

Welcoming Regions



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Summary

Encouraging migrants to move to regional Australia is frequently viewed as a ‘win-win’ for receiving communities, local economies, and migrants themselves. New arrivals—including skilled workers, temporary migrants, refugees and other permanent migrants—have the potential to revitalise regional towns and bring new life to local economies. Migration to Australia’s regions also adds cultural richness and diversity while easing pressure on urban infrastructure and services. In turn, settling in regional contexts can speed up the integration process for migrants, providing them with unique settings in which to establish a new life.

However, Australia’s regional areas differ greatly in terms of their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Many of the potential benefits of regional migrant settlement may be offset by the challenges of existing disadvantage, limited employment and career opportunities, and gaps in service provision, housing and affordable transport. Moreover, not all communities in regional towns have experience in supporting new arrivals or a shared commitment to celebrating cultural diversity. Migrants themselves may be wary of the limited opportunities for employment and cultural safety in regional towns and may choose to relocate only temporarily, sometimes to meet visa requirements. These risk factors can combine to compromise the sustainability of regional settlement initiatives before they have even begun.

Realising the benefits of regional settlement requires careful planning, knowledge of what works, and close collaboration between key stakeholders. Funded by the Queensland Government through Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Welcoming Cities has partnered with the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre to conduct a review of existing evidence on regional migrant settlement in Australia and propose scenarios for the design of potential migrant resettlement initiatives. The key findings of this research are summarised below.

1. Successful settlement is a long-term project, requiring contributions from migrants, receiving communities, local organisations, service providers and government

Careful planning is required in each regional location to determine local workforce needs, service gaps and appropriate strategies to respond. Ideally guided by a federal-level regional settlement strategy, local planning should commence well in advance of migrants’ arrival and take account of economic trends, community concerns, service provider capacities, and funding constraints. Given the annual budgeting and policy cycles of government departments, local planning approaches may need to be responsive and adaptive to the non-linear settlement dynamics of migration.

Local governments need to have a formal role in settlement planning networks and program delivery. Planning should be inclusive of community groups (businesses, schools, volunteers, etc.), and importantly, migrants themselves. Meaningful consultations with migrant groups (through, for example, ethno-specific community organisations) can provide insights to real experiences, concerns and aspirations, and mitigate risks of early flight from regional destinations.

Receiving communities and local organisations should be well-informed and prepared to welcome new arrivals. An understanding of local attitudes towards migrants, as well as the perceptions that locals have about different cultures and ethnicities, need to be addressed in planning for regional settlement. Community consultations and information-sharing are critical approaches to build trust, respect and understanding. Engaging local Indigenous communities in welcoming work is a core component of resettlement preparation and planning. Many regional areas of Australia are home to long-established First Nations communities, whose active voice and participation is critical in negotiating matters of settlement, cultural exchange and understanding. Policies and programs that include First Nations Peoples while also emphasising shared values and building positive social relationships can go a long way to fostering openness and acceptance in local communities.

Integration can also be assisted by the active role of established ethnic communities and multicultural institutions. Where these communities do not yet exist in regional areas, there may be opportunities to foster intercultural contact through existing institutions such as schools and workplaces.

Economic security is at the heart of the 'win-win' argument advanced in favour of regional settlement. Sustained employment that enables migrants to meet their costs of living and pursue career advancement is central to settlement success. Given the diversity of regional economies and labour market opportunities, however, careful consideration must be given to the potential 'fit' between available jobs and migrants' skills, qualifications and career aspirations.

While government-initiated skilled migration schemes have attempted to direct migrant workers to regional destinations for decades, there remains no coordinated system or strategy for linking migrant workers with regional employers. Despite this, Australian employers are proactively playing a variety of roles in regional areas to attract and retain migrant workers, including but not limited to: acting as proxies for settlement service providers in remote areas; as hosts and cultural ambassadors; and sometimes as determinants of future residency prospects for temporary migrants. In other cases, employers or employer associations have acted on ethical motivations to participate in

‘welcome’ projects for newly-arrived refugees. Smaller employers, however, are likely to have limited capacity to absorb extra responsibility for supporting new arrivals and may need assistance to support adaptation to Australian work settings, to understand visa conditions and options, and facilitate employee settlement.

Finally, social and physical service infrastructure needs to be affordable, culturally-appropriate and accessible to newly-arrived migrants. Specialised services such as skilled interpreters, medical staff trained in refugee health, and English second-language tuition in schools may be required to help migrant populations establish themselves. To meet employment requirements, migrants also need access to vocational education and training options. While federal policy affords humanitarian migrants access to mainstream settlement services, other temporary and skilled migrants do not have the same eligibility for government services. This leaves some groups at risk of isolation, especially where established groups from similar cultural backgrounds are not present. Affordable housing options are also critical to attract and retain migrants who presently reside in metropolitan areas. Without this optimal mix of services and infrastructure in regional locations, the promise of the ‘win-win’ will be difficult to realise.

