

## Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

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The Joint Standing Committee on Migration shall inquire into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia and make recommendations to maximise the positive effects of migration.

PREPARED FOR:  
**The Joint Standing Committee on Migration**  
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## AMES

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AMES Vision is *Full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society*. AMES has worked for 60 years with new and recently arrived refugees and migrants to Victoria to ensure these new arrivals are well supported in their settlement. The overarching aim of the organisation's work is assist refugees and migrants to settle successfully, support them to participate and contribute to Australia's diverse society.

AMES focuses on assisting new arrivals achieve short and medium term settlement outcomes consistent with their own goals, so they can be prepared to make successful transitions to longer term social and economic inclusion within the broader Australian community. The organisation delivers the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) across most of metropolitan Melbourne and all of regional Victoria and provides services under the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS) for all newly arrived refugees settling in Victoria. AMES also provides a CALD specialist employment service through Job Services Australia for job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The AMEP and HSS are the practical programs resulting from successive Australian governments' social and public policy framework of support for newly arrived migrants and refugees. These are unique to Australia and a key reason for the success of our multiculturalism.

## Executive Summary

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This response draws on AMES experience working with newly arrived groups of migrants and refugees. As part of our work, we regularly consult with client communities. This response includes feedback from two consultations undertaken specifically to seek the views of these groups on areas raised in the Inquiry. One consultation was held with community leaders and recently arrived members of refugee communities. A second consultation was held with a group of AMES staff who are from a range of settler communities. Feedback relevant to the issues raised in this Inquiry that has been collected from other research undertaken by AMES with newly arrived refugees and migrants is also included.

In this response AMES argues that participation is the single most important element in achieving successful multiculturalism. While the key to participation for many people is paid employment, participation may take a number of other equally valuable forms that result in people making meaningful contributions. These may be through voluntary work, participating in the local community, participating in sport or other recreational groups or taking a role in school communities.

Participation is a reciprocal endeavour where members of the more established Australian community are an integral part of the process. Participation relies on people interacting on a person to person basis, deepening understanding of individuals and not on forming opinions based on stereotyping of groups by the media, popular opinion and other sources. The communities themselves are aware that stereotyping can occur and can have a negative impact on perceptions of new arrivals by the broader community.

Economic participation relies on employers being open to employing staff who are recently arrived while social participation requires a willingness to welcome and include new arrivals in local communities. These can be powerful ways to modify perceptions and foster positive opinions and perceptions of a multicultural society.

Participation requires consistent and determined intervention. Australia's policy framework supports this intervention, establishing the basis for substantial settlement programs and the opportunity for citizenship. Where refugees and migrants are able to participate the benefits to a cohesive society are manifest. Where participation is not achieved the impact can be negative - for individuals who feel excluded and for the broader community whose perception is influenced by examples of excluded individuals and communities.

The aim of settlement programs is to support people to become independent. Settlement programs are an essential element to provide the foundations for independence and ability to access mainstream services. They should not be seen as programs that provide separate services in the longer term. This can hinder rather than support a multicultural society.

*In order to improve the Karen community and improve their image to society, they suggested to not only bring those who are disadvantaged or uneducated to Bendigo, but also bring those who are literate to help people in the Karen community.*

Community Consultation Bendigo 2009

The first section of this paper provides a number of observations about multiculturalism and social inclusion. The second section describes interventions that can assist in increasing participation and the third section looks at the extent to which Australia is utilising the skills of those who arrive with professional qualifications.

Proposals for intervention are based on some existing programs that are making sound contributions to increased participation as well as additional proposals identified through AMES practice and through consultation with our client communities.

A consultation with newly arrived communities from refugee backgrounds in which participants provided feedback for this Inquiry gives strong reason for believing Australia's multiculturalism is working and that public policy in practice is appreciated from the perspective of new settlers. It was notable that the positive areas spoken about were largely those relating to personal intangible attributes - the areas that are more fundamental and more difficult to change. The areas where participants in the consultation identified things that could change or where existing programs/activities could be expanded, were the more tangible program areas where changes are possibly easier to make.

A question about what makes them feel included elicited the following responses from the new settlers:

- On arrival everybody is treated with dignity and respect
- Early childhood education opportunities and more learning options for young people
- Being encouraged to learn English - access to English tuition for adults
- A lot of diverse cultures but the feeling of one community
- Community media (first language) for larger communities
- Respect for privacy
- A feeling of security and having access to the same services as all Australians - Medicare, Centrelink, access to schooling for children
- Freedom of movement around Australia
- Fair social security
- A standard of living that all can achieve; not such a gap between rich and poor

A question about when newly arrived people feel settled put to a group of AMES staff from different migrant and refugee communities confirmed the importance of employment in feeling part of Australian society.

*Being settled is about how you feel about yourself (self-worth, self esteem).  
Being employed gives you a sense of being valued and of contributing.*  
AMES Staff Consultation 2011

## Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

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### *The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda*

AMES believes that social inclusion is the foundation of a successful multicultural policy. This view is strongly supported by the consultations we have undertaken with our clients as well as consultations with AMES staff who are from diverse backgrounds.

Respect and understanding of cultural diversity and being convinced of the benefits of multiculturalism are most powerfully demonstrated by direct experience. Where individuals experience others from different cultures taking their part in society through employment, education, social and recreational participation, they are likely to form positive views. Where members of a newly arrived group have no employment, no opportunities to meet and interact with members of the wider community and young people are not participating successfully in education, it is very difficult to portray a positive view to the wider community and it can be equally challenging for some members of the Australian community to form positive views of diverse cultures and Australia's migration policies and programs.

An elaboration of the government's Aspirational Principles with respect to the particular role of multiculturalism demonstrates how we believe this applies. These three principles are:

1. Reducing disadvantage
2. Increasing social, civil and economic participation
3. A greater voice, combined with greater responsibility

### 1. Reducing disadvantage

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Large numbers of migrants and some refugees come to Australia with high levels of education and overseas work experience and good levels of English. In addition, Business and Skilled Migrants also frequently arrive with financial resources to establish businesses and settle their families. Migrants who arrive from countries with similar education systems where qualifications are more easily recognised for use in Australia and where systems are familiar are likely to require minimal support to address any disadvantage that may accrue as a result of migration.

Smaller numbers of migrants and refugees arrive with high aspirations, a determination to succeed but no or very limited English, limited formal education and work experience, and no or few established links in Australia. In the case of refugees, a background of dislocation and trauma as a result of their refugee experience further compounds these disadvantages.

This group require investment in the early stages of settlement to establish the basis for independence and participation. Without this investment it is likely that at least some of this group will remain marginalised and may importantly, in terms of a successful multicultural Australia, be perceived by other Australians as not contributing, being a burden on society and thus (through factors out of their control) shape negative perceptions of Australia's migration policies and the diverse society of which all Australians are a part.

## 2. Increasing social, civil and economic participation

AMES experience working to assist newly arrived refugees and migrants to successfully settle in Australia, become contributors and feel a part of the Australian society confirms for us that work and other forms of participation in the broader community are essential elements of successful settlement.

