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Rethinking Socio-Economic Models for Migrant Settlement in Regional Australia Post COVID-19



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Front cover photograph by Dr Ataus Samad

FOREWORD BY THE CHANCELLOR

As NSW Coordinator-General of Settlement, I have for some years been concerned with overcoming the challenges involved in settling (or re-settling) migrants and refugees to Australia in rural and regional areas. The domestic impact of global pandemic, with its manifold uncertainties, slowed progress. Now is the time to act.

We are starting to recognise the full consequences of two years without significant migration. Our challenge is to implement measures that will help meet the increasing labour market shortages outside metropolitan centres whilst, at the same time, promoting new employment opportunities for newcomers and energising the communities they join.

The NSW approach, based upon careful assessment of how best to generate place-based positive collective impact, is underway. It's called Growing Regions of Welcome (GROW). I am cautiously optimistic that it will encourage and assist migrants to establish themselves in regional areas.

But such programs require careful preparation. In years gone by, ambitious plans have too often failed to work effectively. Success depends on evidence: what are the mistakes governments made in the past; what can we learn from them; and how can we be better informed and prepared this time?

That is why this important report is so timely. As the authors emphasise, it is time to re-think the socio-economic models that underpin sustainable migrant settlement in regional Australia. This careful and insightful assessment, based both on desk-top research and structured interviews, can help us to set and deliver policy correctly.

The concept of 'coordination' seems simple. It is not. This study reveals much of what is needed to turn rhetoric into action. We need to bring together the economic requirements of labour-short regional economies, the aspirations of migrants and the abilities of local governments and empowered communities to support successful settlement. We need to think how best to match the work ethics, skills and experience of migrants with the considered demands of local employers and the civic engagement of for-purpose organisations.

It will not be easy to find the 'sweet-spot' of success. But studies such as this increase the likelihood of achieving positive results. I commend Ataus Samad, Melissa Phillips, Devaki Monani and Anita Jahid for their collective efforts. Those of us tasked with changing and delivering government policies are better prepared by the work they have undertaken. I thank them.



PROFESSOR PETER SHERGOLD AC

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NSW Coordinator General of Settlement

FOREWORD BY DEAN, SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Migrants constitute a quarter of Australia's population and significantly contribute to Australia's economic development. They also significantly add to the social and cultural fabric of our country. Over the last few decades, both temporary and permanent migrants have played vital roles in supplying skilled and unskilled labour to Australia's rural and urban regions. The COVID-19 pandemic of the last two years has significantly affected Australia's overall migrant intake.

Regional Australia is a major contributor to the Australian economy. However, Australia's population growth and distribution is mostly centred along urban and coastal areas. In view of a growing aging population and internal migration of our young population to major cities, a labour shortage has become a key issue for the sustained economic growth of Australia's regional areas. While the shortage is visible in all employment sectors, the closure of Australia's international borders during the COVID-19 pandemic saw employee shortages most severely affecting Australia's regional agribusiness sector. With the recent easing of international travel restrictions, the migration situation is likely to improve in the post-COVID-19 era. Due to various economic, social, political, and policy reasons, however, migrants (including refugees) still predominantly settle in metropolitan cities of Australia, which has become a highly contested issue in contemporary Australian media and political discourse.

In this context, the report '*Rethinking Socio-Economic Model for Migrant Settlement in Regional Australia Post COVID-19*' is a timely and noble effort to address the challenges of migrant settlement in regional Australia. The authors took a holistic approach by considering the economic development of regional areas and regional community development, besides focusing on migrant settlement in regional areas. I congratulate Ataus Samad, Melissa Phillips, Devaki Monani, and Anita Jahid for undertaking this important interdisciplinary research project and presenting a report which I consider adds true value to the existing knowledge on migrant settlement in regional areas. It will assist the government, policymakers and practitioners in policy formulation and settlement of migrants in regional Australia. I also acknowledge all who helped the researcher by participating in this research.



PROFESSOR AMIR MAHMOOD

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ABOUT HADRI

Western Sydney University's **Humanitarian and Development Research Initiative (HADRI)** has been established with a globally unique approach to pursue research that highlights the complexity of international responses to conflicts and disasters, and the intersections between the multidimensional health, socio-economic and political aspects of complex emergencies.

HADRI aims to conduct research that:

- Bridges the academic and practice aspects of humanitarian response, rehabilitation and development.
- Informs policy decisions of government, international organisations, academics and other stakeholders.
- Ensures synergies, innovation and knowledge sharing and translation through collaboration with HADRI's global partners, and engagement with WSU's undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Humanitarian and Development Studies (HADS).

HADRI research focuses on the intersections between disaster relief and social and economic development. We explore the practices of government and non-government agencies involved in humanitarian operations, and their development practice. HADRI research addresses the challenges and opportunities associated with disaster preparedness, response and management; public health programs for displaced populations; building the resilience of vulnerable populations; and public health concerns surrounding national and international migration.

HADRI has three intersecting research themes:

1. Disaster Preparedness and Response
2. Migration, Global Health and Development
3. Sustainable Development and Human Security

HADRI's major research activities across these themes focus on:

- Human rights and the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP);
- Food security, food systems and linkages to public health and nutrition;
- Migration, social disadvantage and migrant community health;
- Political economy of conflict;
- Livelihoods, employment and human development;
- Disaster and critical incident perception and preparedness;
- Occupational risk and resilience among humanitarian practitioners;
- Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH).



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR NICHOLE GEORGEOU

Director of HADRI
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 has been a game-changer for regional migrant settlement. With migration at historically low rates and employers unable to rely on international students and groups such as working holidaymakers to meet gaps in the labour market in regional and rural areas, the need for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to regional settlement has never been greater. Furthermore, current global geopolitical situation coupled with the effect of natural disasters due considered to be caused by global warming may enhance displacement of people from their land. This will in turn cause greater human movement across the globe.

This report draws on a desk-based review of literature and interviews with key informants (policy experts and stakeholders) conducted between 2021 and 2022 to provide insights and recommendations to enhance existing frameworks for regional settlement of migrants in Australia with a focus on local community centred settlement, economically driven regional settlement that changes the discourse towards migrants and refugees as assets and allies for longer-term sustainable settlement.

Attending regional and rural settlements is not a new issue. Australia's population growth and distribution are mostly centred along with urban and coastal areas, home to approximately 80% of the population who reside in urban centres. There has been ongoing concern about the decline of rural and regional areas, which has led to schemes over many years to reinvigorate growth through internal migration and overseas migration, including the categorisation of some parts of the country as regional for immigration purposes. Barriers have emerged over time, including challenges of retention, and addressing labour market shortages specific to rural and regional areas, especially in the agricultural sectors and increasingly in skilled sectors such as mining, tourism, defence. According to Regional Australia Institute (RAI) in 2019 new concerns are emerging, such as shifting a focus toward non-traditional areas of employment such as aged care, disability, health care, renewable energy, food processing, manufacturing, tourism, and creative industries. Addressing the 'triple nexus' of economic development – local community empowerment – long-term migrant settlement is a matter of serious concern that has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic with international borders closed.

This research offers a conceptual framework for enabling sustainable migrant settlement in regional areas away from urban areas in Australia. Further, it is a paradigm shift from a charitable view of migrant settlement to regional socio-economic development that ensures new arrivals' quality of life. Currently, however, due to various economic, social, political, and policy reasons, migrants (and refugees) predominantly settle in metropolitan cities of Australia, which has become a highly contested issue in contemporary Australian media and political discourse. As will be discussed in this report, there have been targeted settlement projects mainly to welcome refugees to regional locations; however, they are often one-off and are not part of a broader joined-up government strategy across all levels of government that are also coordinated with industry groups and across local communities. There also remains a severe shortage of workers in Australian regional industries. Presently, a large proportion of this shortage is met by temporary overseas workers, which is a paradox because of its inherent limitations and convenience, especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has until recently required additional investments in quarantine arrangements. COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on policy and planning gaps illustrating that despite serious interest among the various stakeholders, there is a knowledge gap about how to facilitate ongoing migrant settlement in regional areas and share best practices across locations.

With international arrivals re-commencing through 2022-23, there is an opportunity to develop new mechanisms for sustainable regional settlement that fosters improved coordination and promote dialogue across Commonwealth, state and local governments that includes relevant stakeholders. We posit that a regional settlement policy targeting this 'triple nexus' of long-term migrant settlement – economic development – local community empowerment – has numerous inter-connected benefits. For example, it can narrow the existent skill shortage gap; contribute to the economic growth of regional Australia; ensure that the work experience of migrants is utilised in relevant sectors. As integrating members of a regional community, migrants build and contribute to social capital.



Photograph by Dr Ataus Samad

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Photograph by Dr Ataus Samad

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This report showcases the potential of regional settlement alongside contemporary approaches to settlement in metropolitan Australia and other relevant sites. It also presents a socio-economic model to facilitate a sustainable regional settlement drawn from lessons learned from the migrant settlement in Australia and other parts of the world and informed by interviews with experts in the field. It critically examines the triple nexus of migrant settlement – economic development – community empowerment and then proposes key recommendations based on its findings. Accordingly, this study aims to gather information to provide new insights and knowledge about the regional settlement after the COVID-19 scenario and contribute to settlement literature. This study uses a qualitative method and thematic analysis to fulfil the study objectives. This introductory section frames the overall study problem by providing a background to the issues related to regional settlement in Australia. It also states the study objectives and methods following the background of the study in the global and Australian contexts. Finally, this report will make policy recommendations based on a desktop review and analysis of findings from expert interviews taken during this research.

Background

Australia is one of the most successful multicultural nations in the world, with almost one in three of the population born overseas (Bernard et al., 2020; Boese & Moran, 2021) and a long history of inclusion and diversity and settlement policies. Historically, economic, and social imperatives are drivers of Australian immigration policy and determine the type of migrants allowed to enter Australia. For example, most migrants enter Australia under the skilled migration program, while humanitarian entrants (refugees) constitute only 10% of the total migrant intake. However, according to a recent report, one in four skilled migrants are working below their skill level (CEDA, 2021). The story of migrant and refugee settlement is also closely linked to the growth of specific industries. For instance, Italians are well-known to have come to Australia post World War II (second) to build railways and work as miners, woodcutters, and sugarcane farmers (Cresciani, 2003; Ricatti, 2019). Before Afghans came to outback Australia as cameleers and the Chinese came during the gold rush in the mid-19th century. More recently, there are cases such as that of Afghan settlement in Young, New South Wales (NSW), Karen in Nhill, Victoria, and migrant settlement in Biloela, Queensland that highlight the importance and viability of regional settlement. (Ames & Deloitte, 2015; Samad et al., 2018; Stillwell et al., 2003),

