

Multicultural Affairs in Victoria:

A discussion paper for a new policy

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8 OCTOBER 2008

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Overview

AMES response focuses on issues in strengthening multiculturalism with respect to newly arrived communities in Victoria. It draws on AMES experience in providing a broad range of services to new arrivals in their early period of settlement. It also draws on the experience of new settler communities. AMES has consulted with Community Guides¹ from Burma, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq and South Africa to prepare this response.

In practical terms, successful multiculturalism results from new communities being economically and socially included. AMES response outlines some views on how this translates at the policy and service delivery level. AMES considers that education and training policy and employment policy provide the foundations to bridge new arrivals into this economic and social participation. Translation of these policies into services that can achieve sustainable employment for newly arrived refugees and migrants is fundamental.

The response provides input in these areas under five of the discussion areas outlined in the Discussion Paper.

1. Community Relations and the promotion of multiculturalism
2. Social and Civic Participation
3. Institutions, Service Delivery and Cultural Competence
4. The geography of multiculturalism
5. Economic drivers using cultural diversity for competitive advantage

Recommendations

Based on AMES experience and input from members of newly arrived communities, a number of recommendations are included. These recommendations stem from the fundamental desire of newly arrived communities to be productive. Communities see this as a cornerstone in their contribution to successful multicultural policy.

1. That the importance of fundamental importance of employment for new communities be recognised as an essential precursor to social and civic participation and successful multicultural policy.
2. That the state government lead by example by providing workplace opportunities for newly arrived migrants and refugees, through direct employment, intermediate labour market and work placement arrangements as well as the inclusion of social dividend clauses in its purchasing contracts.
3. That the state government encourage Victorian employers to offer work experience and employment opportunities to newly arrived migrants and refugees.
4. That resources provided to support implementation of The Securing Jobs for Your Future: Skills for Victoria initiative be allocated to customised programs which bridge new arrivals successfully into mainstream training.
5. That an orientation and mentoring program be offered to migrants and refugees with existing skills to integrate them into work that uses these skills as quickly as possible

¹ AMES Community Guides are employed in the delivery of settlement services with newly arrived refugees. Community Guides are from refugee backgrounds and work with recently arrived communities in their early settlement. AMES employs over 100 Community Guides and regularly seeks their views on issues confronting newly arrived refugees and ways to address these issues.

1. Community relations and the promotion of multiculturalism

How can we best promote respect and understanding of cultural diversity as well as understanding the benefits multiculturalism brings to the community?

Respect and understanding of cultural diversity and being convinced of the benefits of multiculturalism is 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 Victorian community.

As noted in the discussion paper, refugees require specialist attention to resolve their often complex and multiple needs. They require access to services to meet these needs in a timely way in the initial period of settlement. Increasing access and the opportunity to participate for those who are the most disadvantaged and marginalised is at the core of building a socially cohesive society and promoting respect and understanding of cultural diversity.

The initial building blocks to active participation are re-establishing physical health, re-uniting families and addressing the basic needs of housing and orientation. Access to services and information (in first language where required) to ensure that these issues can be addressed is an essential first step. However, without the next step of employment, which brings a sense of well being and personal self worth, successful settlement, capacity to contribute and participate in the broader community are difficult to achieve.

Policy and practice requirements for newly arrived communities to achieve this are discussed under two areas.

1. Building skills: education and training
2. Access to employment

1. Building skills: education and training

For some refugees and newly arrived migrants, a pathway to employment comes through training. AMES works with over 50,000 clients from migrant and refugee backgrounds annually. The majority require English language skills and a significant number of these require access to VET training to gain first employment in Australia. Others may require training to re-enter employment after losing a job because of inadequate communication and/or vocational skills.

