

# Perceptions of Australia – past, present and future: Literature Review and Survey Findings

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## AMES Vision

Full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Kathy Earp for implementing the survey, the first language research assistants, AMES teachers and the AMEP students who completed the survey.

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## Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to gain an understanding of the past, present and future issues new migrants have in Australia. This report is based on a survey that was administered to 506 students undertaking the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at AMES.

The survey results are supported by an extensive literature review that describes how migrants transition to a new life in their adopted country drawing upon their past experience. It demonstrates that most migrants are not passive bystanders but actively use their agency to forge a new life demonstrating a high level of ingenuity and resilience. Generally speaking, new migrants aspire to become full social, economic and cultural participants in Australia.

The survey was given to AMEP students located at three AMES sites, Box Hill, Dandenong and Footscray. The survey was administered in English and five community languages - Chinese, Dari, Vietnamese, Persian and Hakka Chin.

The survey was divided into 5 sections.

1. Perceptions of Australia now and before you migrated
2. Your future in Australia
3. Multiculturalism
4. Your background
5. Questions on sport and AFL football team affiliation

A summary of the survey findings are as follows:

### Who was surveyed

- 54% of respondents completed the survey in languages other than English
- Two-thirds of respondents were from low level English classes (CSWE1 and CSWE2)<sup>1</sup>.
- More than half the respondents were aged 24 to 44 years
- Two-thirds of respondents came to Australia under the Migrant Visa (including Family, Spouse, Skilled and Business).
- The top three countries where respondents came from were China, Afghanistan and Vietnam. This is a reflection of the student populations at the AMES Centres where the surveys were conducted.
- Just under half (45.2%) the sample had been in Australia for less than 12 months. A further 41.7% had been in Australia between 1 to 5 years.
- Highest level of education achieved - 48% of respondents had post-school qualifications, 30% had secondary school, and 18% primary school or no formal education.
- Eight out of ten respondents were not in paid employment

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<sup>1</sup> Certificate in Spoken and Written English. Everyone who enrolls in the AMEP is assessed on their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in English. This determines eligibility and placement into an appropriate class. These skills are assessed using the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR). The ISLPR ranks English proficiency on a scale between 0 and 5. Zero being no proficiency and five being 'native like proficiency'

## **Perceptions of Australia before and after arriving in Australia**

### ***Australia is safe and secure***

Almost 8 out of 10 respondents believe Australia is safe and secure both before and after arrival.

### ***Australian people are welcoming, warm and friendly***

Three quarters of respondent agreed that Australian people are welcoming, warm and friendly after arriving in Australia.

### ***Finding a good job in Australia that pays well is difficult***

Sixty per cent of respondents agreed with the statement “that finding a good job in Australia that pays well is difficult” after arriving in Australia.

### ***My standard of living will be better in Australia***

Two-thirds of respondents felt that their standard of living would be better in Australia.

### ***My family will have a better life***

Seventy per cent of respondents stated that my family will have a better life in Australia.

### ***Australia is a democratic country that allows freedom of speech***

Three quarters of respondents agreed that Australia is a democratic country before they arrived, this figure increased to 83.8% after they arrived in Australia.

### ***Australia has a good health care system***

Seventy three per cent of respondents agreed that Australia has a good health care system after their arrival in Australia.

### ***People treat each other equally and fairly***

Almost two thirds (65.2%) agreed with the statement that people living in Australia treat each other equally and fairly before they arrived. More people (69.4%) agreed with this statement after living in Australia.

### ***Decision to come to Australia***

Eight out of 10 respondents felt that their decision to come to Australia was the right one. Sixty three per cent said that they would encourage other people from their country to come to Australia.

### ***Feeling welcome in Australia***

Over half (56.9%) of respondents felt welcome in Australia, while 29.2% stated that they sometimes feel welcome.

### ***Level of happiness***

Six out of ten respondents felt happy since arriving in Australia. Almost one-third (31.4%) felt neither happy nor unhappy.

### ***Citizenship aspirations***

Almost 7 out of 10 (68.2%) respondents stated that they were *hoping to become an Australian citizen*, 16.2% said they might become an Australian citizen.

### ***Future aspirations***

- Just under half (49%) of respondent thought their life in Australia would be “much improved”, 31.4% said that it would be “a little improved” in the next three to four years.
- Three quarters of respondents felt that compared with their life, the lives of children living in Australia would be “much improved”, 14.2% felt it would be a “little improved”.

### ***Views on multiculturalism***

- Almost two-thirds of respondents felt that multiculturalism has been good for Australia. While one in three (30.6%) were unsure.

### ***Sport***

- The top 3 favourite sports identified by respondents were tennis, soccer and basketball.
- Just over a quarter (26.3%) of respondents followed teams in the AFL.
- The top three AFL teams were Melbourne, Collingwood and Hawthorn.

## Introduction and Overview

The aim of this report is to add to the composite knowledge about how new migrants transition to their new life in Australia. To understand the nuances of migrants' personal experience small qualitative studies (eg Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003) have provided the best insight into their experiences. While larger longitudinal studies have tended to focus on tracking and monitoring the settlement experiences of migrants. These include, Department of Immigration and Citizenship funded the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants that commenced in 1993 and ran until 2005. The Longitudinal Surveys of Immigrants to Australia collected data only for the first few years of settlement and do not follow migrant families across the life cycle, exploring changes to members' housing, work and family situations. The Building a New Life in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants commenced in 2012 and will run until 2017. This survey will be managed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The survey is interested in a range of experiences including employment, English proficiency, service usage, life before migration, housing, financial circumstances and citizenship.

Opinion polls are conducted from time-to-time about migrant issues and are reported in the media. These polls look at the community's views on migration and asylum seekers. Generally speaking, these surveys are conducted in English only. Although these surveys are weighted to be representative of the Australian population in terms of age and gender, they may not adequately represent the population in terms of diversity of views from a broad range of ethnic groups.

AMES Research and Policy Unit are uniquely placed to consult directly with migrants and refugees who come to Australia on a variety of visas and who use the range of programs offered by AMES. AMES has been following a sample of 243 Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) clients since 2008. The most recent wave of interviews was completed in 2012. The aim of this longitudinal study is to assess how the AMEP impacts upon the settlement of new migrants and refugees with low levels of English and to ascertain the types of early vocational and employment pathways for people participating in the AMEP (AMES, 2011).

The aim of this report is to provide a context in which to understand the way in which migrants to Australia understand the journey they have made to their new country. It details respondents' perceptions before and after migration and their future aspirations and attitudes to sport.

Where this report will diverge from other studies, is to provide a theoretical foundation upon which to understand how migrants are not necessarily passive bystanders but rather how they use their agency to actively forge a new life in their adopted country.

This report is based on the results of a survey administered to students undertaking the AMEP. The first part of this report provides an overview of the AMEP. It posits a theoretical framework in which to understand the experiences of migrants before they come to Australia and how they settle into life here. There is no doubt that a one-size fits all approach cannot adequately capture the breadth of experiences of new migrants. What this section aims to do is to detail some of the ways in which migrants' transition into their new life by identifying barriers and enablers to finding happiness, seeking citizenship and achieving aspirations for themselves and their family.