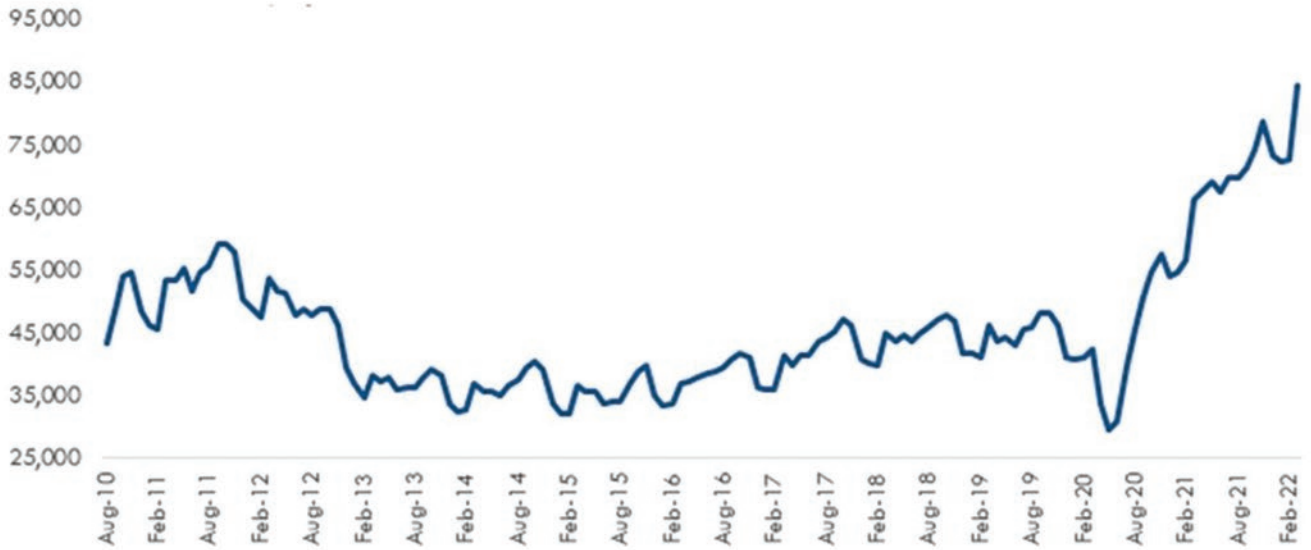
It is argued that the advancement of Australia's migration strategies is significantly dependent on the regional settlement of migrants and refugees (Bernard et al., 2020; Shergold et al., 2022). However, most migrants ultimately settle in metropolitan areas of Australia's East Coast (Boese & Moran, 2021; CEDA, 2021; Collins et al., 2016; RAI, 2016a). Population declines and skills shortages in the regional areas are drivers of regional migration policy (Collins et al., 2016).

A well-facilitated regional settlement significantly contributes to the economic and social fabric of regional communities in Australia (Georgeou & Hawksley, 2022). While the direct settlement of migrants and refugees from overseas seldom takes place in Australia, the re-settlement of migrants (including refugees) in regional areas from their initial settlement in metropolitan areas takes place to meet labour shortages in the regional communities. There is a city-centric approach to settling migrants in metropolitan cities of Australia, with the skills shortage in Australian regional areas largely met by temporary migrants. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), temporary visa holders were the majority of overseas migrant arrivals (61.3%) and overseas migrant departures (62.1%) (ABS, 2020a). Temporary visa holders have little or no incentive to invest in Australia's regional economy.

Despite the relatively long-term history of migrant and refugee settlement in rural and regional Australia, there continues to be an ad hoc approach to regional migration. This approach is characterised by short-term approaches, a lack of joined-up thinking and gaps between local, state and federal domains of responsibility (Galligan et al., 2014). It is also a niche approach to the potential labour market gaps migrants and refugees are deemed suitable to fill, resulting in a limited view of employment opportunities (Boese & Moran, 2021; Wickramaarachchi & Butt, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Australia's migration policy and migrant settlement in regional areas of Australia. While there is a significant decrease in migrant intake due to international border closures until early 2022, rural employers face acute labour shortages in agriculture, aged care, and health care (Coates et al., 2022). According to Regional Australia Institute (RAI, 2022) regional areas had more than 84,400 job vacancies in March 2022 (Figure 1). The recent data showed that the need for unskilled labour in the agricultural sector vacancies were largest for professional roles (24%) of all vacancies on March 22, followed by technicians and trades roles (16%), and clerical and administrative roles (14 %) (RAI, 2022).

Figure 1: Regional Australia Job Vacancies

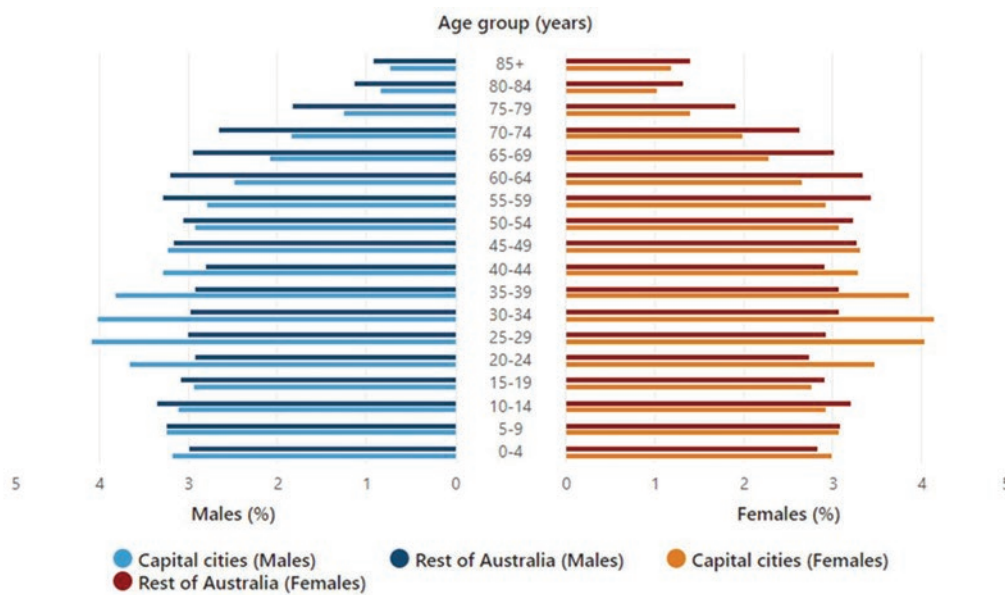


(Source: RAI, 2022)

In the face of a record high skill shortage in regional Australia, recently, the federal government promised a job boom in regional areas (ABC Southern Qld, 2022). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought this into sharp relief, highlighting the lack of a long-term sustainable plan for filling gaps in regional labour markets and responding to the drivers for migrants

and refugees who may want to move and settle in regional areas. Besides, in view of the trend of Australia’s population growth and increasing ageing population, as shown below (Figure 2), regional Australia needs human resources for sustainable population and economic development.

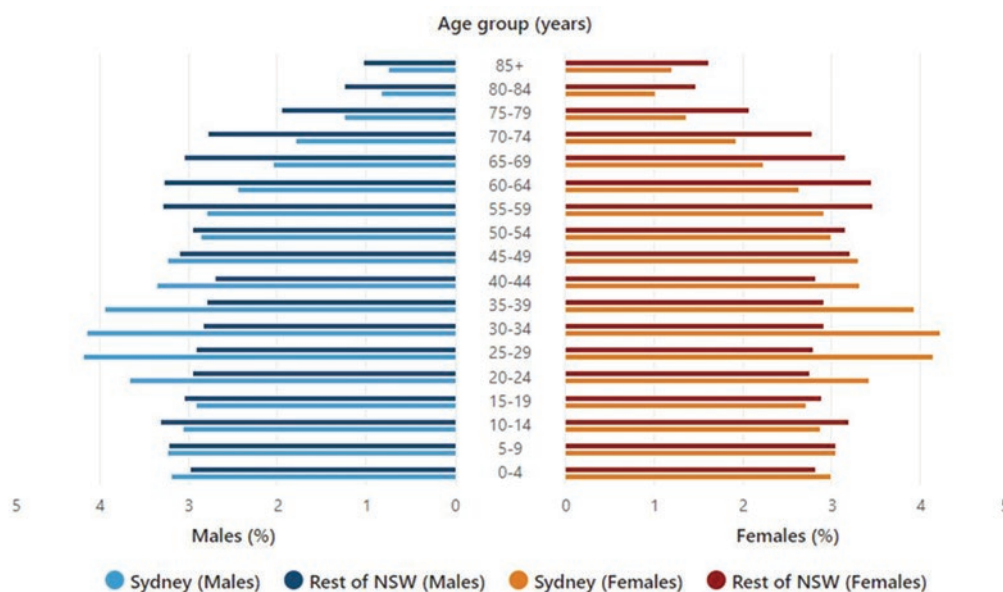
Figure 2: Age and Sex Distribution



(Source: ABS, 2021a)

Further, state-based data also shows that capital cities have a younger population than other cities in the state. For example, the following graph portrays the age and

sex distribution of NSW, which indicates that Greater Sydney has an age distribution more than the rest of NSW (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Age and Sex Distribution, NSW


(Source: ABS, 2021a)

Attraction and retention of migrants, more specifically permanent migrants in regional Australia, depends on many factors such as quality of life, meaningful employment, social support, health and education of family and children and provision of communication with the families in their home countries (Forbes et al., 2021; Nussbaum, 2011; Samad et al., 2018). A significant population shortage and growing aged population also affect the provision of different services such as health, housing, and education in the regional areas essential for the growth of an area (ABS, 2022c; Klocker et al., 2021). It is, therefore, essential to address these issues for a sustainable and long-term settlement of migrants in regional Australia, which will positively contribute to economic development besides addressing the population shortage. Furthermore, there is also a need for buy-in from the regional communities who would welcome the newcomers into their communities.

There is plenty of evidence that regional communities play a significant role in the successful settlement or resettlement of migrants (including refugees) in regional areas (Coates et al., 2022; Georgeou & Hawksley, 2022). However, the economic and social development of the regional regions, which may enhance their capacity to accommodate migrants in regional areas, is largely ignored in the literature and policy (Boese & Moran, 2021). In the 2022-23 budget, the federal government allocated AU\$21 billion for regional development, particularly in infrastructure development such as rail, roads, and mobile networks. Despite some policy and effort by the federal government, there is limited progress in the sustainable settlement of migrants in regional areas.

Most of the discussions in the literature, in the public and policy domain, are around the settlement of migrants and refugees to address the labour shortage in the regional areas and are decided centrally by federal and state governments with little or limited involvement of the regional community or the host communities, who are the key stakeholders. The regional communities should be empowered to play their part in the decision-making process of settlement of migrants including refugees in their respective areas. Furthermore, the issue of buy-in by the local communities is largely ignored in the current settlement process. Regional communities must have the resources and a reason to accommodate the new arrivals in their areas. Since local communities in regional Australia has a significant stake in the migrant settlement in their areas, and historically, it was found that the regional communities play an essential role in successful migrant settlement; it is essential to identify their needs and aspiration to build their capacity to welcome and retain the new arrivals in their areas. This research would also shed light on this and make practical recommendations for regional community development.

Among others, migrants are key stakeholders in the regional settlement; it is also essential to understand their needs, aspirations, and barriers to settling in regional areas. However, it is observed that many migrants in Australia have experienced social exclusion that COVID - 19 has intensified (Georgeou & Hawksley, 2022; Wright & Clibborn, 2020). This study also offers comprehensive recommendations to reduce the marginalization of and enhance social inclusion through a socio-economic development model.