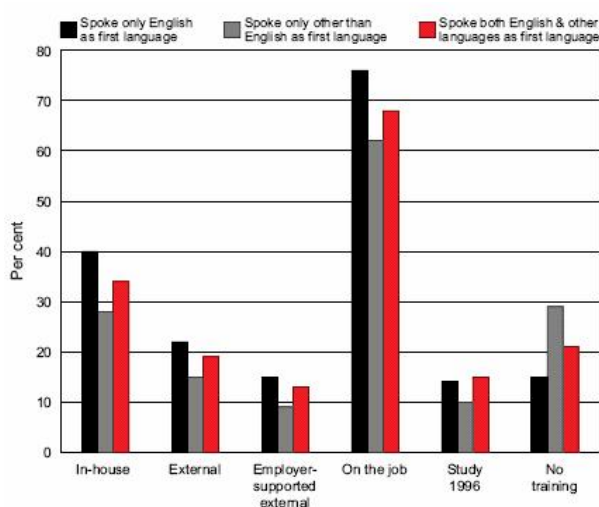
The vocational training needs of learners within these groups are diverse and require a policy framework that drives inclusion and is followed through with practical application in a training system that can respond appropriately.

The Securing Jobs for Your Future: Skills for Victoria initiative provides an investment of \$316 million over four years. Within this budget it will be important to provide resources to bridge new arrivals successfully into mainstream training.

It is important that provision is made within this budget to provide accessible information as a first step to participation and that programs are available for learners from newly arrived communities who may require language support to undertake vocational training.

Opportunities for training for those in low skilled work is an additional policy area where opportunities to support positive views of multiculturalism can be addressed. Two studies,² support the concern that workers with low English language skills have fewer opportunities to gain or to upgrade skills and qualifications. This limits the capacity of people to participate and feel productive and thereby affects perceptions of the contributions of people from cultures whose first language is not English. Table 1 provides evidence of this lower access to training.

Table 1 - Employers' contribution to training, NCVER 2004, ANTA, 2004



Pathways within the training system and continued pathways for employees once they commence work are important contributors to social cohesion.

The school system is working to equip young people to be able to succeed and take an equal place with their fellow Australian born students. Additional initiatives in the most recent state budgets to support homework clubs are commended in this regard. Ensuring that language centres are available in areas where new arrivals are settling is also noted in this regard. Success in education for young people is critical if they are to develop the sense of personal worth and well being that will equip them to take their place as fully contributing members of a society, exercise choices and return benefits to the society.

For young people who arrive in Australia in adolescence and have interrupted schooling, the challenges and the risks are greater. For these young people, a concerted effort to link services is required to ensure that they do not fall through the cracks, that they settle successfully and contribute to a positive view of multiculturalism. By failing to address settlement issues faced by young migrants and refugees we contribute to negative perceptions portrayed from time to time in the media.

2. Access to employment

Gaining employment is a major milestone in successful settlement. Contributions to cohesive communities and a cohesive society flow directly from this. People who are either unemployed or are not part of the labour force may have fewer opportunities to build social relationships.

Work also provides income, which facilitates participation in many social activities in Australia. However, migrants and refugees still remain noticeably under-represented in the workforce despite their motivation and willingness to be productive and economically independent.

² Employers' contribution to training, NCVER 2004, ANTA, 2004

Australian Industry Group Skilling the Existing Workforce Background Research Paper March 2007: Findings were that casual and part-time workers are less likely to participate compared to full-time workers and that CALD people and people with language and the literacy deficits are also less likely to participate in all forms of skills training.

High unemployment in refugee communities

The most comprehensive survey undertaken on participation rates for Humanitarian and Migrant Entrants to Australia is the DIAC Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA)³.

Against the current national unemployment rate of 4.2%, Humanitarian Stream Entrants and some categories within the Migration Stream continue to be severely under-represented in the workforce. Table 2 provides data.

Table 2 - Participation Rates

		Humanitarian Entrants	Preferential Family / Family Stream
Unemployed	After 4-5 months	75%	21%
	After 16-17 months	43%	13%
Participating in labour force	After 4-5 months	16%	54%
	After 16-17 months	32%	62%

Source: DIAC Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA)

The third wave of this study (Dec 2004–March 2005) did not include refugees and therefore there is no recent accurate indicator of participation and unemployment rates for newly arrived refugee communities. AMES does have data from our Job Network that indicates significant unemployment amongst newly arrived refugees.

Practical approaches to increase access to employment

AMES is implementing a number of practical programs to assist newly arrived refugees to gain employment as soon as possible after arrival. AMES is also working to advocate policy changes where required at federal level.

Two examples provide approaches to working directly with employers. These projects can have lasting impacts in shaping positive employer perceptions of newly arrived migrants and refugees.