2. Long-term migrant settlement, regional revitalisation and addressing immediate labour needs are different policy objectives, requiring targeted responses

The concept of migrant settlement presumes a long-term timeframe. It can take several years, especially for refugees, to adjust to a new context, with social and economic participation likely to fluctuate during early years of settlement. Similarly, investing in the ‘revitalisation’ of regional towns presumes that people will stay in these locations, ideally for several generations. These concepts lend themselves primarily to the settlement trajectories of permanent migrants, or those with pathways to permanent (or at least long-term) residency. Fully realising the benefits of regional immigration therefore requires a combination of long-term strategic coordination, inclusive planning, welcoming communities and multicultural institutions, matched employment, and service availability.

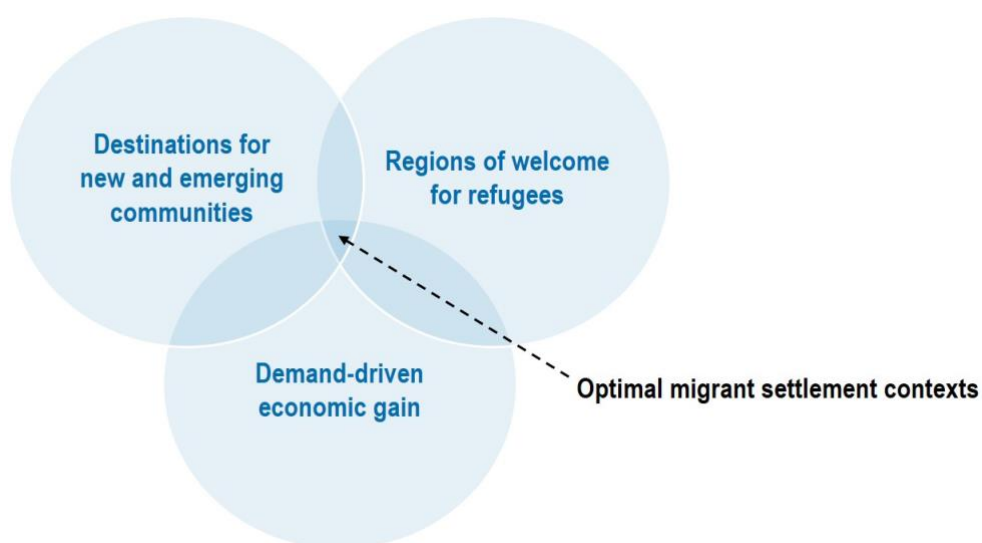
Channelling temporary workers and migrants on short-term visas to regional areas addresses a narrower policy objective. Temporary migrants may provide an immediate boost to regional economies, but the durability of these benefits is likely to be limited. Moreover, the nature of these benefits will change according to macroeconomic and industry trends. In regional contexts experiencing high levels of disadvantage, unemployment, depopulation or even environmental calamities, the arrival of temporary migrants who have no intention or feasible option to remain could exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities.

For these reasons, a nuanced approach to local labour market analysis is necessary to ensure that strategies are contextualised, stakeholders are well-prepared, benefits are maximised, and risks are mitigated.

3. Operationalising migrant settlement in regional communities

An understanding of the demographic, economic and social characteristics of locations in regional Australia is required in order to effectively assess the opportunities and risks of regional migrant settlement. Based on our review of the available evidence, we propose four migration scenarios with accompanying migrant profiles that may suit different regional contexts and indicate sources of available data and information that can inform the design of migrant resettlement initiatives. We detail these scenarios in Section 5, but as depicted by Figure 1 optimal migrant settlement contexts are regions of welcome for refugees and those that have the capacity to facilitate both new and emerging communities and shorter, temporary migrants working in particular employment sectors.

Figure 1. Operational contexts for migrant settlement



1 Methodology

We reviewed scholarly literature published in Australia on regional migrant settlement, integration, service infrastructure and settlement policy and programs. We also reviewed key publications produced by government agencies, peak bodies, community sector organisations, multicultural organisations and advocacy groups. Our search criteria for the literature review included publications that addressed: primary and secondary (re)settlement; labour migration; rural and regional contexts; revitalisation; dispersal policies; settlement services, opportunities and resources.

We used the following key questions to interrogate the literature:

- What are the key factors that contribute to successful migrant settlement in regional Australia?
- What are the services, opportunities and resources needed to receive new arrivals in regional locations while maintaining and enhancing the vibrancy of local communities?
- What are the potential opportunities to revitalise communities, or address workforce shortages and demands in regional areas?
- Which areas require further investigation?

To supplement the literature review, we consulted secondary government data on migration and settlement in Australia, including demographic, economic and social statistics. We focused on the Australian Census and Migrants Integrated Dataset (ACMID), which links data from the 2011 and 2016 Australian Census of Population and Housing to Permanent Migrant Settlement Data from the federal Department of Social Services.

2 Regional migrant settlement: a win-win scenario?

Political and public interest in regional resettlement of migrants and refugees has surged in recent years. Federal politicians, community organisations and media commentators have argued for the ‘win-win scenario’ of sending newly-arrived migrants to country towns to address labour market gaps and dwindling populations (Remeikis 2015; Stünzner 2017). Recent experiences of migrant and refugee resettlement in destinations like Nhill (South Australia), and Mingoola (on the border of New South Wales and Queensland) have been hailed as ‘successful social experiments’ in news media and evaluation studies (Curry, Smedley & Lenette 2018; AMES Australia & Deloitte Access Economics 2015). In these examples, resettling migrants and refugees has been touted as a solution to population ageing in rural communities and a lack of farm labour, while satisfying migrants’ ‘yearning’ for space (Hassall 2016).

