

Written submission

Joint Standing committee on Migration

NAME:

ORGANISATION: English as Second Language Teacher to new migrants at Swinburne
University of technology (Tafe), Wantirna Campus
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6. The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants;

As a skilled migrant myself 15 years ago, we were one of the few who arrived then. In the last 7 years, there have been numerous migrants coming from Singapore who have settled well into a life here. Many skilled migrants are hard working and have excellent work ethics. As skilled migrants are eager to establish themselves, they are committed to their work and have become valued members of their work place for their high efficiency. Their bilingual ability has also served the work place well and some have unofficially become interpreters for clients who may not speak English well. However, I have also witnessed some who were dissatisfied with having to make do with a lower position at work and have returned to Singapore. As work culture and management of people are so different here, it is not an easy adjustment for some skilled migrants.

While coming from an English speaking society, it has been easier to look for a job here and there are many skilled migrants contributing to IT, Accountancy, Teaching and Nursing. Still there are adjustments to be made. Work practices are different, the relationship between a manager and the team is different, how a meeting is conducted and how opinions are expressed is also different.

On top of cultural adjustments, skilled migrants who come from a non English speaking background have a further obstacle of language. From my experience teaching English to new migrants in Swinburne Tafe (Wantirna Campus), I have identified an arising issue among my students who are skilled migrants and their spouses, particularly those from Mainland China and India, and more recently from Iran. They are having difficulties finding employment in their skilled areas. While there are many support services for refugees to help them settle and find employment, these services are not accessible to skilled migrants and their families.

At the time of application for migration as a skilled migrant, it was made absolutely clear that they have to rely on themselves to settle and find a livelihood after arriving in Australia. Most of the skilled migrants are professional people and have a certain status in their societies and many enjoyed a good livelihood. However, they wanted a better life for themselves and especially for their children.

When they arrive, many realise that their level of English though functional in the general society is not up to par with the requirements in their professional areas. They have difficulties performing well enough in the stringent professional texts to get their qualifications recognised, especially those in the medical fields.

Due to the lack of local experience, they also have difficulties finding employment. There are huge differences between the work cultures in Australia and where they came from, especially in communication at work.

As a consequence, many of these skilled workers or spouses of skilled workers who are men feel increasingly frustrated. They feel they have failed and after a few years, many give up trying and end up in jobs just to make ends meet. There is an ENT specialist driving buses, a brain surgeon doing massages at shopping centres, a dermatologist who runs a nut shack, an engineer who took 10 months to find a job as a technician, another engineer who gave up after a year to start a small business as a painter. The dissatisfaction and unhappiness creep into their lives and I suspect many have become depressed as they have lost their self esteem, status in life and question why they had given up a relatively good life to become such a 'disgrace'.

It is such a waste of all the effort to select and allow skilled migrants to fill in gaps in our economy and then watch these gaps in skills and talents unfilled as these skilled workers struggle unsuccessfully to assimilate into Australian work environments which are vastly different to what they are used to.

Furthermore, leaving such skilled migrants alone may lead to social problems in mental health, breakdown in marriages, gambling etc as some may turn to such avenues to release their frustrations.

What is needed are services to help these skilled migrants learn the work culture, to get support services to help prepare themselves for employment and perhaps to have mentoring programmes to help them gain an understanding of how things are done professionally here. I am not sure about the details but it would be a great idea if medical professionals from overseas could work as a sort of apprentice to a medical professional here and may be allowed privileges to do some part of medical work and progressively be tested and allowed more privileges. That way all the training and education invested in these skilled migrants would not be wasted.

As these skilled migrants struggle to find employment, their settlement becomes affected. They also do not have a voice to the government as they are desperately trying to cope with their new life. If the government provide support, measures and programs to help skilled migrants find their first job, our country would benefit from the skills of these new migrants and reap their contribution to the economy and society as they are very driven people who are committed to hard work. To leave them to struggle on their own and to allow them to "fail" in their settlement here does not benefit the new migrant we accept nor the Australian society.

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