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## INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION IN IMMIGRATION, SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION POLICIES FOR IMMIGRANTS IN REGIONAL AREAS OF AUSTRALIA

Key words:

*immigration, immigration policies, Australia*

### Introduction

Australia is a country of immigration. In 2010, it was estimated that 27 per cent of its population was overseas-born (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011b).<sup>1</sup> Australia's urbanisation rate of 89 per cent (2009) is one of the highest in the world (United Nations (UN) 2009). Population has long been concentrated in major metropolitan areas (100,000 inhabitants and more) and in particular in the nation's capital cities. In 2010, Australia had 22.5m inhabitants of whom 64 per cent lived in the capital cities. If all cities with populations over 100,000 were considered, this proportion would increase to 77 per cent (ABS 2011a).

In the late 1990s Australia introduced a regional policy for skilled and business migration as one means of achieving a better spatial distribution of the population. This article discusses the role of the Federal, State/Territory and Local Governments in planning and implementing this policy, and their role in policies of settlement and integration of immigrants in regional areas. The article has seven sections. The current section summarises the key trends that have triggered the introduction of the

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<sup>1</sup> This proportion is higher than in other migration countries. New Zealand overseas-born make up 22.9 per cent of its population, and in Canada they represent 19.8 per cent. In the US, overseas-born comprise 11.1 per cent of the population and in United Kingdom 8.3 per cent. Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) 2010:24.

regional dispersal policy for skilled and business migrants, discusses its core objectives and presents the key principles of the policy. The next section sketches the constitutional and jurisdictional division of power in immigration matters, introduces the key legislation and outlines mechanisms for intergovernmental policy consultations. Sections three to five review the roles of the three tiers of government in immigration, settlement and integration policies with illustrations provided from regional areas. Section 4 discusses an auxiliary strategy of dispersal of humanitarian entrants. Section six offers an appraisal of the intergovernmental collaboration in the dispersal, settlement and integration of immigrants. Recommendations for an enhanced retention in regions are made in the Conclusions.

#### *Rationale for regional dispersal policy for immigration*

Decades worth of post-war immigration have substantially contributed to the high urbanisation rate in Australia. The regional dispersal policy has served to direct some skilled and business migrants away from the largest cities and into regional locations. This has been motivated by interrelated demographic and economic trends. First, immigrants have long preferred to live in urban areas, particularly in the largest capital cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. This has contributed to problems of urban congestion, pressures on the infrastructure and land use (Golebiowska unpublished manuscript: 1). Settlement of immigrants in these cities has contributed to their population and economic growth and turned them into even greater magnets for subsequent migration and business activities. At the 2001 Census, 79 per cent of all migrants arrived in the previous five years lived in Sydney (37 per cent), Melbourne (22 per cent), Brisbane and Perth (10 per cent each); this overall proportion only decreased minimally to 77 per cent at the 2006 Census (ABS CData online; Golebiowska *et al.* 2011: 54). In effect, demographic and socioeconomic disparities between such areas of high growth and other areas, typically referred to as regions, have arisen. Hence, the first objective of the policy has been to encourage migrants to settle in less populated and slower growing areas

as a means of supporting their demographic and economic growth as well as reducing the pressures on the largest Australian cities.

Uneven population distribution has been further exacerbated by the effects of internal migration. Internal migration may support growth in the destination areas and contribute to population stagnation or decline in the areas of origin. South Australia and Tasmania have small populations and a history of substantial internal outmigration. Net internal migration losses, which these two states posted in 1991–96 and 1996–2001 have contributed to their low population growth. Tasmania actually suffered a minimal population decline in 1996–2001. In the most recent intercensal period (2001–06), population growth of these two states has remained low although Tasmania recorded a minimal internal migration gain (ABS 2003: 22, 39; 2008: 23, 28, 31). Rural and remote areas are similarly concerned about the consequences of their small or declining populations.

Large urban areas may also suffer net migration losses as was the case of Hobart (capital city of Tasmania) and Adelaide (capital city of South Australia) in 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses. As a result, their respective populations practically stagnated. In the first two intercensal periods their respective population growth rates were less than 50 per cent of the national average annual growth rates. Melbourne also experienced net migration losses and a below national average annual growth rates in the 1991–96 intercensal period. The tide started turning in the intercensal period of 1996–2001 when Melbourne improved its average annual population growth rate and exceeded the national average annual growth rate in 2001–06 (ABS 1998: 39, 40; 2003: 20, 25, 46; 2008:28; 2009a: 46, 47; 2009b). The effects of out-migration represent then another rationale for introducing the regional dispersal policy (Golebiowska unpublished manuscript:29).

In the Northern Territory (NT), which has the smallest population base of all Australian jurisdictions, historically unpredictable internal migration flows and the consequent highly volatile annual population growth (Golebiowska and Carson 2009; Taylor and Carson 2009) have been of concern. Statistics suggests that the NT has

been attractive for temporary, short-term interstate moves for employment reasons but not for long-term residence (ABS 1998: 35; 2003: 41). By directing long-term migrants to areas like the NT it is hoped that they can contribute to a more sustainable demographic growth.