While the rhetoric of the ‘win-win’ may be relatively recent (Taylor & Stanovic 2005), Australian governments have been encouraging migrants and refugees to settle in regional areas for decades. Schemes such as the State Specific and Regional Migration Programs (SSRMs) and Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa, both created in the mid-1990s, were designed to channel migrants into particular regions with acute labour shortages (Boese 2010a). A significant review of settlement services commissioned by the federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) in 2003 argued that refugee resettlement in particular could simultaneously address local labour shortages, foster refugee employment, contribute to regional sustainability and spread the benefits of cultural diversity, while easing a perceived population ‘burden’ on Melbourne and Sydney (Schech 2014).

Policy incentives to boost regional populations and labour markets through immigration have since followed these directions, including clearer permanent residency pathways for migrants and lower salary requirements for employers (Hugo 2014). Most recently, the Federal Government has adopted forms of conditionality within immigration schemes, such as the case of the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV), which offers temporary humanitarian protection to refugees under the condition that they move to a nominated regional area and engage in work or study (Dufty-Jones 2014).

Boosting regional economies and labour markets

The core argument in favour of regional migrant settlement in Australia has, at least in part, been an economic one. In its most desirable form, immigration is argued by governments and advocates as a solution to worker shortages or skills gaps in regional labour markets, to boost the working age population and labour force participation rates, and as an injection of

diverse forms of 'human capital' (skills, qualifications, worker attributes and knowledge) (Joint Standing Committee on Migration 2017; RAI 2018). Recent analysis by the Productivity Commission (2016) and Migration Council Australia (2015) has supported arguments that migrant employment has a positive overall impact on government resources and the economy through taxation and consumption.

Another component of the 'win-win' is the view that regional locations offer employment in industries that suit the occupational profiles of some migrant groups (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). Agricultural work, in particular, is suggested as a good 'fit' for migrants and refugees who have left rural economies in their home countries (Nguyen 2017). Perhaps the most notable recent example of such a 'fit' is the small Victorian border town of Nhill, in which at least 61 Karen refugees from rural Myanmar have been employed in businesses that breed and supply ducks for commercial food retailers (AMES Australia & Deloitte Access Economics 2015).

The argument that regional towns are a good fit for some migrants is often coupled with a discourse that portrays migrants (refugees in particular) as characteristically hard-working, entrepreneurial and willing to do jobs considered undesirable by local populations (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009; Piper 2017). Examples include jobs in abattoirs, poultry plants, farms and fruit-picking—all of which have struggled to attract members of the 'mainstream' Australian workforce (Stevenson 2005).

While filling regional job vacancies appears to offer obvious mutual benefits for migrant jobseekers and their prospective employers, it can also have the effect of limiting expectations for migrants' occupational mobility and career advancement. Often it is government departments and settlement stakeholders themselves arguing strongly that the employment expectations for newly-arrived refugees need to be lowered to align with available vacancies in local labour markets (see for example DSS 2018; Piper 2017). Along with the seasonal nature of many regional jobs, low expectations for employment pathways can lead to segmentation of refugees into secondary (lower-skilled, lower-paid and more precarious) labour markets (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2006).

Revitalisation of regional towns and easing pressure on metropolitan areas

Along with the benefits to regional economies, secondary migrant settlement has been advanced as a solution to the twin challenges of dwindling populations in country towns and growing pressure on urban infrastructure and services (SCoA 2016a; RAI 2016). The term 'regional revitalisation' is often used by government departments and settlement stakeholders in reference to this effect (see for example DSS 2018; QCOSS 2014), but is rarely defined. The argument for secondary settlement as a revitalisation strategy is,

however, synonymous in grey literature with both repopulation and creating new demand for diminished local services (Schech 2014; RAI 2016; Piper 2017).

Few arguments for regional dispersal of immigrants make explicit the link between revitalisation and permanent settlement pathways. Temporary migrants, estimated at more than two million people nation-wide at the time of writing (DoHA 2018), may offer a short-term regional population and labour force boost in particular industries. For example, the National Farmers' Federation (2015) recently estimated that temporary migrants (including working holiday makers, seasonal workers and skilled temporary migrants) make up almost one-third of the total non-managerial workforce on Australian farms. However, many of these temporary workers may be unlikely to remain in regional towns long enough to contribute to sustainable 'revitalisation,' either due to visa restrictions or aspirations to settle in cities (Boese 2010a).

In recognition of the trend that newly-arrived migrants overwhelmingly settle (at least initially) in major metropolitan centres (McDonald et al. 2008), regional resettlement has been touted as a strategy to offset pressure on urban infrastructure, housing and services. In other countries, government policies that direct migrants to specific internal locations have been referred to as 'dispersal' or even 'burden-sharing,' though such terms are rare in Australian policy discourses (Boese 2010b). Nevertheless, decreasing population pressure on Australia's cities has been a consistent rationale in migration policy reviews commissioned by government and lobby groups (Productivity Commission 2016; CEDA 2016).