The final part of the report discusses migrant's views on the AFL (Australian Football League) and sport in general. Sport is an important Australian past time both as players and spectators and can be a significant factor that contributes to social inclusion and cohesion.

## About AMEP

AMES programs are focused on supporting successful settlement of migrants and refugees. One of the programs that offered by AMES is the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). AMEP is the largest component of Australian Government's settlement program. The ability to communicate in English is vital as it is associated with labour market success, accessing education and training opportunities, gaining information about services and finding suitable housing. This program provides English language tuition to new migrants from the humanitarian, family and skilled visa streams. The program generally gives clients access to up to 510 hours (in some cases more hours may be provided) of English language tuition, in their first five years of settlement in Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Not all migrants and refugees are eligible for the AMEP. Eligibility is primarily determined by the person's proficiency in English and visa status. This means the principal application on Skilled Visas, including employer sponsored migrants are not eligible as functional English is a requirement to obtain these visas. The AMEP is generally only available to those recently arrived, and for those over 18 years of age.

The AMEP offers flexible learning arrangements by running weekday, evening and weekend classes, distance learning and a volunteer home tutor program. The majority of students study the AMEP in weekday classes of 15 hours per week over three terms of 10 weeks.

The program teaches English within the context of settlement. The topics and themes are based around the mainstream systems and services that migrants and refugees need to negotiate during settlement.

## Overview of migration in Australia

Over the past sixty years, Australia's migration policy has been largely shaped by the needs of the Australian economy. Current immigration, settlement and citizenship policy is aligned to economic objectives and as stated in government policy has been designed to build a sustainable future for Australia. The emphasis is on bringing skilled migrants who are proficient in English and have tertiary qualifications into Australia to fill gaps in skill shortages. The Coalition Government is aiming to maintain current levels of migration where skilled migrants make up approximately two-thirds of the total Migration Program while at the same time sustaining its commitment to family reunion (Larson, 2013).

In the 2014-15 Federal Budget, the government has set Migration planning levels at 190,000 places. This includes 128,550 places for skilled migrants and 60,885 places for family migrants. In terms of humanitarian and refugee migrants, Australia is one of only 10 Western countries that have planned refugee quotas. Each year approximately 13,700 refugees are allowed to enter on a humanitarian visa.

Castles et al (2013) argue that migration to Australia is certain to grow in the years ahead. Strong demand for additional labour (both unskilled and skilled), combined with lower fertility, an ageing population and declining numbers of young people entering the labour market means that Australia will have to look overseas for sufficient workers in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.industry.gov.au/skills/LiteracyAndNumeracy/AdultMigrantEnglishProgram/Pages/EnglishCourses.aspx>

## Making sense of the new and old country – adjusting to life in Australia

Migrants and refugees come to Australia with different levels of knowledge. A number have visited Australia prior to migration, some have a cursory knowledge of Australia acquired in their home country while others come with no knowledge (AMES, 2011:13). People emigrate for many reasons and come to Australia under a range of visa types. Some are motivated by socioeconomic reasons and seeking employment, others seek political asylum. Whatever the reasons, most people emigrate in the belief and hope for a better, more successful future than their home country can offer (Wong, 2013).

On arrival in Australia, new migrants seek to secure long-term accommodation, find employment or an income source, pursue education, learn English, enhance their health and wellbeing, understand Australian norms and laws as well as staying connected to their own community and the broader Australian community. It is common for people who move to a new country to experience discomfort, helplessness, frustration, fear, insecurity, uncertainty about how to behave, a sense that one's cultural beliefs and values are being challenged and that things are not predictable<sup>3</sup>.

New migrants come to Australia with a range of life experiences. Some migrants settle into Australian life more quickly than others. Hugo (2011:163) identifies some of the issues faced by refugees and how this may impact upon their pre-settlement experience. Recent waves of humanitarian migrants may for example have fewer life skills, limited health awareness, basic budgeting skills and find day-to-day living a challenge. Living in refugee camps can be a deskilling experience for some that impacts upon an individual's education, employment experience resulting in a lack of confidence and a preparedness to enter the labour market and understanding of how to live in an urban society (Hugo, 2011:163).

One way to help us understand how migrants make sense of the new and old country is to understand where they have come from and how this influences their ability to forge a future in their adopted country. A migrant's past experience in their homeland has a significant impact upon how they settle into their new life in Australia (Ramsden & Ridge, 2012).

Populist notions of Australia as seen in tourist brochures portray Australia as a prosperous country that enjoys a wide range of sporting events, has large tracts of outback and rural areas, with kangaroos, beaches, large cosmopolitan cities, iconic buildings like the Sydney Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. Yet, the reality of living as a new migrant in Australia may be far removed from pre-migration understandings and expectations of what life is like in Australia. Migrants that come to Australia on a skilled visa may be under the impression that there are ample jobs in their profession and that they will walk into a well paid job that is commensurate with their qualifications and experience. Others may believe that they have excellent English language skills until they arrive in Australia and have to speak English to negotiate everyday life. Refugee or humanitarian migrants may have had limited or little time to plan their journey to Australia and may be unprepared for transitioning into their new life in Australia (Hugo, 2011:164).

To appreciate the settlement process there is a need to focus on how both past and present experiences intersect to forge a future. In order to understand this process, we need to look at the notion of agency and structure from a theoretical perspective. This enables us to test a range of ideas, assumptions and concepts about settlement. Although theory is an artificial construct, it has the capacity to provide a systematic way to unpack and explain (at least in part) the way in which migrants transition from the old life to the new.

The narratives and meaning that new migrants create in their lives do not happen in isolation, they are embedded in larger political, cultural, and historical contexts (structure) which influence human agency (Gemignani, 2011). They also relate to hegemonic discourses or the dominant ways of seeing the world of a particular culture or

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/docs/research\\_reports/research\\_series/Research\\_Series\\_10..pdf?origin=publication\\_detail](http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/docs/research_reports/research_series/Research_Series_10..pdf?origin=publication_detail)

society. Explicit rules and laws define how individuals should act and behave in ways that are acceptable to the broader society. For newcomers, arriving in a new country with a different cultural background, these social structures may be difficult to comprehend and understand (Healey, 2006).

Structure enables and constrains human agency in *everyday life*. Agency takes the form of for example, noticing, integrating, resisting, accommodating and sense making (Ramsden & Ridge, 2012). New migrants make choices (albeit in a constrained environment with limited choice for some) and use their own agency or self-determination with the view to gaining control over their lives. The duality of agency and structure in relation to migration provides a conceptual framework in which to assess the way in which social organisations and institutions determine decision making processes in receiving societies, how new migrants interact within their own communities and the broader community and the services they encounter to assist them in the settlement process (Castles, 2007). For policy makers and service providers, understanding how migrants feel in their host country is important to understanding how they can participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life of Australia (Healy, 2006).