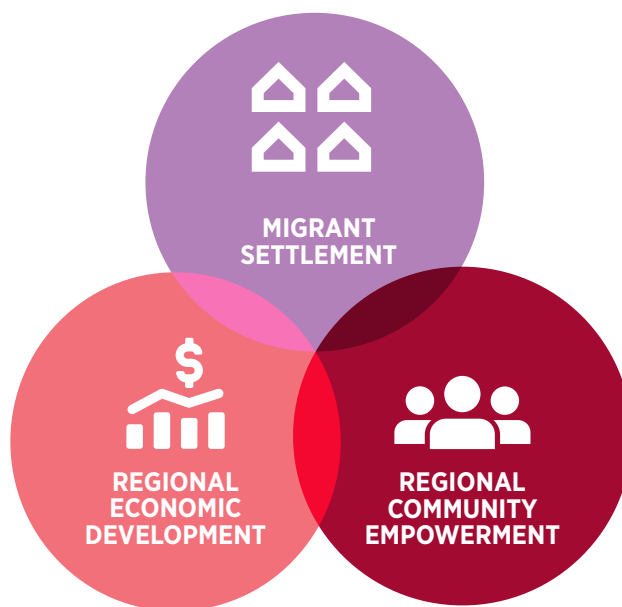
Study Objectives

The study explores the multiple dimensions of regional settlement of migrants in Australia, including permanent migrants, temporary migrants, and refugees. In addition, it proposes a framework to facilitate a regional settlement that attends to regional, economic, and social development. The proposed model offers a paradigm shift from a charitable view of migrant settlement in regional areas to a regional economic development approach encompassing sustainable migrant settlement, regional community empowerment and economic development of Australia’s regional areas. A model detailing this conceptual framework is set out below (Figure 4). The rationale for a broad focus on migrants and refugees is that at the local community level, there is often less focus on the visa status of new arrivals and more on the attributes that will allow them to come into a community and be able to fully participate.

Methods

This report is based on a literature review that draws on academic and grey literature in this area. Additionally, ten key informant interviews were conducted with experts in the field. Key informants are specialists and people who have experience settling migrants in regional areas. The desk-based literature review was conducted between 2021 and 2022 and involved an extensive review of existing materials in the field focused on regional settlement in Australia and overseas. Materials were selected based on keyword searches and then refined to ensure applicability to the research focus area. Key informant interviews were also carried out following ethical guidelines. Interviews were conducted by zoom and face-to-face mode and then transcribed. Thematic analysis has been used to analyse the qualitative data. The participants’ answers were coded, and themes were created and organized based on the key objectives of the study.

Figure 4: Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Migrant Settlement in Regional Australia



(Source: Author generated)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Migration is a significant demographic force globally. The emergence of international migration as a global phenomenon has been exacerbated by the flow of information and frequent travel options (Bhagat, 2020; Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2017). Overall, the estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades. According to International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022), there were 281 million international migrants in 2020, which is 3.6 per cent of the global population. Most international migrants (around 74%) were of working age (20 to 64 years of age) and are potential contributors to economic growth in the host countries. From a development perspective, international migration has its advantages and disadvantages for a country. According to scholars, migration has several economic benefits, including a more flexible labour market, increased skills base, increased demand, and greater innovation diversity. However, migration also presents a controversial issue since it can cause overcrowding, congestion, and increased pressure on public services (Bhagat, 2020; Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2017; Zetter, 2015).

The outflow of forced migrants or refugees to a safer place is increasing rapidly due to the continued political fragility of populous and growing countries. International obligations mandate a humanitarian duty to accept refugees and provide them with the opportunities to establish themselves effectively. Reluctant acceptance of those obligations with complicated asylum processes and conditions may hinder successful integration. Ager and Strang (2008) suggest four domains of integration that act as both markers of integration and the means of achieving it: employment, housing, education, and health. Social connections in the form of bridges, bonds, and links, facilitated by language, cultural knowledge, safety, and stability, is another critical dimension. Finally, they argue that the foundation of integration is built upon rights and citizenship.

Depending on the global environment and economic circumstances, people migrate to different countries. Each country manages these migrants and refugees depending on their internal and international circumstances. Lately, a regional settlement is an effective way of settling migrants in Australia and overseas, beneficial for both new arrivals and the host communities.

Regional Settlement in Global Context

Migrant and refugee settlement in regional communities is an important component of the advancement of global migration strategies. When well-facilitated, it contributes to regional communities' economic and social development. Different countries have taken different strategies for regional settlements. New Zealand follows a community-based communication strategy based on "putting out the welcome mat" (NZ Immigration, 2018). According to this idea, welcoming new migrants is an all-inclusive process that includes local community members, new migrants, and local government representatives to plan and implement a welcoming program. The local government becomes well informed about the new migrants coming to their region and proactively seeks data about the new migrants from relevant sources. The engagement of local government with their residents is based on two features, e.g., culturally appropriate and fit for purpose. The local community also becomes well informed about the local benefits of immigration and the welcoming communities' programs. Besides, there is an innovative way to communicate with new migrants, such as the 'Start with a Smile' campaign, where the local council encourages community members to smile and chat with the new arrivals. This strategy is developed to ensure that people from all cultures and backgrounds feel included, listened to, and informed about community change. Also, it ensures a range of ways that consider their different communication needs. Engagement with newcomers in a meaningful way confirms the newcomer's participation in local decision-making. For example, local online hubs where locals connect with new migrants, learn about the benefits they bring to the community and read and watch success stories (Akbari & MacDonald, 2018; Kanengoni et al., 2018; Stanley & Williamson, 2021).

Canada gives states and territories a significant role in immigration target setting and selection and allows states and territories to request the number of skilled migrants they would like to admit each year (Boese & Phillips, 2017; Hutchinson, 2018). It helps the country take off the pressure from important cities without reducing immigration rates. In Canada, people move to big cities like many other countries worldwide. This is a big challenge of population declines in small towns. Canadian authorities have created "a community consensus" model to attract overseas immigrants to regional areas (National Working Group on

Small Centre Strategies, 2007). According to this model, small towns are encouraged to develop strategies to attract new residents by focusing on several factors (Hyndman & Hynie, 2016; MIPEX, 2015; Oudshoorn et al., 2019). The factors include the significance of family ties. It endorses the relationship between families in the community, and the relatives who may be coming to help attract new migrants to the area (Brell et al., 2020; Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). This model also focuses on the importance of employment by promoting those jobs are being created every month for local applicants as people leave the workforce or as businesses expand. This model gives greater impotence to a welcoming community. This recognises the importance of respecting diversity, creating accessible public services, endorsing a range of educational opportunities, promoting health, wellness, and safety, inviting new migrants to share leisure time activities, and acknowledging faith and spirituality.

Further, it focuses on the possible barriers that impede a successful immigration strategy and the plans to create solutions. Like Australia, in Canada, a broad range of services such as temporary housing, help with finding permanent housing, and orientation to the community are available to assist immigrants in settling and establishing themselves in their new country (Brell et al., 2020; Hyndman & Hynie, 2016). Multiculturalism, recognising cultural and ethnic identities to facilitate integration, is a crucial feature of Canadian immigration policy. Upon arrival, policies and programs that target settlement, citizenship, and multiculturalism further facilitate integration (Brell et al., 2020; Neumann et al., 2014).

Australian regional settlement initiatives will be discussed in the following section. The key difference is that unlike Canada and New Zealand, where the focus has predominantly been on attracting migrants directly from overseas, in Australia, regional settlement initiatives have explored both direct settlement and secondary settlement (that is, relocation to regional communities from major Australian cities).

Settlement of Migrants in Australia

Australia is a nation of immigrants. According to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP, 2016) since the initial settlement in the 18th century, Australia has housed about 10 million people, and most of these migrants (approximately seven million) arrived in Australia after 1945. However, a bill was passed in 1905 by the government restricting the ability of Non-English-Speaking

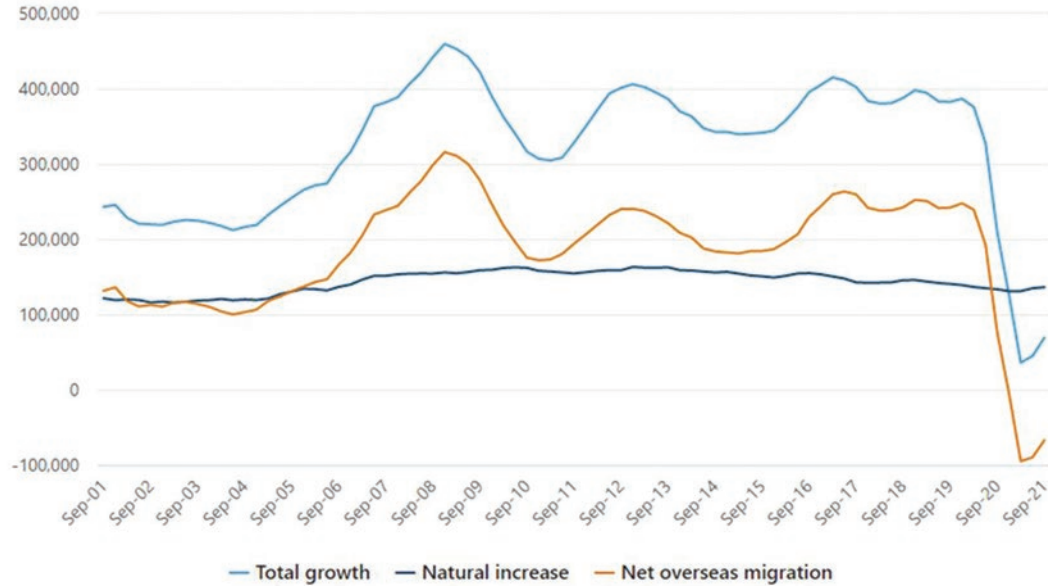
Background (NESB) people to enter Australia by imposing a dictation test for gaining permanent residency by people from NESB (Ghosh, 2019; Klocker et al., 2021; Productivity Commission, 2016). Following World War II, in 1945, Australia wanted to increase its population to boost post-war economic development and established the world's first Department of Immigration and floated a policy of increasing one per cent of its population through the migrant intake (Parliament of Australia, 2010). In 1958 the dictation test was abolished (under the Migration Act 1958), and the visa system was introduced. This facilitated migrants from NESB to enter Australia. A majority of those who came in the late 1950s contributed to the construction of the Snowy Mountains project. In 1970 the White Australia policy was abolished by adopting a non-discriminatory immigration program with strict entry criteria.

Under the annual permanent resettlement program, Australia actively participates through two Global Compacts: (1) Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2) Refugees. Through practical action, migrants and refugees are placed into visa sub-categories that best fit their status. According to ABS (2021b) over 7.6 million migrants lived in Australia; **this was 29.8% of the total population**. Over the period, the demographic composition and number of migrants varied because of changes in policies and the global environment. Due to the geopolitical situation, besides migrants from Europe, the UK, and other Anglo-Saxon countries, more and more people from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have arrived in Australia over the past few decades. According to data released by the ABS (2021b), those born in England continued to be the largest group.

In the past 20 years, the number of China-born Australian residents has more than tripled. Similarly, India-born residents increased more than fourfold over the same period (DIBP, 2017).

Australia is one of the leading countries granting refuge to humanitarian entrants into Australia on a per-capita basis. The annual intake of humanitarian entrants (refugees and asylum seekers) is about 10% of Australia's total migrant intake. While there is a growing demand for accepting more humanitarian entrants given the present global circumstances, besides other considerations, it is also important to consider how well Australia could provide a meaningful and dignified life to these refugees. Components of annual population growth, including the recent decline due to COVID -19 travel restrictions is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Components of Population Growth (by year)



(Source: ABS, 2021c)

In Australia, the rate of population growth has increased since the turn of the millennium. Population changes depend on three elements – natural increase, overseas migration, and internal migration (Bernard et al., 2020). In recent years, migration has overtaken natural increase as the dominant component of population growth. This has led to an accelerated rate of population growth. However, the border closure due to COVID-19 has stopped this growth and impacted population growth significantly. Recent forecasts from the Centre for Population suggest this growth will return from 2023-to 24.

