



Answer to question:

## PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

### MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

#### QUESTION:

**CHAIR:** ... But how do you envisage a body that actually can advise government on these very important issues, has incredible research capacity and is funded accordingly for the specific purpose of immigration, our economy and the Australian community?

**Professor Gamlen:** Thank you for the question. I believe this is an issue of an ecosystem and fostering an ecosystem rather than building a single body. It begins with rebuilding capacity in the Department of Home Affairs, but it's impossible for the Department of Home Affairs, sitting as it does within the executive branch of government within the civil service, to really provide that total ecosystem. I think what we need is something that is outside of politics and outside of government that aggregates the perspectives of all the different political, apolitical and community research groups; provides a venue for them to come together and present their perspectives; have those perspectives weighed in light of evidence and reasoned debate; and advise the government of the day on policy for the present and for the future...

**CHAIR:** I agree with you. I think that we have an entire generation of prospective early researchers and academics who didn't have access to be guided and mentored by a previous generation of scholarship on these issues. So thank you for that. It helps us in a way. **If you can think of any other ideas in relation to this, please come back to us with that. ...**

#### ANSWER:

Harnessing the disruptive power of migration is one of the great challenges of the 21st Century. Well-managed migration yields global benefits, but the disorderly movement of people can generate serious risks. Making sense of population movement in a fast-changing world is not easy – but as Australia's migration system enters a period of rapid, radical transformation, it is critical. Australia needs to invest in understanding and managing this new era of migration.

Against a background of considerable global turbulence surrounding migration, Australia needs to develop a strategic vision of migration policy that engages with global partners and long-term trends. Migration affects not just our economy and labour market, but who we are as a nation. It is central to the major issues of our times, such as immobilising disease, filling

skills shortages, reducing congestion, planning infrastructure, solving housing, stimulating regions, strengthening global alliances, and maintaining social cohesion.

On one hand our migration system is being fundamentally reshaped by a series of volatile crises such as the pandemic, natural disasters, and refugee-producing conflicts. On the other hand, our migration system is being transformed by long-term mega-trends like population ageing, rising geopolitical tensions, climate change, the spread of disruptive new information and communication technologies, and the resurrection of migrant guestworker schemes.

As these issues have grown in urgency, Australia's capacity to address them through the migration system has shrunk. Public service capacity radically declined as many senior officials left when immigration responsibilities were divided between Home Affairs and the Department of Social Services. Meanwhile, NGOs, research centres and media outlets have become more partisan in their research on migration, encouraging fragmented and polarised public debate. In the university sector, a generation of world leading migration experts have not been replaced, such as Professor Graham Hugo (who passed away in 2015), and Professor Stephen Castles (who passed away in 2022). This has resulted in an absence of well-informed Australian thought leadership on migration.

As we noted in our submission to the Parkinson Review, declining migration research and management capacity has led to a shallower and more divisive public discourse over the issue. Public debates keep returning to themes that emerged in the 1950s, because there is limited understanding of how profoundly actual flows and dynamics of migration have changed over the decades. Migration has become a key target of misinformation by foreign states and is weaponized on social media, because too few people have the capacity to fact-check inaccurate information or rebut ill-informed opinions. Digital media has produced a quantitative explosion of misinformation by foreign actors and polarising invective. This threatens the social licence for well-managed migration systems. What is needed is high quality and authoritative research that cuts through this misinformation, and engages both policymakers and the public.