Agnew (2005: 12) believes that defining diasporic identities is complex and notes that these identities are socially constructed, contingent on time, space and social context and are therefore fluid and unstable. Immigrating to a new country means from a literal and metaphysical sense crossing new frontiers and borders. Yet, despite the upheaval experienced by many, the migration experience can be conducive to personal and intellectual growth that engenders resilience and ingenuity (Agnew, 2005: 20). Ramsden & Ridge (2012) propose that human agency and imagination are the key to self-determination and enable new migrants to make the necessary adjustments and employ problem solving strategies. This is a reflexive activity that empowers people to regain control over their lives by making their experiences intelligible and useful.

The process known as re-identification (Cousens, 2003) involves the new migrant reflecting and rebuilding who they are in a new environment. This includes how they interact with their family, any changes to their material circumstances as well as their emotional wellbeing. Re-identification may challenge traditional notions of family identity, role change and involve the adoption of new values and norms that are commonplace in Australia such as 'consumption', 'independence' and 'individualism' (Cousens, 2003). It is during this process that migrants not only begin to establish a community identity, but also highlights a commitment to resettlement and provides scenarios for possible futures (Ramsden & Ridge, 2012). It is important to highlight that the use of agency by individuals is an empowering experience that draws upon their resourcefulness, their creative capacity to adapt to various barriers and constraints as they re-invent and transform their lives in a new environment (Christou, 2008). For those migrants who have experienced trauma before they came to Australia, the way that these people create new meanings and understandings both past and present, not only helps them to adjust to their new life but also helps them come to terms with their past in a current context and to restore order after the disruption they may have experienced (Ramsden & Ridge, 2012). Chamberlain & Leydesdorff (2004) argue that migrants are essentially 'made by their memories'. During settlement in both the short term and long term migrants adjust and reinterpret past and current events in terms of their experiences and values and in doing so create a sense of belonging in their host country (Cousens, 2003).

Although settlement is a challenging experience for many, there is an overwhelming willingness by most new migrants to Australia to contribute in a positive way to the host country. There is no doubt that Australia has been enriched as a country that embraces many cultures.

## Happiness

Happiness and life satisfaction are strongly associated with refugees' subjective perceptions of their settlement success and consequent life satisfaction (Colic-Peisker, 2009). Gender, race, ethnicity and disability also influence life satisfaction. Happiness and wellbeing among migrant populations is a complex issue that is influenced by a range of inter-related variables such as health, employment status, job satisfaction, financial success, social support, adaptation to Australian culture and society (Kim, et al 2012). Other issues that impact upon levels of happiness and wellbeing include loss of pre-migration socio-economic status where well educated and middle

class people may have had to access lower paid and lower status jobs. While for refugees or those migrants who have left tumultuous homelands the opportunity to live a life that is safe with the opportunity of providing a better future for their children is linked to enhanced wellbeing.

Research undertaken by DIAC (2011:6) found that humanitarian migrants felt happy about themselves when they were confident making life choices, were treated well by their local community and found it easy to find a place to live. Levels of happiness were also correlated with high degrees of social connectedness and good physical health.

Webb et al (2012) argues that when assessing individual happiness and satisfaction among migrant groups, it is prudent to couch it in terms of the level of risk individuals and their families have taken in the migratory process. The authors describe a continuum where the migratory process is 'untroubled' at one end of the scale implying a smoother process to settlement to 'highly risky; on the other referring to the level of risk that individuals and their families have endured. The authors believe it is not helpful nor accurate to judge the success of migration based on happiness or personal satisfaction, as it is the outcome of the migratory journey that is important.

Simpson, (2013) undertook a review on a range of international surveys that looked at happiness and wellbeing indexes and their relationship to migrant groups and concluded that:

1. Migration increases happiness, but migrants are generally less happy than people born in their host country.
2. Levels of happiness are largely dependent upon the migrant's country origin.
3. Migrants from poorer countries tends to have the most to gain, as happiness is correlated with a rise in income.

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that many new migrants tend to feel unsettled when they first arrive, but after a period of time many adapted to their new lives and were more likely to be content (Healey, 2006).

## **Citizenship**

Most migrants who come to Australia generally settle and become citizens (Castles, 2013). Becoming an Australian citizen has long been associated with a feeling of belonging as well as developing community cohesion. Markus found that Australia is a highly cohesive society with migrants experiencing a sense optimism and belonging as well as high levels of financial satisfaction (Markus 2013).

Citizenship engenders a shared civic national identity that ensures Australian born citizens and migrant fulfil their obligations in terms of language, culture and institutions. Obtaining or an intention to gain citizenship is an indicator for connectedness for new migrants (DIAC, 2011:44).

Many migrants come to Australia and seek transnational identities where they have a foothold in two homelands (Castles, 2013). Critics of transnationalism believe that migrants who retain ties to their homeland are unlikely to develop a sense of belonging to the national identity of their settlement country. The fear is that immigrants may develop divided loyalties that has the potential to undermine a cohesive liberal society (Vasta, 2013).

A survey commissioned by DIAC that was sent to 20,000 migrants who had arrived in Australia on a range of visas asked respondents whether they intended to become Australian citizens. The results indicated that nearly all respondents intended to become citizens. A large proportion of the sample had lived in Australia for fewer than four years and were not yet eligible to apply for citizenship (DIAC, 2011:44).

## Prospects for the future

As noted above many migrants who come to Australia aspire to gain employment that uses their skills and knowledge, to feel safe and secure, have the opportunity to live with relatives and/or friends, and imagine a better future for their children. Ultimately most migrants want to have a sense of belonging, to feel valued, connected and to contribute in a meaningful way to their own and the broader Australian community.

One of the consistent findings from surveys of migrants on all visa types is that their motivation for coming to Australia is for the increased wellbeing and improved prospects for their children. Evidence suggests that first generation migrants often make sacrifices by working in lower paid and lower status job so that their children can achieve social mobility. Bearing this in mind, migration and settlement does not end with the first generation, but rather it continues through the second generation and beyond. As the children of migrants are educated in Australia, they tend to be more familiar with the local culture and lifestyle, coupled with a greater proficiency in English that leads to lower levels of unemployment and higher levels of workforce participation (Hugo, 2011).

## Sport in Australia – the great leveller?

Australians like to see themselves as a sporting nation and the idea that Australian's excel in sport is an important part of the national identity. Sport has been assigned a pivotal role in our identity and sense of nationalism. Australia's obsession with sport can be attributed to a sports ethic that dates back to the early years of colonisation and settlement where the dominant culture was masculine and competitive because of the lack of alternative activities. The open spaces and climate are also conducive to a range of sporting activities (Taylor & Toohey, 2011).

There is a widely held perception that sport promotes egalitarianism and can work across class and gender divides. A number of sporting events in Victoria attract large audiences, particularly, tennis (the Australian Open), cricket (Boxing Day match) and Australian Rules Football. Sport is seen as not only a distraction but also an agency for bonding Australian society, people and culture. Sporting personalities are presented in the media regularly and sports stars maintain a revered place in society. Some of them have attained Australia's highest public honours (Taylor & Toohey, 2011). The Australian of the Year 2014 is Adam Goode an indigenous AFL player.