The policy has also had economic motivations. It was instituted at a time of positive economic growth, which translated into a tighter national labour market and employer difficulties, including in regions, in attracting and retaining skilled workers. The labour force supply, including the availability of specific skills, has been exacerbated in those areas of Australia that have suffered population losses through out-migration. Young adults have long been known to be leaving regional Australia for largest cities to pursue education and economic opportunities (Bell and Hugo 2000: 99). Thus, another policy objective has been to attract young and skilled individuals to fill vacancies in regions and migrant entrepreneurs to establish new or joint ventures there.

#### *Principles of regional dispersal policy for immigration*

'Regional' Australia for purposes of this policy covers areas with less than 200,000 inhabitants and low growth metropolitan areas that is those that in the last intercensal period had posted an average annual population growth rate below 50 per cent of the national average annual population growth rate (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) 2005b: 42). All non-metropolitan areas and some metropolitan areas are included. Large capital cities such as Sydney, Brisbane and Perth, which have high proportions of the immigrant-born and some other highly populated areas have been excluded. Adelaide, Hobart and Darwin (capital city of the NT) have been included. Melbourne, Australia's second largest city has been eligible under some regional visas, which has arisen from its low average population growth in the first part of the 1990s. The strong pro-immigration stance of the Victorian Government (Hugo 2008b: 555) has also been critical. In 2001–06, growth has improved in Adelaide, Hobart and Melbourne and technically



they do not meet the low growth metropolitan area criterion now (ABS 2008: 28; 2009b). Their latest population growth trends will be revealed by the 2011 Census.

It is difficult to swiftly change long-established trajectories of immigration to such internationally well-known cities as Sydney or Melbourne. Since 1995–96, a combination of incentives has been used to encourage skilled and business migrants to settle and work in regional locations. For these purposes, a new set of skilled and business visas has been developed within Australia's skilled migration program. Their specific criteria have been refined over time. These visas fall under the 'State-Specific and Regional Migration' (SSRM) initiatives. They enable employers, State and Territory Governments and families in regional areas to nominate individuals for migration.

The majority of skilled migrants are subject to a federally established points-test. For regional skilled migrants the minimum threshold is lower than for the independent skilled migrants (Golebiowska *et al.* 2011: 65). Under some visas, such as the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) available for those who have a specific job offer, the points-test does not apply. Regional skilled migrants can access some lower entry criteria than those applicable to independent skilled migrants. They include lower English language standards, higher age limit and lower level skills (the latter two are only available under RSMS). Independent business migrants and regional business migrants are not points tested but some lower criteria, such as less money available for investment, apply to the latter group. Migration criteria for both groups of business people are federally-established. Regional skilled and business migrants also benefit from priority visa processing (2011: 65).

Nowadays, migration to Australia, including to regional areas, is a two-step process. First, most regional migrants receive temporary visas. They are expected to settle and work (or enter into business) in the region for which they have been nominated for a minimum period of time, which is usually two years. After they have met the initial residence and employment criteria, they become eligible to apply for a permanent visa. These initial restrictions serve to enhance their chances of long-term

retention in the destination areas, which in turn is expected to support the local population and economic growth. It is hoped that by the time migrants have become eligible for permanent visas (and in most cases become eligible to relocate), they would have developed local links and therefore be less prone to move (Golebiowska *et al.* 2011: 64). Currently, occasional surveys are the only source of information regarding secondary movements before and after the initial restrictions have been lifted. Relocations occurring before the initial restrictions expire require approval by the relevant authorities such as the State/Territory Governments concerned.

### **Constitutional and legal framework for immigration policy and consultative mechanisms**

#### *Constitutional division of powers, key legislation and statutory bodies*

The Australian Constitution (1901) stipulates that immigration is a prerogative of the Federal Parliament, which has powers to make laws about immigration and emigration (s 51 (xxvii)), naturalisation and aliens (s 51 (xix)).<sup>2</sup> The Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)<sup>3</sup> administers Australia's immigration laws under the direction of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship (MIAC).

The *Migration Act 1958* provides the framework for regulating entry, presence, removal or deportation of non-citizens. The *Migration Regulations 1994* provide the procedural mechanisms for how that *Act* is to be administered.<sup>4</sup> The *Act* and the *Regulations* provide for many matters to be specified by notice in the Commonwealth Gazette as a way of quickly fine-tuning the law (Vrachnas *et al.* 2008: 29).

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<sup>2</sup> Parliament of Australia 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Other names of the Department are used in this paper as per its official name at any given time. The word 'Department' also refers to the Federal Department of Immigration.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the *Migration Act 1958* is Act No. 62 of 1958 as amended, prepared 25 September 2009, taking into account amendments up to Act No. 91 of 2009. The *Migration Regulations 1994* are Statutory Rules 1994 No. 268, prepared 22 September 2009, taking into account amendments up to SLI 2009 No 237.

The Migration Review Tribunal (MRT) and the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) provide independent merits reviews of most visa-related DIAC's decisions (Vrachnas *et al.* 2008: 318).<sup>5</sup> They are established by the *Act* and their jurisdiction, powers and procedures are determined by the *Act* and the *Regulations* (MRT-RRT 2011). The Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) is authorised under the *Act* to conduct merits reviews of decisions relating to refusal or cancellation of certain visas based on character or criminal grounds. Decisions of the MRT, RRT and AAT are subject to judicial review by the Federal Magistrates Court, the Federal Court and the High Court (Vrachnas *et al.* 2008:319). Two other framing pieces of legislation are the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* and the *Migration Agents Regulations 1998*.