Characteristics of Migrants in Australia

As shown in Figure 6, most of the migrants arriving in Australia are skilled migrants. However, there has been a significant decrease in these numbers due to travel restrictions. Most recent migrants arrive in Australia at a younger age. According to ABS (2020b), about 69% of recent migrants held a non-school qualification before arriving in Australia, and 35% had obtained a non-school qualification after arriving in Australia.

Figure 6: Visa Category of Arrivals in Australia (in '000)



(Source: Author generated based on statistics at ABS, 2021d)

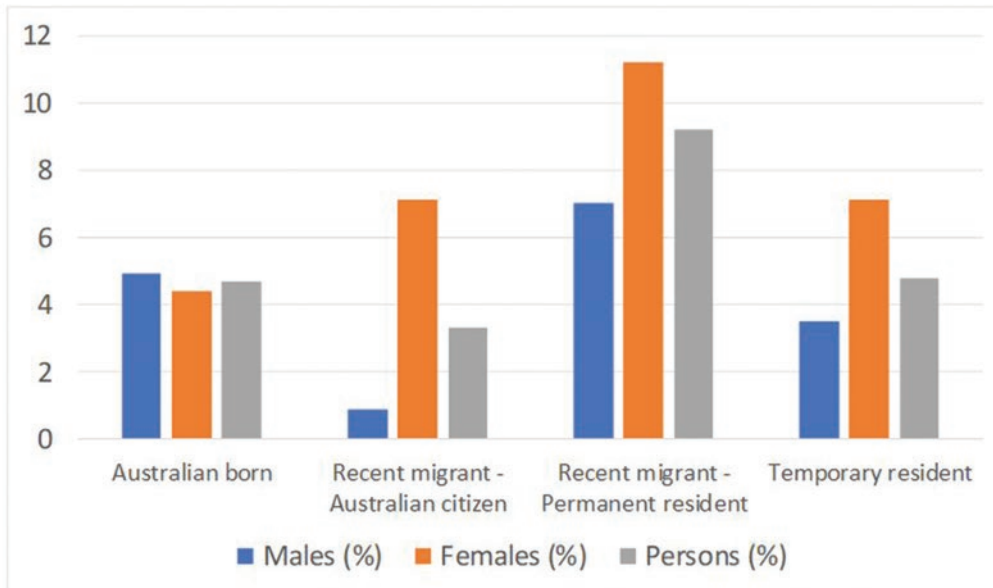
Recent migrants and refugees experience a higher unemployment rate than the wider population (Figure 7). “Migrants from the Middle East and North Africa are also three times more likely than European or Asian immigrants to be out of work in the first five years of settlement. Moreover, their 33 per cent jobless rate is six times higher than the national average” (Rita, 2017). About 68% of recent migrants and temporary residents were employed, with a labour force participation rate of 72%. Only one in ten migrants came to Australia with their job arranged, and 44% of the migrants up to three months looking for their first job.

Most migrants resort to their social networks, specifically networks of their cultural community. However, “Social

networks are utilized every day throughout the world by family, friends, community members, businesses, organizations, government agencies, and a wide range of others” (Poros, 2011). According to the ABS (2022b), 48% of them received some form of help from their friends or family to secure a job.

Refugees are disadvantaged socially and economically relative to other immigrants at arrival. In general, refugees arrive in a host country with less locally applicable human capital, including language and job skills, than economic migrants. Therefore, refugees are likely to start at significantly lower levels of wages and employability (Becker & Ferrara, 2019; Chiswick & Miller, 2015).

Figure 7: Unemployment Rate by Residency Type (November 2019)

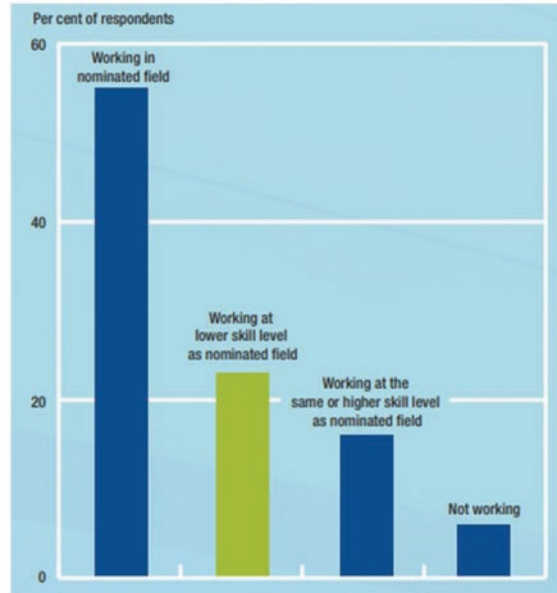


(Source: ABS, 2020b)

Underutilisation of skill is another issue of concern that has economic consequences and mental health implications for migrants. For example, according to Deloitte Institute (2018), in Queensland, 49% of the skilled migrants are not using their skills, 42% of the male migrants, and 58% of the female employees are underemployed. The report showed that if Queensland could make maximum use of these underutilised migrants, it would have paid an additional \$250 million

dividend over the next ten years in the State’s economy. A recent report by the Centre for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA, 2021) shows that a quarter of the permanent skilled migrants are working in a job below their skill level (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Permanent Skilled Migrants Working in Nominated Occupation

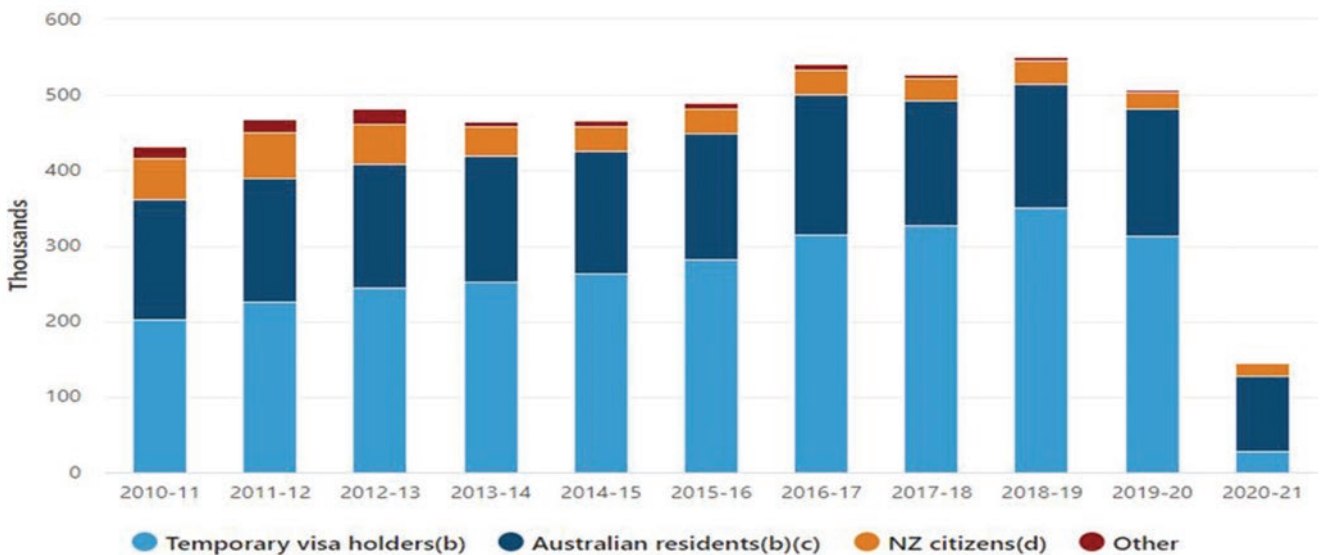


(Source: CEDA, 2021)

While there is a higher unemployment rate (Compared to people born in Australia or citizens) among the permanent migrants, there is a greater reliance on temporary migrants to fill Australia’s skills shortage.

Although migrant intake significantly decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic period, historically, as shown in Figure 9, most migrants arriving in Australia are temporary visa holders.

Figure 9: Overseas Migrant Arrivals (2010-2021) in '000

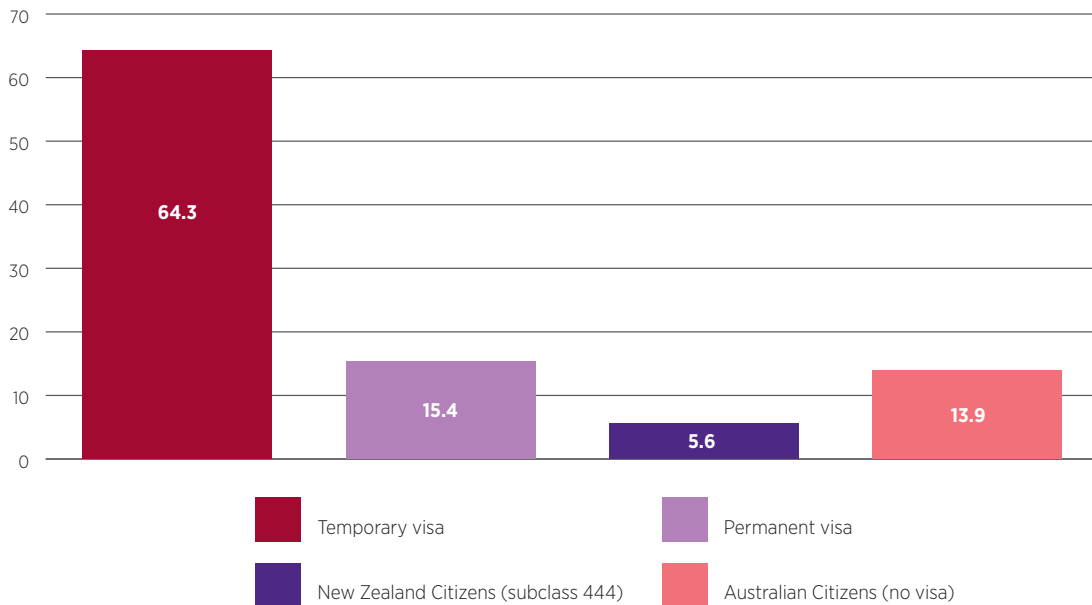


(Source: ABS, 2021d)

Figure 10 below shows the proportion of temporary migrants compared to permanent migrants. Among 1.9 million people in Australia who were recent migrants or temporary residents, 50% had permanent visas or had become Australian citizens (ABS, 2019a). The statistics show that the number of temporary workers and overstay is much greater than the number of migrants, putting pressure on permanent migrants' ability to secure meaningful jobs. According to the annual report of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA, 2018) 99% of the 8,694,048 people granted temporary visas in that year maintained their lawful

immigration status while in Australia. However, around 86,940 people entered Australia in 2017-18 breached their visa conditions. Many of them quickly left the country, but as of 30 June 2017, 62,900 unlawful non-citizens were residing in Australia, which has remained roughly constant over the past few years. The cases of the more than 30,000 unlawful non-citizens who have lived in Australia for five years or longer also need to be considered (Coyne, 2019; DHA, 2018). In 2016-17, 18,290 applications for protection visas were lodged by people who arrived by air, 1,711 of which were granted. In 2017-18, claims jumped to 27,931, 1,425 of which were granted.