This concurs strongly with the views expressed in Labour's Policy statements in 2007 and the emphasis on employment as a key component of this participation.<sup>1</sup>

Labor believes that work, along with family and community, gives meaning to life. Workforce Participation is a foundation of social inclusion; it creates opportunities for financial independence and personal fulfilment.<sup>1</sup>

Feedback from consultations AMES has undertaken as a part of gathering input for this Inquiry, and in other research we have recently conducted, makes it very clear that these newly arrived Australians have a strong desire to participate. They are looking for:

- Employment opportunities for new arrivals and emerging communities
- Government incentives to local businesses and agencies to employ new migrants
- Mentoring to build on strengths of new arrivals
- Recognition of the skills of refugees/migrants - not just appreciation of food, dance, etc
- Pathways for young people - (training, apprenticeships)<sup>2</sup>

*"We are not lazy people. We were working hard in Africa and we want to do the same here. We want to contribute to the country that has helped us a lot."*

**Ballarat Consultation 2009**

*"In Africa, we as males must work hard to support our family and give everything to wife and children. When I come here I just go to school and come back and wait for little money from Government. We need a job to support our family and kids for the future."*

**Togolese male, refugee; interviewed in Ballarat 2009**

Parents from all settling communities across Victoria are keen to engage with their children's schools. Very often this communication is restricted by language barriers - but the will to participate and the frustration of being unable to communicate easily has been strongly expressed in numerous consultations. The new arrivals say that:

*They want more communication with the children's school and to receive information about the school and about their children's performance at school.*

*Parents who know a bit of English (often fathers) usually attend parent-teacher interviews, but without bilingual support at the interviews most struggle to communicate with teachers effectively, particularly with education terminology.*

**Bendigo Consultation 2009**

School aged children are often the family members who participate earliest in their settlement, and most actively, in the broader community. While the cost of joining clubs or using sporting facilities can be prohibitive, the children still often find ways to join in.

*"They participate in swimming, athletics, soccer, football, tennis, and music classes. Although joining sports clubs is expensive, the majority of young people just play at school".*

**Bendigo Consultation 2009**

<sup>1</sup> An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda ALP Policy Document 2007

<sup>2</sup> AMES Consultation with newly arrived communities, March 2011

There are two broad areas that AMES believes to be critical in making participation achievable - particularly for refugees and humanitarian entrants who often experience high levels of disadvantage on arrival. These are:

1. the ability to speak English
2. the right support to gain work in Australia

Success in these areas will in part depend on the reciprocal requirement of multiculturalism - Australia's readiness to include people from diverse backgrounds in the broader social fabric of Australia and have an open mind on diverse work places.

## 1. The ability to speak English

The Adult Migrant English Program demonstrates Australia's bipartisan commitment to assisting newly arrived migrants and refugees to learn English. The policy framework for the AMEP demonstrates the important role of English as part of successful settlement.

Research has demonstrated that English language proficiency is the single most important determinant of successful settlement and the AMEP plays a significant role in this regard by providing AMEP Clients with settlement focused English language tuition and settlement support. However, it is important to note that a range of factors can impact on an individual's ability to make English language gains, such as their pre-migration experiences (which might include torture or trauma), literacy levels, years of education, family, and economic situation. The AMEP is an integral part of the network of settlement services<sup>3</sup>

The policy framework also notes that the AMEP cannot realistically equip clients with sufficient English to function at the level required for full participation in employment or in other aspects of Australian society.

There has been an expectation in the past that the program should be able to equip AMEP Clients with 'Functional English' in 510 hours of tuition. However given that the majority of AMEP Clients (approximately 60%) begin the program with little or no English, this expectation is unattainable and unrealistic. A more accurate description of the program is that it provides preliminary English skills in a specifically settlement context, teaching English while introducing newly arrived clients to Australian social norms and practices, services, and the rule of law.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship Adult Migrant English Program Request for Tender 09/65: Appendix C: AMEP New Business Model (2009)

<sup>4</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship Adult Migrant English Program Request for Tender 09/65: Appendix C: AMEP New Business Model (2009)

Given the importance of English and the fact that the AMEP cannot realistically be expected to deliver sufficient English tuition for clients to fully function in Australia AMES proposes a number of approaches.

It is essential to use the hours available in the AMEP to the very best effect for people who need this service. Clients' feedback on what they perceive as most relevant and useful provides some insights. Three areas are frequently noted.

- i. Employment content
- ii. Including vocational training with English
- iii. Opportunities for social connections

#### i. Employment content

A longitudinal study with AMEP clients undertaken by AMES from 2008 to 2010<sup>5</sup> indicated that language for employment was rated more highly than any other settlement content area used in the AMEP for teaching English. Ninety-five percent of participants across a range of English language levels indicated they thought that learning about employment was 'important' or 'very important', with 80% saying it was 'very important'. This included participants at all levels of English proficiency. It is therefore very important to ensure that the AMEP has sufficient flexibility to include employment content at all levels of the program and to have language skills and knowledge for employment as one focus from the start of participants' programs.

*Participants said they need more motivation and information to be ready for employment. They need more information about job opportunities, networking and work placement.*

**Ballarat Consultation 2009**

A number of new arrivals have competing needs to both learn English and find employment early in their settlement. Including a focus on employment related content early in AMEP courses can assist new arrivals to understand the requirements of different types of jobs in Australia. This is especially important for people who come from a very different overseas job market. It will provide a foundation to assist job seekers understand their employment options. Participants in AMES longitudinal study said they relied on the AMEP for accurate advice about working in Australia. Many people found work before they had a level of English proficiency that would allow them to understand their rights and responsibilities in the workplace or engage in job pathway planning in English. This reinforces the importance of providing this information early in the AMEP - and in first language where clients have no English or low levels of English.

<sup>5</sup>Words to Work: Settling In and Finding Work. The Report of AMES Longitudinal Study 2008-2010. AMES 2011

A selection of feedback from participants in this study and a study undertaken with refugees by AMES and the Centre for Refugee Research (CCR) at the University of NSW<sup>6</sup> demonstrate the importance of employment content.

*I hope to find a job for my daily expenses, not to rely on Centrelink benefits and feel independent*

**Refugee, Vietnam, male,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2010**

*I will do anything. I need money – I have two children. I think my English is not enough for many jobs so I will take whatever I can get.*

**Refugee, Sri Lanka, female,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2010**

*Language learning is very important for health, banking, Centrelink, making friends, socialising and living in the community, communicating with others. English language is important for every purpose because if we don't know English language how can we do everyday things, especially in the work place*

**Migrant, Cambodia, male,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2010**

*I needed to improve my English and look for a job that's why I focused on AMEP.*

**Refugee, Iraq, male,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2010**

*“English, English – without it you are nothing here. I speak 6 languages but I am nothing. We cannot communicate, not work, not even become a citizen. We need more help with this, more time and different sorts of classes. The AMES English for Work is great.”*

**AMES CRR Research 2008/09**

*“The next thing is work. We cannot make a life without work. We are nothing without work. We have no status. We give nothing to Australia.”*

**AMES CRR Research 2008/09**

*“We are nothing in our families. Our dreams go away because we sit all day just feeling sad. People don't respect us.”*

**AMES CRR Research 2008/09**

<sup>6</sup> *Unsung Heroes: An Evaluation of the AMES Community Guides Program.* Centre for Refugee Research UNSW, 2009

## ii. Including vocational training with English

AMEP clients who have had the opportunity to combine vocational training with English language learning, strongly recommend this model as a very relevant and effective way to improve their English. This supports the argument for including employment content noted above and gives clients a clear context for their learning and a more direct link to future vocational learning. A strong theme that emerged from AMES consultations with newly arrived refugees who have settled in four locations regional Victoria<sup>7</sup> was a desire for vocational training. When asked for suggestions for improving services that could assist employment readiness all requested English integrated with vocational training.