Facilitating successful integration

The 'win-win' scenario for migrants and regional areas is underpinned by the idea that less-populated and lower-density destinations are conducive to migrants' integration with mainstream Australia. Settlement patterns in major cities indicate that migrant groups may be forming clusters according to similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, raising concerns about their meaningful opportunities to develop links to the mainstream, as well as relationships and networks that can mitigate social and economic exclusion (Productivity Commission 2016). In contrast, less-populated areas are thought to hold the potential to 'speed up' integration through both employment opportunities and migrants' closer exposure to elements of Australian culture and English language (Schech 2014; McDonald et al. 2008). The features of country towns may be particularly attractive for some refugees who also seek 'a quieter life less scrutinised by authorities' (Schech 2014, p.602), and migrants from rural-agricultural backgrounds who are thought to identify more closely with the features of regional towns (Major et al. 2013).

3 Key success factors of regional settlement

In the 2003 DIAC federal review of settlement services, several criteria for regional areas were identified that would be prioritised for humanitarian resettlement programs: a population of more than 20,000; the presence of existing migrant communities; evidence of community acceptance of immigrants; an accessible location; and the availability of appropriate employment opportunities and service infrastructure (Hugo 2014).

Since the 2003 review, the proportions of migrants and refugees settling in regional areas has increased nationally, along with various pilot initiatives, programs, and associated research that has added to our understanding of the key success factors of regional settlement. This section provides an overview of these measures of success, along with examples from available literature on program design elements.

Strategic consultation, planning and budgeting

Reviews of regional resettlement initiatives have emphasised the need for appropriate resourcing, careful planning, and management of an end-to-end process in order to maximise the benefits for migrants and receiving communities (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009; Piper 2017). There are important roles for federal, state and local governments, service providers, employers and community organisations in the planning process.

While specific dispersal schemes are in place for certain visa categories (such as SHEV), there remains no federally-coordinated strategy to guide and inform regional settlement planning. The Department of Home Affairs (DoHA) and Department of Social Services (DSS) are central agencies with responsibility for the design and administration of migration intakes, visa conditions, as well as resourcing mainstream settlement support services. However, the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA 2016a) has acknowledged a federal coordination gap, recommending that a 'whole-of-government regional settlement strategy' be developed. This echoes calls from VicHealth for a 'package of supportive policy initiatives' delivered across all levels of government to aid refugee resettlement (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009).

Private and not-for-profit service providers have their roles and responsibilities mapped out in the DSS National Settlement Framework (2016). While SCoA (2016b) has developed quality standards and indicators to guide implementation, it has also acknowledged that service providers have varying levels of capacity and require adequate funding and consistent flows of clients to be effective. A recent review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case support programs (Ernst & Young 2015, p.87) noted that service users tend to arrive in 'clusters', particularly in regional areas, which results in 'feast-

or-famine settlement patterns in some areas, with sharp peaks and troughs in demand for services.’ No guaranteed minimum numbers and inconsistent referrals impact upon regional service providers’ financial sustainability and their ability to attract and retain qualified and experienced staff (Ernst & Young 2015).

In addition to the need for a proactive federal strategy that addresses the resourcing needs of settlement service providers, the diversity of regional contexts necessitates a localised approach to the design of migrant settlement schemes. Local government is a key stakeholder in this process. A recent review of six regional sites for migrant and refugee settlement in Victoria concluded that local governments needed to participate more fully in settlement planning networks, as well as having a formalised program delivery role (Boese & Phillips 2017). In the Swan Hill (Vic.) refugee relocation program, for example, local government took an active role in developing an economic plan centred on the agriculture industry, which was the basis for establishing training and work experience opportunities for refugees (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007).

Beyond the critical role of local government, the design of local settlement programs needs to include contributions from a variety of local community groups. For example, when the town of Young (NSW) began receiving Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders from Afghanistan in the early 2000s, a range of local stakeholders cooperated on activities to assist with settlement, including local business people, TAFE teachers, volunteer tutors, local library staff, human rights advocates, the Mayoral staff and Council (McDonald et al. 2008).

Including prospective migrants in the design and planning of relocation initiatives is critical for program sustainability in long-term settlement and integration projects (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). Partnerships with migrant groups residing either in primary or secondary settlement locations, and represented by ethno-specific community organisations, can provide a ‘communication vehicle’ to stakeholders in receiving communities to understand real experiences and prevent early withdrawal or flight from regional destinations (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007).

Seeking input from migrants themselves, including an appreciation of their perceptions, aspirations, and unique contributions, can help to maximise benefits and mitigate risks inherent in planned relocation initiatives (Curry, Smedley & Lenette 2018). Migrants and refugees need to have the right to make informed choices about their settlement destinations (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). The social participation of migrants and their families depends on their perceptions of local quality of life, and how these perceptions match with expectations that had been built up before re-location (QCOSS 2014).

In addition, migrant groups must also have the freedom to look for different destinations if the initial settlement choice does not work out. Young migrants who are studying in regional areas, for example, may eventually make plans to leave towns in favour of metropolitan employment opportunities (Joyce & Liamputtong 2017). More broadly:

[Migrants] may decide to [leave the initial settlement destination] because things have not worked out as well as they hoped in one place, they may be seeking out better employment opportunities, they may want to purchase a house they can afford and would enjoy living in, they may feel isolated and disconnected where they currently live, they may want to live closer to a university to provide their children with better prospects for the future, to name only a few examples (Boese 2010a, p.8).