A critical success factor in both of the approaches is the bridging support between employers and refugee employees provided by a skilled community member who can work in first language and English.

These approaches are strongly supported as effective employment entry strategies by the communities. Community members stress the importance of practical training for community members with low levels of formal education.

Working with employers and the Karen community

AMES has established relationships with market gardeners in Werribee to set up opportunities for newly arrived refugee job seekers from communities from Burma to obtain work as vegetable pickers and packers. This has been done in close cooperation with the Australian Karen Association (AKO). Input from the community through bilingual outreach staff has been essential to make this project successful.

Employers were initially reluctant to employ members of the Burmese community, perceiving them to be inexperienced and lacking sufficient English. AMES organised employment liaison staff (including Karen staff) to work with the employers and support workers who have very limited English.

AMES is also establishing ways to ensure that these new arrivals can continue to learn English in the AMEP while taking up what is initially unpredictable casual work. To meet the requirements of the employers who did not want to directly employ these workers, AMES undertook a labour hire function.

The outcomes in terms of employment are promising. To date 35 members of the Burmese community have had casual and full-time employment at 4 market gardens in Werribee. Employers are impressed by their speed, reliability and work ethic. The level of resources required for this project is significant but the long term benefits will be enduring for this community and for the confidence with which this community can begin to engage with their wider Australian community.

AMES is now extending this project by developing a relationship with the Victorian Farmers Federation to expand this to the South East of Melbourne and potentially to regional areas.

³ The DIAC Longitudinal Survey surveys Primary Applicants in all visa categories over an extended period. LSIA 1 surveyed arrivals between September 1993 and August 1995, LSIA 2 surveyed arrivals between September 1999 and August 2000. LSIA 3 surveyed arrivals and those granted their visa onshore between December 2004 and March 2005. Humanitarian Entrants were not included in LSIA 3.

Working in the Hospitality Industry

English and Certificate I in Hospitality are delivered concurrently for a group of Sudanese women who have very low levels of English but are highly motivated to undertake vocational training that will increase their chance of employment. English language training is delivered with Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) or Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) funding. The Hospitality training is funded by state vocational training funding. This training is delivered in first language. The English language component is strongly focussed on the language and concepts of the hospitality course. One day is based in a local workplace hotel site where hands-on workplace learning takes place.

AMES is negotiating for these women to undertake two four day shifts at the Sofitel where they will be supported by a first language employee who has previously worked at the Sofitel. There is potential to expand this to employment in the spectrum of budget to luxury hotels in the Accor Group.

A role for state government

The state government has a strong commitment to supporting and consolidating multicultural policy through a legislative framework that serves as the basis for policies. The government has also allocated resources in a number of areas to implement this commitment.

The Discussion Paper notes that to have a socially cohesive society, people must have basic needs provided for, including physical and economic needs and the right to work. Employment is a fundamental plank in this package and provides an opportunity for the government to lead by practice. A government led program (such as the example described below), offering employment opportunities to newly arrived refugees and migrants across all skill levels would clearly broadcast the government's commitment and provide those essential opportunities required to translate policy into practice. The existing Youth Employment Scheme provides a model for replication with this group.

Using this approach, AMES is establishing a formal Intermediate Labour Market program. This builds on work previously undertaken to offer employment opportunities to NESB job seekers with relevant vocational skills who can also contribute bi-lingual and bi-cultural skills and knowledge to the workplace. In 2008 this program is offering 50 traineeships and other paid work to migrants and refugees. Positions that have been created include Employment Information Officers who work with job seekers in

AMES Employment and also work with employers to provide support in bridging job seekers with low levels of English into employment. Settlement Information Officers provide settlement information and assistance for newly arrived refugees. There are opportunities for these staff to progress into other positions that become available in the organisation or to apply for jobs externally. The experience and data from this program will inform future practices and support for other employers to conduct similar ILM programs within their organisations.

The emphasis in the program is to provide a solid work and training experience that can equip these employees for their next job. There is a strong emphasis on assisting these trainees into their next job to ensure that each year opportunities are available for new recruits.

State government as a major employer can also lead by example by providing opportunities for refugees and migrants to demonstrate their existing skills through short term work placements whereby employers can experience the skills, capabilities and potential of migrants and refugees in the workplace. AMES experience is that work placements are not only a very useful way for refugees and migrants to gain familiarity with the Australian workplace but have also resulted in employment outcomes.

