



*Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We work with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; gender and ecological justice.*

Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600  
By email: [migration@aph.gov.au](mailto:migration@aph.gov.au)

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Dear Committee

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry into migration in regional Australia.

### **Introduction**

Jesuit Social Services has over 40 years' experience working with individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage. The people we work with are often living in disadvantaged areas and may have multiple and complex needs, histories of trauma or abuse, mental ill-health, disability or involvement with the justice system. In supporting people to reach their full potential, including to find meaningful work, we cannot ignore the structural barriers to participation that many people face, including locational disadvantage, discrimination, social isolation, a lack of appropriate housing and a social safety net that has been chronically underfunded.

Through our Settlement Program, we work with individuals, families and groups from a refugee or culturally diverse background to improve social interaction, build personal capacity and foster a sense of belonging in Australia. Based in Melbourne's western suburbs, the support we provide includes casework, English language support and community development. We refer people to local networks and services, such as those providing housing support and cultural linkages, and run facilitated groups, workshops and information sessions based on participant-identified need, including specific groups for women, elderly people and youth. We also run the Flemington Homework Club, providing a welcoming, safe and stimulating environment for local refugee and migrant school students to receive educational support and assistance.

With the right policies, services and support in place, regional settlement initiatives have the potential to benefit both newly arrived people, including refugees, and the communities in which they live. In order to give people a genuine choice between living in a metropolitan or regional area, a suite of factors demand long-term government investment and planning in regional areas, including in relation to stable employment opportunities; affordable housing; education; English language support; transport and other infrastructure; settlement, health and related services.

In addition, whether people are able to successfully settle in a regional community – or any community – may also depend on the extent to which “the community is a welcoming community that is ready to embrace the new migrants”.<sup>1</sup> As noted by the Settlement Council of Australia, regional settlement policy should carefully consider “the intersection between social cohesion and economic outcomes” in particular locations, as well as “the full range of experiences facing refugees in regional areas”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Musoni, E. (2019). *Understanding regional settlement in Australia: Key learnings from past experiences*.

Canberra, The Regional Australia Institute, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019/06/apo-nid247766-1373176.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Settlement Council of Australia (22 Jan 2019) Submission to the *Review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants*, <http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Settlement-Council-of-Australia-Follow-up-Submission-Jan-2019.pdf>.

It is equally important to recognise that, for many newly arrived people, for a variety of reasons, it is simply not possible to move to a regional area to live and work. Jesuit Social Services believes that regional settlement strategies should proceed on the basis that such settlement is voluntary. Newly arrived people – in particular, humanitarian migrants – should not be subject to strict criteria on where they settle as a condition of their visa. Rather, regional settlement policies should provide people with genuine incentives to live and work in communities that are safe, welcoming and inclusive.

### **Flexible, individualised settlement support**

In considering prospective regional settlement policy and strategies, we should look to what current Federal policy settings in relation to settlement are working, and what could be improved. The Government commissioned a review into the “integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian migrants to Australia” in late 2018, with the report due to be submitted to the government in February 2019. We note that this report, which a number of settlement and other organisations made submissions to, has not been made public to date. Jesuit Social Services looks forward to the report being made publically available as soon as possible.

As fundamental to any settlement policy, Jesuit Social Services believes the Federal Government should recognise that settlement is an individualised, complex and lifelong endeavour. Some challenges will be overcome, while others may be overcome and then return. Our responses, therefore, must be flexible and based on a person’s unique needs. Some of the people we work with, for example, have been forced to flee their country of origin, leaving family and culture behind, and have experienced significant trauma. Some people have had limited access to education prior to their arrival in Australia and possess low levels of literacy and numeracy, adding to the stress of engaging with their new community. These pre-arrival experiences impact on a person’s ability to connect with, and develop a sense of belonging in, their new community, as well as their understanding of new legal, social and other structures.

Funding for settlement services must allow for tailored and flexible support that mirrors the non-linear journey toward successful settlement. As such, we believe that services funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program should be able to respond to the settlement needs of newly arrived people beyond the current post-arrival five year period of eligibility. A similarly flexible approach should be adopted with regard to English language support. Although the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides up to 510 hours of English language tuition, Jesuit Social Services’ participants have indicated this is less than adequate to obtain a level of English that allows an individual to confidently engage with employers and service providers. For migrants who are also parents, the capacity to attend AMEP tuition and complete it within five years of commencement can be limited because of the demands of raising young children in a new country and other barriers including a lack of familial and personal networks, social isolation, issues of transportation and insecure finances.

### **Securing employment in regional areas**

The importance of meaningful work for newly arrived people is significant. Securing a job can help foster broader participation in society, enhance financial independence and reduce social isolation, among other positive outcomes. Newly arrived people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often face barriers to employment, including discrimination and lower levels of English which can limit their sense of belonging in the Australian community.