Planning for new migrants should commence well in advance of their arrival and be adaptive as settlement processes continue (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007). The fluid nature of settlement makes it difficult to determine precisely when 'successful settlement' has been achieved; therefore, ongoing support is needed to promote sustained, positive outcomes and a sense of belonging (Curry, Smedley & Lenette 2018).

An adaptive local planning approach is even more important given the annual budgeting and policy cycles of government departments, which may not be responsive enough to deal with fluctuations in settlement processes (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). Funding arrangements need to be flexible and drawn from a diversity of sources. An evaluation of refugee resettlement programs in Swan Hill and Warrnambool (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007) recommended that funding be allocated to refugee advocacy groups, so that they may act as conduits for information to and from refugee communities, and be called upon for their expertise without 'burning out'. The same review argued that direct funding to relocating migrants in the form of 'relocation packages' for refugee families can contribute to the viability of resettlement programs (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007).

Welcoming attitudes and cultural awareness in receiving communities

Incorporating migrants into regional and rural areas should be seen as a community 'project for local economic and social sustainability' (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). The success of this 'project' is dependent on the commitment and buy-in of the receiving community, informed by welcoming attitudes, cultural awareness and a well-developed understanding of settlement dynamics.

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS 2014) has recommended extensive consultations and social impact assessments prior to settlement implementation, with a view to fostering greater understanding of attitudes and expectations. Fostering a culture of 'welcome' in regional destinations may include practical contributions from community members, such as providing information about the local area and a willingness to provide volunteer support (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009; Joyce & Liamputtong 2017).

Engaging local Indigenous communities in welcoming work is a core component of resettlement preparation and planning. Many regional areas of Australia are home to long-established First Nations communities, whose active voice and participation is critical in negotiating matters of settlement, cultural exchange and understanding (Booth 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the custodians of all migrant settlement destinations. Collaboration with elders past, present and future in resettlement policies, initiatives and public events, as well as opportunities for cultural exchange and understanding, is central to a holistic community welcome of new migrant arrivals (Welcoming Cities 2018).

The preparedness of receiving communities to welcome new migrants can be grounded in experience with previous waves of immigration. Research from Shepparton and Mildura (Vic.) has shown that historical experience with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups can positively influence community attitudes towards acceptance of new migrant arrivals (Moran & Mallman 2015). Conversely, regional communities that do not have a history of migrant settlement may face difficulties bridging cultural divides between established groups and newly-arrived communities (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009).

The quality of encounters between migrants and local residents as an 'everyday experience' is critical, as well as receiving community attitudes of familiarity, openness and acceptance of diversity and difference (Schech 2014). Some members of the receiving community may require induction, resources and support to develop long-term acceptance of impending cultural change in their community (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007). Social inclusion and positive social relationships are critical; local policies that focus on developing a sense of belonging over time contribute to successful settlement (Fozdar & Hartley 2013; Major et al. 2013; Correa-Velez, Gifford & McMichael 2015)

Established ethnic communities and multicultural institutions

The presence of previously-settled migrant communities in regional towns can be an 'anchor' for new arrivals, providing a source of experience, advice and familiarity with settlement processes and opportunities (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). A 'critical mass' of migrants or refugees from the same or related ethnic backgrounds helps to consolidate the

settlement of new arrivals and attract further numbers of refugees to that town. As noted earlier, service providers can also stabilise the quality and extent of their service offerings with a critical mass of service users.

In contrast, the absence of culturally and linguistically diverse groups in regional towns can be a 'unique source of acculturation stress', especially for young migrants (Joyce & Liamputtong 2017). Remoteness and distance from one's own cultural group can lead to loneliness and isolation. The presence of local ethnic communities and multicultural institutions are especially important because of the variable nature of public services in regional locations (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). Migrant families with young children, for example, have been shown to share childcare responsibilities where such services are not readily accessible or affordable (Ressia 2010).

Educational institutions can also serve as important anchoring sites. In Shepparton and Mildura, for example, schools with high levels of cultural diversity have been able to play a role as 'multicultural institutions' that maintain social cohesion and positive intercultural interaction between students from different backgrounds. Learning and social activities are focused on English language acquisition for children from migrant backgrounds, while the school community emphasises inclusive shared values of respect, environment and learning (Moran & Mallman 2015).

Employment that matches demand with the characteristics of new migrants

As noted earlier, the 'win-win' scenario for regional towns and new migrants and refugees hinges upon successful migrant employment and economic security over the long-term. Secure employment that enables migrants to meet their costs of living and plan for the future is widely recognised as a critical component of successful settlement (Ager & Strang 2008). Stable employment can also speed up integration into Australian society and is one of the important factors in social inclusion (Schech 2014). Better labour force integration of migrants is also presumed to be correlated with the benefits of 'self-sufficiency' (i.e. non-reliance on welfare or income support), increased earnings, and even better health outcomes (McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). For regions experiencing acute skills shortages and an undersupply of workers, targeted skilled migration programs offer an attainable strategy that can add to the cultural diversity and richness of communities (Cameron 2011).