Government could consider a ways of acknowledging employers who take on migrants and refugees for ILM experiences or for short term work placements, such as providing wage subsidies for the period of the placement and other incentives to encourage broader uptake of the initiative amongst employer and industry groups. Public acknowledgement of employers and promotion of success stories from the initiatives would contribute to the public perception of the positive and productive contribution migrants and refugees can make.

As a major purchaser of contracts requiring a broad range of skills the State government similarly has capacity to provide employment opportunities for migrants and refugees by including social dividend clauses within all purchasing contracts. Neighbourhood renewal contracts and public / private construction contracts are existing examples. Additional opportunities exist in areas such as transport and in the full range of services accessed by the settler communities.

Examples of international practice in migrant and refugee employment

Canada and a number of European countries have well supported programs to assist with the employment of migrants and refugees. Approaches validate that a number of programs that Victoria has trialled or implemented also work elsewhere. Additionally they identify other possible approaches that could be implemented to increase access to employment for newly arrived communities and support a strong multicultural Victorian community.

Canada

As in Australia, newcomers cite difficulties finding employment, especially employment in their own field, to be the principal barrier to settlement. Programs proposed by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) provide examples of how this may be addressed. They also confirm that approaches already being taken in Victoria are successful internationally and form a basis for further investment to achieve maximum uptake of migrant skills. Programs include:

- Career Bridge: a 4 month internship for skilled migrants
- Mentor Partnerships: matching skilled migrants with Canadian counterparts in the same profession
- Occupation and Licensing Bridge: sector based bridging programs
- Employer Promising Practices: a toolkit to assist employers in recruitment, training and promotion of skilled migrants

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has established Emplooi – an employment agency for refugees.⁴ The agency was set up by the Refugee Council and became

independent in 2004. It uses a national network of 100 retired executives who work 2 days a week to mentor case loads of refugees. It is very effective placing refugees into jobs, and generates 500 to 600 jobs each year. Since the founding of the agency in 1990, Emplooi has helped 10,000 refugees find jobs.

Scotland

The Bridges Program⁵ operates for refugees and asylum seekers and offers work shadow placements. Companies are invited to offer suitable placements and asylum seekers and refugees apply for a work shadow placement in their respective profession or employment sphere. Placements are usually made for one day a week over three months. The Bridges Program is promoted to companies as an opportunity to make an investment in people who in turn may be in a position to contribute to Scotland, or to establish their own company in the future.

Norway

An Introductory Program⁶ is provided for refugees and immigrants. The introductory course is delivered within three months after settlement and municipalities must also provide extra tuition, up to a total of 3000 hours, if it is required. Workplace practice is often combined with the introductory courses and employers are subsidised to do this.

In addition, all employers, whether state, municipal or private, are actively encouraged to employ persons with immigrant backgrounds. In the state administration, employers are obliged to call in at least one applicant with an immigrant background for interviews when hiring personnel, provided that the applicant is qualified. Senior managers of all wholly state-owned enterprises are urged to introduce the same scheme. The Government has also focused on large private companies as major employers.

⁴ www.emplooi.net

⁵ www.diverseroutes.co.uk/professional-qualifications.htm

⁶ www.vox.no/templates/CommonPage.aspx?id=2609

2. Social and Civic Participation

How can multicultural policy increase representation and social and civic participation among Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities?

As well as participation in the labour force, involvement in social activities provides people with opportunities to engage with the wider community and to build social support networks, which in turn contribute to an increased sense of community. Opportunities for social participation and interaction may be found through participation in paid and unpaid work, friendships and networks of shared interest and participation in sporting, cultural and leisure activities. High levels of social participation and social connectedness are also believed to contribute to the overall wellbeing of individuals and their communities.