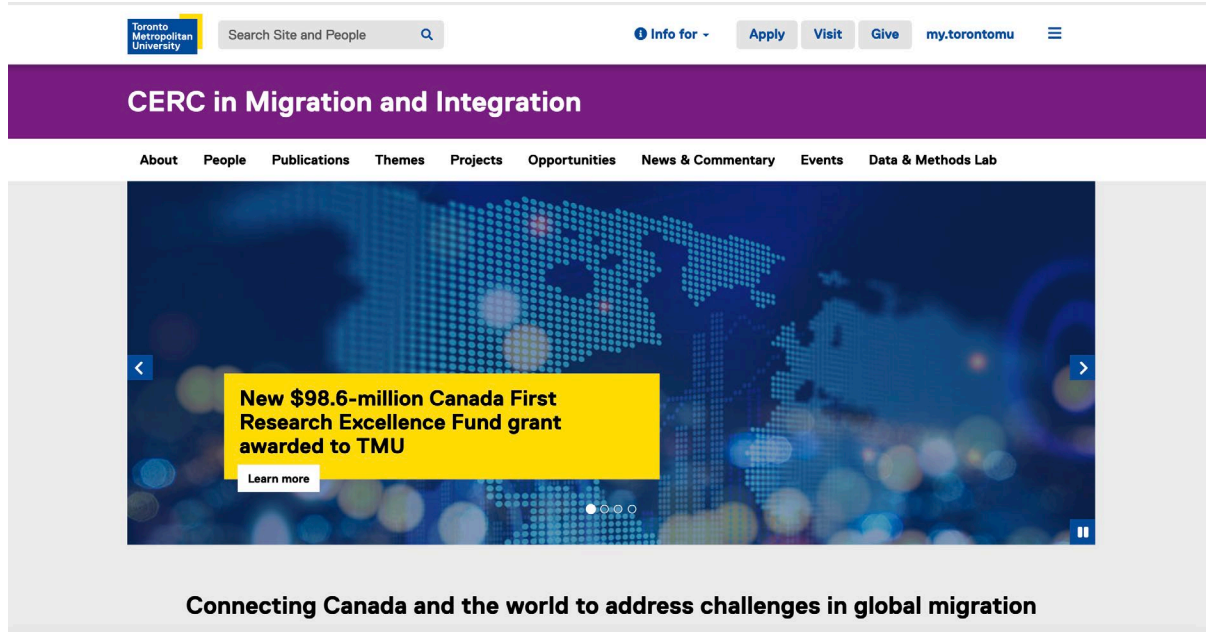
The social licence of Australia's migration system relies on public confidence in the management of new arrivals and in a vision that bridges national and local benefits of immigrants. However, through ad hoc developments over the years, the migration system has strayed from these objectives. Home Affairs currently manages Australia's permanent Migration Program very well. But most migration now comes through an unwieldy array of temporary visa channels, offered by various government agencies. Meanwhile in a separate silo, the Treasury generates long-term projections about Australia's Net Overseas Migration. These projections are central to the national budget and national conversations about migration, but Treasury does not publish the underpinning methods and assumptions.

Recognizing these systemic issues, the government is now placing high priority on restoring the capability to develop and deliver good migration policy. Migration currently plays a central role in several major reviews across multiple areas of government, including:

- The Parkinson Review of the Migration System;
- The Multicultural Framework Review;
- The Administrative Review Reforms underway at the Office of the Attorney-General;
- The Nixon Inquiry into border integrity and human trafficking; and
- The O’Kane Review of Australia’s Higher Education System.

These reviews react to problems that have arisen as the current system has evolved ad hoc over a period of decades. Now that these reviews have issued their findings, we need to build and strengthen the key institutions that will drive the new system, ensuring they take a more sustained, holistic, and systemic approach to this whole area. We need institutions that generate new knowledge – through the data, analysis, interpretation, and insight – that is required to inform a long-term strategic view. Australia should be aiming to cultivate strong institutions capable of building knowledge that transcends reactive single government administrations and forecasts the major issues surrounding migration.

Figure 1: Screenshot of Canada’s CERC in Migration and Integration website



Australia was once seen as a world leader in migration policy; a country that invested in its future through a large-scale migration program, maximising the economic and social benefits of new arrivals through government management, community engagement, and significant research investments, such as the Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies or the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia. However, the peak of Australia’s public investment in migration is now far in the past. Rather than a world leader in migration policy

Australia is more often seen internationally as a laggard – and unfortunately in some cases, a pariah. We have fallen behind our peers in attracting the best and brightest migrants to our shores, partly through a lack of investment in the proper capacity to understand and manage migration.

Australia aspires to compete in the migration field with Canada, the United States, and the UK. But Australia has not kept pace with the significant investments these other countries have made in the establishment of quality research institutes for migration. Australia has nothing vaguely comparable to the Canadian Government’s recent investment of AU\$111 million (CA\$98.6 million) in ‘Migrant Integration in the Mid-21<sup>st</sup> Century’, through a multi-partner consortium led by the CERC in Migration and Integration at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) – which was itself made possible by an earlier government ‘seed’ investment of AU\$11 million (CA\$10 million) in establishing the CERC itself (see Figure 1). We have nothing like the leading national migration institutes – such as the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society; the Migration Policy Centre; the Migration Policy Institute; and the Centre for Comparative Immigration Studies – that have been established at top universities in the USA and Europe over the past three decades (see Figures 2 & 3 for two relevant examples).