Hugo (2011: 238) argues that there is an increasing body of evidence that sport can play a key role in increasing economic and social cohesion among ethnic communities either through participating in sport or as volunteers in sporting organisation.

## Methodology

A self-complete survey was administered to 508 students. A total of 506 surveys were usable. Students from three AMES locations Dandenong, Box Hill and Footscray were surveyed. The survey was administered at the end of March, 2014. For most students the survey took between 20-30 minutes to complete.

The survey was divided into 5 sections. These included:

1. Perceptions of Australia now and before you migrated
2. Your future in Australia
3. Multiculturalism
4. Your background
5. Questions on sport

To increase the representativeness of the survey, the questionnaire was translated into five community languages. The community languages were determined by the number of students enrolled at each centre. The five most common languages other than English were:

1. Vietnamese
2. Chinese
3. Farsi
4. Dari
5. Chin (Hakka)

Students in CSWE 1 and CSWE 2 classes who were literate in one of the five community languages were given a translated copy of the questionnaire. While, those undertaking classes at CSWE Level 3 completed the survey in English. Students who fell outside these groups were unable to participate in the survey.

A CSWE 3 class located at AMES Flagstaff was used to pilot the survey. Generally speaking, students found the survey easy to complete and were forthcoming with useful feedback. Minor changes were made to a small number of questions and the lay out of the survey instrument. In hindsight, it may have been better to pilot the survey in one of the selected locations. Students who attend the Flagstaff site tend to have higher levels of education and English proficiency. They are also more likely to be familiar with the concept of a survey and how to complete them. Students at the Dandenong site had some difficulty understanding the lay out of the survey and some terminology. A significant number of students had a problem with the two part questions – and found it hard to delineate between before and after they came to Australia. This meant that the survey administrator and the research assistants had to spend considerable time explaining these to students. The non-response level for these questions was higher than other questions at between 3 to 7 per cent.

The administration of the survey was conducted by an external contractor who was previously employed at AMES and had a familiarity with how the Centres and AMEP classes operate. In order to minimise disruption to teaching schedules, the administrator liaised with each Centre and teaching staff to organise an appropriate time to administer the surveys. The class teacher had the option to choose to use participation in the survey as a learning activity for students. An information and briefing session was provided to teaching staff and others at each centre.

The survey administrator trained the research assistants. This involved an afternoon training session and support provided on the day the survey was administered. Research assistants in each site were selected on the basis of their ability to speak one of the five community languages in which the survey was translated. Their role was to explain to students how to complete the survey and clarify any questions as they arose. The research assistants were also required to make a note on how the survey administration went in each class, detailing any problems or issues. The research assistants were vital for the smooth implementation of the survey.

The survey consisted of closed questions. To allow respondents to voluntarily provide additional information and thoughts about their perceptions of Australia since they arrived, a mini-focus group was conducted once the paper based survey was completed. Respondents could voluntarily provide further information on a range of issues that they deemed important. These mini-focus groups were convened by the survey administrator and were offered only to those classes that completed the survey in English.

### ***Limitations of the survey***

This study does not make any claims to be representative of all new migrants. The study sample was purposive rather than representative of new immigrants who arrive in Australia. It provides a snapshot of views that reflect a specific time and place. However, it does provide a voice for migrants views to be heard that are often overlooked in the mainstream media and by surveys that are conducted only in English. The survey consisted of closed questions to make it simpler for participants to complete. In addition, limited resources meant that there was no capacity to translate qualitative answers in languages other than English.

The qualitative data collected from the focus groups were not collected as a verbatim transcript from each respondent, but rather a summary of the issues and sentiments identified by the focus group participants. These sentiments have been included in the survey findings below.

## Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was sought according to the AMES policy and adheres to the NHMRC guidelines on the Ethical Conduct of Human Research. The Ethics approval stipulated that the following criteria would be adhered to in relation to the administration of the survey.

1. That participation is entirely voluntary. Clients can choose not to complete the survey and that there is no obligation to answer all the questions on the survey. We will not have any way of knowing who did and did not complete a survey in any class.
2. That the survey is completely anonymous. There is no way to link any individual surveys to the person who completed it. The surveys will be entered onto a database stored at the AMES head office by independent data entry staff who will not know the names or details of anyone in any of the classes surveyed.
3. More than 400 surveys will be collected across 3 AMES sites
4. The survey results will not be analysed at a specific classroom or centre level. All data will be analysed in aggregate way for all AMEP students only.
5. Information collected from the “mini-focus groups” will be non-identifying. Any quotes will not be directly attributed to specific individuals but rather the aim of these groups is to capture collective views and advice that could be provided to new migrants before and shortly after they arrive in Australia.
6. The purpose and use of the data will include the potential publication of results in a report and for the Communications Unit to develop stories for newspapers and other forms of media.
7. Survey results will be made available to AMEP respondents. Teachers will be notified of the date the results will be made available on the AMES website.
8. The name and contact details of the research project leader at AMES will be made known to AMEP clients should they choose to follow up on any questions or concerns about the surveys.

Participants were also provided with an opportunity to ask questions throughout the survey collection and were given a thorough explanation and demonstration of how to complete the survey.

Clients were provided with a range of information to ensure they could make an informed decision as to whether or not they would like to participate. Due to the anonymous nature of this survey consent forms were not collected.

## Survey findings

The following section details the findings from the survey.

### Survey languages

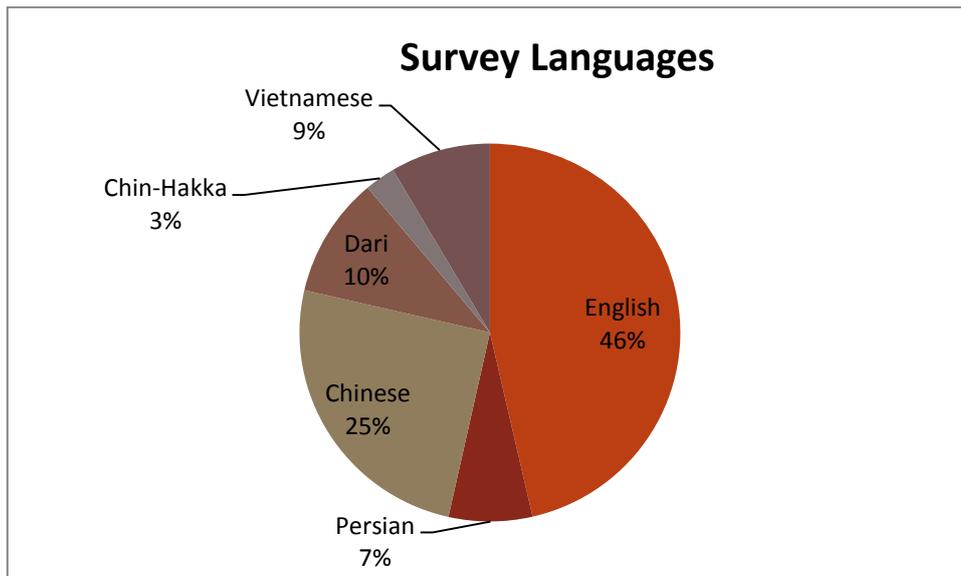
Fifty-four per cent of surveys were completed in languages other than English. This is significant given that most surveys are conducted in English. Although large population surveys offer translation services in a range of community languages, generally speaking, less than 3 per cent of the total surveys are completed in LOTE if at all<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> For example the Victorian Population Health Survey is a population survey that has a sample size of 30,000, only 800 surveys (2.6%) were conducted in languages other than English. <http://www.centralhumeppc.org/articles/427/pdf/VPHS%202011-12%20LGA%20profile%20July%202013.pdf>