*We need vocational training which will give hope and opportunity for people.*

**Togolese male, refugee;  
Ballarat interview 2009**

*Vocational training and English language is needed to enable better opportunities for people to obtain employment (eg. Welding, nursing, hospitality) and they require bilingual support for this as well.*

**Ballarat individual interview 2009**

*The majority of settlers would like vocational training, they are ready to work and study English at the same time – suggestion is to have English training on the job. Incorporate vocational training and English class together.*

**Bendigo Consultation 2009**

*One participant suggested that it would be good to have morning sessions of studying English in AMEP, and then in the afternoon they can have a practical session – vocational training and language together.*

**Bendigo Consultation 2009**

*Of the participants interviewed, all are unemployed and are looking everywhere for work. They stated that they need practical vocational training (mainly in building, painting, carpentry, tiling, bricklaying and the mechanics industry) and require English language support*

**Mildura Consultation 2009**

*Everyone suggested two days of job training and then three days of English classes in a week in order to improve English and improve job search skills at the same time.*

**Swan Hill Consultation 2009**

*What settlement programs are working well? AMEP for English to help get a job – English language combined with work training.*

**Community Consultation Melbourne 2011**

<sup>7</sup> Regional settlement: An analysis of four settlement locations in Victoria, AMES 2011.

### iii. Opportunities for social connections

Many migrants and refugees arrive in Australia with limited social connections. Where they do have connections these are frequently within their own community. For example, about one in five of the 245 participants in AMES longitudinal study said that they didn't have any contact in Australia when they arrived. For those people who did have a contact in most cases it was a family member or friend. Other longer established communities can also be socially isolated from the wider Australian community and risk criticism for failing to integrate.

There are a number of ways in which this isolation can be addressed in programs that are provided as part of the government's suite of settlement services. These include linking learners in the AMEP with mainstream programs. The use of volunteers provides an excellent link - providing social connection to a person or family who is well established or who was born in Australia. This provides that essential opportunity for people to get to know each other as individuals and form the basis of positive perceptions on the part of both new arrivals and those who are well established.

Section 2 of this response - *Settlement and Participation* - provides some program ideas that respond to these expressed preferences of newly arrived refugees and migrants and some proposals for additional services.

Budget constraints will always mean that there is a greater demand by some participants in settlement programs than capacity to provide. Clients who commence the AMEP with no or low levels of English frequently tell us that 510 hours is not long enough to prepare them to find work or to undertake vocational training as a necessary step to employment. Feedback in the recent AMES longitudinal study is representative of almost all consultations undertaken by AMES. While this need for more hours of English language tuition is particularly acute for people who arrive with no English and low levels of formal education, it is also expressed by those who come with previous formal education and possibly some English before arrival. For this later group the frustration of not being able to achieve a level of English to re-enter their previous overseas work is often a strong concern.

This points to the need for additional language programs (preferably combined with vocational training) after the AMEP and the need for participants in the AMEP to focus on the most useful ways to use their hours - given that these will always be less than they may desire. While programs including the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Language Literacy and Numeracy Program provide some opportunities for those who are registered job seekers, the opportunities for those who are not currently seeking work are very limited.

*I do not have enough English for the job [for which] I am qualified and skilled.*

**Migrant, Vietnam, male,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

*It's not necessary to do now (getting qualifications assessed) because my English is not good. [I can't] use my overseas qualification to find a matching job.*

**Migrant, China, male,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

*AMEP (510 hours) is not enough especially for people who have already finished within first 2 years. It would be great to have more training after first period.*

**Migrant, China, female,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

*I think AMES programs are good but they are certainly not enough for me to improve my listening and speaking skills required for a job. I actually need more language classes.*

**Migrant, Vietnam, female,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

## 2. The right support to gain work in Australia

The importance of work for social inclusion is emphasised equally by policy makers in documents such as the *Social Inclusion Principles for Australia* and by newly arrived migrants and refugees themselves. The challenge is to ensure that the goals of employment are achieved as early as possible in settlement.

Gaining employment is a major milestone in successful settlement. Contributions to cohesive communities and a cohesive society flow directly from this. However, migrants and refugees still remain noticeably under-represented in the workforce despite their motivation and willingness to be productive and economically independent.

Commentary above on the AMEP addresses the approaches that AMES considers need to be adopted in order for the AMEP and other language programs to make the most effective contribution to preparation for employment. However the AMEP and subsequent language programs can provide only part of the support needed for those who have significant skills and knowledge gaps to address before they will be employable in Australia. There are three areas that seem essential in providing this support.

- i. Access to Vocational Training
- ii. Exposure to Australian workplaces
- iii. Specialist job services for refugees and migrants

### i. Access to Vocational Training

Refugees and migrants who arrive in Australia with no or very low levels of English complete their entitlement to government funded AMEP language programs that form part of the government's suite of settlement services before they have sufficient proficiency in English to undertake mainstream vocational training - where learners need to be fluent in English, and preferably have good literacy skills.

Seventy three percent of refugees and 32% of the migrants involved in the recent AMES longitudinal study enrolled in the AMEP with very low English proficiency. Most completed their AMEP entitlement and exited the program still without basic social English proficiency. Feedback from clients in this study and from AMES consultations with client communities also identifies this gap between what the AMEP can realistically deliver and the English language skills needed for further training and employment.

*The hours are not enough to learn the language. I need to study at least one year more to go to do some training.*

**Refugee, Iraq, female,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

*510 hours are not enough to improve language, mainly for those who are illiterate in their own language.*

**Community Consultation 2009,  
Karen in Bendigo**

*510 hours of English classes are not enough, they need more to improve their English language.*

**Community Consultation 2009,  
Afghans in Swan Hill**

A consultation with 12 former AMES students who have moved onto TAFE and/or work identified three significant areas that confirm the issues related to successfully accessing vocational training.

In relation to their level of English they said:

*We need more English and support with English. The VET courses were too difficult because students did not have the required level of English exiting from the AMEP at CSWE III and did not get the required support at TAFE even in Access programs which advertise ESL plus VET.*

*“We need good reading and writing skills and [to] be good at speaking for oral presentations and group assessment tasks. VET courses use lots of slang for that industry or area of study. Teachers didn’t explain words – my teacher told me “this is not an English class.”*

**Youth Consultation Noble Park 2011**

In relation to providing English as a support to their vocational training they requested the following.

*Students asked for specific VET courses (like TAFE) after level 3, with English built in. “Give students courses with many subjects, not just English-general education, maths, science, computer, study skills, interview skills, “language about my area of study.”*

*[We] want to be allowed to incorporate modules of other foundation skills-e.g. IT and Voc Prep into 510 hours.*

**Youth Consultation Noble Park 2011**

In relation to work experience and work they had the following to share.