Figure 2: Screenshot of California’s Center for Comparative Immigration Studies website

**Center For Comparative Immigration StudiesHomepage**

**About**

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**Mailing List**

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**About CCIS**

The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies (CCIS) was established in March 1999 under the leadership of Dr. Wayne Cornelius. Today, CCIS has become an independent research unit at UCSD and has further continued to grow its outreach and research dissemination capabilities, academic programs and research portfolio.

Led by Co-Directors Dr. David FitzGerald and Dr. Claire Adida, CCIS has become a recognized institutional home for high quality academic scholarship and policy-oriented research on all aspects related to international migration. CCIS is the only academic center in the United States specializing in international migration from a broad geographical as well as interdisciplinary perspective, devoting substantial attention to migrant-sending and receiving countries in North America, Europe, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region.

From its unique vantage point on the Pacific coast, only 30 miles from the Mexican border, CCIS maintains a global outlook through a worldwide network of research associates, institutional affiliates and alumni. Today, the Center’s global network of research associates has expanded to over 355 Research Associates based in 25 different countries. The Center also has 35 institutional affiliates, 12 of which are located outside the United States. CCIS academic staff and Fellows appear frequently in the [local and national media](#) discourse on immigration issues, and their scholarly work informs immigration policy and practice worldwide.

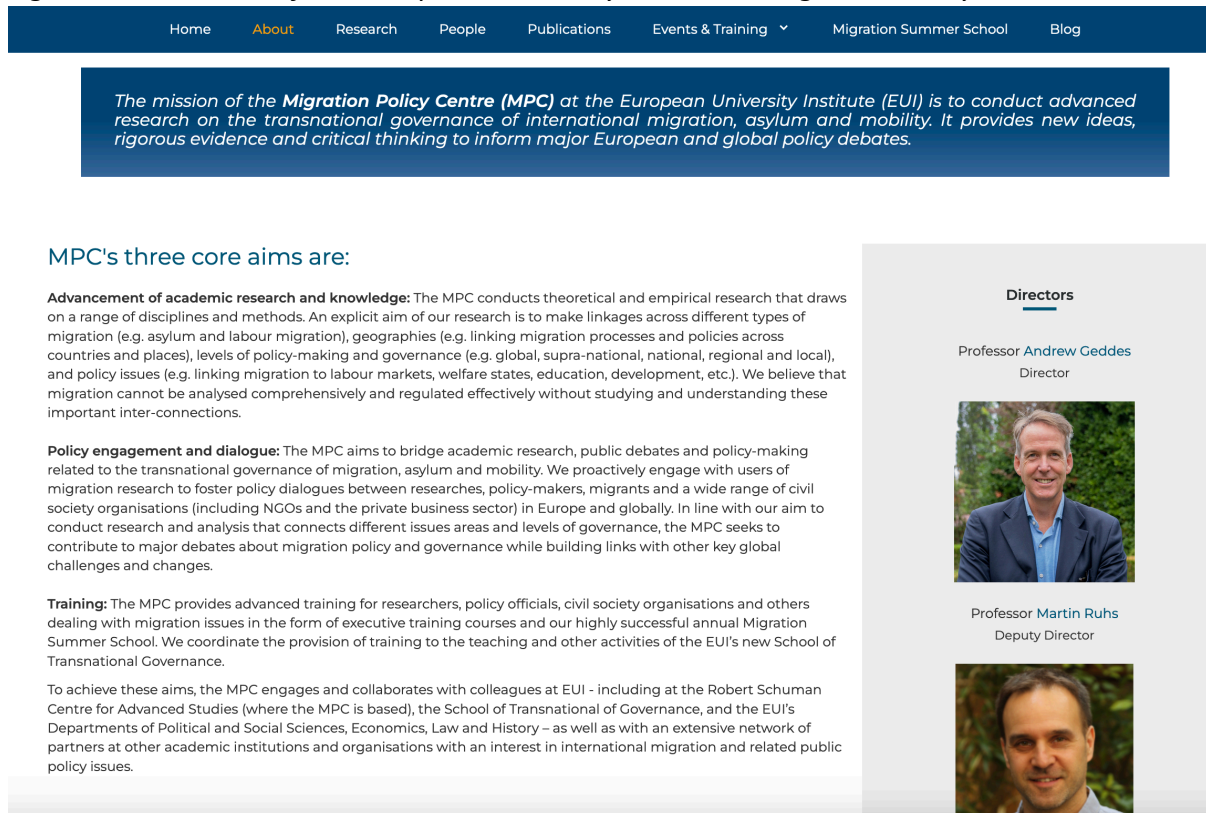
Alongside developing innovative research, CCIS endeavors to develop greater public engagement with migration studies through comprehensive outreach and education. At home at UC San Diego’s Eleanor Roosevelt College, CCIS has long been a center for the training of undergraduate and graduate students, with unique academic programming both in La Jolla and through the Mexican Migration Field Research Program. CCIS has maintained a longstanding [Visiting Research Fellowship Program](#) and [research seminar series](#). Open to the campus and the general public, the series continues to provide the opportunity for Visiting Fellows, Guest Scholars, UCSD faculty, and non-local guest speakers to present and receive feedback on their most recent work.