While migrants contribute to and enrich Australian society through their different skills, abilities and experiences, they potentially face difficulties such as language barriers and cultural differences which could affect their ability to participate in some social activities.⁷

Social and civic participation relies on a complex set of variables and may be viewed as different things by different communities. It may also take on different meaning and importance depending on the length of settlement. Areas that need to be considered with respect to facilitating increased representation for new communities include:

1. Social and civic participation as part of a transitional settlement pathway
2. Building blocks to social and civic participation

1. Social and civic participation as part of a transitional settlement pathway

Social and civic participation is more likely to develop for new communities once the fundamentals of settlement are in place. Housing, health, settlement of family members and re-unification of families are urgent issues that will take priority. Until these are in place it is not reasonable to expect or measure successful multiculturalism by levels of participation. This is not to suggest that this should not be a long term objective. New communities consulted noted that settling and feeling part of a new community is a long process. Their personal experiences of settlement were that it takes a significant period of time for this process to evolve and for new arrivals to feel part of a new society.

Forms of social and civic participation often go unrecognised in new communities. There are many forms of participation in establishing the community's own members, setting up community organisations and building social capital within the new community that play a very significant role in establishing new communities and setting them on a path of longer term participation in the wider community.

The effect of volunteering on the functioning and connectedness of communities is increasingly being recognised. Through their contribution to a wide range of organisations, volunteers help to build social networks, shared values and social cohesion. Recent census data⁸ showing that people born in Australia were more likely to undertake voluntary work than those born elsewhere did not take into account the less formal volunteering that is a hallmark of newly arrived communities. Within communities there is significant volunteer work undertaken by earlier arrivals who have had some time to settle in Australia in looking after the latest flow of refugees. This volunteering extends from providing funds to bring family members to Australia, assisting in initial support and orientation, sharing their accommodation with newly arrived refugees to working with organisations such as AMES to broker employment opportunities for their communities and establishing cultural and social activities. Increased recognition of these activities would support positive perceptions of newly arrived groups in the wider community.

⁷ ABS July 2008 Catalogue 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends: Social Participation of Migrants

⁸ ABS July 2008 Catalogue 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends: Social Participation of Migrants. Survey focused on adults who volunteer at least once a fortnight for one or more organisations, i.e. 'formal' volunteering only.

2. Building blocks to social and civic participation

Secure employment is an essential building block that will precede the capacity to participate more broadly. As noted in the previous section, employment is fundamental for many new arrivals to gain the sense of well being and confidence that are the precursors to broader social and civic participation. The importance of access to employment cannot be overstated. AMES as a provider of services, and newly arrived communities themselves, articulate this as a fundamental element.

A component of this pathway to employment is frequently additional training to either develop new skills for employment and to recognise and build on the skills and capabilities gained prior to coming to Australia. Ensuring that the education system for young people is set up to support and provide every opportunity for success is very important to set young new arrivals on a secure path. As noted, there are a number of initiatives to support this. Likewise, Victoria's training system must provide appropriate access for adults who require some training as a pathway to work.

Inter-generational role models are an important part of a community building self esteem and confidence and the motivation to achieve the longer term goal of social and civic participation. For young people, success in education and training are critical, as are positive role models of adults in the community who are employed, preferably in areas that recognise and use existing skills. The negative impacts of inter-generational unemployment on a community are well documented.

Newly arrived families also need access to opportunities to participate outside the immediate settlement context. Such opportunities include locally organised sporting and recreational activities where families from the broader community can meet regularly and interact. Local councils could play a role in these arrangements providing the bridge for newly and recently arrived to start building social capital outside the immediate family.

AMES experience with mentoring through the Big Brothers / Big Sisters organisation is a good example of how children and adolescents from three or four families can be introduced to other young people, sporting clubs and similar activities by meeting fortnightly with a mentor from the organisation. This has had a very positive impact on bringing the new arrivals into contact with others from the broader community and fostered a greater sense of participation.

The ABS data from 2006 shows that, over time migrants from non English speaking backgrounds do participate in social and civic activities, for example in sporting activities just over half (53%) reporting some form of participation in sport in the previous 12 months, a similar level to that of people from main English-speaking countries. Similarly, attendance at cultural venues was high for migrant groups in 2006 with about eight out of ten people from other countries reporting that they had attended a culture or leisure venue in the previous twelve months.

3. Institutions, Service Delivery and Cultural Competence

How can multicultural policy achieve culturally responsive service delivery?

Creating opportunities for employment is essential for successful multiculturalism. One way to create such opportunities is to consider where using the cultural and linguistic skills of migrants and refugees from new communities will increase the cultural responsiveness of service delivery. Two initiatives to achieve these joint objectives are discussed.