*Intergovernmental consultations on immigration, settlement and integration policies*

The development of these policies is informed by consultations between DIAC and other Federal departments and agencies, State/Territory and Local Government authorities, the community sector, industry, ethnic associations and the general public. This collaboration takes on many forms and binds DIAC to various degrees. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, initiates, develops and monitors the implementation of policy reforms which are of national significance and which require cooperative action by the Australian Governments. At the time of writing in July 2011, COAG and the associated Ministerial Councils are undergoing a re-structure but immigration and settlement will remain as a core area of interest. In the past, the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (MCIMA) has provided a forum to develop policies and strategies around the regional dispersal of skilled migrants, settlement and citizenship (COAG 2011; Commonwealth-State Relations Secretariat 2010:59; MIAC 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> Merits review – reconsideration of an original administrative decision with the objective of making the correct or preferable decision based on the facts before it in accordance with applicable laws. Vrachnas *et al.* 2008:318.

The regional dispersal policy has its origins in a Commonwealth/State Working Party on Immigration established in 1996 (Hugo 2008a: 133). The current Commonwealth/State Working Party on Skilled Migration brings together stakeholders from the Federal and State/Territory Governments to investigate the development of long-term skilled migration options and strategies to increase the number of skilled migrants in States/Territories and regional areas (DIAC 2009: 35). Similar Working Parties were established in the past between the Federal Government and individual State Governments, such as New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria. Each group investigated options for increasing settlement of skilled and business migrants in regional areas and in NSW for reducing the level of permanent and temporary migration to the Sydney metropolitan area, Newcastle and Wollongong (Commonwealth/NSW Working Party on Migration to Sydney and Regional NSW 2003; Department of Premier and Cabinet Victoria (DPCV) 2004).

#### *Advisory bodies to DIAC*

Numerous government and non-government stakeholders advise DIAC and the Minister on various aspects of immigration, settlement and integration of immigrants. An example of an advisory body to the Federal Minister is the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council. It deals with matters related to cultural diversity and social and civic participation of immigrants in wider society. It will be replaced by the Australian Multicultural Council (DIAC 2011a). There are also consultations on the annual immigrant intake with community-level organisations and others who work with DIAC.



## **Roles and Responsibilities of Each Level of Government for Immigration Policy and Programs**

### *Federal planning for immigration and humanitarian programs*

The Federal Government plans the annual scale and composition of the immigration and humanitarian programs in consultation with the State/Territory Governments. Between 2003–04 and 2009–10, the total number of annually granted immigration visas (skilled, family and special eligibility) has ranged between 114,400 and 171,300. In the same period, the annual number of humanitarian visas has ranged between 13,000 and 14,100. Besides the permanent migration program, DIAC manages temporary entry into Australia (DIAC 2009:71; 2010:30,32,81).

The Federal Government reviews the prevailing economic and social circumstances and may adjust the scale and/or composition of the annual immigrant intake. Two reductions to the skilled migrant intake were made in March and May 2009 in response to the economic slowdown (MIAC 2009). More recently, policy adjustments have been made to better address specific skill shortages in regional Australia. Following announcements by the Federal Minister for Immigration in February 2010, in late 2010 and early 2011, State Migration Plans were rolled out. They are formal agreements between the Minister and each State/Territory Government (DIAC 2011c). Before they came into force, the State and Territory Governments used their own lists of occupations in demand to nominate skilled migrants with a matching skills set. Such nominations have never required a job offer. Rather, they have been based on the match between the State/Territory-wide or regional labour market needs and the migrant occupation and skills as well as an assumption that the individual would find employment quickly. Under the State Migration Plans, the lists have remained in force and Governments have become authorised to set the number of migrants that they will nominate from their lists every year (2011c). State Migration Plans have similar structures but the annual

number of nominations and the lists of occupations in demand differ slightly among jurisdictions. This reflects the unique labour market needs of each State/Territory.

Given that immigration is a sole constitutional responsibility of the Federal Government, these plans are a development worth monitoring. A formal transfer of some decision-making powers to the sub-national governments may with time come to transform the federal-state relations and the practice of the migration policy planning process. The national planning levels may come to better reflect the different needs of States and Territories and regions within them. The plans provide an illustration of Australia's long-standing interest in regional variation, which can also be observed in such public domains as fiscal policy or parliamentary representation.

In July 2011, the Federal Minister announced a new model for skilled migration to Australia, planned to commence in July 2012. It departs from the current model in that it involves an electronic expression of interest for skilled migration against the points test, followed by an invitation to submit a full visa application for successful candidates. Applicants for independent, family and State/Territory-nominated migration will require such an invitation in order to submit a visa application. The underlying principle is for the skilled migration program to meet Australia's economic needs and in particular match State and Territory-wide as well as regional skill shortages. The new model will have safeguards against the previous concentration of independent skilled visa grants in a handful of occupations. State and Territory Governments will have access to the electronic database containing expressions of interest and will be able to nominate candidates for migration who have specific skills in demand in their jurisdictions. Candidates will then be invited to submit visa applications in scheduled rounds to apply. Employers Australia-wide will also have access to the database so that they can contact prospective migrants directly to arrange a nomination. Other expected benefits include a match between the number of applicants and the number of places available annually as well as more streamlined

processing (DIAC 2011b; n.d.). No details of how this new model would interact with the State Migration Plans have yet been released.