*Students reported doing their English course and pre apprenticeship course and even getting their white card (general OHS construction induction course) to work on site but being unable to continue onto an apprenticeship because they had no employer and no help at TAFE to link with a potential employer. Consequently they had to pick up casual low skilled work (at best). In the focus group there were young people actively seeking apprenticeships as an electrician and in building and construction and engineering fields.*

*“At TAFE there was no help to get a job so I could do the apprenticeship.”*

**Youth Consultation Noble Park 2011**

Undertaking vocational training in Australia is perceived by many as a necessary step to gaining employment. AMES longitudinal study found that more than 80% of participants intended to do some vocational training in Australia as a pathway to their chosen area of work. There is, therefore, a need for specialist training programs that integrate vocational training with English language, tailored for clients who exit the AMEP with insufficient English to access mainstream programs. These programs should provide accredited vocational training with sufficient English language support to achieve the vocational outcomes. This type of training should be available for people exiting the AMEP who have not found employment and for other migrants and refugees who may have been in Australia for longer periods but are not able to successfully complete vocational training as a result of low English language skills.

## ii. Exposure to Australian workplaces

A challenge for migrants and refugees trying to gain their first employment in Australia is their lack of Australian work experience. Local work experience is important in a number of ways. First it provides newly arrived job seekers with experience to strengthen their job applications as many employers have a strong preference for workers who have Australian experience. Second, it provides these job seekers with a realistic understanding of Australian workplaces and the requirements of particular jobs - both of which may be very different from employment experiences in their home countries. Third, it gives employers an opportunity to assess the capabilities of job seekers through direct observation and often make more positive assessments of capabilities than would be the case through a screening process of CVs and interviews.

Where newly arrived job seekers cannot gain direct entry to the work force work experience can be one effective way to bridge this gap. For job seekers who come with high levels of English and professional work histories overseas having the opportunity to do work experience in a workplace that matches their skills can provide an entry to work that would not otherwise be possible.

The importance of work experience is underlined by the following observations by newly arrived refugees and migrants.

*It's hard to get a job as every employer needs Australian workplace experience. I think new people should get a chance to enter, even as work experience.*

**Migrant, India, female,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

*It doesn't matter what qualification you have in Australia, everyone wants Australian workplace experience.*

**Migrant, Sri Lanka, female,  
Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

*Every employer is after Australian workplace experience. I have applied for more than 30 jobs so far and they are all after Australian experience. It's very hard to find a job in Australia.*

**Refugee, Iraq, male,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

*Local experience is critical to gaining employment in Australia. Even international experience is not valued in the workplace.*

**Refugee, Iraq, male,  
AMES Longitudinal Study 2008–2009**

The provision of the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training Programs in the new AMEP contract beginning in 2011 has acknowledged there is a need for ongoing English language tuition with a vocational focus and a work placement component. These programs will be based on pilots in 2008 to 2011 within the AMEP that combined English language, vocational training and work experience. They have all of the elements that AMES considers can provide the most relevant learning experiences for newly arrived migrants and refugees who are learning English. Clients would benefit significantly from the model being applied more widely in the AMEP.

Members of a number of migrant and refugee communities are employed in various capacities by AMES. At a consultation to gather input for this response AMES ask some of these staff what had helped and would help new arrivals to gain employment. Key ideas from the group include:

- Link training and education to employers (need to bring employers on board)
- Bridging courses with work placement (and/or traineeships)
- Longer work placement - up to 3 months
  - For professional and para-professional migrants (not entry-level skills areas such as basic hospitality, cleaning, etc) allows migrants to demonstrate skills and to develop an understanding of Australian workplace culture and systems
  - Trainees on work placement keep access to Centrelink benefits
- Incentives (perhaps tax breaks) for employers to provide work placement (and mentoring) but:
  - need to make sure these are not use to exploit (i) migrants/refugees or (ii) government funding
  - workplace training needs to link to qualification and/or a statement of local work experience
  - Companies/employers need to apply to sign up for the Work Placement scheme and be vetted and approved before being able to access incentives.

### iii. Specialist job services for refugees and migrants

While the aim of services is to equip newly arrived refugees and migrants to access mainstream services as soon as possible, there are a number of reasons for having specialist services for job seekers. These services can provide staff with the cultural and language backgrounds of clients and established links with employers who have a history of employing CALD staff. The services can often assist job seekers into employment more quickly particularly where job seekers have low levels of English. These job seekers benefit from some information about employment being provided in first language by staff who share knowledge of previous employment experiences in their home countries and understand the differences in finding and retaining work in Australia.

CALD job seekers from different backgrounds will need different types and levels of support to gain employment. Many refugee and humanitarian entrants will need more intensive support than most family and skilled migrants. From AMES experience and feedback from clients the types of support that can be critical in providing effective support for different groups of CALD job seekers are:

- Early intervention
- Concurrent job search and English language tuition
- Practical job search assistance
- Appropriate level of assistance for refugees and humanitarian entrants

**Early intervention:** Government policy argues that workforce participation is a foundation for social inclusion, creating opportunities for financial independence and personal fulfilment. CALD communities in general strongly support this view and most have finding a job as their priority. In their view, the sooner they start to have some employment - even if it is only part time or casual - the higher the chances of successful settlement and progressive entry into more sustainable employment. To achieve this it is important that both humanitarian and migrant entrants are provided with JSA support as early as possible in their settlement process.

Migrants in the Family and Skilled Migrants Streams are not eligible for JSA services for 104 weeks after arrival. Many of these job seekers have skills and experiences that could help meet labour and skill shortages but do not have networks or knowledge of the Australian job market to find work that uses their skills.

It is AMES experience, and a view expressed by the communities themselves, that the longer these job seekers remain unemployed or in a job that does not use their skills the less likely it is that they will find employment in their original or related occupations.

The objective of proposing interventions for these job seekers is that of ensuring that they never become recipients of welfare, are using their skills and participating in the workforce well before they are eligible for income support.

Early intervention for Family and Skilled Migrant Entrants should provide access to services (not income support) within the 2 year waiting period. Targeted support that provides interventions to bridge these skilled migrants into employment includes shorter interventions (rather than long term re-training) to maximise skills which will assist these CALD job seekers into work that uses their overseas skills and experience. Effective interventions include: vocational counselling, pathway planning, mentoring and short courses.

**English language tuition:** In addition, the newly arrived communities and AMES recognise that early intervention needs to be flexible so that clients can balance job search assistance with the equally important imperative to learn English early during settlement. Without English language new arrivals capacity to both participate in Australian society and have sustainable employment in the long term is severely diminished.

*More speaking practice, language is preventing us from jobs. Some job seekers need to be referred back to English classes. Need more information on entitlement to English classes, post-LLNP*

Community Consultation Melbourne 2011

**Practical job search assistance:** In recent consultations, new and recent arrivals have commented that services provided by Job Services Australia are “too formal”. The types of assistance available for Stream 1 job seekers - assistance to prepare a résumé; explanation of and access to job search facilities; providing a list of appropriate job vacancies and advice about the best ways to look for and find work - is not what these clients need to equip them to find a job in Australia. Feedback from clients, supported by AMES experience of providing education, training and employment programs for refugees and migrants, is that they need more practical concrete assistance to gain work. This includes exposure to working in Australia under (for many) supported conditions - eg workplace orientation and/or on-the-job training with first language support.

*Job network – job-seeking too formal, not practical – a formal process but not concrete help. Need exposure to native speakers. Difficult to manage in the workplace [language barriers].*

Community Consultation Melbourne 2011

**Appropriate level of assistance for refugees and humanitarian entrants:** The limited support available for job seekers who are classified as Stream 1 or Stream 1 Limited is of concern to both the communities and to AMES. The rationale for low levels of support to Stream 1 job seekers is premised on the job seekers having the resources, in terms of personal capital and labour market skills and experience, to essentially find their own employment. Newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants and some other migrant entrants do not have these resources, networks, skills or experience.