Careful consideration of the possible match between available jobs and the skills, qualifications and career aspirations of migrant settlers is required to ensure employment facilitates successful settlement. Regional economies are diverse in their job offerings, including the distribution of skilled employment opportunities, security and earning potential of jobs. Smaller regional areas, for example, tend to be dominated by agriculture and related

industries which offer disproportionately lower-skilled jobs (Schech 2014). While these might represent a good 'fit' for refugees from similar economic backgrounds, regional labour markets can also be quite 'thin,' offering limited depth and variety of employment opportunities and few options for advancement for a diverse range of migrants (DIBP 2014).

Whereas the availability of employment may be the primary driver of migrant decision-making in the initial stages of settlement, the quality of the employment, including opportunities for advancement, may begin to have a more significant impact throughout later stages of settlement. For example, a study on the attraction and retention of professionals to regional areas of Queensland noted that perceived limits to career development was a major reason for people moving to alternative locations (Miles et al. 2006). In Warrnambool (Vic.) some of the participants in a refugee resettlement program were unable to find permanent jobs: the evaluators considered this a threat to the sustainability of the project (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007).

The Regional Australia Institute (2018, p.2) has recently argued that there is currently 'no systemic way for migrant workers to link up with rural employers,' nor an 'integrated support mechanism to facilitate secondary migration away from metropolitan cities.' Although the extension of the Northern Territory Designated Area Migration Agreement to other states and territories in Australia is designed to give councils in regional areas the option to sponsor overseas workers (Bagshaw 2018), there remains a need for end-to-end policy frameworks to facilitate migrant worker resettlement.

Employers and employer associations are critical in identifying and communicating workforce requirements, investing in training and work experience opportunities, and linking local job vacancies to longer-term career pathways with industry. The willingness of employer associations to participate in refugee resettlement and as sponsors of skilled and temporary migrant workers is an opportunity to attract migrants from metropolitan areas. In a study of eight regional settlement sites across Victoria, Boese (2014) found that employers played various roles depending on the local context, including:

- assuming the role of settlement support providers where mainstream services were difficult to access, particularly in isolated rural locations,
- as hosts and cultural ambassadors where migrants' opportunities for local intercultural interaction were limited, and
- acting as determinants of current or future residency prospects for migrants.

These varying roles, many of which are not directly related to the standard employment relationship, were driven either by ethical concern for workers' wellbeing or business concerns with workforce productivity and retention.

There are examples of employment projects led by businesses that deliver on the short-term economic 'win-win.' Cotton Australia, which is a member of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), signed a Memorandum with the Migration Council of Australia in 2016 pledging to roll out a refugee resettlement pilot project in locations including Griffith, Dubbo, Gunnedah, Moree and Toowoomba—all designated 'Refugee Welcome Zones'. The pilot project was launched under the *Friendly Nation Initiative* for Syrian refugees, and is aimed at coordinating employers in regional areas that can offer jobs to refugees (Cotton Australia 2016). Although the initiative has not yet been evaluated, the concept points to the value of involving employer associations operating at sufficient scale and with the economic footprint to offer multiple employment pathways to migrants in regional areas.

Availability and accessibility of housing and culturally-appropriate services

Accessible, specialised service infrastructure is needed in regional towns to facilitate migrant settlement—whether in the form of mainstream services funded through government contracts or developed as community-based initiatives. Specialised services such as skilled interpreters, medical staff trained in refugee health, and English second-language tuition in schools are required to help migrant populations establish themselves (Schech 2014).

However, there is significant variation across regional areas with regard to key areas of English language support, health care and welfare services—a situation exacerbated for those on temporary visas who may not have the same access as permanent residents (Curry, Smedley & Lenette 2018; Johnston, Vasey & Markovic 2009). Skilled migrants, for instance, are not eligible for settlement support. Destinations without a history of welcoming new migrants and integrating different cultural groups may not have the necessary service infrastructure to support an influx of new arrivals. Understanding the different needs of migrant groups and ensuring representative services are available across the board is essential for successful settlement.

The availability of affordable rental accommodation and public transport, in particular, is a key constraint on attracting migrants and refugees to regional areas. In the case of Swan Hill and Warrnambool's refugee resettlement programs, refugees were often unwilling to give up public housing in Melbourne to enter the private rental market in regional towns. As the program's evaluators argue,

Private rental is expensive, often not of an adequate standard and not always central to schools and transport. The payment of rent on the private rental market limits the refugee community's ability to develop employment pathways, particularly if they wanted to undertake further training (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter 2007, p.xi).

Affordable housing, transport options and welfare services affect a broad cross-section of the population, especially low-income groups, and these issues present policy challenges at all levels of government and the service sector. However, it is worth noting research findings on the 'double disadvantage' dilemma that is presented by migrants arriving in destinations which are already disadvantaged compared to urban areas. The policy question remains 'how best to accommodate the need to share the burden of migrant settlement on the one hand, and to facilitate social participation in the context of regional inequality on the other' (Correa-Velez, Spaaij & Upham 2013, pp.181–2).

Accessibility of services for people from migrant backgrounds is also determined by levels of staff intercultural competency, including frontline workers who need the attributes and knowledge to work with diverse clients. Again, in areas without a history of intercultural contact, the potential for culturally-competent service provision may be limited (Major et al. 2013). This points to the need for additional support and training for mainstream service providers in designed regional areas as part of any resettlement initiative (QCROSS 2014).

