



Skills Report Position Paper 5: Appreciating Migrants

REPORT FINDINGS

While Australia has become an increasingly multicultural country since the mid-1900s, parts of regional Australia have had limited exposure to the cultural shift that is associated with migration. Some regions see that migrants bring new perspectives and enthusiasm to their towns, while also helping fill gaps for unskilled labour. Others take a more cautious approach.

Research by the Regional Australia Institute shows that small towns in Australia are growing through migration. In some parts of Australia, attracting migrants has been the answer to filling skills gaps and slowing population decline.

International migration is responsible for more than half of Australia's population growth and presents a unique opportunity for regional areas looking to transform their community. If more international migrants settled in regional Australia, our regional population would grow at the same pace or even faster than the capital cities. With negative population in at least four of local government areas in the Orana region, and two areas where nearly one in four people are over 65 years old, these are important growth opportunities.


Skilled migrants help fill gaps in the workforce and are willing to settle in more remote areas for the chance of a new life. They often come to communities with a partner and children and sometimes their extended family members also migrate. These people bring a new element to rural communities and also help revitalise local communities. They are correcting aging population trends and they are ensuring important health and education services are being maintained for all residents in our country towns.

They boost population growth and, in turn, create more jobs. They bring diverse and younger residents to our communities, bring an untapped, unskilled labour resource and play a crucial role in community building, including participating in sport and other community groups and volunteering.

The Regional Australia Institute suggests that international migrants should be the top priority instead of an option of last resort for regional communities. Overall, less than 20% of the international migrants that arrived in Australia between 2006 and 2011 settled in a regional area. This is significantly less than the proportion of the population already living outside capital cities. International migrants are a vital asset for building the local economy and the community in rural Australia.

SITUATIONAL REVIEW AND GAP ANALYSIS

There are many programs throughout Australian communities for supporting migrants to assimilate. There are also programs to attract skilled migrants. However, many have partners and family members who could also play a greater role in the community, including filling gaps for unskilled workers.



With this focus in mind, there appears to be a need to support migrants by providing training in other skills, including:

- conversational and work-related English
- job finding
- cultural awareness for the workplace, including what to wear.

There are also still pockets of low tolerance and even resentment to migrants in some communities, largely caused by a lack of understanding and limited exposure to a variety of cultural experiences.

Visa incentives that encourage regional settlement are important for attracting international migrants to rural Australia. However, evidence shows that many international migrants remain in regional areas beyond visa requirements. This suggests that visa concessions are not necessarily the reason they stay. The local community, access to services and the opportunities available will shape those longer-term decisions.



RDA Orana Position

Migrants are important for the growth and ongoing viability of regional and rural communities. RDA Orana believes that immigrants can help grow rural and regional communities and is committed building a greater appreciation of the economic value and cultural benefits they bring to our region.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a program to encourage the acceptance of cultural difference within our communities.
2. Encourage businesses to understand how best to use migrant labour effectively to grow and sustain their operations.
3. Advocate for visa incentives that encourage regional settlement by skilled and unskilled migrants.
4. Investigate the feasibility of establishing an English language school in the Orana region.