If JSA is to provide equal access to job seeking services and support for newly arrived migrants and refugees and so *increase social, civil and economic participation*, consideration needs to be given to how we can best help everyone get the skills and support they need so they can work and connect with community, even during hard times. AMES would argue that placing any recently arrived refugees in Stream 1 is not the best way to achieve this.

### 3. A greater voice, combined with greater responsibility

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AMES experience with newly arrived communities is that they are keen to have input into the development of services. However, the issues of consultation can be complex given the diverse client groups, the previous experiences of some groups of repressive government and the cultural differences in providing critical feedback. Gaining feedback from a wide cross section within communities, rather than appointed spokespeople, can also be challenging.

For AMES, consultation means listening to our clients and client communities using structured processes with a view to improving, changing or achieving a greater depth of understanding of our work with them. It also means understanding the strengths of communities and identifying with them the contributions that they can make to address the issues they raise. It is therefore an endeavour of shared responsibility.

Much of the consultation AMES currently does is integrated into our everyday practice. AMES employs a number of staff from client communities and uses this as one way of providing continuous input from people who have direct and regular contact with those communities and can seek honest feedback.

Other, more formalised consultation processes are also undertaken. These require a clear understanding on the part of all parties about both the objectives of the consultation and, importantly, the possible outcomes of the consultation.

Some of the principles AMES uses in addressing these complexities apply more broadly in consulting with diverse communities. First, managing the diversity of languages is important and consultations need to take into account the number of language groups that can realistically be included in any one consultation. Second, consultation activities must take into account that newly arrived refugees and migrants will have a range of experiences relating to talking to an institution, sharing one's views publicly, giving critical feedback and similar issues. They also need to take into account differing education levels and conceptual understanding of consultation. Third, achieving a wide representation from those who are formal or informal spokespeople as well as the views of clients whose points of view may not be commonly heard is important. Fourth, it is not unusual in a consultation activity for participants to raise issues other than those which the consulting organisation sets out to learn about. It is important to approach consultations as a form of co-inquiry, a process in which both those consulting and the communities being consulted are mutually engaged in increasing our understanding of one another and finding agreement about appropriate actions to take.

## Settlement and participation

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### *Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society*

There were several themes in feedback in the consultations AMES undertook with communities. Central to each of these was establishing ways of assisting newly arrived refugees and migrants to participate and a strong theme within this was finding work in Australia. The ideas are described under four areas.

1. Improved links between training and employers
2. Improving services through using the skills of newly arrived members to create new work opportunities
3. Supporting the transition from welfare dependence to work
4. Volunteering programs

### 1. Improved links between training and employers

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The reciprocal requirement of successful multiculturalism is nowhere more important than in the nexus between training and employers. Participants in all consultation groups frequently talked about the importance of having training programs that have links with employers so that training can have some direct connection to possible employment. Where training programs are directly linked with employers in programs run by AMES these are highly regarded.

AMES experience is that new and recent arrivals are highly motivated to start work early in their settlement. Providing assistance to move into employment at this time can avoid the slide into unemployment that may become protracted.

Assistance is needed because one of the most significant challenges facing new arrivals is securing a first job in Australia in order to learn about Australian workplace culture and develop local work experience. The “Catch 22” situation in which the job seeker needs experience to get the job, but can’t get the job to get that experience, is an ongoing reality for many migrants and refugees.

Significantly expanding work experience programs is one of the most useful ways of achieving these links. In the words of one consultation group participant:

*Wherever you have a course that includes work experience you have good chances.*

AMES Staff Consultation 2011

Work experience can take a number of forms - partly depending on the employment background of the participants. Three models that lend themselves to wider application are briefly described below.

1. AMEP Programs that include work experience
2. Intermediate Labour Market Programs
3. Apprenticeships

### 1. AMEP Programs that include work experience

There is potential to include work experience in a greater number of English language and vocational training programs. Programs commenced in 2009 as part of the Adult Migrant English Program provide one very successful model. AMEP participants who are at the end of their AMEP programs can enrol in an additional course. In AMES and our Consortium partner programs, these courses combine English language learning with accredited vocational training modules and a two week work placement. These courses are usually targeted to particular industry sectors, providing newly arrived refugees and migrants with an entry to vocational training. A number of participants go on to complete vocational training in the same field or in some cases where AMEP programs provide taster programs in a number of trades, are able to make a more informed choice about what area they would like to train and find employment in.

The feedback from participants in these programs underlines the value that they place on these added components in language programs for newly arrived refugee and migrants. Two students who undertook work experience in Aged Care and subsequently completed Certificates in this field confirm the value of this exposure in work experience.

*We have little English but last year we went to see the facilities and to work with the people and so we are not scared. We know we can do it.*

**AMES Aged Care student**

*The Term 4 course was the main difference for me. It improved a lot my writing, my listening. I feel more confident when talking to the residents. This course was good for me to start, because I want to be part of the Australian system. I want to get a job.*

**AMES Aged Care student**

In the Community Consultation conducted in March this year representatives of the recently arrived communities strongly supported the idea of work experience in the AMEP.

*The 510 hours needs to be managed to include job search and other settlement information, work experience and more options than CSWE I, II, III.*

**Community Consultation March 2011**

## 2. Intermediate Labour Market Programs

AMES Intermediate Labour Market program targets migrants and refugees who have skills, experience and/or employment histories and who need a first workplace opportunity in Australia. The program provides short term work placements and longer term traineeship positions in various departments within the organisation. As a large organisation AMES is able to offer short term opportunities for people with a diverse range of skills in areas such as finance, accommodation and facilities, IT, office administration, customer service, as well as traineeships in education and employment services. Many large workplaces could assist by providing similar programs.

Participants in the ILM benefit from the opportunity to observe and learn about Australian workplace culture and language, receive on the job training and feedback on performance. They gain local work experience and local referees so essential to gaining employment in Australia. They also have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in an Australian workplace.

The Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) has also proposed incentives for business who hire and train 'untested' employees in the form of, for example, payroll tax breaks for small businesses<sup>8</sup>. Similar incentives for businesses, large employers and government departments to establish ILM programs or work experience programs would support new arrivals to move into employment as soon as possible.

## 3. Apprenticeships

In recent consultations with client communities AMES has identified significant numbers of recently arrived migrants and refugees (largely male) who are strongly motivated to gain apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are attractive training and employment options for many in newly arrived communities as the focus on hands-on learning reflects the way they have previously acquired skills.

The challenge is to prepare CALD clients with low levels of English language with both (i) language skills for communication in the workplace and (ii) vocational language for study in their chosen field.

AMES has identified that a framework that provides a scaffolded pathway into mainstream training / apprenticeships and integrates Foundation Skills (ESL & LLN) and Vocational Skills would provide improved access for newly arrived refugees and migrants - and for other equity groups, for example those with low literacy and numeracy skills and/or limited formal learning experience.

As a result AMES is currently piloting pre-apprenticeship courses in partnership with TAFE. These courses provide language, literacy and numeracy support for clients with low levels of English language skills in a vocational context as well as a hands-on introduction to the skills of a trade (eg bricklaying) with the aim of increasing the chances that some of these clients will go on to and succeed in full apprenticeships.