CCIS has developed several unique academic programs for students focusing on migration for undergraduate and graduate students. The minor in International Migration Studies, designed to provide undergraduate students with an understanding of the causes, politics, and social consequences of international migration from a broad comparative perspective, is the only program of its kind in the United States. CCIS has also collaborated with UCSD’s [Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies](#) to establish an interdisciplinary M.A. Program in Latin American Studies with specialization in International Migration. In recent years, CCIS has concluded collaborative research and student training agreements with 11 universities and research institutions abroad, including five in Mexico and six in Spain.

These are just a few of the many world-leading research centres that other countries have, but which Australia – and indeed the Asian Pacific region as a whole – does not have. As well

as providing institutional hubs for world-leading academic research, these institutes deliver national capabilities for policy-oriented research on a wide range of issues related to human migration and mobility. In addition to driving forward basic scientific research on migration, they also translate research into action-ready insights, through rigorous engagement with government agencies, media, international organisations, NGOs, industry, and the general public. Although we are well into what is often called the Asian-Pacific century, the Asia Pacific region lacks any substantial research institute dedicated to the global flows of people that tie the region together.

Figure 3: Screenshot of the European University Institute’s Migration Policy Centre website



There are many international models for how Australia could build a national migration institute. One particularly important example is Oxford University’s Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS – see Figure 4). COMPAS is dedicated to basic scientific research and postgraduate teaching on migration, and is funded by a mix of university, government, philanthropic, teaching, and grant income. A key component of COMPAS is the Oxford Migration Observatory, which translates the basic academic research into actionable information, and provides a public presence dedicated to improving the quality of media and political debate about migration in the UK, Europe and beyond.

One key to the success of COMPAS has been its ability to combine the production of ground-breaking new research (by being embedded in one of the world’s great universities), and

translation of this new knowledge into action-ready insights for a range of stakeholders such as media, politicians, policy makers, NGOs, private sector firms, and the general public. COMPAS achieves this by investing in world-leading fundamental research, as well as generating engaging data analysis and visualizations, providing a venue for frank and open debate, and showcasing the latest developments in global migration research and policy making. COMPAS succeeds because it invests in both understanding migration as a fundamental science, and in science communication.

*Figure 4: Screenshot of Oxford University's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society website*

**Centre Overview**

The Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) is a research centre at the University of Oxford. Since 2003, COMPAS has established an international reputation for original research and policy relevance. It undertakes multi-disciplinary research, publication, teaching, and user engagement activities with a broad set of academic and non-academic users worldwide.

COMPAS research covers a spectrum of global migration processes and phenomena, from conditions in places of migrant origins, through to institutions and activities affecting mobility, to social and economic effects in receiving contexts.

COMPAS has over 20 staff members from a range of backgrounds and is actively involved in many international networks and projects. COMPAS is based within the [School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography](#) and maintains strong links with departments across the University of Oxford.

**Mission and aims**

The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, train the next generation of academics and policymakers on migration, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration.