Figure 10: Net Overseas Migration % (June 2019)



(Source: Author generated based on statistics at ABS, 2019a)

Australia is one of the world's most urbanised countries, with almost 90% of the country living in urban areas in 2016 (ABS, 2016; 2019b). In 1901, just over one in three Australians (1.3 million) lived in capital cities. In line with increasing urbanisation worldwide, the proportion of Australia's population living in the capitals first tipped over, and by 2016 two-thirds of the population (16 million) resided in the capitals. Australia's population growth and distribution are mostly in urban and coastal areas. For example, Within Queensland, 63% of residents live in 'major cities', 20.1% in 'inner regional' areas, 14.2% in 'outer regional' areas, 1.5% in 'remote' areas, and 1.1% live in 'very remote' parts of the state (Queensland Treasury, 2021). Australia's population was 25,522,169 people on 31 December 2019 (ABS, 2019b). Around 300,000 more people are living in capital cities. Melbourne's population grew by 113,500 to reach 5 million residents during 2018-19. This was the largest growth for any capital city and was followed by Sydney (up 87,100 people), Brisbane (52,600) and Perth (27,400). Melbourne also had the highest growth rate (2.3 per cent), ahead of Brisbane

(2.1 per cent) and Sydney (1.7 per cent) (ABS, 2019b). Because of social reasons such as having a critical mass of people from similar ethnic, national or cultural backgrounds, and several economic factors such as greater employment opportunities, there is a concentration of migrants (including refugees) in the major metropolitan areas (CEDA, 2016; Collins et al. 2016; RAI, 2016a).

Given this current trend of urban settlement, where and how to successfully settle migrants, including refugees, is an important issue for Australia. Due to various economic, social, political, and policy reasons, migrants (including refugees) also predominantly settle in metropolitan cities of Australia. Migrants, particularly those from NESB countries, are more likely to settle in capital cities, specially Sydney and Melbourne (CEDA, 2016; RAI, 2016b). However, second-generation immigrants are less likely to live in major cities than their parents (Productivity Commission, 2016). The Scanlon Institute report in 2011 stated that about 82% of the

migrant population lived in the major cities, while 66% of the overall population lived in major cities (Markus, 2015). For example, 26% population of Brisbane, 33% of Melbourne, 37% of Perth, 36% of Sydney, 26% of Adelaide and 14% of the population of Hobart are from migrant backgrounds (Markus, 2015). In 2020 total of 86.24% of Australia's population lived in urban metropolitan areas (Trading Economics, 2022). According to the ABS (2019), more than 1/3 of the migrants resided in NSW. Under this circumstance, further concentration of refugees in the metropolitan areas and letting them fend for themselves may lead to a challenging situation for the Australian society in future. Furthermore, the concentration of migrants has become a highly contested issue in contemporary Australian media and political discourse. Therefore, it is essential to develop a framework for the sustainable settlement of migrants in regional Australia.

Throughout Australia's history of migrant settlement, migrants tend to cluster into 'ethno burbs' formed around major metropolitan cities. The migrant settlement services are central to these locations and cater to initial settlement needs while increasing social accessibility to individuals with similar experiences. Metropolitan settlement also provides greater access to industries in demand, such as skilled work and overseas student experience. Also, many young migrants are transitioning into metropolitan areas due to the vast accessibility of jobs, including IT and other technological and property industries (Mardaneh, 2015). However, due to the growing population in metropolitan cities, there is a need to expand and utilise the landmass available within Australia to address infrastructure and environmental pressures, increasing the cost of living and congestion (Bolleter et al., 2021). Other pressures included state governments facing slow population growth, ageing populations, and population retention. The matter also became a political and media discourse in the recent past.

Although there may be more significant opportunities to find skilled work in these metropolitan cities, there is an apparent demand for these professions in regional towns. For example, healthcare, education and construction are among the highest demand as it meets workforce needs and business development in regional towns (Wickramaarachchi & Butt, 2014). RAI (2022) reported a growing need for skilled persons such as tradespersons, technicians, and administrative and clerical staff in the regional areas besides its usual need for unskilled/semiskilled labours in the agribusiness sector.

The Commonwealth-State Working Party on Skilled Migration, which started in 1996, was one of the first government initiatives to focus attention on this

issue, driven by pressure from the state governments. Managing tensions between States that naturally attract migrants, such as NSW, and encouraging specific groups such as students, and driving migrants towards regional area is complex. No one model can be applied nationally. There have also been occasions where governments have sent messages about the undesirability of migrants and refugees, which can complicate the situation further.

In view of the trend of Australia's population growth and increasing ageing population, regional Australia needs human resources for sustainable population and economic growth. Skill shortages exist in several regional Australian industries, such as agribusinesses, aged care, healthcare, and administration and technical sectors (Collins et al., 2016; RAI, 2022; Shergold et al., 2022). However, there is an influx of migrants in the metropolitan cities (CEDA, 2016; Collins et al., 2016; DHA, 2022; RAI, 2016a). Furthermore, there is a higher unemployment rate among these migrants in metropolitan areas. Getting the right person with the right skills can be a key challenge for regional Australian employers. Presently a large share of the skill shortages in the agribusiness in regional areas is met by temporary overseas migrants (on various visa arrangements). However, employing temporary migrants is problematic despite the attraction of flexibility. For example, temporary migrants do not have the motivation to spend or reinvest money in the regional areas. A solution to this may be to accept a manageable number of migrants including refugees and settle them in the regional areas based on the needs assessment of the regions and the personal circumstances of the refugees.

Because of not finding meaningful employment, migrants often open their own businesses. It was found that migrants own one-third of Australian small businesses, employing 1.4 million people across Australia. The annual revenue generated by the migrant small businesses accounted for an annual revenue, which was 53% higher than the non-migrant businesses (Sweeney, 2018). Therefore, innovative, and proactive steps such as providing micro-credit to the newly arrived migrant (including refugees) entrepreneurs may help boost this sector.

As noted earlier, in 1996, Australia reintroduced a regional immigration policy. Population declines and skills shortages in the regional areas were drivers of regional migration policy. Such a focused immigration process is not a new idea. For example, Australia applied such focused migration after World War II, and countries such as Canada and New Zealand also adopted regional migration policies to meet their country's needs (Hugo, 2008; Wickramaarachchi & Butt, 2014).

The Australian government supports ongoing regional settlement to relieve pressure on metropolitan gateways and address population decline and skill shortages in regional areas (Galligan et al., 2014). The DHA undertakes comprehensive consultation to inform the size and composition of the migration program each year, including advice from states and territories, government agencies, industry, academia, and the public. The Australian government announced that it intends to restore the migration program planning levels to 160,000 in 2022-23. Besides, the government has announced that the humanitarian program will be maintained at 13,750 places from 2022-23. The program's size will remain as a ceiling, not a target. The Australian government is committed to increasing regional humanitarian settlement to support growth in regional areas, with a target of 50 per cent of humanitarian entrants to be settled in a regional location by 2022 (DHA, 2022; Ethos Migration, 2022). According to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2019) shifting settlement processes into regional parts of NSW, Queensland, and Melbourne supports growth in smaller cities in economic and multicultural contexts. Here, Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane (including Logan) are considered metropolitan locations and all other areas are considered regional in Australia.

Evidence from the past suggests that most migrants settled in regional and rural areas, moved to big cities or metropolitan areas after completion of their visa requirement of mandatory settlement in the designated areas for a specified period (DIMIA, 2005; Ethos Migration, 2022). There are extensive examples of successful regional settlements that tend to be driven locally. However, an absence of coordination persists; and without the ability to replicate promising practices using incentives such as funding, policy, and legal tools, they remain ad hoc. It is essential to review the current context and see why despite considerable effort to settle migrants in the regional areas, there is limited success in this regard. Through a holistic approach, well-managed migration aims to seek mutual benefit between migrant and refugee individuals, local communities, and the Australian government.

In 2021, the NSW government launched a pilot program known as the NSW Growing Regions of Welcome (GROW). The three-year pilot program provides a place-based cross-sectoral partnerships to strengthen the capability of regional communities to attract newcomers, and welcome and support them to stay for the long-term. The program also provides the gateway for interested newcomers in western Sydney with complementary skills and aspirations to move to the pilot NSW regions of Riverina and Murray for employment and lifestyle opportunities.

Attributes of Regional Settlement in Australia

While there is a stereotypical view about migrants and refugees, which is seldom based on facts, there is also a stereotypical view about the regional communities in Australia. Regional Australia is more than a significant source of Australia's economic prosperity. Regions also partly stabilise our overall economic performance because they are critical in maintaining a high degree of economic diversity. Collectively, Australia's regions account for around 40 per cent of our total economic output.

Regional areas play a significant role in Australia's economic development; however, a tiny proportion of Australia's population lives in the regional and rural areas. In view of the trend of Australia's population growth and increasing ageing population, regional Australia needs human resources for sustainable population and economic growth. One in six Australians is now over the age of 65, i.e., we have a growing ageing population (ABS, 2019b). For example, in Queensland, 38% of the migrants are 25-34 years, 45% are 35-45 years, and only 17% are 45-54%. From an age perspective, migrants may contribute to more extended periods of Australia's economic growth. Younger workforce, entrepreneurial acumen, best and brightest, diversity, training levy (ABS, 2019b). Balanced population growth will also impact the regional areas' education, commerce, accommodation, retail service, and social services sectors. The required investment is also needed to attract and retain people, including the migrants in the regional areas.

While there is evidence suggesting a higher rate of unemployment among the refugees and recent migrants, there is also a shortage of workers in the Australian regional areas. Other industries, including retail and small businesses, are noted as being common industries in remote towns. Due to the remoteness and small population in these towns, these industries tend to be locally led, posing a barrier for newly arrived migrants and refugees (Mardaneh, 2015). It is significant to investigate the needs of regional communities for sustained growth and progress, compare industry demands in specific regional areas to the infrastructures and ascertain resources required for skilled work such as administration, education, construction, hospitality, aged care, and healthcare. Also, an investigation into the factors that link mobility and migration will be an indicator to suggest levels of long-term retention in regional towns.

There is also a stereotypical view of the regional employment prospect, and regional areas are synonymous with primary industries such as agriculture and mining. There is a perception that regional employment means employment in the agriculture sector only. Furthermore, the prospect and opportunities for migrants in other non-

traditional sectors other than the agri-business sector, such as the hi-tech industry (robotics in agribusiness, satellite/space industry, renewable energy, manufacturing industry), health and aged care industry in regional areas, are mostly ignored

in the popular discourse. Regional primary industries need professionals with various skills, such as medical practitioner, engineer, IT specialist, biotechnologist, and agriculturalist. Appropriate investment in infrastructure development can contribute to the development of the regional sectors and the primary industry sector. Evidence can be drawn from the past as well as recent times. For example, back in the 60s, Australia's satellite program was in a remote area from where the world saw the moon landing by Apollo 11. Recent examples of the use of technology can be observed in the case of Wi-Sky Qld. An innovative effort by an IT professional in regional Queensland (Richmond Shire) impacted the dairy industry, beef industry and education sector in that region besides changing the lives of the rural community through the use of technology. There is a greater dependence on robotics in the mining industry as well.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare recently reported that around 20 per cent of Australia's rural

population could not see a General Practitioner (GP) due to the scarcity of doctors. At the same time, almost 60 per cent admitted they had no access to specialists in their region. According to Taylor (2022), doctor shortages outside major cities impact the health of regional communities in Australia. It also stated that the lack of doctors affects regional people's reproductive and sexual health. Outer metropolitan, rural, and regional areas have higher teenage pregnancy rates, maternal mortality, and some sexually transmissible diseases. It is also found that the regional clinic faces closure after failing to recruit GPs. The pandemic has impacted the arrival of international doctors, who comprise a significant portion of the GP workforce in regional Australia. It is essential to train more doctors.

