

Africans in Australia

Introduction

8.1 This chapter considers the African diaspora living in Australia. It begins with a review of the number of Africans living in Australia, and their geographic origins. The Chapter then discusses African migrants and refugees living in Australia, and concludes with discussion of the problems facing some African migrants to Australia. This includes proposals made to the Committee which raise issues such as better utilising the African community in Australia to the mutual benefit of both Africa and Australia.

The African Diaspora in Australia

8.2 Australia has a growing African community. Over the last two decades, Africans have come to Australia via two routes; both as migrants through Australia's skilled and family reunion programs, and as refugees through Australia's humanitarian program. These two streams are dealt with in later sections of this Chapter.

Numbers

- 8.3 As of 2006, Census data showed that there were 248 699 African-born people living in Australia.¹ It is not possible to separate this particular figure into humanitarian arrivals. DIAC, however, provided figures for the number of visas granted in various categories.
- 8.4 In 2008-09, 3493 Africans were granted humanitarian visas.² This included:
- 1756 visas granted under the Refugee category;
 - 1737 visas granted under the offshore Special Humanitarian Program category.³
- 8.5 In 2008-09 the number of Africans migrating to Australia outside the humanitarian program were:
- 8025 people from African nations were granted visas under the Skill Stream;
 - 2290 people from African nations were granted visas under the Family Stream.⁴

Geographical Origins

- 8.6 Figures on the geographical origins of all African migrants are not available from Census data. However, citizenship data does provide some indication of geographic origin.
- 8.7 In 2008-09, 11.3 per cent of those being conferred Australian citizenship were born in Africa – a total of 9841 people. Of these, the largest number were born in South Africa (4128), with Sudan second (1430).⁵ These numbers were similar to those in 2009-10, with 5207 South Africans being conferred Australian citizenship – the only African country in the overall top ten that year.⁶

1 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 427.

2 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, pp. 427, 433.

3 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 427. The Refugee category refers to refugees resettled in Australia after being referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, while under the Special Humanitarian Program, applicants are proposed for entry by relatives or community organisations in Australia.

4 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 427.

5 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 437.

6 <<http://www.citizenship.gov.au/learn/facts-and-stats/#>> Accessed April 2011.

Migrants

- 8.8 As mentioned, Australia has a sizeable community of people born in Africa. Most of the African-born community came to Australia via the non-humanitarian migration program.
- 8.9 Between 1999–2000 and 2008–9, around 100 000 Africans migrated to Australia through the Skills Stream and the Family Stream. Within these figures, South Africa is the largest source country for migrants.⁷

Skills Stream

- 8.10 The Skills Stream of Australia's migration program is its largest component. There are several categories within the Skills Stream:
- 'Employer Sponsored Migrants', wherein migrants are recruited and then sponsored by employers;
 - 'State Sponsored Migrants', wherein state and territory government identify skill shortages;
 - 'General Skilled Migration';
 - 'Business Skilled Entry', wherein successful business people migrate to Australia; and
 - 'Distinguished Talent visas', which are issued to people with 'special or unique talents of benefit to Australia'.⁸
- 8.11 The Skills Stream accounts for the majority of African migrants to Australia. Between 1999–2000 and 2008–9, 80 252 Africans migrated to Australia under the Skills Stream. Of these, the vast majority (over 90 per cent) came from Southern and Eastern Africa.⁹
- 8.12 From all regions of Africa, the largest occupation group within the Skills Stream were 'professionals', which includes occupations such as accountants, medical practitioners, and nurses. Australia has gained significantly from its growing African-born community.
- 8.13 However, while the result of skilled migration is a net benefit to Australia, this is not always the case for the source countries. Professor Helen Ware told the Committee that skilled migration from Africa was:

7 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 428.

8 DEEWR, *Submission No. 38*, p. 336.

9 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 428.

Part of the brain drain: in which Australia benefits from the human resource development and training paid for by poor African countries, but put to work in Australia.¹⁰

8.14 For example, according to figures provided by DEEWR, in 2007 and 2008, on balance Africa as a continent lost 359 doctors and 577 nurses to Australia.¹¹

8.15 In relation to this, Professor Ware noted that while:

An argument could possibly be made for a poor country training more nurses than it needs and then 'exporting' the surplus as a means of securing foreign exchange ... no African country has, or will have in the foreseeable future, anything like a surplus of medical doctors.