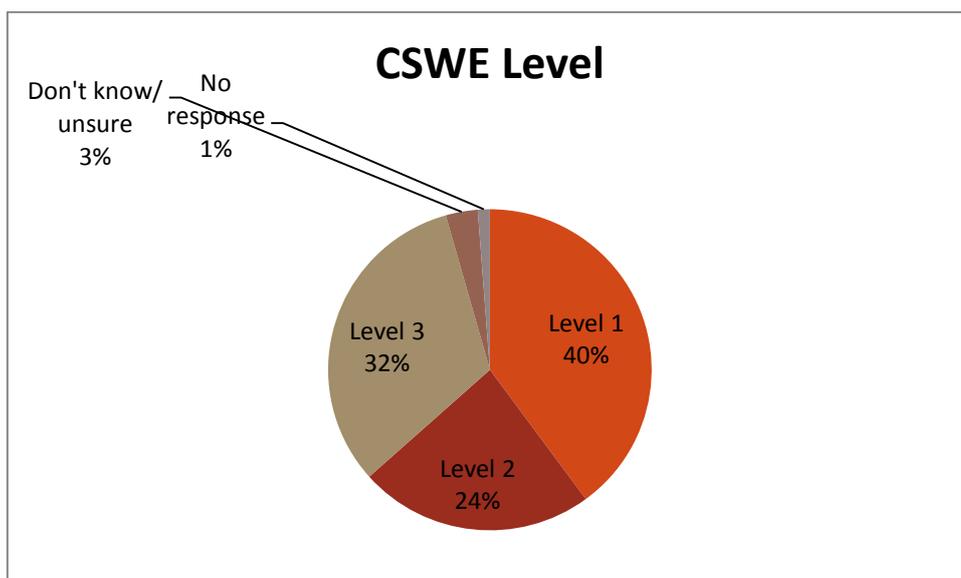
The Scanlon Report on *Mapping Social Cohesion* (2013) conducts an online survey to respondents recruited via online panels that are available through commercial companies. This survey is conducted in English. Two-thirds of respondents arrived under the permanent settlement scheme either as skilled migrants or partner/family members, only 1.4% were on humanitarian visas. Just under a third (30%) were born in English speaking countries. Sixty per cent were already Australian citizens.

Just under half (46%) of all the surveys completed were in English. Out of the five community languages in which the survey was translated, one quarter were completed in Chinese, 10% in Dari, 9% in Vietnamese, 7% in Persian and 3% in Chin-Hakka.



### CSWE Level

Two-thirds of students from the lower level English classes CSWE1 and 2 completed the survey. While one third were from CSWE 3 classes.



Profile of migrants and refugees		%
Gender	Male	37.2
	Female	61.1
Age in years	18-24	14
	25-44	53.4
	45-54	15.8
	55 or older	14
	No response	2.6
Visa Type	Migrant Visa (eg family, spouse, skilled, business)	66
	Humanitarian or refugee	28
	Other	4
	No response	2
Country of birth	China & Hong Kong	29.1
	Afghanistan	19.4
	No response	16
	Vietnam	8.8
	India & Sri Lanka	6.5
	South East Asia	5.3
	Africa	2.8
	Pakistan	2.3
	Eastern Europe	2
	Other Asia	2
	South America	0.4
	Other Europe	0.4
Length of time in Australia	Less than 6 months	24.3
	6 to 12 months	20.9
	1 to 2 years	17.6
	2 to 5 years	24.1
	5 to 10 years	7.1
	More than 10 years	4.5
	No response	1.4
Highest Level of Education	None	6.5
	Primary School	11.7
	Secondary School	30.2
	Trade College or similar	18.2
	University or similar	29.6
	Other	2.6
	No response	1.2
Type of housing	Private rental – renting from a landlord or agent	54.4
	Own house	21.9
	In a shared house with family or friends	18.4
	Government housing	3
	Other	1.2
	No response	1.2

More females (61.1%) than males (37.2%) completed the survey. The gender split of 60% female and 40% male is fairly typical of any surveys that are conducted. In relation to the *Perceptions of Australia Survey*, the reason why there are more women than men is that more women tend to attend AMEP classes. Although a number of evening classes were surveyed, most surveys were done during business hours which may have precluded a higher proportion of men from participating because they were working during the day.

More than half the respondents who participated in the survey were aged between 25 to 44 years. The second largest group was the 45 to 54 year olds followed by the 18-24 year olds.

Two thirds of the respondents surveyed came to Australia under a Migrant Visa (including family, spouse, skilled and business). Just over a quarter (28%) migrated under a humanitarian visa. While 4% identified other visa types (for example student visa). Country of origin reflected the type of clientele that attend the AMES Dandenong, Box Hill and Footscray Centres. Box Hill has a large population of people born in China and Hong Kong, Dandenong has a large number of people from Afghanistan and the Middle East, while Footscray has a large number of people born in Vietnam. Just under one third (29.1%) of all respondents were born in either China or Hong Kong. The second largest group were born in Afghanistan and the third largest group were born in Vietnam. There were significant numbers of students from India, Sri Lanka and South East Asia.

Just under half (45.2%) the respondents surveyed had been in Australia less than 12 months, while 41.7% had lived in Australia between 1 to 5 years. Just over 4 per cent had been in Australia more than 10 years.

Forty eight per cent of respondents had post-school qualifications, with 29.5% with a university or similar and 18.2% with trade college or similar. Just under one third (30%) had attended secondary school while 18.2% had either no formal education or primary school level.

More than half (54.4%) the respondents were living in accommodation that was privately rented from a landlord or agent. One-fifth (21.9%) of respondents were living in homes which they either owned or were purchasing and 18.4% were in shared housing with family or friends. Given that most of the respondents had been in Australia for less than 12 months and most were not in paid employment and only half were in households with someone employment, it is not surprising that the proportion of those in rented accommodation was high.

### Employment status

Employment Status				
	Yes	No	Don't know	No response
Ever been in a paid job?	28.1	67.8	2.4	1.8
Are you currently working?	19	78.7	0.4	2
Anyone else in your household have paid work now	49.6	46	2.4	2

Over two-thirds of respondents (67.8%) had not had a paid job in Australia and just over one quarter (28.1%) had been in paid employment. This is not surprising given that most respondents were still learning English and had only been in the country for a short period of time and were enrolled in English classes. Eight out of ten respondents were currently not working. In terms of household employment, half the respondents surveyed lived in households where there were other members in paid employment.