In line with this overall mission statement our aims are:

- Academic advancement: reflecting and advancing theory, methods and multi-disciplinary understanding in the field of Migration Studies; contributing new empirical data; and supporting international collaborations and publications in the field of migration.
- Teaching: offering graduate programmes on migration at the [masters](#) and [doctoral](#) level; offering expert training for policymakers and others interested in migration issues; and building capacity among migration researchers and practitioners.
- Informing policy-making and public debate: providing evidence and analysis to policy-makers and to the wider public and facilitating knowledge exchange and collaboration with relevant policy makers.
- Facilitating knowledge exchange with research users: establishing reciprocal relationships with individuals and organisations with experience of migration, including migrants and their organisations, government, business, international organisations, and third sector and civil society organisations.

Australia should establish a National Migration Institute that is comparable to those of Canada, the UK, and other major migrant-destination countries. The objectives of a National Migration Institute should be to create a step change in Australia's capacity to understand and manage future human migration and mobility. Rather than funding migration research almost exclusively through small-scale, piecemeal investment in short-term issue-specific research projects, the Commonwealth Government should establish a National Migration Institute at an ambitious enough scale to parallel those of other leading migration countries.

Specifically, a National Migration Institute should furnish Australia with the strategic capabilities necessary to:

- Lead the world in understanding and managing human migration and mobility;
- Inform migration policies based on world-leading standards of knowledge on established and emerging topics;
- Attract and develop world-leading migration and mobility researchers and connect them with government and society; and
- Provide researchers with world-leading facilities for conducting migration research.

The National Migration Institute should achieve these objectives by delivering the following:

- **External partnerships:** It should cross-appoint, second and/or embed staff from and to key partner organisations outside academia. For example, given the innovative migration data linkage programs of the ABS and Home Affairs, there are exciting opportunities for research on a local, national and global scale by an Institute with expertise in data analytics, spatial analysis, and cutting-edge visualisation.
- **Public engagement:** The Institute should generate policy briefings, working papers, blogs, public lectures, practitioner workshops and media engagements to disseminate its ground-breaking scholarly research, and support collaborations that translate research into better migration policy outcomes. The Institute should be equipped with researchers who can engage with local, national, and global decision-makers and opinion-shapers – from local community leaders in Australian cities and regions, to United Nations officials, to centres of research excellence in the homelands of Australia’s largest migrant groups.
- **External research fundraising:** Institute staff and associates should build a portfolio of projects to drive growth, create stakeholder partnerships, produce world-leading research output, and generate policy innovation and best practice.
- **Postgraduate scholarships and training:** The institute should deliver postgraduate teaching and PhD supervision for a new cohort of migration and mobility experts. This will build critical mass for PhD recruitment, new research, and revenue to drive growth. It should offer competitive and prestigious masters and PhD scholarships to top applicants in this area, so that the top students can access opportunities irrespective of their financial backgrounds. It should offer scholarships that target public servants, migrant service workers and refugees, to bring a step change to the migration sector.
- **Professional short courses:** The Institute should offer a range of training programs from data skills, visualisation, futures workshops, scenario analysis and communication on migration to compliment the PhD training section. Such courses should target public servants, journalists, politicians, migrant service workers, international organization staff, and refugees, with the aim of bringing about a step change in the capacity of the migration sector.

- **Guest scholars and practitioners:** The Institute should become an essential venue for leading voices on migration at the local, national, regional, and global level. To facilitate this, it should co-fund fixed-term international visits from senior migration scholars and policymakers across the Asia-Pacific and beyond as Visiting Fellows, to exchange best practices with Australian counterparts.

The National Migration Institute should be head-quartered at one of the nation's top universities, one with prestigious global standing, where there is a large critical mass of migration scholars, and where there is capacity to engage intensively with all levels of government decision-making related to migration.

The National Migration Institute should also incorporate substantive funded partnerships on research and teaching with other 'nodes' for migration research, built around leading migration scholars at the top university or universities within each Australian state and territory. It should have deep institutional links with other migration research centres around the world, and particularly within the Asian-Pacific region.

The National Migration Institute should be resourced by a 'healthy mix' of different funding sources, to ensure that the institute is both financially sustainable and un beholden to any single funder, so that it can provide strategic and contestable advice from an independent, non-partisan perspective, based on world-leading standards of evidence and reasoning.