1. Employment strategies that increase culturally responsive service delivery.
2. Provision of interpreting

1. Employment strategies that increase culturally responsive service delivery.

The state government has implemented some excellent initiatives that increase capacity to deliver culturally responsive services. The Refugee Health Nurse (RHN) initiative is one good example of this.

The way in which AMES and the RHN service work together provides one example of how the effectiveness and cultural responsiveness of services can be increased. AMES works closely with the RHNs as an essential referral service to address the multiple health issues facing refugees in the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) program in the early period of their settlement. The effectiveness of this program has been further increased by the support provided by culturally competent Community Guides who have an understanding of the new refugee communities.

The Community Guides program was established in October 2005 as part of the delivery of IHSS services. AMES employs Community Guides as part of the IHSS program to provide assistance in refugee's first language during their initial resettlement process, and particularly to provide information and assistance to access available services. Because health is the most significant, time consuming and ongoing issue for many refugee families, a large part of the Community Guide role is in educating, supporting and assisting refugees to access the health system and manage their own complex health needs.

Community Guides are an integral part of the IHSS service delivery model and are matched with families based on language and cultural backgrounds. Community Guides have first language skills of current refugee arrivals, an understanding of, or shared experience of refugees, sound community networks and an understanding of the systems they need to use in Australia.

The Community Guides program has:

- improved access to health services for newly arrived refugees
- contributed to improved health outcomes for newly arrived refugees
- reduced the number of "no shows" at medical appointments
- educated refugees in first language about the health system
- increased awareness of health issues of refugees amongst health services and practitioners
- increased the effectiveness of health services by ensuring they reach intended participants.

This program model is readily transferable to other services. As well as contributing significantly to the effectiveness of services, it provides meaningful employment opportunities for relatively newly arrived refugees and migrants and provides a powerful way to gain added benefit from using a combination of commonwealth and state funds.

The model could be readily transferred to areas such as the justice system. As noted in the discussion paper, inter-generational issues and tensions are created in families and communities where young people are adapting to Australian culture more rapidly than their parents. By training family mediators from communities to address these issues through the justice system and community members to act as foster carers where there are child protection issues we could

improve understanding of and access to systems and thus decrease risks of family breakdown.

Models such as this send a clear message to new arrival communities of multicultural policy in action. They also increase service effectiveness and provide opportunities for newly arrived staff to work in partnership with mainstream service deliverers.

2. Provision of interpreting

A number of government departments have budget allocations for interpreting. This is essential to ensure that services can be understood and accessed. An even more effective way of delivering services is to employ staff who speak the languages of clients. However this cannot be achieved for all language groups and the provision of interpreters is an excellent complement to having bi-lingual staff in house. It is important to ensure service providers are well informed regarding the languages required by their clients and try to accommodate this through accurate sourcing of interpreters through the available translating and interpreting services. An example of this is a person from

Burma may need a Karen or Chin interpreter rather than a Burmese interpreter.

A related issue is the translation of information into community languages. AMES experience is that significant numbers of people (not only refugees and migrants) have low or no levels of literacy in their first language. A more effective way of providing information and ensuring it is reaching the intended target audience is to provide information in formats such as audio tapes, DVDs and digital photo stories. State government departments' obligations to provide often complex and detailed information to the public could be enhanced by utilising these formats more broadly.

4. The geography of multiculturalism

How can urban planning and infrastructure policy meet the needs of Victoria's multicultural population?

The Discussion Paper notes housing affordability as one of the challenges. Availability of affordable housing for new refugees pushes them onto the fringes of Melbourne. Transport, access to employment opportunities and services are issues faced not only by these new arrivals but many residents in these areas. They may be living in disadvantaged communities where many residents are under pressure and tensions may therefore be greater. The sense of isolation felt and articulated by refugees and migrants is seriously escalated in such locations, especially for those who have come from much more communal and densely populated living arrangements where the opportunity to build social capital and participate with other families and community members was far more immediate and accessible.

Within these constraints there are two issues that AMES can provide some input to.