### Perceptions of Australia before and after arrival

The aim of these questions were to ascertain respondents perceptions of Australia before they arrived and then to reflect on what their experience has been since living in Australia. Generally speaking, most respondents were positive about Australia both before and after arrival. The one area that they were less likely to agree on was in relation to finding work. Many respondents were unsure about finding a good job that pays well before arriving in Australia. After arrival almost 60% agreed with the statement “finding a good job in Australia that pays well is difficult”.

The following sentiment was raised in one of the mini-focus groups:

*“Before we were thinking it was easy to get a job but now I’m here it’s really hard. I don’t want to be rude but I feel discouraged – you cannot find job, you have to wait. Your English is too low.”*

Nearly 8 out of 10 respondents agreed both before and after arrival that Australia is safe and secure. In relation to Australian people being welcoming, warm and friendly, there was a higher level of uncertainty before they arrived in Australia, but once they had arrived three quarters of respondents agreed with this statement.

One respondent was thankful for feeling safe in Australia:

*“Australia is a big country but I am very safe for life.”*

While a female student felt unsafe when walking on the streets.

*“In my country there is war but I can go out. I don’t feel safe here because everybody said to me it’s dangerous to go out without anybody.”*

Two-thirds of respondents felt that their standard of living would be better in Australia, eighteen per cent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement after they had arrived in Australia while 16% either did not know or were unsure. The cost of living was noted by a number of students that life in Australia was expensive particularly in relating to paying utilities, rent and transport.

The following quote highlights some of the difficulties faced by migrants when they first arrive in Australia.

*“Before I came here I thought everything is easy here to find a house, get money. The first difficulty was renting a good house. So we had to rent an old house [which was ] very unhealthy. Because we don’t have a reference here. That was my first shock.”*

Seventy per cent of respondents felt that their family would have a better life both before and after they arrived in Australia. A couple of respondents noted that the impact of social and individualistic values imbued in the Australian way of life posed a challenge to their traditional values. This was summed up by one respondent who said:

*“We come from Burma. We have family values. Here you cannot control your child. You cannot force your child. If we cannot force our child they can go wrong. Even your own child you can’t do anything. That’s bad for me. Up to 18 years they are dependent on us. After 18 years they can do anything they like.”*

Three quarters of respondents agreed that Australia is a democratic country before they arrived, this figure increased to 83.8% who agreed with statement after they had arrived in Australia.

In relation to Australia’s health care system, 68% of respondents agreed that Australia’s health care system was good before arrival and this figure increased to 73% after arrival. A significant proportion (17.8%) of respondents were unsure about this statement prior to arrival. Some of the students noted the high cost of health care in Australia, particularly when they are not eligible to access Medicare.

*“About the health system...Before I came, I thought everything was covered but I found out it’s not as easy. If you go to a normal doctor still you have to pay. If you want something quicker you have to pay more. The same doctor you see in a normal hospital takes two hours.”*

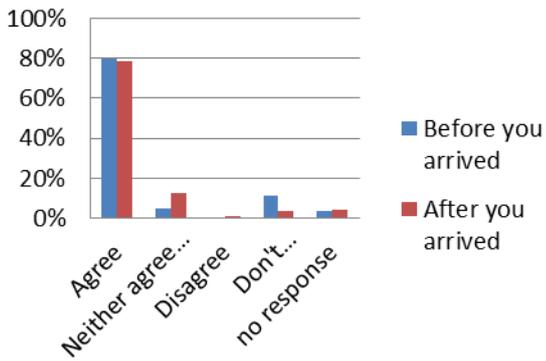
The final question in this series asked people their level of agreement with the statement “people treat each other fairly and equally”. Almost two thirds (65.2%) of respondents agreed with this statement before arrival and 69.4% agreed after arrival.

The following statements support the claim that people treat each other fairly:

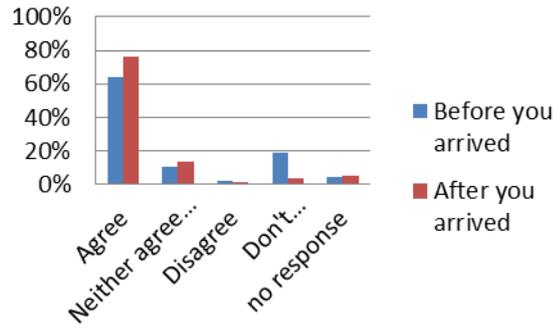
*“Compared to other the countries, Australia is generous and they treat each other very evenly.”*

*“They have a very different system [in other countries] – rich people and poor people. If they are poor they can survive here.”*

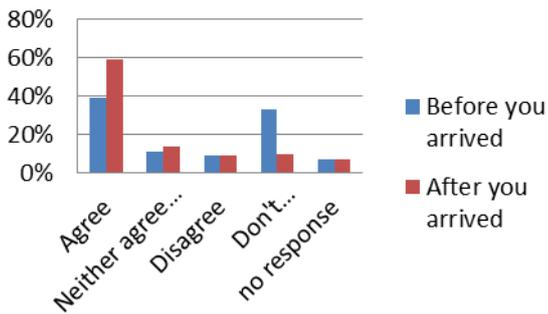
### Australia is safe and secure



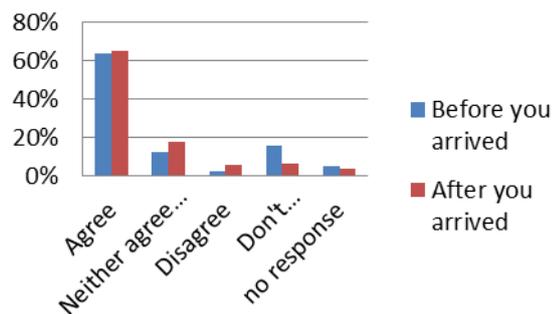
### Australian people are welcoming, warm and friendly



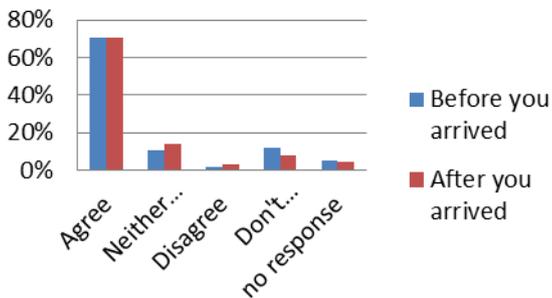
### Finding a good job in Australia that pays well is difficult



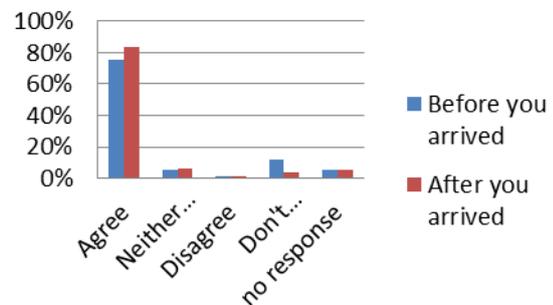
### My standard of living will be better in Australia