#### *Role of State/Territory and Local Governments in implementing immigration policy*

To help the Federal Government implement regional dispersal all State/Territory Governments have created units responsible for their 'portion' of processing of regional skilled and business visa applications. These units are also pivotal in the two-way traffic between DIAC and local stakeholders. Daily engagement with the latter gives the migration units extensive local knowledge. This in turn can be used to inform the development of the national policy at forums such as MCIMA. Some local councils are gazetted as 'regional certifying bodies' to assist with administration of RSMS visas.

#### *Recruitment, selection, admission and control of stay of immigrants*

The implementation of immigration policy involves recruitment, selection, admission and control of the stay of immigrants. The Federal Government has sole responsibility for the selection and admission of non-citizens and control of their entry and stay including removal and deportation. It facilitates their recruitment in numerous ways. The DIAC website is the most authoritative source of reference for prospective migrants in that it presents the most-up-to-date official information. It also hosts the Skill Matching Database (SMD), which can be searched by Australian employers and State/Territory Governments to identify candidates for nomination under selected skilled visas including for regional areas (DIAC 2009: 36). It is yet unclear what will happen to SMD after the new model for skilled migration has been implemented. DIAC also advises employers (Australia-wide) at free information sessions on the process of nominating skilled workers.

The State/Territory Governments are active internationally and domestically in attracting skilled and business migrants. Their migration units maintain websites containing details about immigration requirements and promote the

employment/business opportunities and lifestyle in their respective jurisdictions. They also undertake promotion and recruitment missions in selected countries. Domestically, they advise employers on nominations, hold seminars for international students interested in migrating and so forth.

Collaboration between the Federal and State/Territory Governments in implementing the regional dispersal policy is legislated. By virtue of *Migration Regulations 1994*, administration of certain visas, such as those falling into the regional categories, is shared between the Minister for Immigration and the State/Territory Governments and/or assisted by other bodies gazetted for this purpose. The RSMS visa, which enables employers to nominate a candidate for a specific employment offer, provides an illustration of this interaction. In order to apply to the Federal Minister for the approval of the nomination, an employer is required to obtain an endorsement from a gazetted body that the business and the conditions of the employment offer meet the specific criteria set out in the *Regulations*. These bodies are known as 'regional certifying bodies'. Their role may be assumed by the Governments' migration units, regional development authorities and local councils (Commonwealth of Australia Gazette 2002).

DIAC retains the sole responsibility for selection of migrants. This is regardless of the nominations made by employers and State/Territory Governments and the legislated co-administration of the regional visas. If potential migrants meet all principal selection criteria but fail to meet the medical, criminal and security criteria, their visa application is usually refused (Vrachnas *et al.* 2008: 150).

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Each Tier of Government in Settlement Policy and Programs**

### *Federal policy framework and policy coordination*

The policy context for settlement programs is provided by *National Framework for Settlement Planning 2006* (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs



(DIMA) 2006) and the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society 1998* (National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC) 1999). The *Charter* provides a framework for delivering government-funded services (mainstream and those provided by community-based organisations) in a way that is sensitive and responsive to the language and cultural needs of all Australians.

The *National Framework* has been developed in consultations undertaken by the Department to follow-up on the recommendations made by the *2003 Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* (DIMIA 2003). Its implementation involves cooperation across all levels of government (including government service providers), with community organisations and other settlement service providers (for example not-for-profit community-based organisations). This is coordinated by the National Settlement Planning Unit located in the Federal DIAC office, which receives information from the Settlement Planning Units located in the State/Territory DIAC offices. The National Unit has the dual role of using received information to inform and coordinate program management and policy development and of advising stakeholders on settlement patterns, expected needs of new arrivals and services available to meet those needs (DIMA 2006: 10,12). The Settlement Planning Units in regional DIAC offices perform a similar role with respect to the local service providers and other settlement stakeholders. Furthermore, they report to the Federal DIAC office on regional settlement issues, including on potential sites for humanitarian settlement (2006: 11).

Direct regional settlement of humanitarian migrants has not, until recently, been pursued in a planned way (Piper and Associates 2007: 4). A current focus on settling humanitarian entrants in regional areas<sup>1</sup> has resulted from recommendations made in the *2003 Review*. The goal is to relieve pressure on services and resources in larger centres, to help regional towns boost their populations and benefit the migrants themselves particularly if they have skills in demand in particular regional areas and/or they themselves have rural backgrounds (Piper and Associates 2009: 5;

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<sup>1</sup> DIAC can most readily influence the settlement of humanitarian entrants who have no substantial social links elsewhere in the country.

2008: point 4.2). Thus, their dispersal offers an auxiliary means of better distributing immigrants throughout the country.