A promising approach to 'bundling' community services targeted to migrant families is the Community Hubs model, of which there are currently 70 examples operating across metropolitan Victoria, NSW and QLD (the first regional hub is currently being trialled in Wollongong). Based in schools and community centres, Community Hubs offer services such as skills training, English language classes, social clubs, volunteering opportunities and community events (Community Hubs Australia 2017). A recent evaluation commissioned by DSS found that Community Hubs are 'effective and have reached and engaged positively with newly arrived migrant families. A recent parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) also recommended 'that the Commonwealth provide additional funding to expand the Community Hubs network nationally and to establish similar flexible settlement service programs.'

Effective employment services, based on knowledge of local economies and strong relationships with employers, are integral to the regional settlement process. A review of Australia's regional skilled migration programs (Cameron 2011), for example, argued that the range of employment services required in regions included: pre-arrival and post-arrival settlement and employment information and support; professional and peer support and; community social contact, networking and support. Support and information is also needed for regional employers in relation to: skilled migration program/visa information and options; support with skilled migration processes and; employee settlement (Cameron 2011, p.29).

Sustainability

The viability of regional settlement programs depend on stakeholders' understanding of long-term demographic, social and economic impacts. Not all migrants, for example, can be considered part of 'settler' communities. In reviewing the literature on migrant settlement, Boese (2010a, p.6) argues that it is a 'tacit and mostly unquestioned assumption' of many government-commissioned evaluations and community-based research that 'settlers are there to stay'—in other words, that they will not leave rural or regional areas in search of better opportunities or connections elsewhere. Sustainability is considered across the following dimensions:

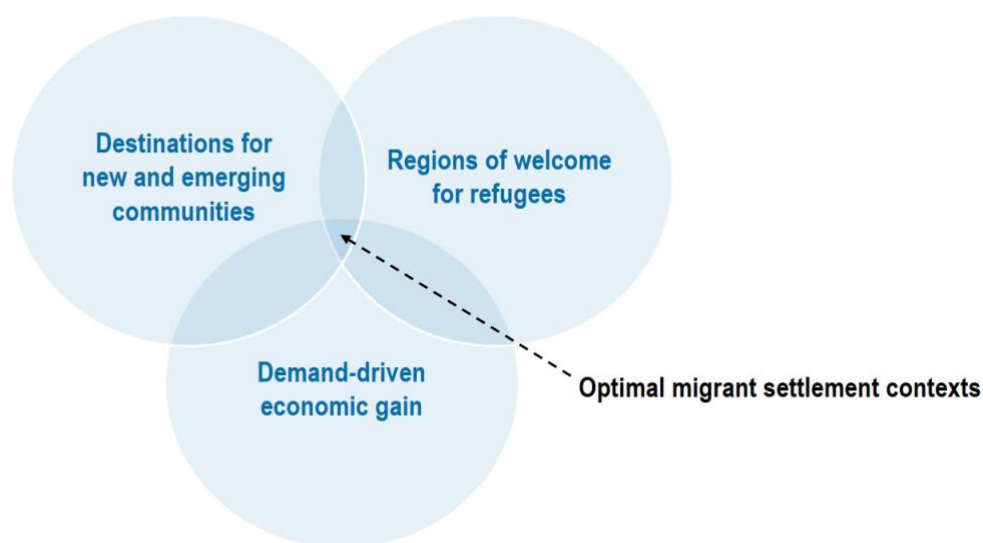
- duration for which migrant settlers are anticipated (or expected) to remain in a regional/rural location (or whether they are expected to remain at all);
- retention of employment, and longer-term career directions, including the possibilities for career advancement and occupational mobility;
- prospects for children of migrants to remain in regional locations and thus make long-term contributions to regional populations.

Sustainability dimensions, as Boese (2010a) points out, are challenged by the specific settlement trajectory of the migrant; for example, temporary skilled workers may be useful for addressing short-term labour gaps or employer needs, but may not remain long enough to contribute to the revitalisation of regional communities.

4 Making it work: operationalising regional settlement

An understanding of the demographic, economic and social characteristics of regional communities is required to map the opportunities and risks of regional migrant settlement. Based on our review of the available evidence, we propose four scenarios that may suit different regional contexts and point to sources of available data and information that can inform the design of possible migrant resettlement initiatives.

Figure 10. Operational contexts for migrant settlement



4.1 Destinations for new and emerging migrant communities

Destinations for new and emerging communities (NEACs) are regional towns that do not have a history or experience with supporting migrant settlement or multiculturalism. However, a detailed needs analysis may identify population decline, low demand for services and/or worker shortages that could be addressed by a targeted long-term settlement program. Community consultations, including with communities of First Nations people, should indicate a sentiment and willingness to facilitate settlement of a small number of migrants from NEACs on a long-term and/or permanent basis. Not suited to areas with high levels of youth unemployment, or significant socioeconomic inequalities between existing cultural groups.

- Planning and operational requirements: Local government establishes knowledge exchange partnerships with peer councils/shires that have implemented multicultural policies and programs. Employers provide input on workforce needs and vocational education/training opportunities. Federal and state resources are allocated for the establishment of culturally-appropriate settlement services, including support to

multicultural institutions and ethno-specific community organisations. Receiving communities partner with organisations in metropolitan areas to facilitate exposure visits, multicultural events and other opportunities to build awareness and trust between residents, First Nations people and NEACs.

