trauma-informed approach to refugees, with journalists avoiding sensationalism and use of particular terms such as ‘refugee crisis’, ‘influx’, ‘hordes’, ‘tough on border protection’, etc in reporting; and
- Explicit acknowledgement that the refugee experience is far from homogenous and there must be diversity and an acknowledgement of intersectional identities, with a particular focus on ensuring the voices of the most marginalised are heard and listened to.<sup>54</sup>

Changing the conversation is an active process of engaging with mainstream services and the wider community around the benefits of migration for nation building. To this end, we highlight the value of cultural diversity training and capacity building, and submit that it should be recognised as core training.

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<sup>53</sup> Comparative Network on Refugee Externalisation Policies (CONREP). (2022). *Combating Corrosive Narratives About Refugees*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Multicultural Australia's work to change the conversation**

Multicultural Australia delivers key signature Community Events including the LUMINOUS Lantern Parade, LUMINOUS in the Neighbourhood, LUMINOUS in the Regions, and the MOSAIC Multicultural Festival.

Multicultural Australia's LUMINOUS Lantern Parade is an annual cultural spectacle of solidarity and support by the broader public, for people from diverse backgrounds, especially refugees, migrants and people seeking asylum. From a modest start, LUMINOUS has grown into an iconic Queensland event, hosting over 10,000 attendees and participants in 2021, and over 20,000 attendees and participants in 2019.

In 2022, LUMINOUS expanded into Brisbane's suburbs and beyond and into key Queensland Humanitarian settlement regions – Toowoomba, Rockhampton, and Cairns. Through Neighbourhood or regional events, in partnership with key community centres or agencies – engaging them in promoting inclusion and belonging, while celebrating the rich cultural traditions of the local diverse communities. The success of LUMINOUS in the Neighbourhood and LUMINOUS in the Regions attests to the importance of local community-based presence through planned and resourced hubs and community organisations and centres.

The successful delivery of LUMINOUS demonstrates that much can be done to bring people and communities together, using existing community assets.

### **Expansion of Australia's migration program**

Multicultural Australia notes the anticipated significant productivity gains associated with an expansion of Australia's migration program. Expanding the labour force has immediate impact on local markets for goods, and particularly services. Increasing cultural diversity also increases Australia's international competitiveness. Migrants arrive with significant social capital in their countries of origin which cannot be discounted in any assessment of the impact of migration.

As a separate but related policy consideration, Multicultural Australia submits that migration policy should foster maintenance of regular ties between migrants and their home countries, by supporting the establishment of migrant associations and an integrated Diaspora policy.<sup>55</sup> As noted above, there is significant value in the development of global bridging capital for core nation building. These measures will provide the policy and infrastructure framework for this.

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<sup>55</sup> Hugo G. (2005). *Migrants in society diversity and cohesion*. National Centre for Social Applications of GIS University of Adelaide.