[Therefore if] Australia is to accept physicians emigrating from Africa we should think very carefully about our responsibility for contributing to the training of their replacements.¹²

8.16 Professor Ware also raised the benefits to African countries that can flow from skilled migration, such as 'through remittances sent home by professionals working overseas'.¹³

8.17 The Refugee Council of Australia informed the Committee that:

Remittances can play an important role in economic development through improving living conditions and supporting the establishment of small businesses, particularly in rural areas.¹⁴

8.18 These remittances, while difficult to quantify accurately, are a large source of foreign exchange for African countries, and in some cases are estimated to represent as much as five percent of the GDP of African countries, with overall transfers perhaps reaching as much as \$40 billion annually. The Refugee Council noted that this both exceeds 'official development assistance to the region, and in many countries [exceeds] foreign direct investment as well'.¹⁵

10 Professor Helen Ware, *Submission No. 45*, p. 451.

11 DEEWR, *Submission No. 38*, p. 337.

12 Professor Helen Ware, *Submission No. 45*, p. 452.

13 Professor Helen Ware, *Submission No. 45*, p. 452.

14 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 57*, p. 665.

15 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 57*, p. 665.

8.19 The activities of African Australians goes further than simply sending money to relatives in home countries. Mr Haileluel Gebre-Selassie noted that:

African Australians have also raised and donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to their respective original countries through different government, welfare and international aid organisations. For example, the Australian-Ethiopian community donated over \$25 000 to the Fistula Foundation of Australia ... Similarly, the African Australian communities donated funds through Care Australia to address health related issues in the Afar region.¹⁶

Family Stream

8.20 The Family Stream of Australia's migration program accounts for a far lower number of African-born people migrating to Australia than does the Skills Stream. According to DIAC, between 1999–2000 and 2008–9, 22 290 African came to Australia under this stream, with South Africa accounting for 40 per cent of these. Other countries which are prominent in this stream include Egypt, Ethiopia, and Ghana.¹⁷

Refugees

8.21 There are two components to Australia's official humanitarian migration program: an offshore and an onshore component.¹⁸ Within these components, the 13 750 refugees Australia takes annually (as of 2009–10 program year) are divided as follows:

- resettlement of refugees from offshore accounts for around 6000 places; and
- 7750 places are accounted for by both the Special Humanitarian Program and the onshore settlement of refugees.¹⁹

8.22 Most Africans settling in Australia through the humanitarian program do so via the offshore component. In 2003–4, Africans accounted for around

16 Mr Haileluel Gebre-Selassie, *Submission No. 21*, p. 160.

17 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 428.

18 Under the offshore component, refugees are mostly referred to DIAC by the UNHCR. Applicants for a Special Humanitarian Visa are proposed by a relative in Australia, or by an Australian NGO or community organisation. Onshore applicants apply for asylum while already present in Australia.

19 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 433.

70 per cent of these places. However, this number has declined in recent years, to around one third in 2007–8 and 2008–9.²⁰

8.23 Over the last decade, more than 48 000 Africans have been settled in Australia under the humanitarian program and Africa remains one of the three regions targeted as priorities by DIAC.²¹

8.24 Africans do not feature prominently in the onshore settlement figures (usually less than ten per cent). However, DIAC told the Committee that

An unusual increase in 2008–9 was due to applications lodged by World Youth Day and the Homeless World Cup attendees, with lodgements subsequently returning to normal levels.²²

8.25 Furthermore, DIAC notes that, Zimbabwe aside, no particular nationality stands out in these figures so as to be statistically significant.²³

8.26 The issue of the apparent arbitrariness of the assessment of refugees from Sudan was raised by Professor Ware:

Currently what causes so much anguish for people who are often already traumatised ... is the fact that X's cousin is allowed in from refugee camp KK whilst Y's cousin is not, even though, to both the Africans and the Australian NGOs trying to assist them their circumstances appear identical. The current rumour is that the granting of a visa depends entirely on the day of the month the application form lands on the official's desk.²⁴

8.27 DIAC responded in a supplementary submission:

Australia does not have the capacity to accept every SHP [Special Humanitarian Program] applicant. ...

While the SHP enables people to propose family members it is not in essence a family reunion program. The limited number of visas means that only those in greatest need of resettlement can be assisted under the SHP.

Greatest priority is given to those people assessed as refugees by the UNHCR and referred to Australia for resettlement, and applicants who are proposed by an immediate family member in Australia. ...

20 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 433.

21 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, pp. 427, 433

22 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 434.

23 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 434.