- Migrant profile: Would suit permanent migrants or those with long-term residency rights, and those who opt to relocate from metropolitan areas. Assessed levels of 'work readiness' and workplace-level English proficiency are key factors.
- Information and knowledge sources: examples of local government policies on multiculturalism and inclusion; local industry and employment data; regional population statistics including density of cultural diversity and non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB); mapping of service availability; practice models applied in similar regional contexts.

4.2 Regions of welcome for refugees

Based on extensive community consultation, local governments in regional areas initiate small-scale refugee resettlement programs based a commitment to humanitarianism and the concept of 'welcome,' appreciating the benefits of cultural diversity and inclusion. First Nations communities are engaged in welcoming work that reflects the cultural heritage of the area. Receiving communities may consider community sponsorship models. Possible long-term employment options are considered primarily for their potential to facilitate refugee integration into mainstream Australia, rather than addressing immediate labour shortages. Resettlement is supported by service providers and ethno-specific or multicultural organisations; refugees find a welcoming community to settle for the long-term.

- Planning and operational requirements: Federal and state government resources are allocated for culturally-appropriate settlement services. Formal partnerships are established between state/local government, service providers and volunteer community groups working specifically with refugee communities. Analysis of labour and housing market dynamics is conducted to ensure income and housing security for new arrivals. Receiving communities partner with organisations in metropolitan areas to facilitate exposure visits, multicultural events and other opportunities to build awareness and trust between residents and refugee communities.
- Migrant profile: Suits permanent humanitarian entrants (including family reunion visa holders) and onshore protection visa applicants with pathways to permanent residence. English language proficiency can be lower-level, provided opportunities exist to engage in AMEP language training. Ideally the refugee cohort will have access to existing migrant communities in regional destinations from similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds to mitigate risks of cultural isolation.

- Information and knowledge sources: frameworks (e.g. *The Australian Standard for Welcoming Cities*) to develop inclusive local policies and practices; demographic and cultural information on refugee cohorts, source countries and forced migration experiences; assessment of refugees' work skills, experience and qualifications; practice examples of successful refugee settlement initiatives.

4.3 Demand-driven economic gain

In these contexts, employer demand in regional industries drives the identification and recruitment of skilled migrants and temporary workers for secondary migration to regional locations. Employer-worker linkages are facilitated by partnerships between state and federal agencies, local governments and service providers. Migrants are placed into local labour markets and matched with jobs that meet their income and visa requirements. Not a settlement scenario, but could include pathways to long-term residence for some visa holders. Not suited to areas with high levels of youth unemployment, or significant socioeconomic inequalities between existing cultural groups.

- Planning and operational requirements: Detailed economic analysis of local labour market conditions. Formal partnerships (or networks) between individual employers, employer associations, service providers, local and state governments, and unions. Vocational education and training institutions (e.g. TAFEs, technical colleges) are accessible, affordable and service temporary visa holders. Visa schemes and conditions incentivise secondary labour migration. Federal and/or state resources are allocated for qualification and skills recognition services.
- Migrant profile: Suits temporary migrant workers and those with employment-related visa conditions. Workplace-level English proficiency is required, as well as the individual or household resources to move for existing job opportunities.
- Information and knowledge sources: local industry and employment data; mapping of service availability for temporary migrant workers and possible government incentive schemes; detailed visa information and guidance from federal authorities; practice models applied in similar regional contexts.

4.4 Optimal migrant settlement

Optimal regional settlement contexts are destinations that exhibit most of the social, cultural and institutional features necessary for successful long-term primary or secondary settlement (i.e. a combination of the above elements). With the commitment of local authorities supporting new arrivals, receiving communities and First Nations people engage in collaborative planning and preparation. Employment pathways are identified that reflect

career opportunities rather than short-term job placements. Local service providers have demonstrated intercultural competencies.

- Planning and operational requirements: Local government has experience implementing multicultural policies and programs. Formal partnerships (or networks) between employers/employer associations, service providers, local and state governments, and unions. Detailed economic analysis of local labour market conditions has been conducted, with employers identifying workforce needs and vocational education/training opportunities. Federal and state settlement services are in place, including multicultural institutions and ethno-specific community organisations.
- Migrant profiles: would suit different migrant cohorts including short-term/temporary migrants, humanitarian entrants and longer-term/permanent residents.
- Information and knowledge sources: local industry and employment data; assessment of migrants' work skills, experience and qualifications; detailed visa information and guidance from federal authorities; regional population statistics including density of cultural diversity and non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB); mapping of existing service network and referral pathways.

5 Next steps

The initial research, funded by the Queensland Government through Multicultural Affairs Queensland, focussed on leading practice in supporting local governments to create opportunities to grow welcome, belonging, intercultural connections and inform uptake of regional opportunities.

The next steps in this work will include:

Advising and supporting regional councils to strengthen welcome and inclusion

Informed by and building on the key learnings, Welcoming Cities will support interested regional councils to consult, partner, plan and commence initiatives to strengthen welcome and inclusion in local areas. This may include engagement with the Welcoming Cities network and the Welcoming Cities Standard.

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