1. Planning for new communities
2. Transport

1. Planning for new communities

Access to affordable rental accommodation is currently placing an enormous strain on refugee and newly arrived families in the same way as it is affecting members of the broader community. Significant numbers of migrants and refugees come from community based social structures, with families living in close proximity, and where social and civic participation are a way of life. Examples from current new arrival groups in Victoria are those from Burma, Africa, Afghanistan, China, Vietnam and India. The current housing situation forces people further to the fringes of the city, into areas where transport and community services are underdeveloped and employment opportunities are few. This exacerbates the sense of isolation and disconnection from society and effectively inhibits opportunities for participation with the wider community.

Where new communities are being established in a new geographic location careful planning is required to ensure that services are in place and the settling community and host community are prepared. A recent example of AMES experience provides some indicators that support successful settlement.

AMES, with its IHSS consortium partners GATE and Redback, seeded a new community of Karen families in Corio to address the need to find and establish a broader range of settlement locations

for refugees. Of particular concern was the shortage of affordable housing in some of the established settlement centres. Karen refugee families have been settled in Werribee over the past four years and there is now a strong, established community in place but affordable housing is now in short supply.

The objective was to settle a group of families so that a small but viable community could begin and families could support each other and not move away to join the existing community in Werribee. AMES used a well planned and managed strategy involving both the settler community and the "host" or receiving community in Corio. AMES is monitoring the settlement of the initial families to ensure requisite on-going support is provided to make this a sustainable settlement location for these and other families in future. AMES is also documenting the process, issues and resources needed in order to modify and /or replicate the strategy in other suitable regional areas in Victoria.

The preparation for the settlement of Karen families in Corio began in April 2007. The first families arrived in August 2007 and to date fifteen families, comprising 71 individuals, have been settled in Corio. All these families are currently still resident in Corio.

AMES applied the following principles to plan and implement this regional settlement.

- **Sustainable settlement**

Attention needs to be given to how infrastructure can be resourced to support and sustain settlement over time. This should be done well before settlers arrive, not just in the initial settlement phase.

- **Community infrastructure**

Plans for settlement in regional areas need to address economic, educational, health, housing and social issues for both the settler and the host communities. Services in these sectors need to be in place to support both these groups. Both groups will vary in their willingness or readiness to accept, or to be new settlers.

- **Settler consultation**

Representatives of the settler communities, both already settled and about to arrive, need to be involved in all aspects of planning for settlement in a new location and are key to sustaining settlement in the new area.

- **Cultural support**

Newly arrived refugees can adapt more easily to their new host communities if they have strong links to their original culture. Strategies for maintenance of language and culture need to be part of the planning process.

- **Promotion to new settlers**

Benefits of settling in the new location need to be clear to and valued by the refugee families themselves.

- **Promotion to host communities**

Local agencies, particularly local government, local press, schools, human services (e.g. health, housing) and volunteers are key community drivers.

- **Employment**

Regional settlement should target areas where sustainable employment is available. This may include employment for skilled as well as unskilled refugees reflecting the profile of the refugees to be settled in a specific region.

In practice this resulted in the following implementation.

AMES convened a Service Providers Group four months prior to the arrival of the first families. This included representatives from local service providers including Centrelink, health and education providers, real estate agents and local settlement providers who would have direct contact with the Karen families. A representative from the State DIAC settlement office also joined the group.

AMES worked closely with the two key Karen community associations so that community leaders could make an informed choice and would actively support the Corio settlement plans.

Relationships were established with local real estate agents. AMES IHSS Consortium partner Redback proposed that they would be a “one stop shop” for any problems such as property damage or unpaid rental to assure agents that taking these new families would not be problematic. Over time a good relationship has been developed with three agents and one private landlord. Fifteen families have now been settled all within 2 blocks of each other.

All service providers and a number of volunteers provided a welcoming atmosphere and opportunities for the new families to participate in community activities. Local press coverage of such community events has been very supportive and helped to generate a positive perception within the host community.

Indications are that the new Karen community in Corio are settling well and likely to increase in number over the coming years. Critical success factors in this pilot included substantial preparation and consultation, sourcing of affordable accommodation **with families in close proximity to each other**, case management and development of local community support. This managed process, based on tripartite support from settlement services, the host community and settler community, provides a replicable model for seeding humanitarian settlement in new regional communities and building a sound base for community cohesion.