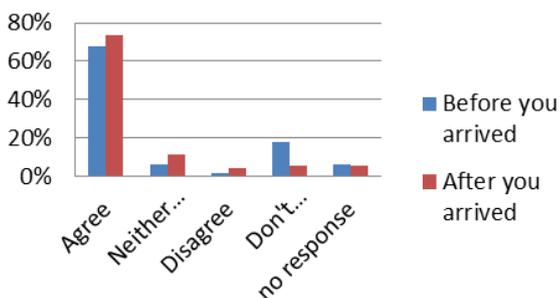
### My family will have a better life



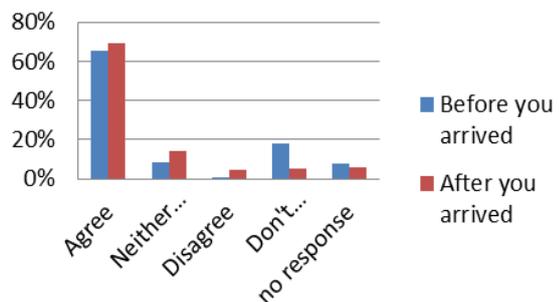
### Australia is a democratic country that allows freedom of speech



### Australia has a good health care system



### People treat each other equally and fairly



## Decision to come to Australia

The next two questions asked respondents to reflect on their decision to migrate to Australia and whether they would encourage other people from their home country to come to Australia. Eight out of 10 respondents felt that their decision to come to Australia was the right one, while 14.6% either did not know or were unsure. Almost two-thirds (63.2%) of survey participants answered in the affirmative about encouraging other people from their country of origin to migrate to Australia. While one in five (21.3%) respondents was unsure and 12.6% stated that they would not encourage people to come to Australia.

Do you think your decision to come to Australia was the right one?	%
Yes	81.2
No	1.8
Don't know/unsure	14.6
No response	2.4
Total	100

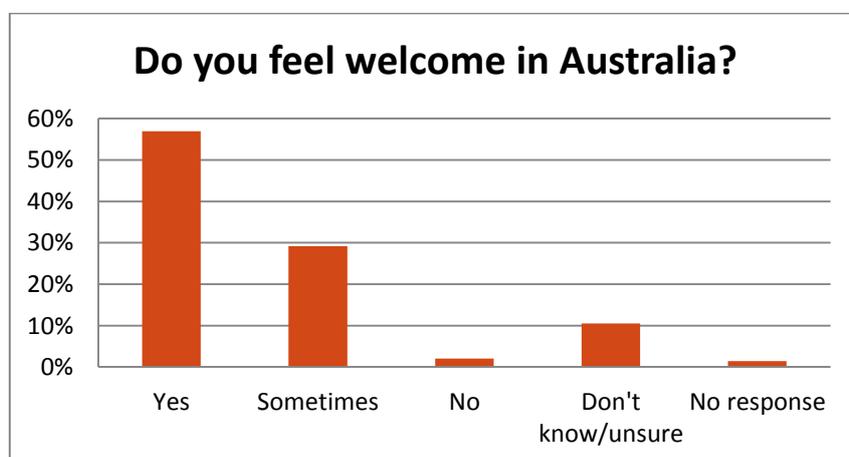
Would you encourage other people from your country to come to Australia?	%
Yes	63.2
No	12.6
Don't know/unsure	21.3
No response	2.8
Total	100

## Feeling welcome in Australia

Over half (56.9%) the respondents to this survey felt welcome in Australia, while 29.2% stated that they sometimes feel welcome. One in 10 respondents either did not know or were unsure about this question.

One respondent who was made welcome by their neighbour notes:

*“When the first time I came to Australia I thought that people were individual. What surprised me was my neighbour looked after me. They knocked on the door – “oh you just arrived, welcome to the neighbourhood”. I made something for them – a cake. I gave it to each house. I moved my house to a different suburb. I think I’m lucky because in this suburb I still have a good neighbour.”*

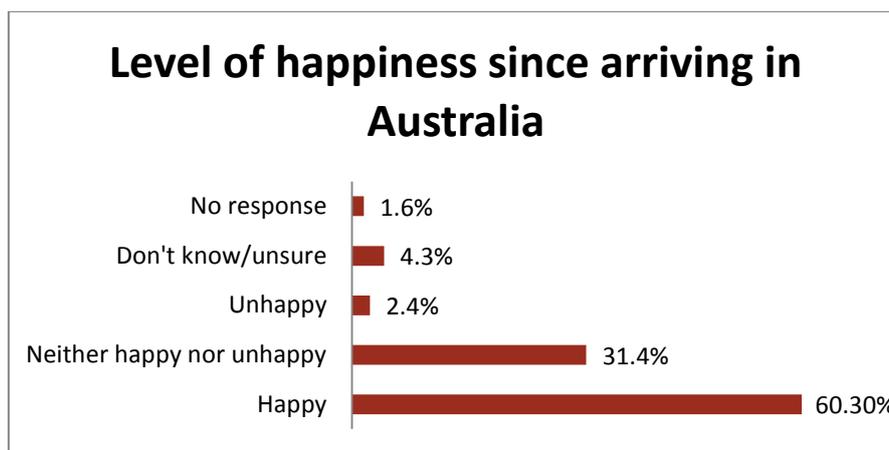


## Level of happiness

Six out of ten respondents felt happy since arriving in Australia. Almost one-third (31.4%) felt neither happy nor unhappy. Only a small number (2.4%) were unhappy. The fact that there were a significant proportion of respondents who felt neither happy nor unhappy is reflected by the reality that almost two-thirds of respondents (62.5%) had been in Australia for less than two years. As noted above, migrants take some time to settle into their new life after migration.

One AMEP participant describes how happy she has been since arriving in Australia:

*“I think we are all happy living here because the government is giving us facilities that help us improve and make a standard of living like in Australia. We are really grateful. They behave in a good manner with us. We are happy.”*



## Citizenship aspirations

Almost 7 out of 10 (68.2%) respondents stated that they were hoping to become an Australia citizen, while 16.2% stated that they might become an Australian citizen. Only 4.9% stated that they did not hope to become an Australian citizen. Although citizenship was an aspiration for most respondents, a number were still on temporary visas and hoping to secure permanent visas

## Future aspirations

There are two parts to this section. The first question asks respondents to think about their life in Australia in three to four years time. Given that just under two-thirds of respondents had been in Australia for less than 2 years, just under half (49%) the respondents felt that their life in Australia would be much improved, 31.4% thought it would be improved, while 6.1% thought it would be the same as now. Only a small proportion 2.4% felt that life would be either a little or much worse in three to four years time.

