

Submission by



To the Joint Standing Committee on Migration:

Inquiry on Migration in Regional Australia

September 2019

Introduction

Metro Assist Limited welcomes this Inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration and for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry on Migration in Regional Australia. It is our belief that migrant and humanitarian settlement in regional areas can be beneficial to both new settlers in terms of lifestyle, and to host communities in terms of economic benefits. The approach however, needs to be carefully planned and executed with the intention of creating real and sustainable employment so that individuals and families can establish long-term roots in their new homeland and become part of their community.

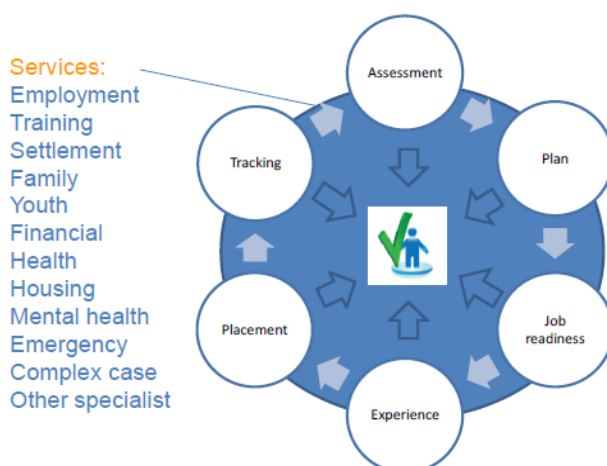
As a Sydney based settlement services provider for 33 years, we have a keen interest in the proposed settlement of migrants and humanitarian entrants in regional Australia. We believe that if properly supported, settlement in regional Australia can be mutually rewarding to both host communities and new settlers. We are in fact developing our network of contacts in regional NSW with a strong emphasis on providing employment opportunities.

In our experience, some of the key challenges include the need to ensure that settlement and employment services are better aligned and possibly integrated to ensure that migrant and humanitarian job-seekers have access to training, English learning, work experience, placement and post-placement support to support a long and viable relationship between employer and employee. It is also our experience that while migrant and humanitarian job-seekers come to Australia with hope and aspirations; all too often they are locked out by discriminatory practices and in the case of skilled migrants; a complex and costly process in having overseas qualifications recognised. As a result, many are under-employed and deskilled, with many cast onto welfare dependency.

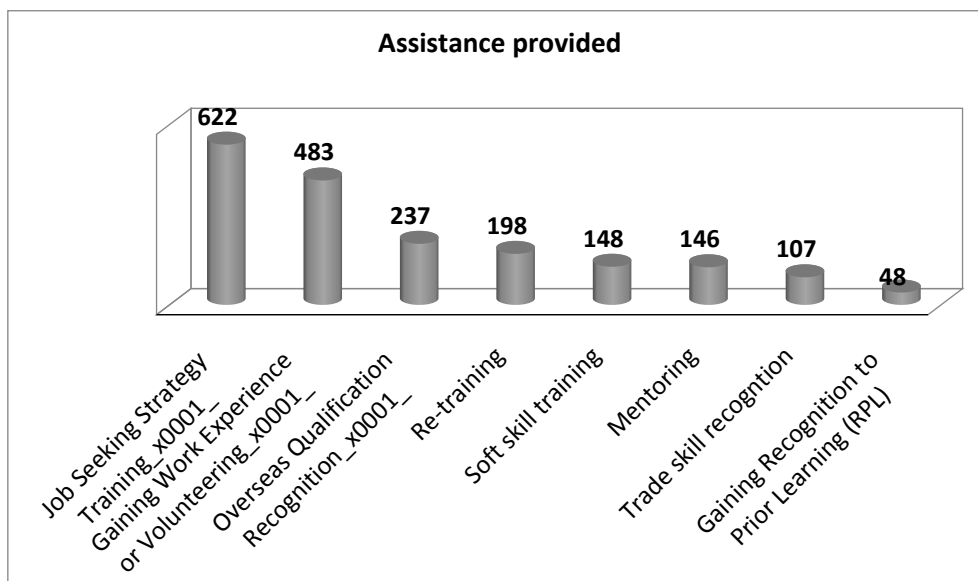
In making this submission, we would like to draw the Inquiry's attention to a project we conducted which we believe is highly adaptable to regional settlement and responds to many of the barriers faced by migrant and humanitarian job-seekers.

In 2015, we commenced SkillME, a three-year trial project funded by Multicultural NSW, to assist skilled migrants and humanitarian job-seekers into employment by addressing issues such as the recognition of overseas qualifications and creating training and employment pathways. SkillME provides a holistic case managed approach which we believe is highly adaptable in a regional context.

Person-centred support



From June 2015 until March 2018, SkillME worked with 1,082 participants.



An evaluation sample of 184 SkillME participants showed that:

- 30% (56) found full time employment
- 34% (62) found part time or casual employment
- 36% (66) were still unemployed

We believe that SkillME is highly adaptive to supporting regional settlement for skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants, with employment as perhaps the most critical factor in promoting self-determination and long-term settlement in regional communities.

In particular, SkillME incorporated elements that would result in long-term careers and re-engaging skilled migrants with their profession. This was achieved by engaging with industry and employers to seek work placements and encourage our skilled participants into traineeships. This was successfully applied across sectors including construction, IT, finance and other professional roles. Training and career pathways were also established by working with employers in areas such as aged care, logistics and warehousing, heavy vehicle licensing; combining vocational training with the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program in order to fast-track vocational and English learning which saw the majority of participants either placed in jobs, or continued to higher level qualifications.