24 Prof. Helen Ware, *Submission No. 45*, p. 452.

All applicants must demonstrate compelling reasons for giving special consideration for the grant of a visa. Assessment against this requirement involves balancing the following factors:

- the degree of persecution or discrimination to which the applicant is subject in their home country;
- the extent of the applicant's connection with Australia;
- whether or not there is a suitable country available, other than Australia ...
- the capacity of the Australian community to provide for the permanent settlement of persons such as the applicant ...²⁵

Issues Faced by the African Community in Australia

8.28 A number of the submissions to the Committee raised issues facing African migrants in Australia.

8.29 One of the major issues of concern is unemployment. DEEWR told the Committee that:

Data consistently show recently arrived migrants have a higher unemployment rate than those who have lived in Australia for some years. Several factors influence the unemployment rates of migrants ... including the period since arrival in Australia, skill level, age, English language proficiency, and recent and relevant work experience.²⁶

8.30 DIAC identified the following further issues as of particular concern:

- difficulties in dealing with traumatic histories which may have involved a significant level of violence and loss of family and friends;
- challenges to family gender roles and traditional family structures;
- differing rates of adjustment to Australian society between African youths and their parents;
- lack of understanding about legal rights and responsibilities, including in situations where racism, discrimination or domestic violence occurs;
- shortage of affordable, suitable private rental accommodation and long waiting periods for public housing;

25 DIAC, *Submission No. 83*, p. 934.

26 DEEWR, *Submission No. 38*, p. 340.

- lack of cultural sensitivity by healthcare providers in treatment options for mental illness, and in providing aged care;
- lack of acknowledgement of professional qualifications by employers;
- lack of affordable childcare;
- negative connotation of the 'refugee' label amongst the general public;
- pressures of having to support families in source countries and sponsor family members attempting to visit or live in Australia; and
- concerns about political situations in home countries.²⁷

8.31 In regard to supporting families in home countries, the Refugee Council told the Committee that some refugees:

May be forced to sacrifice or postpone their education, work in two jobs or forfeit holidays and other social and recreational activities in order to send remittances to relatives.²⁸

8.32 The Refugee Council said that as a result of this situation many in the African community are acknowledging:

The need to transcend remittances as an aid and development strategy and instead develop more sustainable solutions which focus on capacity building. The Australian Government could provide invaluable support in developing these sustainable solutions through supplementing community fundraising efforts and assisting diaspora communities in developing the partnerships and institutional capacity necessary to implement sustainable development projects.²⁹

8.33 There are signs that the African Australian community is already moving in such a direction. Mr Haileluel Gebre-Selassie told the Committee that remittances flowing from Australia to Africa not only went to support families, but 'also assisted in opening businesses'.³⁰

8.34 In regard to African Australians' concerns about political situations in their home countries, the Committee received submissions from several Australian groups and individuals expressing concerns of this nature. Several of these submissions came from the Ethiopian community in Australia.

27 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, p. 435.

28 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 57*, p. 666.

29 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 57*, p. 666.

30 Mr Haileluel Gebre-Selassie, *Submission No. 21*, p. 160.

- 8.35 For example, both the Ethiopian Democratic Forum (EDF) and Mr Amare Mekonnen called on the Australian Government to, in the words of the EDF, 'not support African dictators in general', and to 'support democratic movements' in Africa.³¹ Mr Mekonnen also called for Australia to support the urgent and unconditional release of all political prisoners.³²
- 8.36 The Refugee Council told the Committee that refugees from Africa, and their first-hand experience:
- ... of the conditions in their countries of origin, combined with their direct personal connections in these countries, places them in a unique position to raise awareness about human rights issues in African nations. These communities play a particularly important role in drawing attention to the needs of vulnerable groups which may otherwise escape international attention.³³
- 8.37 Dr Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe, La Trobe University, informed the Committee that he is:
- Leading a team undertaking a major project in the Goulburn Valley, Victoria, aimed at minimising wastage in the utilisation of the migrants' Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs). This research project also aims to suggest how such KSAs could be used as a spring board for new economic and social contribution to the region and the migrants themselves.³⁴
- 8.38 Mr Peter Odhiambo contended that 'African populations in Australia are critically under-served', and further that 'there are no clear policies designed to integrate Africans into Australia as there were during the previous waves of migration'.³⁵
- 8.39 The Government of Western Australia told the Committee that research has shown:
- African humanitarian entrants face a range of barriers to inclusion and integration, particularly in the areas of employment, education and training, social participation and political, civic and community participation. In particular the research noted a need for targeted programs to increase access to further education, issues associated with the high costs and complexity of recognition

31 EDF, *Submission No. 16*, p. 134.

32 Mr Amare Mekonnen, *Submission No. 17*, p. 139.

33 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 57*, p. 666.