### Pathways and Pre-apprenticeships

In a recent response to Skills Australia's Discussion Paper *Creating a future direction for Australian vocational education and training*<sup>9</sup> AMES made the following recommendations regarding apprenticeships.

To bridge the gap in knowledge and English communication skills that currently precludes direct entry to an apprenticeship in its current form for most newly arrived refugees and migrants AMES recommends that in the national skills agenda:

- the *Pre-employment stream* includes Foundation Skills training to adequately prepare clients with English language for the *Employment and training contract*
- language skill development is integrated with vocational preparation using a "built in" model and includes communication skills in the context of vocational and technical skills and industry specific language
- some of the more conceptual and technical skill development be through limited use of bilingual training

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Kayler-Thompson, CEO VECCI; The Age, 26 October, 2010

<sup>9</sup> AMES response to Skills Australia: Creating a future direction for Australian vocational education and training, Nov 2010

### Support for Apprentices and Employers

AMES also supports the following Recommendation 10 of the *Apprenticeships for the 21st Century Expert Panel Paper*<sup>10</sup>.

Further to this we would argue that CALD should be added as an additional category of potential apprentices who face specific challenges and should be provided with additional support. While support for those “having poor language, literacy and numeracy skills” would benefit many from the CALD communities, others, particularly the newly arrived, also need support in understanding some of the underlying concepts of an occupation and Australian systems in general.

10. Provide additional support for apprentices and trainees who face specific challenges, such as:
- Indigenous Australians
  - disability
  - located in regional or remote Australia
  - having poor language, literacy and numeracy skills

Australian Government support will be provided to these apprentices, trainees and their employers to assist in overcoming barriers to participation and completion of their apprenticeship or traineeship. Support will be through the provision of tailored structured support services and the continuation of some current Australian Government employer incentives.

Australian Government employer initiatives for employers taking on CALD apprentices would greatly increase the likelihood of apprenticeship opportunities for newly arrived refugees and migrants.

## 2. Improving services through using the skills of newly arrived people to create new work opportunities

Employing staff from newly arrived communities is a very effective way of improving the delivery of services and flow of information to these communities. AMES has piloted this approach and now applies this strategy to the delivery of various settlement services through the recruitment and training of Community Guides, Employment Consultants and Counsellors. These staff members have language and cultural skills and first-hand knowledge of the refugee or migrant experience which contributes directly to culturally appropriate and comprehensible service delivery to new arrivals.

Positions range from entry level to more skilled roles. Community Guides work directly with newly arrived refugees, meeting families and assisting with their initial orientation to housing, mainstream services and the local community. These services are provided in first language. Employment Consultants who speak the main client languages of jobseekers work in AMES Job Services Australia (JSA) service specifically to work with CALD jobseekers. Counsellors have a different skill set and work with AMEP clients on their training pathways and settlement issues. Feedback from one AMES Employment Manager having one of AMES Intermediate Labour Market participants at their site confirms the contribution of newly arrived people to a workplace.

*“She is well connected and respected in her community and has developed a good understanding of Australian workplace culture. Her impact on her community has been nothing short of phenomenal. She has been able to give out advice to her community when needed as well as positively contribute to site KPIs”.*<sup>11</sup>

**AMES Employment Unit Manager, Werribee**

<sup>10</sup> Apprenticeships for the 21st Century Expert Panel Paper - developed by the Apprenticeships for the 21st Century Expert Panel, Jan 2011

<sup>11</sup> Heading in the Right Direction: Migrants and Refugees in the AMES Intermediate Labour Market Program, AMES 2009

The benefits are two-fold. Members of newly arrived communities are employed in positions which utilise their skills, training and experience; and the level of engagement and outcomes for clients improve as a result of service delivery in first language by someone with whom the client can readily relate.

AMES is aware of other organisations that have taken systemic approaches to utilising the skills of new arrivals to improve service delivery to on arrival communities, and enhance two way communication processes. Examples are Victoria Police with a deliberate recruitment strategy targeting members of migrant communities and Victoria Department of Justice employment of Community Educators in the Justice for Refugees Program.

Once people are in jobs AMES experience shows that there is a positive flow on effect into the communities in terms of building knowledge and provision of role models engaged in meaningful employment. This view of positive roles models was strongly endorsed in feedback from consultation with newly arrived communities.

There are further opportunities to build on this model especially in Government services and human services sectors such as Health.

### 3. Supporting the transition from welfare dependence to work

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The following initiatives proposed in this response are made in the context of:

- the high priority CALD job seekers place on getting work as soon as possible and based on government and AMES analyses that employment is a critical factor in successful settlement and social inclusion
- the high priority established members of CALD communities place on working with new arrivals in their communities to avert long term dependence on welfare
- the transitional nature of employment pathways for newly arrived settlers whose entry to employment in Australia is often through casual and part-time work and work in the informal economy or work experience programs

Australia's welfare system is designed to ensure that those in need are supported and to provide protection against poverty. It provides assistance (payments and services) for the unemployed, while acknowledging that increased participation in work, from all those capable of work, increases individual wellbeing.

While welfare support is integral to inclusion in a wealthy country such as Australia, it is well documented that the social impact of welfare dependency is high. Finding the balance between supporting those in need and providing them with incentives to take on employment is not an easy matter. Loss of benefits can act as a strong disincentive to taking up employment, particularly where the income from a job is only marginally better than social security and associated concessions or, very importantly, where the work is casual and therefore provides less security than staying on benefits.

A frequently repeated concern raised during AMES consultations with CALD communities is that for newly arrived migrants the risk of losing benefits can be a disincentive to taking up casual and/or low paying work.

This can be particularly so for new arrivals from refugee backgrounds who often have significant levels of insecurity with respect to financial resources required to re-establish their lives, repay debts to community and/or family members who have supported their travel and settlement and to support family members who may still be in refugee camps or other unsafe situations.

Therefore, one challenge for government is to find ways to improve the incentive to join and stay in the workforce, while still providing a welfare system that adequately supports those who may never be able to participate, partially or fully, in the workforce.

AMES, and the CALD individuals and communities consulted, believe that some incentives for individuals and families on benefits to take low paying jobs are:

- Retention of Health Care Cards while on low income or in short term casual employment
- An income 'safety net' that ensures low income earners retain a proportion of benefits to offset any loss of income
- Targeted wage rate subsidies, in which the government subsidises the wage rates of low wage earners, making continued work more attractive than benefits
- Breaking the link between benefits for parents and children when parents take on low paid work (i.e. children retain benefits)

AMES would like to note that these arguments apply to all job seekers - not only migrants and refugees.

## **Incentives for individuals and families on benefits to take low paying jobs**

### Health Care Cards

AMES experience in working with refugees and humanitarian entrants in the provision of services under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy is that refugee and humanitarian entrants frequently have a range of chronic health issues that need to be addressed over an extended period.

Resolution of these health issues is critical if these new settlers are to establish reasonable lives and are able to participate in educational, social and other community activities. Attention to health issues is also critical in ensuring that people have the physical capacity to undertake sustained employment.

Loss of Health Care Card benefits can result in some new arrivals not having the financial resources to continue to address their chronic health issues or alternatively placing immense financial pressure on families where these issues are urgent.

### Income 'safety net'

Newly arrived refugees and migrants frequently gain entry to employment through casual and unpredictable work - particularly those with no Australian work experience. This reliance on casual work is likely to increase where employers are seeking to manage labour costs.