Similarly, it is significant to ensure that young doctors get to do their training in a regional, rural, or remote community and have a positive and rewarding experience. It was mentioned that longer work hours, professional isolation, limited career opportunities for partners, and educational opportunities for children are challenges in attracting doctors to regional and rural areas. It also noted that a lack of medical services hinders growth in rural and regional areas and deters people from moving to the country.



Photograph by Dr Ataus Samad

Regional Australia's Settlement Opportunities and Determinants post COVID-19

From early 2020 to current times in Australia and worldwide, COVID-19 has significantly reduced and will change the way migrants and refugees settle in Australia. This disease has further potential to spread infection and increase large numbers and crippling death rates, urging for early response rates from states and governments (Georgeou & Hawksley, 2022). Preventative modes of action have been enforced in Australia, including social distancing and high levels of sanitation. However, some states and governments have experienced horrendous social and economic damage. The Australian government recognises the current barriers for these vulnerable groups and will hope to increase service providers' provision and accessibility to reach communities. These grants do not provide immediate solutions to noted problems; however, they may reduce financial burdens on families due to job loss and less tourism and travel to regional towns. Also, it will aim to link people to services that address mental health, transport, and interpreting services. This led to some city dwellers moving to the regional areas. As per the RAI (2022), on average, the quarterly flow of people from capital cities to regional areas during 2020 and 2021 was 15 per cent higher than the previous years. However, it is essential to equip the regional areas with adequate resources to sustain this increase for a longer period.

As Australia's economy relies heavily on migrant and refugee economic participation, the sudden intake drop rate has significantly disrupted regional township economic production and community development. According to the DHA (2017), Australia's migrant intake for 2017-2018 is 190,000. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, migrant intake to Australia is experiencing a pause. In addition, migrant and refugee communities heavily rely on family and community support structures and networks in regional areas due to their small population. Large restriction measures on social outings and the limited population intake affect migrants and refugees living in Australia hoping to support family members arriving under the Special Humanitarian Program initially. Disconnectedness to family results in poorer well-being outcomes and is adversely linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The reduced statistic intake rate is yet to be announced. However, there is a definitive need to investigate these through a theoretical lens and conduct on-the-ground case studies to determine long-term effects on migrants and refugees and regional towns.

Getting employees to sustain growth is a key challenge for regional areas (ABC News, 2022), which can be addressed through a planned migration program. Although reduced immigration rates have significantly reduced regional population and economic growth, there is now more than

ever a push to kick start sectors in regional areas such as agriculture to begin economic production in Australia. It is likely to attract migrants that have lost jobs to relocate where employment is available. In addition, these changes will most likely be pushed within the coming months and end of 2022 as regional towns have been noted to have low levels of community transmission of COVID – 19.

Lessons learnt from internal migration during the COVID-19 pandemic can be applied to the settlement and employment of migrants, including the refugees may be incorporated into policy formulation. (ABC News, 2021). As per the ABS (2022) net internal migration to regional areas from the metropolitan cities has increased while migration from the regional areas to the metropolitan city has decreased. As a result, Net internal migration to regional Ares was the highest in 2020 since the process started in 2001 and doubled compared to 2019. ABS (2021e) states, "104,800 people moved interstate in the three months to the end of December 2020. Around 3,900 less people moved interstate compared with the December 2019 quarter. Capital cities had a net loss of 10,600 people from internal migration, compared with a net loss of 3,800 for the December 2019 quarter." Since the Pandemic, the housing crisis has quadrupled; housing is the number one priority for everyone. Housing will enable people to engage in ongoing employment; this will automatically impact business and contribute to socio-economic development. However, the infrastructure for communities needs to be invested in.

Migration plays an important foundation in Australia's economic development and prosperity. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a dramatic slowing of overseas arrivals. Cilento (2020) suggests that providing enough information and transparency on skills shortages will be critical to bolstering confidence in both skills and migration systems when there is historically high and rising unemployment, as well as pockets of skills shortages. Further, it is significant to have an equal focus on improving the migration systems to ensure migration plays its part in economic recovery. Temporary skilled migration has filled the short-term skills gaps, including playing a significant role in developing global talent and importing unique overseas experiences into the Australian workforce. For example, medical device manufacturer cochlear used temporary skilled migration for a decade when it faced a lack of engineering skills in advanced manufacturing. It is a stable Australian workforce as those engineers have built up the skill base.

SUSTAINABLE MIGRANT SETTLEMENT IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

This report section draws on research data obtained from the participants and sets out three regional settlement dimensions: migrant settlement, economic development, and local community empowerment.

Regarding public and political discourse and the rationale for regional settlement, a migration expert in the public sector mentioned,

"So, pressure from the states was the driver. And my second driver was Bob Carr [...] Bob Carr said, 'We have too many migrants in Sydney [...] Sydney is full and your Migration Program is causing me all sorts of problems. I have to go around building things and I don't have the money to build things. I want you to cut the Migration Program.' You can't meet both objectives. Well, you can't cut the Migration Program and get more to go to Adelaide without a great deal of difficulty. So, we then started to design mechanisms to encourage people to settle anywhere but Sydney."

On regional settlement/re-settlement it is argued,

"There are different ways that different places have been able to get there, and there's often different drivers from within the community, but it has that strong degree of leadership at a local level, that I think is really critical. And then, I think the broader community feels that this is a good thing for their community."

Regional Migrant Settlement

The proportion of migrants settled directly in the regional areas under different visa conditions is tiny compared to people settled in the metropolitan areas. For example, from 2019 to 2020, a small portion of the migrant intake came to Australia under the regional settlement program (DHA, 2020). Several factors enable settlement on the part of migrants and refugees cited in the literature, including employment, lifestyle, developing social capital, education, and affordability (Gaston & Nelson, 2013; Kline, 2003; Richardson et al., 2004; Shepley, 2007; Sjaastad, 1962; Tuli, 2019). Interviewees for this research confirmed the importance of key areas such as good schools and affordable housing for regional settlement.

"And when we're talking about regional, I think yes, they want to know is there a place where they can practice their faith, whatever it is? Is there a place where their children can go to school? Is there a place where they can upgrade their skill sets?"

While there are push factors mentioned above factors limiting migrant settlement in regional areas, there are pull factors as well. These include a relaxing lifestyle, natural beauty, living cost, affordable housing, ease of raising family, shorter commute time and consequent greater time with family, having people from own cultural background already settled in regional areas (Samad et al., 2018). In this regard, a respondent mentioned,

"They express their own interest in wanting to go, probably because of their background, that's the life they lived before they came to Australia. And the other reason may be that the cost of living is affordable in regional areas than in the city, where there might be a lifestyle as well. That's what they are used to."

The most critical factor is paid employment, as it contributes to financial stability, independence, and social exchanges and heightens a positive sense of identity (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). As has been in other sites, interviewees described a 'ripple effect' when settlement begins with one employer and a few people and widens to encompass multiple employers. In this regard, it has been argued,

"The spark is not going to work if the people are going to an area that is not able to support them or understand what is going to be necessary in terms of the economic opportunities that exist there. It's one thing to say, 'the schools will be welcoming you, there's a very good community, there's an organization to support migrants, and the mayor as well as few councillors are supportive' [...] That doesn't mean anything in my view unless there are employment opportunities within a few months."

While securing employment is important, from a long-term sustainability perspective, having meaningful employment with opportunities for career progression that is commensurate with peoples' aspirations and qualifications is important. Out of necessity or desperation, many migrants and refugees undertake low-skilled jobs however, leave that job or workplace as soon as opportunities arise. As identified by a participant, peoples' motivation may differ,

"For some people it's about having a good school and being able to afford a house. For others it is about being able to use their skill set and go into a job that they're qualified for. So, it's much more complex I feel, when you talk about what is a good outcome for a migrant and for your general community."

Echoing the arguments about the underemployment of migrants and employment opportunities in regional areas made earlier in this report, a specialist in this field argued,

"Frankly, the nice thing about disability care, age care, even healthcare is you can start at junior positions. But what you want to do is to talk with the industry, if they acquire English and do certificate two and three, then can they take in more senior caring position and even registered nurse positions?"

"There may be evolving employment opportunities. They may start at low skill levels, but hopefully if you can use the local TAFE there, you can get people to do cert two, cert three. The other thing that I'm constantly amazed with is when we talk about regional settlement for people who don't really think of it, they think about agricultural harvesting, they think about abattoirs. Migrant people are really good in abattoirs, but they don't think about where there are very significant needs, which is in healthcare, age care, disability, where most regional communities are really struggling. So, there is a much broader range of employment opportunities I think, than is envisioned. But unless we bring those two bits together, in my view, it is not going to work."

However, migrants are entrepreneurial. Talking about the aspirations and motivation of the migrants (including refugees) for setting up their own businesses in the regional areas, an expert in the migrant settlement in Australia argued,

"One of the things we should be talking to them about is not just employment opportunities, but the opportunities in regional areas over time to build your own business. Because, what happens is in most instances, many of those migrant groups will never acquire the level of English that accords with the skills they have, it's very hard. But one of the very best means of avoiding that with modest levels of English is setting up your own business [...] And one of the things I've noticed is migrants generally and refugee in particular, will tend to lie to me because they relate to the situational authority I have. So, when I talk to them, they will always be talking about wanting to get employment and so on. But when I listen in on what they're talking to each other, they want to set up their own business."

This report emphasises that regional settlement offers many newcomers (including migrants and refugees) the chance to rebuild their lives in a safe and welcoming environment that provides a quality of life and enhances the socio-economic development of those areas (DHA, 2022). A welcoming community is invaluable as two interviewees noted,

"Anyone coming into a new community, wants to feel welcomed. And if you can help them overcome that hurdle, it makes a huge difference. If you just cast them aside and say, 'Well, you'll find your own way now,' then you are heading for a failure."

This aspect of empowering local communities will be discussed next, recognising, as one interviewee said,

"Social times are as important as the work times. It's not all about employment. It's about what goes on when you're not at work."

"You need a bridge between bringing them, providing them work and making them valuable and accepted community members. You just need a link to be able to do that. And perhaps that's where the government could come in with offering, get people on board, offer jobs [...] Okay, you've got a cohort. Say on a veggie farm, for example, and they need the workers, or picking fruits. Work out which cohort would be interested in doing that and find someone who's going to be the settlement worker to settle them."

"We do not want to duplicate the work of Migrant Resource Centres. It is critical that not for profits can and are able to compliment the work of Migrant Resource Centres."

However specialised job services network with adequate staff with knowledge of migrant and local issues is needed to address employee needs in regional areas as a respondent argued,

"If we're going to be successful in regional areas, I think we need a labour market provider, a job active centre, which either specializes in migrants or at least has two or three people working there. Because my experience of the refugee employment support program that we set up in New South Wales, it hasn't been perfect; but it has certainly indicated that if you have a service which is particularly focused to refugees and asylum seekers, you will get better employment outcomes than just sending those people into a generalised service. And that's important in regional areas because if they say, 'Oh well, we're just going to have a regional employment service,' it's not going to work."