34 Dr Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe, *Submission No. 34*, p. 245.

35 Mr Peter Odhiambo, *Submission No. 98*, p. 1232.

of overseas qualifications and the significant adjustment difficulties faced by African humanitarian entrants.³⁶

8.40 At the Federal level, DIAC is:

Working very closely with the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia to encourage them to provide exactly that kind of support. That organisation has now created a new subcommittee that is addressing African communities in particular.³⁷

8.41 Furthermore, DIAC has asked the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils 'to pay particular attention to what we are calling "emerging communities", such as the African ones'.³⁸

Settlement Services

8.42 There is interaction between DIAC and the African diaspora in Australia at several levels. DIAC told the Committee that their community liaison officers around the country:

... work with the community to make sure that any of their concerns are addressed and to provide advice back to us that will help inform our policy development or advice about issues to do with those communities.³⁹

8.43 Furthermore:

As an organisation, we have regular meetings with the community stakeholders to look at the various issues and policies that might impact on African communities in Australia. We provide a lot of information sessions for the community to educate them on Australia's governance systems and the way they can access other visa programs such as the Special Humanitarian Program for their family and friends.⁴⁰

8.44 DIAC runs a number of programs designed to help migrants settle into Australian life:

- Humanitarian entrants are introduced to life in Australia before they arrive through the Australian Cultural Orientation Program. This

36 WA Government, *Submission No. 93*, p. 1162.

37 Mr James Fox, *Transcript 21 April 2010*, p. 41.

38 Mr James Fox, *Transcript 21 April 2010*, p. 41.

39 Mr James Fox, *Transcript 21 April 2010*, pp. 24-5.

40 Mr James Fox, *Transcript 21 April 2010*, p. 25.

program 'helps participants develop realistic expectations for their lives in Australia and enhances their settlement experience by assisting them to learn about Australian laws, values, lifestyle and culture'. 257 of these courses have been delivered in Africa, with 4320 participants.

- Once humanitarian entrants arrive in Australia, the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy attempts to assist them achieve self-sufficiency through a six-month program of specialised settlement services. This provides reception, information about services and assistance with things like accommodation, counselling and basic household goods.
- The Settlement Grants Program 'provides another level of settlement support by funding organisations to deliver projects targeting refugees and humanitarian entrants from African backgrounds'. These projects attempt to assist in such areas as the 'health, housing, education, employment, legal, and social aspects of settlement in Australia'.
- English language tuition is provided through the Adult Migrant English Program. In addition to this, humanitarian entrants 'with low levels of schooling, or who have had difficult pre-migration experiences such as torture or trauma' can access the Special Preparatory Program.
- For those with very low English language proficiency, DIAC offers the Translating and Interpreting Service, which facilitates communication between individuals and 'approved individuals and organisations, including doctors ... and pharmacies'. This service has provided around 50 000 translation services through 231 interpreters, covering 47 African languages.
- DIAC also provides a DVD called *Australia: A New Home*, providing important information on resettlement in Australia, including information on housing, education, money, work, family, health, and Australian law.
- Humanitarian entrants whose situation requires more support than is offered by the above programs are eligible to access the Complex Case Support program.
- Africans make up 61 percent of the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors. These are 'non-citizen children ... who have been granted visas for resettlement or have been found to be refugees in the onshore asylum process and do not have a parent to care for them in Australia'.

These children become the wards of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, and their care is arranged by a DIAC officer.⁴¹

- 8.45 It must be noted that none of these programs are directed towards Africans in particular, instead being focused on migrants and humanitarian entrants more generally.
- 8.46 Professor Ware noted that in light of the lack of special programs directed towards helping African adjust to life in Australia:
- 8.47 We need to take care that Africans who come to Australia with little or no formal education are able to catch up and do not become an underclass here.⁴² Professor Ware went on to note that these needs were particularly pressing for such Africans because:

... the variety of information which it is necessary to absorb to understand the details of available state and federal services is challenging to this Australian university professor, let alone a scared and non-literate refugee with minimal English.⁴³

Committee Comment

- 8.48 The Committee strongly supports both the official and non-official efforts made towards settling African migrants and humanitarian entrants in Australia. It further notes the contribution the African-born community makes to both Australia and their respective home countries, through their skills, expertise, culture, and remittances.
- 8.49 However, the evidence given by Mr Odhiambo to the effect that Africans in Australia are 'critically underserved' is also pertinent. As noted, no settlement services provided by DIAC are directed at the African community specifically, and as Mr Odhiambo notes there are no clear policies aimed at integration as with previous waves of migrants to Australia. Such a trend would act to increase the range of barriers to social inclusion noted by the Government of Western Australia, and according to Professor Ware these barriers are particularly acute in the case of African refugees.
- 8.50 As such, the Committee notes that more should be done to utilise the cultural, linguistic, and practical expertise of Africans already in Australia
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41 DIAC, *Submission No. 42*, pp. 435–6.