Where income from paid work (taking into account loss of concessions) is less than benefit, an income security safety net would provide incentive for job seekers to take every opportunity to gain paid work.

### Targeted wage rate subsidies

Targeted wage subsidies offer incentives to both newly arrived job seekers and employers to take up/offer employment. Employers are more likely to give an unqualified, inexperienced CALD job seeker an opportunity if a partial wage subsidy is involved as, from the employer's perspective, an inexperienced worker will need support, training and may, initially, cause a decrease in production.

CALD job seekers are encouraged to take on lower paid jobs if their levels of income are not adversely affected - i.e. if the wage is equal to or greater than welfare benefits.

## 4. Volunteering programs

Perceptions can be significantly changed by having direct contact with people who one would otherwise only have knowledge of through media and other indirect means. Volunteering is one way to create these contacts. AMES works with over 1,400 volunteers who have this direct experience of working with newly arrived refugees and migrants through volunteering in the AMEP and in HSS. A number of these volunteers have not previously had any meaningful contact with people who are newly arrived in Australia. Almost all volunteers find the experience rewarding and a learning experience for themselves as well as contributing to helping somebody to settle and assisting them with English.

Volunteering can take many forms and AMES, along with many other organisations, has explored ways to expand this volunteering role. AMES has links with a number of large companies who provide opportunities for their staff to work as mentors. These include engineering and mining companies, banks and law firms. This is extremely valuable for new arrivals who are wanting every opportunity possible to understand Australian workplaces and get to know professionals in their field in Australia. It is also valuable for the professionals in these companies who may not have had opportunities to understand the skills these new arrivals bring and the challenges that professionals from overseas face in finding work in Australia.

The importance of volunteers in providing social connections for newly arrived people who have few contacts in Australia was identified in the recent longitudinal study undertaken by AMES. In this study 14% of migrants and 22% of refugees reported that they did not know anyone when they arrived in Australia. Social support has an important role to advance the successful settlement of migrants and refugees and the AMEP was noted by many participants as an opportunity to make new friends and develop new contacts.

One way in which the AMEP could be further enhanced to increase opportunities for social connection is by increasing the number of clients who are eligible to have a volunteer. Current restrictions on the AMEP Home Tutor Program mean that funding is not available to cover the cost of those using this program if students are also in classes of more than 6 hours a week. Those clients who have limited social support, but are attending classes for more than 6 hours per week would benefit from the important link in to communities and networks that these volunteers very frequently provide in their role.

### *Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole*

A particularly challenging area in which to promote long term settlement is regional Australia. There have been a number of government initiatives to attract migrants to settle in regional Australia. These have had varying degrees of success. In some cases people have settled, only to return to metropolitan centres. There are several studies looking at various aspects of regional settlement. As one of these studies, AMES recently undertook consultations with four regional settlement locations in Victoria to identify factors with respect to locations that can support sustainable regional settlement.

The new settlers in the four locations consulted in Ballarat, Bendigo, Mildura, and Swan Hill were building on their strengths and qualities they acquired during their long journey to Australia - such as resilience, adaptability and resourcefulness. The majority were enjoying living in their new locations - *“it is a nice place with many friendly people. It is safe for children and there is no violence”*. They wished to stay and were very keen to sponsor their families to join them. English language acquisition was a prime challenge for many adult settlers and bilingual services were often requested to support their ongoing settlement.

There were three areas arising out of the issues and solutions identified by participants in these consultations. These provide indications of areas that require support and incentives to achieve the foundation for long term settlement in regional areas.

1. Leadership
2. Employment
3. Critical mass

## 1. Leadership

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There are two dimensions to leadership that contribute to successful settlement: leadership within the settling community and leadership in the host community.

The settling communities with active and strong ethnic associations appear to support their members both in bonding terms (mutual support/interests) and bridging (linking with local community activities). These associations have members taking a lead role in promoting social inclusion and advocating their needs to local authorities and providers, as well as supporting their own culture and identity.

AMES recommends an appropriate level of funding and resources are provided in the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS) to new communities for this leadership to emerge. Providers need to be mindful on how best to facilitate inclusive leadership; for instance, ensuring attention is paid to gender and religious inclusiveness. Another may be the simple action of providing affordable meeting places to initiate the formation of groups, along with timely advice and information on how new groups tap into existing community resources and opportunities.

Inclusive leadership by providers and local governments in the locations selected for settlement is equally important. Host community leaders are crucial for ensuring their cities' welcoming policies are implemented. They also act as role models to the rest of the locality on how to support new arrivals to gain a footing in the local economy and make contributions in accordance with their capacities.

AMES recommends settlement service providers offer leadership development and support for both settling and host communities. The leadership provided by individuals in settler communities and host communities should also be rewarded by formal community recognition.

## 2. Employment

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Finding gainful employment is a cornerstone of successful settlement in any place. AMES and other settlement services are acutely aware of this; however, in the context of regional settlement it is worth re-emphasising its importance. The settlers in the consultations all recognised having a job as critical, not just for economic and social benefits, but also for self-worth and gaining a sense of belonging in their new home.

The example of the members of the Karen community employed by Hazeldenes Chicken Farm in Bendigo is instructive. Not only were they benefiting from participating in a local workplace they are likely to be supported moving from unskilled to semi-skilled roles as their English proficiency improves. With new arrivals quickly engaged a local industry there is a clear indication that they are contributors to the local economy and not a drain on services or limited resources. This in turn promotes a positive perspective of new arrivals within the local community and may lead to greater engagement with new settlers.

AMES recommends that the employment strategy for the Karen settlers in Bendigo be used as an exemplar for HSS providers to engage with employers in all settlement locations.

### 3. Critical mass

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In all locations the overall numbers of new settlers is still relatively small, particularly when divided into ethnic origins. Some of the new settlers in the study come from rural backgrounds, have low literacy levels in their own language, and have suffered tremendous hardships prior to arriving in Australia. Hence, their needs are complex and easy access to HSS and other services is crucial to facilitate their settlement.

The universal request by participants for more bilingual services to promote communication and understanding across all aspects of settlement suggests that the greater the number of settlers with common language/s in one location the greater the likelihood that services can adjust to accommodate a new need. While overall diversity is a goal, small numbers of diverse groups settling in regional centres may result in greater difficulty for services to adjust to meet all needs. Larger numbers also enable people to form community associations, which are of a size that can be sustainable and effective for meeting their needs.

AMES acknowledges the importance of balancing need and opportunity in the context of regional settlement; however, recommends that where possible developing a critical mass for settling communities is a goal. This approach is based on accommodating the limited capacities of local services to adapt to new and significant service demands and also on benefiting the settlers by offering greater access to services that will facilitate their settlement.

Developing leadership capacity in settling communities and creating employment opportunities are not only issues for regional settlement. They apply equally to settlement in metropolitan areas.

## National productive capacity

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### *The role migration has played and contributes to building Australia's long term productive capacity*

Much has previously been documented about the positive contribution of past waves of migrants and refugees to building Australia's long term productive capacity. AMES strongly concurs with these views, noting that this history indicates that while new intakes of refugees and migrants may require initial investment to support them, they will in the medium to long term add to Australia's productive capacity.

The role of post war migrants and refugees provide outstanding examples of individuals who are now eminent Australians and of communities who have contributed enormously to Australia's economy. The Vietnamese are a more recent example that initially had relatively high levels of unemployment, required support to settle but are now extremely well established with the capacity to support their own community, create a significant amount of employment and be represented in a cross section of all Australian workplaces.