People seeking asylum may face additional barriers to employment, including disrupted education and the ongoing health-effects of trauma and displacement. However, certain Federal policies are leaving this vulnerable cohort at risk of financial hardship and exploitation. The Federal Government's cuts to the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS), a vital social safety net, in 2018 have placed additional pressure on people seeking asylum, as well as the community services they rely on. As the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre notes, changes to SRSS eligibility have "increased the need for people seeking asylum to find work (any work) without adequate support to develop their capacity to do so, or adequate guards against their exploitation in the local labour market."<sup>3</sup> These cuts should be reversed.

Safeguards against the workplace exploitation of vulnerable people, including people seeking asylum, should also be improved as a matter of priority. We note that the Government has accepted in principle each of the 22 recommendations of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce Report, released earlier this year. We call on the Government to effectively implement these recommendations to protect vulnerable workers. This includes extending access to the Fair Entitlements Guarantee (FEG) to people with work rights who are on temporary visas, particularly humanitarian migrants. The FEG provides financial assistance to employees to cover unpaid entitlements, including unpaid wages up to 13 weeks, in the event of company liquidation or bankruptcy. At present, eligible employees must be Australian citizens or holders of a permanent or special category visa. This support does not extend, for example, to people with work rights on a bridging visa who are living in the community while their application for asylum is being processed. This cohort – who are paying taxes, like other working people – are among the most vulnerable to exploitation and should be adequately protected.

For newly arrived people seeking to move to a regional area for work, Jesuit Social Services believes it is optimal that employment is secured prior to the person relocating. It is important to recognise the significant challenges in relocating to areas where people may have few social links, including the financial cost of relocation itself which may be especially pronounced for families with children. For many, the risk of moving without certainty of employment is not feasible. Relocating on the 'chance' of employment and at a person's own expense exposes new migrants to an increased risk of exploitation and hardship. As noted above, we must also recognise that employment is only one piece of the puzzle – it must be accompanied by the appropriate services and support in a welcoming community.

### **Employment retention**

While there are existing agencies working to connect newly arrived people with suitable work in regional areas, Jesuit Social Services wishes to highlight a particularly important aspect to successful employment outcomes that is less recognised and catered for: initiatives to enhance retention that focus on pre and post-employment phases, including services to support people (and their employers) *after* they obtain employment. For both skilled and humanitarian migrants, post-employment workplace support would not only aid retention but also act as a protective factor against risks of employer exploitation. Retention is also important at the community level because, where employment breaks down, a person's ability to build a life in and contribute to a given regional community is put at risk.

Through our experience delivering the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program (*see Box 1*), we believe the following factors are key to increasing the probability of retention:

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<sup>3</sup> Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (April 2019) *Towards an optimal employment strategy for people seeking asylum in Victoria*, [https://www.asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ASRC-Employment-Research-Report\\_W\\_FA.pdf](https://www.asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ASRC-Employment-Research-Report_W_FA.pdf).

**1) Recruitment mechanisms which are genuinely focused on ensuring a good fit between a person's capabilities and their prospective role/employer.** Services tasked with matching migrants and refugees with jobs should have a thorough understanding of the potential employer's business, the workplace culture and the requirements of the role. They should also take the time to understand the strengths and aspirations of the person seeking work. Tailored recruitment services which seek to gain this understanding are more likely to set up a suitable person with a suitable role. These services should also take steps to understand the gaps within the business that may affect the placement of skilled or humanitarian migrants, so that capability-building strategies can be planned in advance and implemented.

**2) Pre-employment preparation for both employer and employee.** High quality pre-employment training for both employee and employer can be a powerful mechanism in aiding the likelihood of retention and a successful job placement. For the employer, preparation training would typically cover cultural knowledge and awareness, including in relation to the migrant or refugee journey, and associated factors in terms of behaviour and expectations in the workplace. Core content would ideally be customised to meet each employer's existing workplace culture and level of training need. Cultural awareness training for businesses presents the opportunity to dispel stereotypes and assumptions, foster understanding and increase levels of cultural competency in the workplace. This assists in building a workplace culture that embraces diversity and creates a positive and welcoming environment that aids employee retention. It also helps to address recruitment bias and increase the employment possibilities for more people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

For people with limited or no prior work experience in Australia, the opportunity to learn about and understand the nuances of Australian workplace culture can make or break their employment experience. Tailored pre-employment training builds the confidence of prospective employees and allows them the opportunity to ask questions and test assumptions free of judgement and without risk to professional reputation. It also presents the opportunity for people to develop certain soft skills that may be relevant to their role, such as interpersonal and presentation skills.

