

Thank you for the opportunity to have an input regarding the inquiry into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia.

**My position:**

I am the leader of a group called "Peace International." Our group assists people who are on working Visas, PR or who are migrants. This work is done on a voluntary basis. It offers such aspects such as teaching English, purchasing a motor vehicle, finding a home, finding a job, help after a car accident, assisting with school enrolments and facilitating friendships. As such, I think I am in an interesting position to comment, especially given that I am from a regional centre rather than a capital city. I can not provide research to back my opinions. All I have following is based on anecdotal evidence.

I have noticed a number of ways that the positive effects of migration would be maximised.

**Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation**

I have found that my friends who look to assimilate as much as possible are the happiest and have the best experiences. When migrants assimilate they create for themselves all the benefits of networking – including job opportunities and local knowledge or places to go and things to do. It also give them the maximum opportunity to practice English. Some of the people that I've had contact with who didn't strive to mix with established Australians struggled, missing home and spending a lot of time on the internet thinking of and talking to the people they had left behind. Typically their English does not improve, which in turn hampers any efforts that they do put into social contact with established Australians.

I don't see that enclaves build any real advantage in a rural setting in terms of relationships with other countries. There is a place though for communities of one nationality to gather on a regular basis for support and companionship, however the more intense these relationships are, the less they tend to integrate. A regional town like Rockhampton seems to be ideal for helping migrants assimilate while still giving them the

ability to maintain aspects of their culture. True multiculturalism is valued, almost treasured in Rockhampton as can be evidenced by the large turn-outs at the annual multicultural fair. Diaspora are kept reasonably small by the numbers living in the area, but there seem to be enough for a number of nationalities still to share a sense of community. Those who live in the suburbs seem to quickly form close friendships with their physical neighbours. Those who live in apartment buildings in gated communities away from the rest of the city typically find it harder to meet and make friends with locals.

The church seems to play quite a large role in welcoming and supporting migrants. All the largest Protestant churches in Rockhampton have groups specifically designed for this purpose and all offer this for free. Within the people who accept the friendship and help offered by the church are Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, as well as people who have no faith. The churches, from my observations, identify these people as people rather than caring too much about their religious background and so welcome them all equally and offer all they can to anyone in need.

## **Settlement and participation**

My understanding is that there is a lot more support for people in the cities who want to help migrants on a voluntary basis. Because some organisations like TAFE raise funds from supporting migrants, they seem reluctant to let volunteers 'muscle in on their territory.'

I would love to see free online courses on a government website that gave tips and advice to people in how to teach someone English and what sort of things you can do to support a migrant. There should even be some rudimentary lessons in TESOL. This would be better to be informal and not have a qualification attached to it as this would be taking away from the free enterprise of those who run such courses, but basic help needs to be there. It would also be helpful if information about Migration was on the site so that such volunteers were able to access information and help migrants or would-be migrants make good decisions based on the law, rather than on urban legends that are passed around by word of mouth.

Additionally, it would be positive to have a database with the Department of Immigration that would allow migrants seeking support to be matched up with an appropriate family or volunteer organisation like the one I run. This could possibly occur online.

A real issue here is that of the language test. I have a friend who studied here, successfully completing and Masters in IT, in English. He received strong grades and got a job in that industry and was greatly appreciated by his employer. However, he sat the very expensive English test a number of times and was unable to pass. Each time, he would score one below the requirement in one area and each time it was a different area where he achieved his lower score. Because of that, he now lives in Korea again. Others that I know have had specialise coaching by immigration agents who have copies of the tests and they receive good marks and go through, even though they are relatively unable to deal with English in day to day communication transactions.

Perhaps just as valuable as English, is Australian history and culture, and might I add, our real history and culture, not the rewritten, imaginary one that is about to become our national curriculum. I believe there is a test for citizenship and I believe this is really positive because transmission of the stories of a people is an important part of sharing a culture together. I would like to see such a test expanded to those who are seeking PR. I would also love to see resources available, even if just YouTube clips, that present stories of aboriginal history and culture, early pioneers and exploration, as well as other crucial aspects of our history.

This brings me to the topic of Immigration agents. I am yet to meet a migrant who has not been ripped off by one. They seem to charge top dollars up front and then give poor or incorrect advice, or are lazy or too busy to put in forms in time and do not communicate as necessary with their clients. I believe it should be much harder to qualify as an immigration agent. I think it should be regulated more strictly and I think there should be far more immigration agents available who are not themselves migrants. They should have to pass extremely thorough tests in English comprehension and communication, as well as pronunciation, and they should be more readily available in regional areas. They should also have a wide knowledge and appreciation of Australian culture and heritage.

I believe that decentralisation is a key to the success of migration programs. As already mentioned, I think that regional towns and cities

are a far healthier way to promote integration. This scenario shows itself to both 'Australianise' the immigrant as well as bring a new appreciation and enjoyment of a foreign culture to an area that may not have a lot of contact with other cultures. Of course, this can only happen with support.

This being the case, I think that there should be incentives for migrants to move to regional areas rather than capital cities. I believe that there are already more points to be scored if one is heading regional rather than metropolitan and I would think that an even greater emphasis on a system such as this should be considered, especially in pouring skilled workers into areas where there are skills shortages. Perhaps for a percentage of PR or working visas approvals, conditions could be imposed such as living and working in a regional area.

It would seem to me that such a system would potentially be able to maximise Australia's social and economic health.

### **National productive capacity**

My understanding is that the mines, meatworks and agriculture offer strong opportunities for migrants in this area. They often offer a strong work ethic and a broad and disciplined skills base in areas where Australians either don't want to work, or where there is nobody available to do the job, such as rural doctors and fruit pickers. Obviously this is a massive assistance to Australia's productivity. Without such workers, fruit would rot on the trees and towns would be held back because of a lack of medical assistance.

I believe we should be encouraging those studying in our universities and doing well there, to stay. We need to be accepting the skills of overseas experience more readily. A friend of mine, who was running a large South African Hospital, came to work at the Base Hospital in Rockhampton. The additional pressure of language tests and resitting medical exams meant that the long shifts where too much was asked of him nearly destroyed him and his family. He left and that was a great loss to Rockhampton. I know that an area such as medicine requires great care in accepting a professional, however I wonder if there could be more grace given in the acceptance of already proven skills and in the

acceptance that this person has already been operating in a situation where English is the predominant language used.

Having said all that, I don't think the government needs to provide any programs or grants or specialised help to migrants to start businesses or carry on enterprises. There is already plenty of assistance in this area and it would be inequitable and discriminatory to give them more assistance than existing Australians. Those who are entrepreneurs will certainly show those abilities soon enough.

If these people are to become Australians, then they should have available to them the full force of assistance that is already available to Australians.

That being said, I am dismayed at the large number of people who are arriving illegally by boat. Policies need to be put in place to stop people from having incentives to risk such a deadly journey. I don't think our migrant quota should be all thrown in together. I believe we should have set quotas of skilled migrants who are welcomed in and those seeking asylum should be a completely different category and quota. Refugees should be treated with compassion and care, but if they riot or show extremism and fascism, then they should be evicted.

My sincere hope is that my submission is able to make some positive contribution to the debate and is not just rambling opinion. I am very grateful for the opportunity to submit.

Yours Sincerely,