The lead University should provide a substantial in-kind investment in the Institute's core infrastructure, in the form of office space, IT equipment, consumables, and corporate support such as HR and Finance. Integrating the Institute into a leading University will ensure it is research-led, and can tap deep reservoirs of expertise and harness rich innovations systems.

Philanthropic endowments, entrusted to the lead University, should be sought to underpin the Institute's senior leadership positions. Endowed Chairs are the most prestigious awards any University can bestow on academics. Endowing Chairs to lead the National Migration Institute will ensure it attracts world-leading experts capable of engaging with policymaking in developing a long-term strategic research vision.

Philanthropic funds should also be secured to endow Postgraduate scholarships for the most brilliant up-and-coming migration Master's and Doctoral candidates. This will enable the Institute to cultivate the next generation of migration research leaders, equipped with future-ready skills for organisations across Australia's migration system.

Government HECs and tuition-fee funding should underpin mid-career academic positions devoted to a mixture of teaching, research, and institutional service. Developing a postgraduate teaching program will provide career progression for postgraduates, contribute to the Institute's financial sustainability, and most importantly, enable the Institute to channel



its new knowledge into building capacity for governments, NGOs, media, and industry leaders to understand and manage migration in Australia and beyond.

Grant funds and research contracts – sourced from research councils, foundations, governmental bodies, international collaborators, and industry partners – should underpin fixed-term junior research fellowships attached to specific time-limited projects. This will support the Institute in providing career development opportunities for postdoctoral researchers and ensure the Institute’s research agenda is constantly refreshed through the injection of new people and ideas, while remaining anchored to the evolving needs of its key stakeholders and end users.

Substantial medium- to long-term government investment should furnish the Institute with a core secretariat and a core engagement program at the lead university. A secretariat is necessary to ensure academic leadership is focused on the development of a compelling, independent, non-partisan, research program of long-term national and global significance. An engagement program is necessary to provide a public presence dedicated to translating academic research into actionable information, and a venue for informed contestation among different leading expert opinions and strategies. The objective of such engagement should be to improve the quality of public commentary and the evidence base for policy decisions about migration in Australia, the Asian-Pacific region, and beyond.

Investment has already done in building national research institutions in other major areas of national importance. In security policy we have a resilient future-focused research ecosystem based around the Australian Security Policy Institute, the National Security College at ANU, and others. In economic policy we have institutions such as the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, which provides independent research, a hub for expert debate, and bipartisan thought leadership. In foreign policy the Australian Government invests in key national institutions such as the Australian Institute of International Affairs. Similar institutes exist to lead knowledge creation in many other fields of critical national importance – but not migration.

These government-funded but fundamentally independent Australian research institutions in other areas provide critical national capabilities to inform global, national, and local policy making in their specific issue areas. They do so through activities such as scenario planning, systems analysis, modelling, forecasting, specialist data collection and custodianship, bespoke analysis and visualization, issue-specific briefings, and drill downs in to the international, national, regional, and local impacts of key dynamics and policy responses. Again, nothing similar exists around migration – despite that this issue has extremely broad implications for Australian society.

Despite the problems with the migration system that have been identified by various government reviews in recent months, Australia currently faces historic opportunities to build the institutional foundations of a migration system that can lead the world for decades to come. There is public-service-wide and bipartisan consensus that the system needs an overhaul and requires a new long-term vision and institutional basis. Alongside the mushrooming of 'big data' outside of government, there are exciting research opportunities emerging through data linkage done by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and a range of government agencies; together these unprecedented data ecosystems point to entirely new possibilities for data-driven migration research and policy making.

Meanwhile, Australia does have some deep silos of migration expertise, which could be better brought to bear on major societal problems if simply given their head. Australia has a growing and increasingly diverse network of emerging migration researchers. Though currently dispersed and fragmented, these researchers are collectively capable of making a major difference to the future migration system if moderate investments are made in providing them with an institutional focus and world-class leadership. In addition, Australia does have a small cohort of recognized major international experts on migration, albeit one that is fragmented by disciplinary silos. Australia should seize the opportunity provided by the current migration system reviews, to invest in an institutional foundation for greater connection and focus amongst these isolated silos. To lead the world once again in understanding and managing migration, Australia should establish a National Migration Institute.