### *The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants*

Analysis of the skill base of refugees and migrants with whom AMES works indicates that there is a significant bank of skills that could be more effectively accessed and utilised to contribute to Australia's productive capacity, to address workforce needs and to fill gaps in skill shortage areas.

Getting new arrivals in direct touch with employers and workplaces is critical to utilising the refugee and migrant skills base within the Australian economy.

Four areas are briefly discussed

1. Using skills of overseas qualified migrants
2. Opportunities in resources sector
3. Tradespeople working under supervision
4. Refugees and migrants with skills and competence but no form of recognised credentials

## 1. Using skills of overseas qualified migrants

Refugees and migrants with recognised qualifications who have not been able to find work in their field in Australia are a key source of skills for Australian industry. AMES experience is that these new arrivals are highly motivated to work and quick to benefit from short, sharp “orientation to the Australian workplace” programs in order to start work.

AMES has contact with this group of settlers through its Skilled Professionals Program which works with both refugees and migrants after they have had qualifications recognised in Australia. These include engineers from a range of specialisations, IT professionals, finance and accounting professionals. Many participants often bring many years of relevant experience overseas.

The program includes a 3-week intensive workshop program in Strategies for Gaining Work, and a 4-6 week work experience placement. Participants are matched with a mentor who shares the professional background of the new arrival. Mentors assist in linking participants to industry and employer networks and provide valuable insight, support and feedback in understanding specific professional workplaces in Australia.

The program which has approximately 150 participants annually has achieved high levels of placement into professional employment over the past 4 years. The structured intervention results in participants, who have searched unsuccessfully for work, often being offered work by their work placement employer. It demonstrates the importance of creating this brokering role.

As an example Table 1 provides information about the engineering specialisations of participants in AMES Skilled Professionals Program over the past 3 years. Participants include those on both skilled and refugee visas. Qualifications have been recognised by Engineers Australia.

*Table 1 - Engineering Specialisations in AMES Skilled Professionals Program 2008-2010*

2010	2009	2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Civil engineer: specialising in hydraulics and structural design</li> <li>▪ Mechanical engineer: automotive</li> <li>▪ Civil engineer: water supply</li> <li>▪ Chemical engineer</li> <li>▪ Production engineer: electronics Civil engineer: building and construction</li> <li>▪ Systems engineer: telecommunications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Structural engineer specialising in power plant structures</li> <li>▪ Civil engineer: commercial building and construction</li> <li>▪ Electronics and Instrumentation engineer</li> <li>▪ Instrumentation engineer</li> <li>▪ Electronics engineer: industrial electronics and control systems</li> <li>▪ Electrical engineer: Thermal power</li> <li>▪ Civil Engineer: Road construction</li> <li>▪ Plastics engineer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Civil engineer specialising in hydraulics and structural design</li> <li>▪ Mechanical engineer: vehicle manufacture</li> <li>▪ Industrial engineer: clothing manufacturing</li> <li>▪ Civil engineer: building and construction</li> <li>▪ Systems engineer: wireless telecommunications infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Mechanical engineer: steel fabrication</li> <li>▪ Mechanical engineer: Automotive</li> <li>▪ Electrical engineer</li> <li>▪ Computer hardware engineer: telecommunications</li> </ul>

Currently, this rich source of skills and experience frequently remains outside the usual recruitment and selection activities of many employers and industries. For example, a 2006 Skills Survey<sup>12</sup> conducted by the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) found that many employers with a skill shortage have not considered the possibility of recruiting a skilled migrant.

AMES experience is that employers are frequently impressed with the calibre of refugees and migrants placed on work experience but would not have considered employing these candidates had this advocacy not been undertaken through work placement programs.

## 2. Opportunities in resources sector

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AMES notes that many companies - notably in the Resources sector for example, make effective use of immigration as a source of skills and labour, specifically the use of the permanent skilled migration program and temporary visa arrangements such as the Recognised Graduate Visa (476) and the employer sponsored temporary business or 457 Visa categories.

AMES experience is that there are additional visa categories under the Refugee and Humanitarian program which bring significant professional, para-professional and vocational skills, high levels of motivation and labour for entry level or relatively low skilled occupations.

This represents a great opportunity for the large number and broad range of industries that comprise the resources sector looking to address workforce needs in existing and planned projects.

## 3. Tradespeople working under supervision

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An NCVER research paper<sup>13</sup> notes that there is only a loose match between the qualifications that people have and the jobs they do. Many people work in jobs for which they have no formal qualification and one third of people working as tradespersons and related workers have no post school qualification.

This is borne out in the educational profiles of workers in the construction and mining sectors. This data<sup>14</sup> shows that of those who work in mining around 27% hold a Certificate III or IV qualification and 36 % have no formal post school qualification. In the construction sector almost 40% have Certificate III or IV and 41% do not have a formal post school qualification.

Accordingly an option may be to provide on the job training and practice in Australian conditions that allows newly arrived refugees or migrants to practise their trade without full formal trade recognition under Trades Recognition Australia processes. A system that allows for capacity to work under the supervision of a registered tradesperson may be appropriate. This could be supported by on the job training where required to comply with Australian conditions and to meet enterprise specific requirements.

An example in the resources sector is the unaccredited training provided by companies such as Komatsu or Caterpillar who train site employees on particular equipment.

This approach would allow existing skills to be utilised, new skills, where required, to be acquired but would avoid the lengthy apprenticeship pathway to employment in the trade.

It is particularly appropriate for new settlers to Australia who bring a very broad range of skills and work experience, who are highly motivated to work and who greatly value training.

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<sup>12</sup> Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) Skills Survey 2006

<sup>13</sup> Forecasting future demands: What we can and cannot know NCVER July 2007

<sup>14</sup> Resourcing the Future National Resources Sector Employment Taskforce Discussion Paper March 2010 Figures 11 and 12.

## 4. Refugees and migrants with skills and competence but no form of recognised credential

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AMES notes with interest that the resources sector is a big user of non-accredited on the job training<sup>15</sup>. This hands-on learning is highly suited to refugees and migrants who have skills and competence developed while working overseas, are highly motivated and able to start work but who do not wish to undertake lengthy periods of formal accredited training in order to start work.

Similarly combinations of hands-on or on the job training together with specific modules from sector related training packages is well suited to this group and is a model AMES has successfully used in partnership with employers in other industries.

A very successful recent example is the training and subsequent employment of 12 new arrivals on 866 visas<sup>16</sup> in the building construction industry in the Sunraysia / Mildura area of regional Victoria. Essentially the training involved short hands-on training for a very specific task or job, in this case, welding and concreting. The objective is to get the men into a local workplace and to learn about how these jobs are done under local Australian conditions, particularly the critical focus on occupational health and safety in Australian workplaces.

AMES is currently trialling a similar approach with 15 recently arrived Karen refugees being trained in bricklaying. This “Introduction to Trades and Pre Apprenticeships” program is running in partnership with Victoria University TAFE division at the Werribee campus.

This is a model that could be used by Australian industries fairly quickly in a range of entry level jobs.

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<sup>15</sup>

Resourcing the Future National Resources Sector Employment Taskforce Discussion Paper March 2010.p 43

<sup>16</sup>

866 visas are protection visas granted on shore to people seeking protection of Australia as a refugee.