Humanitarian settlement pilot programs have recently taken place in selected regional towns in Victoria (Ballarat, Shepparton) and South Australia (Mount Gambier) (Piper and Associates 2009; 2008; 2007). Evaluations illustrate coordination of the efforts of, and scope of cooperation between the government and non-government stakeholders, the role of the cross-agency regional settlement planning committees, the nature of the support services and how they were delivered as well as the engagement of volunteers. Evaluations attest to the enormous amount of resources, enthusiasm and lateral thinking required from these agencies and individuals to settle relatively small groups of up to 60 individuals (typically up to a dozen families) in each town.

The ultimate aim of intensive inter-agency cooperation is the longer-term retention of humanitarian migrants in regions. The efforts of these agencies are expected to contribute to this retention. However, these evaluations were undertaken only around 12 months from the commencement of each project, when migrants were still adjusting to their new lives, so that their longer-term retention in these regional towns has not been proven. One example of an incident that could potentially undermine retention is as follows. Humanitarian entrants wished to become reunited with families with whom they had links and that others from their areas of origin could join them (Piper and Associates 2009; 2008). Bringing these families could potentially strengthen the social support in these emerging communities and in turn encourage retention. However, one linked family was sent to Perth by DIAC rather than to Ballarat (in a twist of unfortunate circumstances), causing distress for a family settled in Ballarat. This triggered negative emotions across the community, who became aware of the larger compatriots' community, more employment opportunities and a better climate in Perth. This seems to have convinced many that Perth was a better place to settle. If these migrants do not

secure meaningful employment in Ballarat after they have completed their English and/or other training, some may indeed move to Perth (2009:51–2). No similar incident happened in Mount Gambier and all families appeared happy to stay there (2008:point 5).

#### *Eligibility of immigrants for settlement support*

The provision of services to newly arrived migrants is based on their needs. General needs such as education or health care are met by mainstream agencies. Specialised settlement services are intended to help migrants become self-sufficient as soon as possible after arrival so that they can participate equitably in Australian society and use mainstream services. Eligibility for specialised services depends on the visa and is generally limited to the five-year period after arrival. Eligible groups are: humanitarian entrants, family stream entrants with low levels of English language proficiency and, dependants of skilled migrants with low levels of English language proficiency who have settled in regional and rural areas (DIMA 2006:1–2; Spinks 2009:3,5).

#### *Funding and delivery of settlement services: DIAC and settlement service providers*

Funding distributed by DIAC through a competitive grants process to community-based service providers means that the Department directly ‘purchases’ settlement services. This funding is available for specific projects and is hence time-limited. To meet the needs of their clients the service providers routinely seek funds from other sources. For example, in 2008–09, the Melaleuca Refugee Centre in Darwin secured funding from DIAC, two other Federal Government departments, three NT Government departments and four foundations (Melaleuca n.d.).

The key types of assistance for which DIAC funding is available include:

- a) English language tuition for adults; b) free translating and interpreting services to eligible non-English speaking migrants and humanitarian entrants when accessing services (for example to communicate with a doctor during a medical appointment); c)

intensive on-arrival assistance to humanitarian entrants provided under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), lasting typically six months and designed to engender self-sufficiency as soon as possible; and d) post-IHSS services provided under the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) aimed at helping eligible clients to settle and participate in society as soon as possible after arrival (DIAC 2009:99–102).

Such assistance has been delivered to humanitarian entrants settled in Ballarat, Shepparton and Mount Gambier. Evaluations of these projects commented a great deal on the arrangements for and activities undertaken by the IHSS caseworkers. For example, the evaluation of the Ballarat project (Piper and Associates 2009) has illustrated how a part-time funding model for the IHSS caseworker, who at the initial stage needed to work full-time, adversely impacted both the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council contracted to deliver these services and the refugees. Although the contractual obligations were met, the heavy workload resulted in a high staff turnover in this pivotal position, lack of continuity in service delivery and difficulties in establishing relationships of trust with the clients. The Council accrued a financially problematic debt for the time-in-lieu (2009:30–32).

In Mount Gambier, brokerage undertaken by the IHSS caseworker with local real estate agents helped new residents find suitable accommodation. This person also cooperated with the local media to keep the general public informed about the arrival of and participation of these entrants in community activities (Piper and Associates 2008: points 4.9.2; 6). The latter illustrates that caseworker positions involve activities extending beyond face-to-face contact with refugees and that caseworkers may be engaged in community awareness strategies. Importantly, communities in all three towns have been reported to be welcoming and supporting. Welcoming communities represent a key ingredient for a successful retention.



### *State/Territory Government-funded settlement services for regional skilled/business immigrants*

Support for regional skilled and business migrants varies between jurisdictions. Typically, State/Territory Governments' funds go towards supporting skilled migrants simply because they outnumber business migrants. Although the absolute numbers of the latter may be relatively low, they tend to choose to be nominated by States/Territories to benefit from the lower selection criteria. For example, in 2006–07, more than 95 per cent of entrepreneurs were State/Territory nominated (DIAC 2008:36). As of July 2011, examples of on-arrival support to skilled migrants nominated by the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Tasmania included assistance with finding rental accommodation, one-to-one orientation and information sessions and help in finding employment.<sup>1</sup> Similar assistance in regional Victoria is delivered through a partnership between the Victorian Government and local councils. These services are intended to assist skilled migrants nominated by the State/Territory Governments who did not require employment offers to immigrate. RSMS visa holders are expected to receive settlement assistance from their employers. Settlement information booklets downloadable from the migration units' websites are also popular and a main source of assistance for migrants in larger States such as New South Wales. Across Australia assistance to business migrants tends to be focused on business-related matters.