Australia's migration policy is focused on its economic and labour force needs as well as social benefits. While there is a concentration of migrants and refugees in Australian metropolitan cities on the east coast, there is also higher unemployment among migrants in those metropolitan cities. This requires immediate attention as this may lead to a significant social issue in the future. Besides an ageing population, skill shortage in Australian regional agribusiness is impacting their maximum potential, which is likely to affect Australia's overall economic growth. The settlement of refugees and migrants in regional Australia may play a critical role in rectifying skill shortages in regional Australia. An increase in population, based on the actual needs of the regional areas may contribute significantly to enhancing the socio-economic growth of regional Australia through greater productivity and economic activities. However, the success of any initiative to settle refugees and migrants in the regional areas will depend on a deliberate policy and well-executed action plan.

Regional Economic Development

The above responses clearly show a need for developing infrastructures and facilities for making our regional areas liveable communities, which will benefit the regional communities and attract migrants and refugees to settle in regional areas. The expansion of migrant settlement would create development opportunities to transition services, education, and skilled work to boost regional towns. Expanding rural cities would enable migrants under different visa sub-categories to participate in the Australian economy. Mutual benefits between entrants and the government can rely on the sustainable utilisation of human resources. Utilising the capabilities of migrants and refugees can help shape and support economic growth in Australia, addressing multiple drivers as one expert interviewee noted,

"Looking at it through an economic lens initially, the economic and the social lens are really two sides of the same coin [...] Firstly, what it does is slow the rate of aging and the rate at which population's age has a direct detrimental impact on the economy of those areas. [...] Secondly, it enables you to deliver crucial services that you would otherwise not be able to deliver. The most obvious example is doctors. I think 75% of doctors in regional Australia are now either overseas trained or overseas born. It'll be one of the two."



Photographs by Dr Ataus Samad

Additionally, finding work relevant to individuals' skills and qualifications increased long-term retention in these regional areas (Abood et al., 2022; Farivar et al., 2021; Wickramaarachchi & Butt, 2014). This was evidenced in the interviews with experts, with one person noting,

"There are three or four businesses that have grown exponentially because of those people coming in, they couldn't get people to work in their businesses until the [refugee community] came and now they are expanding. [...] if you put it in percentage terms, it's enormous growth. And that's only been possible by having people to be able to fill the positions. Whether it's the skilled tradesman or the unskilled workers, it doesn't matter. We're all part of a team and we all need each other. And if we're going to expand, we need the tradespeople, we need the professionals, and we need the unskilled workers. Someone has to do it."

They added that settlement is often a commendable gesture, but it needs to go hand in hand with meaningful employment or otherwise,

"They won't settle, they won't feel part of it, they won't feel wanted, and they won't stay."

This is a critical issue that is often pointed to regarding retention. Such an approach also requires re-configuring how migrant and refugee communities are viewed, shifting away from a charitable perception as one expert interviewee noted,

"We need to build communities, we are currently deficit focused and this needs to change, an attitudinal shift needs to occur."

An interviewee from a peak industry body suggested how early workforce modeling and focusing on the skills of migrants and refugees could assist in doing this,

"One of the shortfalls we do identify is, where are the gaps; and if there's nobody providing any services to those gaps, we look at seeing whether or not we can develop programs or initiatives to fill those gaps in workforce development and agriculture. [...] What is common to all of those industries is the problem of getting people employed and skilled in agricultural positions. [...] Even though there's a whole lot of different commodities and they're all growing differently, and they all have different businesses, the demand for labour in horticulture is massive, and that comes from very basic task type roles through to highly skilled positions. [...] I realised how many migrants were in fact in our region, who have come from rural backgrounds, and were wanting to work in agriculture, but could not get those jobs. They didn't know how to link, and we had no pathways. There was a complete gap."

This required considering potential employees for different roles and finding people motivated to do manually intensive work by 'hiring on attitude and training on the job'. A collaborative approach involved working with employers, employment service providers, and community groups resulting in what the interviewee described as a "very intensive program with good outcomes." Further economic benefits result, as one regional provider explained,

"Migrants and refugees earn the money from that particular community because that's where they work from, which is an economic benefit for them. But also they spend the same money in those same communities in those same regional towns. So that develops the local economies with the view that these people are spending more than 95% of their income in those communities. So that's the economic perspective of it that the communities are beneficiaries and the migrants are beneficiaries as well."

On the need for government investment in regional areas, a participant in this research argued,

"Support services are not enough in the small towns. The bigger cities, they have some services, but the other towns don't. [...] Settlement service support is important. Within the settlement service support, those service support are done within a community centre, where they are all together in a sort of one stop centre. Where one comes, if they want mental health support, if they want casework support, if they want to meet other communities, if they want to mingle and mix with local communities to do some stuff together, all that. If the government is going to bring support, that's what is needed in terms of services and also infrastructure."

"Of course, when you put infrastructure such as hospital, it's not only for migrants in a regional community, it's for those communities and then migrants as well. If you put in services such as the finances, actually you employ some people from the local community as well. If you put money into enlarging the settlement services in small towns, it is likely that people who are going to work in those services are from the local community. So economic impact definitely goes into the community as a whole."

Regional Community Empowerment

Local communities are a critical factor for successful settlement, as documented in previous research (Gaston & Nelson, 2013; Kline, 2003; Richardson et al., 2004). Consultation with the local communities in the regional area is crucial as a participant stated,

"The involvement of the community is for the purpose of being part of the decision making. Just because if they are not, and they turn against the settlement, then the people will just go away. [...] It may not be consensus; some people in the community may decide, 'for us, we don't want those people' but the majority of the community will say that 'we want them'. [...] And if one has to do a service around the community, they also need to consult with the local communities themselves to know how they feel about settling of the new people, what facilities are available and how they are going to support."

Citing successful settlement programs overseas, a participant in this research mentioned,

"You've probably heard of the Local Immigration Partnerships Model, which is a collective impact approach, which is place-based. And it's all about building that joined up, collective responsibility for creating a welcoming community and ensuring that people have access to supports and services, and all the rest of the things that need to be in place for settlement to be successful."

"I think local government is really critical and employers are critical as well, not only in their role in terms of influencing. [...] I think, as leaders at a local level, their voices can be really powerful in terms of sharing good experiences they've had and building that broader community consensus, but also the role that they can potentially play."

"Industries specifically need to have a more explicit role in this space, industry bodies."

Success relies on community buy-in and the presence of local advocates and supporters. For example, an interview conducted with members of a local community in Victoria with a history of successful settlement observed that the decision to commence refugee settlement had to be a community decision as said,

"When we were embarking on this, we involved the whole community in a fellowship meeting to meet the people. And so that, we could explain to them what we thought we could do if we all agreed. It was a whole town decision. It wasn't just [our] adventure. And we thought, if everyone isn't involved, it wasn't going to work. As I said, it was a very, very close community. I wouldn't have been surprised which way it took. But [we] felt that we at least have to give it a go. [...] The most critical part of the whole process was to get the community on side with us."

Highlighting the limitation of the Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group (SOSOG) and emphasising the greater level of collaboration between different levels of the government and local communities, a respondent mentioned,

"To be honest, it's been pretty inadequate as a means of coordinating Commonwealth and state responses, and particularly to settlement. [...] We need to do much better planning. We can't continue exist in a world in which the Commonwealth just announces that, 'oh, by the way, we've got this group of refugees arriving in Armidale.' We need to have information and make joint decisions on where people are placed."

"I don't think there's much investment that happens in planning. And so it can't be state government, in my case, or federal government coming in and saying, as it is with refugee settlement, 'We've decided you're a new humanitarian settlement location and you're going to get 200 people from the Yazidi community over the next year.' And it's just this very top down decision that's made."

However, having the right balance between the delegation of authority to the local and state government is difficult, as a migration expert described,

"To some degree the states were right, in that some local governments use the power badly, some local governments use the power corruptly, and we won't talk about Darrell McGuire here, but many local governments used it very, very well. And it was sad that that dimension was cut down because of, I think, a relatively few bad apples."

"About four or five years ago, the department decided to make that even more targeted by negotiating what are called Designated Area Migration Agreements, which are designed to tailor things for each local region. My own view of those was it probably went too far in that tailoring and that it just made it administratively really, really complicated."

Establishing communication between the local and regional communities and the new arrival is essential to build trust and remove any stereotyping. This requires educating both new arrivals and the local communities. As a respondent said,

"The resources are there, but often it's just a matter of saying, 'Oh, hey, there's actually an increasing population in this community, so there's a need.' And then, that then opens up, 'Oh, okay, so we can allocate a new teacher, or we can provide some training to the police in that community.'"

"But also, along the lines of employer capacity building as well, because the employers at the moment are the main people that have contact with a lot of hidden migrants in regional communities. But they don't have time."

Interestingly, despite having lived in the regional town for over 20 years, the interviewees were not from there and, as they described,

"[We] are not from here. We're from away, as we're called. And we had to be very careful in what we were embarking on, because it's a very conservative, closed community. And it was a tricky community to get into when we first came in."

Their reflection after years of being involved in the settlement is that,

"You just can't expect the community to come on side with you unless you bring them along with you."

Their commitment to the project of the regional settlement included around the clock support to new arrivals when needed despite their commitments. A settlement services provider was also identified as instrumental in assisting with tailored support, and a neighbourhood community centre also established a mentoring program. As one expert interviewee noted,

"It's extraordinary how passionate people find solutions to local problems without government reaching down and saying, let me show you how to do it."

With regards to government policies, a participant highlighted,

"The policies maybe with relate to development of infrastructure in regional areas, putting funding into regional settlement. Increase another layer of service provision to regional areas, so that say for example, settlement support services. So that even if people would come from overseas to regional areas, but with such a service that we support them in the primary stage of their settlement."

Acknowledging the difficulties of coordination between different levels of government with different political affiliations, the respondent emphasised at least greater collaboration between the bureaucratic level in terms of sharing of information and planning together.

Many interviewees did not emphasise funding, highlighting instead the role of local communities, coordination and engaging with relevant counterparts. However, community empowerment also requires financial investment in local communities and recognition by the government of the role they can play. Some interviewees criticised the absent role of the federal government with comments such as "they were conspicuous by their absence." The three levels of government each have a role in regional settlement (Forbes et al., 2021). As one interviewee commented, at the community level, there may be a lot of interest; however, often, it falls to the local government to act. As mentioned by one of the participants,

"When it started to catch fire, [...] there were a lot of members of parliament, the state and federal, that'd come along and heard the story and they'd come up here and say, 'Oh, you're doing a hell of a good job. How can we help you?' And I said, 'well, I told you how you can help us. We've made various submissions over the times. These are the areas that we need help with'. Yeah, yeah, good eye. We'll look into that. And they're still looking. The reality is that nothing has come. Local government, we were very fortunate. We had a CEO at the shire, the shire secretary who was excellent. And he got on board with what we were trying to do and he helped develop a plan."

Later in the interview they clarified that,

"The government has come to the party now. But I don't want to take away from the government. They wanted to help. We couldn't tell them how to help us. We just knew we wanted help and they wanted to help, but we couldn't find that bridge to make it happen. And things were just happening too fast. It was like a bush fire."

In a similar vein, the participant mentioned the importance of people from local communities as well as migrant communities,

"There's no such a policy or process that involves our regional communities or other migrant communities in deciding about the settlement of migrants in regional area. The government decides and lifts people from one country overseas to Shepparton or Armadale. I remember, when the 12,000 Syrians came, they took a cohort to Armadale, and the feedback was that a big number of them ended up in Sydney."