We would however, recommend to the Committee, that a review of the way overseas qualifications are assessed and deemed suitable to local industry standards should be urgently undertaken. The process of recognition is complex and can be very costly, often prohibitive to skilled migrants. A fairer way would be to assess qualifications based on assessing functional competencies in industry settings.

National and international best practice strategies to encourage people to settle and stay in regional areas

Coordination and planning between the Commonwealth, state and local governments is critical to ensuring that long-term regional settlement is sustainable and that all instrumentalities, local communities, employers and support services work towards a common goal. It is imperative that

there are real and sustainable job prospects so that any new settler does not fail and is forced into a welfare cycle.

Since European settlement, there are numerous examples where migration has strengthened regional populations, established industries and contributed to Australia's economic development. For example, early Chinese migration to the goldfields of Victoria and NSW, Italian migration to North Queensland in establishing the sugar industry, migrant settlement in South Australia and the Riverina which boosted agricultural production, and the role of migrants in the construction of the Snowy River Scheme. Each of these events has led to the long-term settlement of migrants in regional Australia who now form part of this country's social fabric.

Strategies to develop regional skilled migration/regional humanitarian migration

Critical to supporting regional settlement and planning is what can be termed as an **exploratory phase**, in which:

- Commonwealth, state and local governments identify priority settlement areas where there are strong employment opportunities in identified industries.
- Engage with local MPs (State and Federal) to support the proposal, with the involvement of relevant Ministers.
- Consult with local agencies and community support services to assess gaps and to establishing working collaborations.
- Consult with local government and communities, employers and relevant industry bodies.
- Fund services which are experienced in delivering migrant and humanitarian support services, with experience in training and employment support.

An **implementation phase** would see:

- Funded services establishing relationships with existing regional community and welfare services by providing specialist settlement expertise for migrants and humanitarian settlers.
- A regional presence established for specialised employment and training support, such as the SkillME model, which would engage with local employers, trainers and other stakeholders – with established 'feeder' links in metropolitan areas to access key agencies (such as trauma services, government agencies, migration agencies etc).
- Technology would play a role maintaining contact with friends and family networks in other locations and to provide training through facilities such as TAFE Digital.

Local volunteers, employers and community organisations and their role in facilitating regional settlement

A local engagement strategy with host communities would typically include:

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|----------------------------|---|
| - Community services | Emergency relief, housing support |
| - Schools | Enrolments, support for children |
| - Real estate agents | Private rental market and conditions |
| - Centrelink | Income support and family benefits |
| - TAFE, RTOs, universities | Career development, vocational training and higher learning |
| - Childcare | Availability of childcare places |
| - Health | Local hospitals, health services, GPs and specialist services |
| - Youth | Youth activities |
| - Indigenous | Engagement with local Land Councils |
| - Existing cultural groups | Develop friendships |
| - Police and justice | Police and legal services |

Relevant migration policy, administration and state specific migration mechanisms

Under this heading, it is important to note recent changes in visa categories which can be disadvantageous. On the understanding that some visas may change, we would ask the Inquiry to consider making recommendations to remove the sometimes onerous obligations around waiting periods and entitlement to support services. For example, access to some services is limited to skilled migrants and waiting periods extended before they can access support. Due consideration also needs to be applied where humanitarian settlers cannot adhere to remaining in a region for a specified time where cases of hardship and trauma are assessed, and where specialised support may not be available in that region.

Related infrastructure matters

Two key infrastructure considerations to support regional settlement are:

- Housing availability in both the private rental and social housing sector. Where job opportunities are strong, there may be less housing available for new settlers, or rents may be expensive as a result of regional booms in a particular sector; as was evidenced during the mining boom.
- Health support for humanitarian entrants; particularly trauma support services, may not be readily present in regional areas.

These would be critical in ensuring that competition for housing and health support services does not create tensions between local communities and new settlers.

Risks

Regional settlement for newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian settlers poses significant challenges by virtue of people being established in communities where there may be few or no local contacts and social networks of the same culture. The list of risks below is not comprehensive, and represents higher level risks.

Risks	Mitigation
Lack of coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government and community organisations take an active role in planning and coordination. - Employers are engaged in the process to determine

	<p>opportunities and skill requirements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants are matched and skilled up.
Insufficient local support and resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early consultation with host communities and employers. - Identify potential impact on host communities and on local labour market to avoid backlash. - Incentives/support to host communities and employers to engage with migrant settlers.
Risks to wellbeing of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consideration of any specialist support (health, mental health and circumstance) and ensure that support infrastructure in regional areas can meet such needs. - Settlement support teams in place and working with local organisations to facilitate integration and access to services.
Commitment of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing ongoing support and information to participants and opportunities to engage with local communities. - Promote the long term benefits of regional life. - Maintaining contact with metropolitan networks, language media and promote culture.
Expertise of providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metro Assist/SkillME staff are experienced in working with migrants and refugees and community engagement. - Staff would be fully briefed on regional matters and the overall strategy.
Perceptions of external agencies overriding local involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The team would seek to engage respectfully with local organisations, services and groups to establish collaborations and partnerships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with proper planning and coordination between government, community, employers and services; regional settlement of newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian settlers can inject much needed economic activity into the regions and create positive lifestyles for individuals and families, thereby strengthening the social capital of communities.

As a migrant and humanitarian settlement support service, we would welcome any opportunity extend our services to supporting regional settlement and to contribute to any further discourse in the matter.