Settlement support is an element of the retention strategy. It is hoped that successful initial settlement will in turn enhance longer-term residency in the concerned State/Territory. But retention results from a combination of opportunities and circumstances of which some may fall outside the scope of immigration and settlement-related policies and programs. For example, a survey in the NT has revealed that employment opportunities elsewhere/a completed contract, seeking a change in lifestyle and existence of social links were among the key reasons for

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<sup>1</sup> The ACT also offers a meet and greet service on arrival and transport to temporary accommodation. Such services were offered in 2010 by volunteers in South Australia but seem to have been since cut back.

relocation of skilled migrants from the NT (Garnett *et al.* 2008:85).<sup>2</sup> A survey of migrants nominated by the South Australian Government has established that economic, social and lifestyle considerations were among the key factors initially attracting them to regional areas (Hugo 2008a). This would suggest that the same motivations act as push and pull factors when it comes to migration.

The Department of Immigration has commissioned surveys to investigate mobility motivations, settlement and integration experiences of migrants holding selected regional skilled visas such as the RSMS ([www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research))<sup>3</sup>. These surveys have revealed that economic, lifestyle and social considerations were among the key factors underpinning the initial migration and subsequent relocations. For example, RSMS migrants who have fulfilled their minimum contract obligations and those who still had some way to go were surveyed in 2004. It was revealed that nine per cent of respondents have relocated to areas not designated as regional for RSMS purposes at the time of the survey and that eight per cent of those still living in their designated areas intended to relocate within the next 12 months. Furthermore, those who have met their contractual obligations were slightly less likely to remain in designated areas than other migrants (DIMIA 2005a:5,15–6). Those who have met their obligations and decided ‘voluntarily’ to remain in their regional areas were more likely to do so because they liked the area and the lifestyle rather than for work-related reasons. By comparison, work-related reasons represented a strong motivation to stay put for those migrants who have not yet met their contractual obligations. Almost all survey respondents (96 per cent) were made to feel welcome when they first settled. This suggests that their local communities were welcoming and friendly (DIMIA 2005a:9-10, 20), which is an important factor in retention. In sum, these results suggest that while the majority of regional migrants are likely to be retained, a moderate leakage out of regional areas may occur.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on a survey of overseas-qualified health professionals, which was integrated into a larger survey by Garnett *et al.* 2008 on mobility of health professionals to and from the NT.

<sup>3</sup> State/Territory nominated business migrants are surveyed too, but the results of these surveys could not be immediately located.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Each Level of Government for Integration Policy and Programs**

### *Federal policy framework and key funding initiatives*

The events of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have particularly (but not solely) contributed to the current focus of the integration policy on the embracing of the Australian values, maintaining social cohesion and ensuring national security. Similar values are invoked in the recently released Federal multicultural policy (February 2011). Readers interested in critical evaluation of current and earlier practice and outcomes of the Federal Government's approaches to immigrant integration may refer to Betts and Birrell (2007), Jupp (2007), Jupp *et al.* (2007) and Markus *et al.* (2009). Other authors have also commented on the dynamics and indicators of immigrant integration in Australia.

Since 2006 a framework for initiatives to reinforce social harmony and address intolerance has been provided by the *National Action Plan to Build Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security*. This COAG initiative supports community resilience against radicalisation and extremism including addressing their underlying social and economic causes (MCIMA 2007; Andrews 2007). Its formulation was informed by wide-based consultations with State/Territory Governments and various community reference groups (DIAC 2008:101). The means to achieve these objectives are to better engage with migrants and to educate and engage the wider community (MCIMA 2007).

DIAC coordinates the *National Action Plan*. Funding to community-based organisations to implement its objectives is administered through DIAC's 'Diverse Australia Program'. Community-based organisations may seek funding from other tiers of government and other funders. DIAC funds small and major grants to enable communities to pursue activities promoting respect, fairness, inclusion and a sense of belonging.

Promotion of Australian citizenship as the common bond for all Australians serves to encourage immigrants to fully participate in civic, social and economic life. The *Life in Australia* booklet states that *To maintain a stable, peaceful and prosperous community, Australians of all backgrounds are expected to uphold the shared principles and values that underpin the Australian society.* These are: *respect for equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual; freedom of speech; freedom of religion and secular government; freedom of association; support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law; equality under the law; equality of men and women; equality of opportunity; peacefulness; and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect and compassion for those in need* (DIAC 2007:4). Most visa applicants sign a Values Statement included in their application to acknowledge that they will respect Australian values and obey the laws of Australia during their stay. Australian values are repeated in the citizenship oath. The oaths are taken at citizenship ceremonies, which are conducted on DIAC's behalf by local councils.