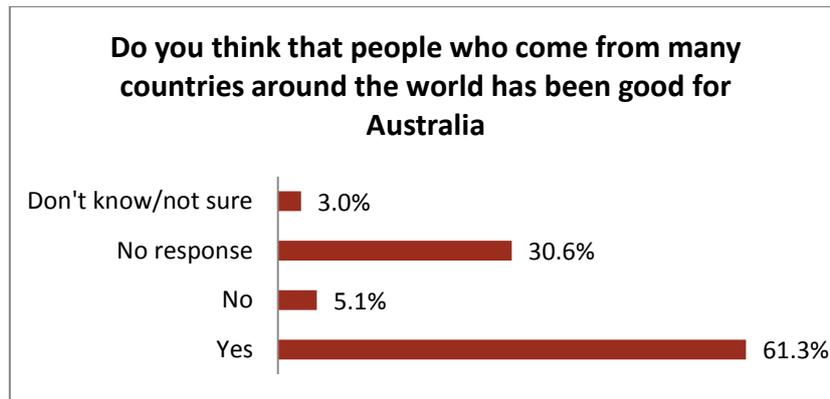
The second question in this section asks respondents to think about the following statement “Compared with your life, how do you think that the lives of today’s children living in Australia will be”? Three quarters of the respondents thought that the lives of children living in Australia would be much improved when compared with their own childhood. While 14.2% felt that it would be a little improved. Only 2.2% of respondents felt that the lives of children living in Australia would be either a little worse or much worse.

## Views on multiculturalism

Respondents were asked whether they thought that people coming from many countries from around the world was good for Australia. Almost two-thirds (61.3%) of respondents felt that multiculturalism has been good for Australia. However, one in three (30.6%) respondents was unsure.

One focus group respondent was positive about the way in which Australian society embraces multiculturalism:

*“Before I came to Australia I thought Australia was a very westernised modern country. After I arrived I saw many migrants. That wasn’t what I expected – multicultural. I thought when you come here you might change yourself [to fit] into the country. The government is giving freedom to people to keep their tradition and culture.”*



## Sport

This question provided respondents with a number of options that they could choose, but it also allowed the respondent to identify their favourite sport. In some instances respondent’s identified more than one sport. Respondents’ top two answers have been included in the table below. The most popular sport identified by respondents was tennis, followed by soccer, basketball and cricket.

Favourite sport	Number
Tennis	129
Soccer	99
Don't know/unsure	89
Basketball	68
Cricket	45
Australian rules football (AFL)	39
Swimming	15
Rugby	9
Badminton	8
Table tennis	6
Marshall arts	6
Volleyball	5
Other	4
Yoga	3
Walking/cycling	3
Gym/fitness classes	3
Chess	3

## Support for Australian Football League (AFL)

Just over one quarter (26.3%) of respondents stated that they followed Australian Rules football. Three out of four respondents either said no, did not know/unsure or provided no response. This is not surprising given that many of the respondents had been living in Australia for less than 2 years.

The most popular AFL Team was Melbourne, followed by Collingwood, Hawthorn, Richmond and Geelong. It is possible that Melbourne was selected as the number one team because respondents identify with the Melbourne team because they live in Melbourne.

TEAM NAME	Number
Melbourne	53
Collingwood	19
Hawthorn	12
Richmond	10
Geelong	10
Adelaide Crows	7
North Melbourne	6
St Kilda	6
Western Bulldogs	6
Carlton	5
Essendon	5
Sydney Swans	3
Brisbane Lions	3
Gold Coast Suns	2
Port Adelaide	1
West Coast Eagles	1
Freemantle	1

## Mini-focus groups

As noted in the survey methodology above, mini-focus groups were conducted after the survey had been completed in the CSWE3 classes. A number of themes emerged from the focus groups. These include:

- Gratitude for a better life in Australia
- Importance of neighbours and neighbourhoods in achieving a sense of belonging
- The lack of corruption in Australia
- Perceptions that Australia is an egalitarian society
- The importance of family reunion
- Traditional family values are compromised and challenged
- Access to health services
- Finding and securing employment, workers' rights
- Safety
- Racism and discrimination
- High cost of living
- Length of time to gain citizenship and permanent residence

As noted in the limitations of the survey, these focus groups provide an indicative account of some of the issues faced by a relatively small number of students completing AMEP courses at a particular place and time. It may be

an interesting exercise with future surveys to employ the assistance of research assistants to conduct focus groups with migrants in first language with the view to canvassing specific issues and questions.

## Conclusions

In addition to the theoretical reflections offered in this report that argue that new migrants are not passive bystanders but actively use their agency to create a new life in their adopted country, the results of the Perceptions of Australia survey offer insights into how new migrants perceive Australia before arrival and after settlement. The survey also details whether their decision to come to Australia was the right one and their future aspirations.

Generally speaking, most of those surveyed were positive about being in Australia and hoped for a better future for themselves and their children. Almost two out of three respondents surveyed had been in the country for less than two years. This is significant, particularly when looking at the level of happiness of respondents, where six out of ten felt happy since being in Australia, while almost one-third felt neither happy nor unhappy. It takes some time to adapt and transition into a new way of life. This includes the challenges of learning English, securing accommodation and income and finding a permanent job that pays reasonably well.

Trivonovitch's cultural adjustment stages (cited in Diakanwa, 2011) provide some understanding into the way in which new migrants adapt to a new country and its culture. It is interesting that there are no specific timelines detailed in the phases and one assumes that moving from one phase to the next is not necessarily linear but rather a process of moving back and forward between the stages and the longer a person is in Australia the more likely they are to reach the "home stage".

The four stages are as follows:

Stage 1 – the honeymoon stage is characterised by excitement, anticipation and inquisitiveness. Many new migrants have thought about coming to Australia for years and now they are here they think about all the things they would like to accomplish.

Stage 2 – the hostility stage is characterised by coming to terms with their new life. This may include the frustration of learning English, experiencing racism and discrimination, learning about customs and social norms, the reality that it is difficult to secure well paid employment and that the high cost of living are very different from their country of origin. During this phase, migrants may miss their home and become disappointed and concerned about their future.

Stage 3 – the integration stage is where migrants begin to feel more comfortable settling into their new life in Australia. They may be more fluent in English, have paid employment, develop new friendship and network groups, have a better understanding of Australian culture and institutions.

Stage 4 – the home stage as the name suggests is where migrants have settled into Australia. They envisage spending the rest of their lives in Australia, they gain citizenship and they see a future for themselves and their families.

There was a high level of optimism demonstrated in the survey, with most people affirming that their decision to come to Australia was the right one and that the majority of respondents felt that their life in Australia would either be much improved or a little improved. Similar sentiments were held about the lives of children living in Australia where the majority felt that life in Australia could offer more opportunities when compared with their life as a child.

The sport question provides an interesting insight into the likes and dislikes of new migrants in relation to sport. Given that AFL is largely a Melbourne centric game it is not surprising that those surveyed had not spent time garnering their favourite team.

Although the survey instrument did not capture any additional qualitative information the results nevertheless provide an insight into the values and priorities new migrants have both before and after arrival to Australia. What would strengthen this survey would be more in-depth focus groups to gain greater understanding and clarity about the experience of moving to a new country.

Australia competes in a global market for skilled workers and it therefore needs to market itself as an attractive destination for skilled migrants. In order to continue to attract new migrants and to keep Australia as a preferred destination for would-be immigrants, policy makers need to understand how migrants feel about their host country both before and after arrival.

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