42 Professor Helen Ware, *Submission No. 48*, p. 451.

43 Professor Helen Ware, *Submission No. 48*, p. 451–2.

in terms of making the settlement process even smoother. This would assist in better tailoring the settlement programs to the needs of Africans, and particularly vulnerable communities such as humanitarian entrants from prolonged conflicts such as those in Southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Utilising the Australian African Community

8.51 The South African High Commissioner told the Committee that:

An important part of the work that we do here is to cultivate relations with the South African diaspora. It is a significant diaspora. We think that as a community they are very much in a position to make a positive influence on our relations, a positive influence on the balance of both trade and investment. Being people who know people and processes both on that side as well as on this side, we think they are in a unique position to assist us in that.⁴⁴

8.52 On the African community in Australia more generally, Dr David Dorwood told the Committee that the human resource represented by the African community was 'underutilised', and given the lack of expertise on Africa in Australian universities and in DFAT, should be given a greater role through better recognition of their qualifications.⁴⁵

8.53 Furthermore, Dr Dorwood told the Committee:

Many African refugees/migrants have tertiary qualifications, as well as significant family and informal contacts in their country of origin. Except for a limited range of institutions – the police, welfare services and the Refugee Review Tribunal, few government organisations or the corporate sector have made an effort to recruit individuals from these communities.⁴⁶

8.54 Mr Haileluel Gebre-Selassie informed the Committee that while current efforts at reengagement with Africa were commendable, 'there is definite potential for greater involvement by African-Australians in the initiatives'.⁴⁷

44 HE Mr Lenin Shope, *Transcript 20 April 2010*, p. 41.

45 Dr David Dorwood, *Submission No. 6*, pp. 51–2.

46 Dr David Dorwood, *Submission No. 6*, pp. 51–2.

47 Mr Haileluel Gebre-Selassie, *Submission No. 21*, p. 161.

8.55 Furthermore,

By actively engaging with African-Australians ... who have valuable links and access to their respective countries, the Australia government can do much to foster stronger cultural and business ties between Australia and African countries.⁴⁸

8.56 An exhibit provided by Mr Gebre-Selassie draws attention to the recently created Africa Australia Association – Africalink organisation which has the following goals:

- Engage in education and training activities
- Conduct annual forums
- Engage African diasporas, NGOs and governments
- Identify and promote business opportunities
- Promote people to people linkages⁴⁹

8.57 An example of a successful attempt at utilising African-Australians to foster greater cultural ties with Africa was given to the Committee by Professor Martin Mhando. The project, run by Murdoch University:

Allows for Africans in Australia to communicate about their experiences to Africans on the main continent. We take films of the Aboriginal community and show them in two festivals in Rwanda and Tanzania.⁵⁰

8.58 Professor Mhando told the Committee that he spent time in 2006 and 2007 teaching Rwandan, Kenyans, Burundians and Tanzanians to make films that help to spread information and knowledge between villagers about a cassava disease in a way that is culturally appropriate and easier to understand because:

We did not expect that the scientists from America who were doing the research would be able to explain that in the same terms as a villager would explain it to another villager.⁵¹

8.59 In doing so, Professor Mhando was building on his experiences in Aboriginal communities in Australia. He characterised these efforts as being:

48 Mr Haileluel Gebre-Selassie, *Submission No. 21*, p. 161.

49 *Exhibit No. 53, Africa Australia Association-Africalink, draft establishment documents.*

50 Prof. Martin Mhando, *Transcript 10 March 2010*, p. 35.

51 Prof. Martin Mhando, *Transcript 10 March 2010*, pp. 35–6.

The direct link between my being in Australia and the experiences, knowledge and skills that I get from Australia, and transferring them to the African context.⁵²

Committee Comment

- 8.60 The Committee notes the potential for the many African-born Australian residents to make a real contribution to relations between Australia and the countries of Africa. Furthermore, the diverse range of countries and cultures from which they come widens the scope for the development of relations.
- 8.61 Efforts to build on and expand cultural relations and interchange, such as those undertaken by Murdoch University and Professor Mhando, are a real boost for Australia's relationship with Africa, particularly at the grassroots level. Activities that achieve this, as well as providing mutual benefits to both African countries and Australia, should be officially encouraged and expanded.

Recommendation 17

- 8.62 **The proposed Australia-Africa Council should include within its goals, support for activities that encourage and facilitate cultural interchange and exchange, particularly including the Australian African community.**

Senator Michael Forshaw

Chair

June 2011

52 Prof. Martin Mhando, *Transcript 10 March 2010*, p. 36.