#### *Roles and responsibilities of State/Territory Governments*

Each State/Territory Government has an agency promoting and supporting cultural diversity. Their key functions include: a) promotion and facilitation of full participation of immigrants in cultural, social and economic life; b) increase in the understanding of ethnic and cultural diversity in the broader community; c) removal of barriers to equity in accessing government services and programs including by coordinating the whole-of-government approach (at State/Territory level); and d) advice to the relevant State/Territory Minister on matters relating to multicultural affairs. These agencies fulfil their roles through the provision of grants to community groups and administration of programs for recently arrived immigrants seeking employment. They also advise other government departments and agencies on access and equity matters and assist with consulting of ethnic client groups.

Other State/Territory Government departments may also help immigrants to integrate into the Australian community. Matters of law and order are often



identified as a key challenge for humanitarian entrants because their previous experiences may make them reserved about interacting with police and other authorities. In this context it is important to note that the State police participated in each regional settlement pilot project discussed earlier and nowhere were the humanitarian entrants reported as getting into trouble with the law (Piper and Associates 2009:46–7; 2008:point 4.9.13; 2007:22–3). At the time of the evaluations it was too early for an in-depth analysis of the migrants' progress in fully embracing Australian norms and customs but stakeholders facilitated their participation in local sports and hobby clubs. This may suggest that these humanitarian entrants were on track to adopting Australian norms and customs.

#### *Roles and responsibilities of Local Governments*

In line with the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society 1998* and the relevant State/Territory legislation, local councils are obliged to operate in a culturally sensitive way and ensure equitable access to their services, facilities and programs. They develop social/community plans to meet the needs of certain groups, including immigrants. Councils with substantial immigrant populations, such as Brisbane City Council, may have their own multicultural strategies, programs and grants. In areas with smaller immigrant populations, such strategies can be streamed into general community development programs. For example, in Darwin, immigrant and/or cultural associations may apply for community grants funded and administered by the Council. Public libraries, which are the Council's responsibility, stock materials in languages other than English. Similar opportunities and services are standard where their greater range is not warranted.

In the regional humanitarian settlement pilots located in Ballarat, Shepparton and Mount Gambier, local Councils provide assistance to new residents to settle and integrate successfully. For example, at the time of evaluation, the City of Mount Gambier was about to offer supervised work experience to some humanitarian entrants (Piper and Associates 2008: point 4.9.8). It could be anticipated that besides

providing economic benefits, this work experience would expose them to Australian work ethics and other common social norms and thus help their integration into the Australian community.

### **Policy appraisal**

Our current knowledge about the impact of intergovernmental cooperation and where relevant, the role of the non-governmental stakeholders in attracting, retaining and integrating immigrants in regional Australia does not have an equal breadth in all areas. The reasons for this imbalance differ for regional skilled and business migrants as compared with regional humanitarian migrants.

The collaboration between the Federal and State/Territory Governments in developing and implementing the regional migration policy has enticed a substantial number of skilled and business migrants to move to regional and low population growth metropolitan areas. Between 2000 and 2009, nearly 160,000 regional skilled and business visas were granted (includes family members). Since 2004–05, these visas have never represented, on an annual basis, less than one-fifth of all skilled visa grants. This is undoubtedly a success. There is clearly a commitment to even better address the skill shortages in regional Australia, as demonstrated by the recently implemented State Migration Plans and the announcement of the new model for skilled migration to Australia.

The effects of the current initiatives encouraging skilled and business migrants to move to and stay in regions are difficult to precisely quantify. First, the State/Territory Governments' migration units may know how many successful applications result from their attendance at promotional events abroad but since they compete for migrants, this knowledge may remain tacit. Second, there is no immediately available information at the State/Territory level regarding whether and how settlement support services delivered by State/Territory Government migration units influence the choice of State/Territory of settlement, actual settlement progress and longer-term retention. Besides eligibility for these services, regional migrants are

generally expected to be independent, thus they may disappear 'from the radar' soon after arrival. The high numbers of applications processed by State/Territory migration units may render monitoring their settlement progress and retention difficult. Consequently, it is also unknown how well community harmony-enhancing projects funded by all three tiers of government increase their sense of belonging and propensity to remain in their original regional areas of settlement. Integration with the local community is important for retention and both the government-funded initiatives and a welcoming community need to be in place to enhance retention.

The experimental nature of regional humanitarian settlement pilot projects, the more manageable numbers involved and containment of the projects to small geographic areas have facilitated detailed evaluation. Reports have attested to the overall positive impact of the work undertaken by collaborating Governments, IHSS caseworkers and non-government stakeholders. The evaluation reports have also noted that the local communities were welcoming. The evaluations were undertaken too early for an in-depth analysis of the migrants' progress in fully embracing Australian norms and customs. However, the evaluations do state that the migrants were happy participants in community sports and hobby clubs and did not have trouble with the law. The latter is likely thanks to the engagement of local State police officers in each pilot project.