The decision made by the government were made not on a consultation basis; however, on the priority of the government, which may not be the priority of the refugees or migrants. There is a need to explore the relationship between mobility and migration and the factors that influence decision making for long-term retention in regional towns. Three pull factors influence intended residential mobility: economic, social and lifestyle. A significant contributor to long-term retention is the supportive structures built to enhance accessibility, leading to stable livelihoods. For example, an important indicator of mobility is economic opportunity and growth. It is necessary to explore the industries available in regional towns and compare them to those in demand. Another indicator is whether migrants are appropriately matched based on their skills and qualifications (Wickramaarachchi & Butt, 2014). The notion of retention highly relies on the availability and suitability of employment for migrants and refugees to boost regional towns.

Regarding supportive structures to support growth, it is essential to provide educational support for children from migrant and refugee backgrounds. An indicator to harness mobility is ensuring that schools employ diverse staff. Also, schools encourage teacher agencies to understand and action the needs of migrant and refugee students. Extensive research into the regional settlement in Australia and key resettlement countries has shown the attributes that contribute most to a successful settlement. Interviewees also spoke about the value of formal and informal programs to foster settlement. An emphasis emerged on having flexible funding that can be delivered on time as needed to local areas.

Regional settlement contributes to Australia's multicultural, progressive, and inclusive societies reflecting positively in global settings, particularly among future migrants and refugees settling in Australia. Within NSW, 143 locations are established as 'welcome zones' for migrant and refugee to lift economic activity and social connections (Collins et al., 2018). For example, Armadale, a 24,000-person city, welcomed international students to a local university to build skills and qualifications (Jennings-Edquist, 2019). In addition, Toowoomba has a history of multiculturalism and migration and welcomes a range of migrants and refugees into the city to identify extra people within that location (Jennings-Edquist, 2019). Future and current welcome zones must create spaces that meet social, cultural, and religious needs and be heightened by engagement tools (Boese & Phillips, 2017).

Within these community-based locations, it is pivotal that internal and external structures of the settlement process are built to support the ongoing needs of migrant and refugee individuals and families. The Department of Human Services is a crucial stakeholder that provides early, tailored, and intensive support to refugees and migrants in the first five years of their arrival.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above examination, migrant-related issues alone may not be sufficient to facilitate successful settlement. Rather, issues related to regional communities must be addressed to achieve a successful settlement of migrants in regional Australia. It is important to incorporate the local population, economic development of regional areas, local employers, and migrant leadership and holistically address the settlement issue. Furthermore, there should be a well-established framework and communication policy to ensure greater collaboration between different levels of the Australian government, industry peak bodies, regional communities, and migrant communities for sustainable settlement in regional areas. To ensure sustainable regional settlement of migrants (including refugees), it is essential to address issues related to the local community development and economic development of regional communities. This will enable the regional communities to facilitate the settlement and integration of the new migrants to ensure a meaningful life for the new migrants. Consequently, regional communities in Australia will develop economically and socially.

Regional Settlement of Migrants

Developing a critical mass of migrants in regional areas. Having a critical number of people from similar ethnic, cultural, or national backgrounds contributes to building that community's social capital, leading concentration of people in the metropolitan areas. A solution to this can be to accept a manageable number of migrants, including refugees and settle them in the regional areas based on the employment and population needs assessment of the regions and the personal circumstances of the migrants. If necessary, different communities can be settled in different geographical areas.

Migrant community development may be done through a strength-based approach (Burkett, 2011; Gibson et al., 2020; Willetts et al., 2014) focusing on the strengths and resources of people, communities, and their environments rather than their problems. To ensure participation of the migrant community in the settlement process, it might be useful to select people (male and female) with a higher level of English proficiency from a particular community and engage them in English language training, for example as a teacher aid, interpreter, or social worker in the regional community. This will enhance the effectiveness of English language training and build a social community and a sense of belonging in the new community.

Enabling a greater understanding of work culture, environment, and special workplace requirements in the Australian workplace. It is vital to have an employment-focused settlement program. Settlement may have a key focus on employment. Skill recognition, skill matching for regional settlement, training and upskilling of migrants may

be part of the employment-focused settlement program to address the needs of the regional areas. There may be differences in work culture, environment, and special workplace requirements in the Australian workplace. Hence, necessary skill conversion training or vocational training may be organised for the new arrivals to work effectively in regional businesses. Secondary employment for partners and children where applicable. This will encourage migrants to settle in regional areas and ensure maximising the utilisation of skills of spouses and partners besides the primary breadwinner. Regarding the harvest trail, regional employers relied until now mainly on working holidaymakers; instead, they now may focus on migrants and refugees and people under Pacific Labour Scheme.

Encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship. Failing to secure a meaningful job, often migrants and refugees establish their own successful businesses. Therefore, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship through providing incentives/supports such as Microcredit for entrepreneurs may be a useful way of attracting migrants to regional areas. Building upon the migrant community's social capital.

Economic Development

An asset mapping exercise needs to be undertaken in consultation with the business community and local communities to demonstrate business benefits when migrants are relocated and resettled in regional Australia.

A resource-based approach (Alonso & Kok, 2018; Lawson, 1999; Neffke et al., 2017) needs to be undertaken to strengthen the capacity of the regional industries and enhance their capacity to accommodate more migrants to address the industry needs. It is essential to have industry bodies involved in the regional area need assessment and migrant settlement process.

Government investment is required in infrastructure development in the non-traditional sector or alternative employment sectors besides the traditional agriculture and mining sectors. Sectors such as renewable energy, hi-tech industry (robotics, communication, aeronautics), tourism, manufacturing, aged care, health, administration, and education are important to meet the needs of regional areas and communities (both migrants and locals).

Wage incentives for a certain period can be given to regional industries and employers for attracting and retaining refugee/migrant workers. This incentive will significantly impact the outcome of the regional settlement initiative.

Community Empowerment

Local communities of Australia's regional areas need to be empowered by acknowledging their social capital and their inclusion in decision making about the settlement and

employment of migrants in regional areas. Evidence from the 'Local Immigration Partnerships Model' (Canada) and initiatives by others may be examined or replicated in the Australian context.

In addition to greater collaboration with mainstream major settlement organisations, more funding is needed for local community organisations to enhance their capacity to welcome and retain new arrivals in the community. This will also facilitate giving ownership of migrant settlements in the regional areas to the regional communities.

The narrative about migrants needs to be changed. Federal and state government initiatives are needed to enhance the efforts of migrant resource centers in this regard.

Policy Recommendations

A conceptual framework for overall migrant settlement (Figure 4) and an integrated approach to migrant settlement showing the roles of federal, state, local governments, settlement support organisations, regional community organisations and migrant communities may be adapted for a sustainable settlement of migrants in regional areas.

New arrivals to be settled in regional areas, based on employment and population needs assessment and personal circumstances of the migrants. There need to be Job Services Providers or Labour Market Providers that specialise in migrants and refugees. Under the current settlement program, most of the people are settled in the metropolitan area, which is a debatable issue in the political media and in public. In most cases, programs are developed, and migrants are encouraged to re-settle in the regional areas, which often turns out to be less effective. Emphasis should be placed on settling more migrants, including refugees in the regional areas, based on the needs assessment of regional industries and the need for having a critical mass of people from the similar cultural background. The reason for people becoming a refugee is not mere economic but rather safety of life which Australian regional areas are very much capable of delivering. The current target of having 50% refugees in regional areas may be reviewed.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on a family visa to allow skilled, semi-skilled and occasionally unskilled people to reunite with their families, enhance the mental peace of migrants, and address the needs of different rural industries.

Based on the needs assessments of the regional industries, low skilled and/or no-skilled should be allowed to migrate to Australia and be granted permanent visas. While Australia's migration policy is focused on its economic and labour force needs and social benefits, emphasis has been placed on allowing migrants predominantly skilled migrants. There is a

growing demand for skilled people in regional jobs (technical, administrative, management, aged care, and healthcare). However, experience in the regional industry, specially, in the agri-business sector, also showed a need for low skill and/or no-skill (people may have transferable skills but no institutional education) to sustain our regional agri-business sector.

Reliance on temporary migrants to address the labour shortage in the agribusiness sector needs to be reduced through a direct settlement of migrants and refugees (Permanent Residents and Citizens) in regional agri-business. Harvest cycle employment to be reintroduced where people living in a particular regional area may be employed in surrounding locations nearby depending on the season (growing till harvest) of crops.

For delivery of English language training prior to arrival, English language training may be outsourced and provided offshore in coordination with International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the host nation. The curriculum can be decided by the Department of Education in consultation with the community organisations, settlement service providers and the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

Emphasis needs to be placed on work-based functional English language training for the new arrivals. Under exceptional circumstances, individuals granted humanitarian visas must attend English-language training on arrival in Australia. Job-focused English language training (if not done prior to their journey to Australia). TAFE and schools can provide English language training in regional areas. Individuals over a certain age (e.g., 50 years) and children may be exempted from the minimum English language standards. Children may attend 'prior to school' training on arrival in regional Australia.

Government departments at all levels need to be strengthened to reduce the lengthy determination of residency status of the humanitarian entrants such as asylum seekers, so that they can be granted permanent visa in the shortest possible time where applicable and integrate with the society with full benefits of permanent residents.

Greater consultation is required with the organizations like UNHCR and IOM, host nations (countries from where refugees need to be taken), and all levels of the Australian government, and regional Australian people.

Universities, in collaboration with the industry and research organisations, need to be funded to conduct research on the sustainability of settlement projects and recommend remedial measures for issues that might arise during these settlements.

CONCLUSION

Regional Australia is a significant contributor to the Australian economy. Yet, regional Australia is under-resourced in infrastructure and essential services, resulting in a population decline, increased ageing population and a shortage of employees in regional industries. A well-facilitated regional settlement significantly contributes to the economic and social fabric of regional communities in Australia. Although in Australia, regional settlement of migrants, including refugees, has been in discussion for the past few decades, there are gaps in the policy and implementation affecting the overall outcome of regional settlement. Despite serious interest among the various stakeholders, there is a knowledge gap about how to facilitate successful migrant settlement and integration in regional areas. This research offers a conceptual framework encompassing migrant (including refugee) settlement, regional economic development, and regional community development for enabling sustainable migrant settlement away from urban areas and into regional Australia. The proposed concept is a paradigm shift from a charitable view of migrant settlement to regional socio-economic development while ensuring a quality of life for new arrivals.

The COVID-19 pandemic was not just a health crisis; it also affected every aspect of the Australian economy, including migration. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, overall migrant intake into Australia significantly decreased in the past two years. COVID-19 has shone a spotlight that despite serious interest among the various stakeholders, there is a knowledge gap regarding facilitating ongoing migrant settlement in regional areas and sharing best practices across locations.

This research is focused on the nuances of regional settlement through desktop research and interviewing key stakeholders. However, the views of migrants themselves, including refugees who have settled in regional, rural, and remote areas of Australia or who are willing to relocate to these areas and who are not willing to relocate to regional areas, are not included here. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with stakeholders such as experts, professionals and community members involved in the regional settlement. Based on the desktop research and expert opinions, several recommendations have been made to contribute to the sustainable migrant settlement of migrants (including refugees) in regional areas while ensuring regional economic development and regional community development intertwined with each other.

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