**3) Access to support and mentoring for new employees during the first 6 months.** In our experience, providing access to support, as needed, for people settling in to a new job can make a significant difference

### **Corporate Diversity Partnerships**

Jesuit Social Services has developed the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program to help companies connect with a diverse talent pool of qualified people who seek an opportunity to obtain the corporate experience and professional networks needed to launch their careers.

We partner with employers to develop a customised paid internship program that creates a life changing career experience for the intern; progress toward business goals for the company; and positive social impact for the community. To date, we have partnered with the Australian Taxation Office as part of their 'Opening Doors' initiative; John Holland, one of Australia's leading engineering contractors; Yarra Valley Water; Melbourne Water; and super fund CBUS.

This program is built on the success of our African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP), formed in partnership with the National Australia Bank (NAB), which offers six-month paid work placements, including mentoring and career coaching, to qualified African-Australians. As of this year, more than 400 participants have graduated from AAIP across Melbourne and Sydney since its inception in 2009 and more than half the alumni are still working at NAB.

A program such as the AAIP not only performs a social good, in broadening the employment prospects of people from diverse backgrounds, but also provides significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers and shifting perceptions in a positive way.

to retention outcomes. Employers we have partnered with as part of our Corporate Diversity Partnerships program have told us that the ongoing mentoring we offer has been an invaluable element of the program's success. This support is open-ended — it includes the ability for people to pick up the phone or email to discuss any issue that might be affecting their general wellbeing or ability to do their job. Establishing a new life in a new country is difficult and the challenges can be multiple and complex. Inevitably, it will take time to adjust to new beginnings in work in Australia — whether it is childcare arrangements, discussing leave or work hours, or the particulars of a role. For employers, the availability of support during the early stages of the employer-employee relationship reduces the sense of risk for the business and provides an avenue for troubleshooting small issues before they escalate.

### **Alumni Experience: Daniel Mabil, John Holland Pathway Program**

Daniel Mabil estimates that he applied for more than 200 engineering positions. Each time, he was rejected.

He came to Australia in 2007 after fleeing war in South Sudan and living for nine years in a refugee camp in Kenya.

Mr Mabil thrived here, and eventually earned an engineering degree from the University of Adelaide.

After finishing his studies he was told he needed work experience. He returned to his homeland and worked on projects including the construction of a hospital ward.

When war once again forced him back to Australia, he was confident his engineering experience would open doors. It did not happen. "When I came back I start applying. But there was no opportunity for me," he said. "It's very frustrating and demoralising."

But for Mr Mabil, there was finally good news. He was recruited as part of an employment program called Pathways, which is run by Jesuit Social Services and engineering giant John Holland.

"We thought we'd take 20 people into a pilot program, and after having the applications [open] for two weeks, we got 450 applications," said John Holland's executive general manager Trevor Hall. "It just opened our eyes to the massive untapped community of engineers out there."

Mr Mabil said that was what so many migrants and refugees in Australia with qualifications want — a chance.

"I know there are many, many migrants... who are dying to gain the opportunity I have now. I'd like to see more people taking my path."

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Diversity is a central pillar of our national identity that should be recognised and celebrated. With well-targeted policies, formed in consultation with communities, settlement organisations and other providers of support, backed by appropriate services and infrastructure, regional settlement initiatives have significant positive potential for both communities and the people who seek to settle there. As outlined in this submission, we believe any such initiatives should be voluntary and targeted to, and in full

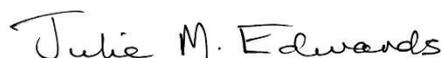
consultation with, supportive regional communities. People from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including refugees, enrich the communities in which they live and should be supported to access the opportunities in life that will enable them to thrive in welcoming and inclusive communities.

**In developing policies and initiatives on regional settlement, Jesuit Social Services calls on the Federal Government to give particular attention to the following:**

- **Regional settlement policies should be voluntary and centred on providing people with genuine incentives to live and work in communities that are safe, welcoming and inclusive.**
- **Newly arrived people — in particular, humanitarian migrants — should not be subject to strict criteria on where they settle as a condition of their visa.**
- **Services funded under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program should be able to respond to the settlement needs of newly arrived people beyond the current post-arrival five year period of eligibility (this could involve a tiered response with access to support such as group programs). A similarly flexible approach should be adopted with regard to English language support.**
- **The Fair Entitlements Guarantee (FEG) should be extended to people with work rights who are on temporary visas, particularly humanitarian migrants.**
- **Services that provide post-placement support to newly employed people, as well as support for employers, should be funded to aid retention and protect against exploitation.**

We appreciate the committee taking our views into account.

Yours sincerely



**Julie Edwards – CEO, Jesuit Social Services**