Regional retention is the key outcome of regional dispersal strategies for skilled, business and humanitarian entrants. It results from a combination of opportunities and circumstances of which some may fall outside the scope of immigration-related policies and programs. The RSMS survey has suggested that the majority of migrants are likely to be retained in their initial areas of destination possibly for lifestyle reasons and their fondness of the areas concerned. The fact that they felt welcome when they first settled is encouraging and demonstrates the friendly nature of Australian communities. However, this and the NT survey have also suggested that a moderate leakage may occur from regional areas both before and after migrants have met their contractual obligations. This points to real or perceived

reasons driving relocation, which are seemingly more important than the initial visa restrictions. For example, housing may represent an important lifestyle consideration and prompt people to move. Quality education for children may represent another reason. For some professionals, longer-term career opportunities may exist in metropolitan areas.

The efforts of all stakeholders involved in the regional humanitarian settlement pilot projects and the clients' progress in settlement have suggested that a long-term retention could be achieved. However, incidents like the one reported for Ballarat and Perth could undermine chances of a high rate of retention of members of this refugee community in Ballarat (Piper and Associates 2009: 52–3). The reactions the incident has triggered point to social, economic and lifestyle considerations that may become important factors in making longer-term settlement decisions. Social imperatives to move to a metropolitan area could possibly be tempered if DIAC and the collaborating local stakeholders more carefully coordinated family reunification.

The occasional surveys of regional skilled migrants have been either visa or State/Territory-specific, thus our understanding of retention factors rests on somewhat fragmented evidence. A database cross-referencing de-identified visa and selected Census statistics could better serve the ongoing focus on regional dispersal. Such a project was piloted in Australia in 2009 (Golebiowska *et al.* 2011: 75). By comparison, evaluations of regional humanitarian settlement pilot projects were undertaken too early for a definitive impression of longer-term retention outcomes.

The surveys reviewed here and one of the evaluations (Piper and Associates 2009) point to economic, social and lifestyle considerations as potential drivers of out-migration from regional areas. This reveals the universality of these drivers regardless of the type of visa at entry. Undoubtedly, some humanitarian and skilled and business migrants will move away from regional areas, as it is ultimately a personal and/or a family choice influenced by a combination of external factors.



## Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that although immigration policy is a sole constitutional responsibility of the Federal Government, regional dispersal of skilled and business migrants rests on collaboration of Federal and State/Territory Governments. Settlement support for these migrants is funded and delivered by State/Territory Governments. Employer-nominated migrants such as RSMS visa holders are expected to receive similar assistance from their employers. Regional humanitarian settlement requires concerted efforts over time from all levels of government and from non-government stakeholders. State/Territory and Local Governments have funds and programs to facilitate integration of all groups of migrants and to support community cohesion more broadly. Settlement and integration programs cover key aspects of social, economic and civic adjustment to life in Australia.

Longer-term retention in regions is the key policy outcome and the ultimate indicator of success of regional dispersal strategies. Many skilled and business migrants initially enticed to regional areas and many humanitarian entrants settled in regional towns are likely to be retained there longer-term. Yet, there is suggestive evidence that economic, lifestyle and social considerations may drive moderate numbers of them out of the regional areas. These considerations point to real or perceived opportunities and concerns about the broader environment, which may fall outside the scope of the immigration, settlement and integration policies. Human and financial resources committed to dispersal, settlement and integration of migrants can support long-term retention but alone they will not suffice. They need to be assisted by investments in physical infrastructure, services and human capital, which will create conditions and opportunities attractive enough for the immigrants and other residents to stay. Finally, welcoming communities encourage retention. The Australian studies reviewed in this paper suggest that host communities around Australia generally have these qualities. What is now needed are better assessment

tools to investigate retention and mobility outcomes for the skilled and business migrants and repeat studies of humanitarian settlers in regional towns.

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## **WSPÓŁPRACA WŁADZ REGIONALNYCH W ZAKRESIE IMIGRACJI, OSIEDLANIA I INTEGRACJI IMIGRANTÓW NA OBSZARACH REGIONALNYCH AUSTRALII**

### **Abstrakt**

Australia jest krajem imigracji i krajem wysoko zurbanizowanym. W ostatnich latach władze australijskie wprowadziły politykę zachęcającą imigrantów do osiedlania się w regionach (poza wielkimi miastami), licząc że uda się ich tam zatrzymać na dłuższy okres, co w konsekwencji ma wesprzeć wzrost liczby ludności i rozwój ekonomiczny tych terenów. Artykuł omawia współpracę wszystkich szczebli administracji w dziedzinie tej polityki i w zakresie powiązanych polityk osiedlenia i integracji. Ocenia on następnie wyniki tej współpracy, zwraca uwagę na główne czynniki sprzyjające długoterminowemu osiedlaniu się imigrantów w regionach i wskazuje na przyczyny luk w wiedzy o efektach tej współpracy. Artykuł zamykają propozycje w jaki sposób poprawić dotychczasowe wyniki osadnictwa imigrantów w regionach.

## Abstract

Australia is a country built on immigration and one which is highly urbanised. The authorities have recently embarked on a policy of regional dispersal of immigrants with a view of retaining them in regions long-term so as to assist the regional demographic and economic growth. This article reviews the collaboration of the Federal, State/Territory and Local Governments in this and related policies of settlement and integration of immigrants in regions. It then evaluates the effects of this collaboration, highlights key retention factors and points to reasons behind current knowledge gaps. It offers recommendations for an enhanced retention.