2. Transport

Mobility is a challenge when new arrivals must settle in areas where there are limited opportunities for employment and services are not within close proximity. Private transport is frequently the only alternative to get to work or transport children to school, sporting and other recreational and social events but many refugees do not have a knowledge and understanding of road safety and rules in Australia. For this reason refugees and some migrants need to be recognised as high risk, in the same way as young drivers are, and educated in road safety.

The Fit to Drive program for young people is very useful for this group but needs wider application for older new arrivals. Whilst a number of learning to drive programs have been established

within new and recently communities, often using volunteer resources, these tend to focus solely on the theoretical aspects of road safety and road rules. The requirement for 120 hours of supervised driving practice is out of the reach of most as they do not own or have access to a vehicle nor do they have licensed family members or friends who can undertake this role. The cost of 120 hours of supervised driving practice through a commercial driving school is prohibitive. The State government through TAC and / or Vic Roads could consider ways in which learner driver programs could be made more accessible to recently arrived migrant and refugee groups, such as supporting representatives of on arrival communities to become registered driving instructors.

5. Economic drivers: using cultural diversity for competitive advantage

How can we better enhance our competitive economic edge through our cultural and linguistic and religious diversity?

The Discussion Paper notes that economic imperatives have been the overwhelming driver for the development of our multicultural diversity and that immigration continues to play a critical role in driving development in Victoria. Those consulted, however, noted underemployment, job seeking skills and recognition of skills gained overseas as some of the challenges.

AMES experience strongly confirms this assessment of challenges with respect to employment. Previous sections of the paper have noted issues with respect to training and access to employment and proposed some interventions to address these. They have emphasised the fundamental contribution of employment in social cohesion and successful multiculturalism.

This section will provide input specifically on underemployment.

Underemployment

The issue of underemployment and the under-use of existing skills of migrants and refugees has been a long standing challenge. While there are many examples of refugees who have made outstanding public contributions, there are also many who cannot manage to gain satisfying and sustainable employment that uses their skills.

AMES has recently commenced a longitudinal study to track clients over a period from their initial settlement. Some preliminary data collected in a retrospective component of this study indicates that newly arrived migrants with qualifications accept that they will not necessarily be able to immediately enter their field at the same level. Given that this is frequently a realistic assessment, it is important to ensure there are pathways once newly arrived migrants commence work so that their skills can be progressively better used. Other options are to provide some fast track training prior to employment to fill gaps and facilitate more effective use of skills once employment commences. AMES and our consortia partners in TAFE Institutes are implementing some models to provide such training.

What is of greater concern is the group of migrants who fail to secure any work in their field.

The requirement to increase the skills of the Victorian workforce is a major driver of the current reform to the VET system in Victoria. Multicultural policy in Victoria could be supported by ensuring that this skills reform includes ways

of making better use skills that are existing, but are not sufficiently recognised.

The state government has previously funded programs that provide highly focussed workplace orientation followed by work experience to assist migrants with overseas qualifications to gain entry to their profession. AMES has delivered a number of these programs. These have been very successful in achieving employment for migrants with skills who have not been able to break into the labour market. No programs for overseas qualified migrants are currently funded by government. Re-establishing these programs would be an excellent initiative to increase the use of the existing skills of our migrant population.

Another solution may be “adult apprenticeships” whereby people with existing skills and experience are able to work with and shadow experienced practitioners on-the-job to learn the local rules, regulatory environment and context, rather than return to study to completely requalify. Recognition of overseas qualifications and prior learning processes can be very time consuming and demotivating and can result in people never working at their level of competence post arrival. Not recognising existing skills and knowledge and not providing the opportunities for people to demonstrate their skills and knowledge can result in refugees and migrants being under or unemployed and has a very direct and negative impact on willingness and opportunity for civic and social participation.

A 2006 Skills Survey⁹ 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. Initiatives that provide opportunities for employers to experience for themselves the capabilities of skilled migrants are invaluable in building awareness of this often untapped source of skilled labour. AMES experience is that employers are frequently impressed with the calibre of migrants placed on work experience but would not have considered

employing these candidates had this advocacy not been undertaken through work placement programs.

As outlined in Section 1 of this response the state government can take a proactive role in encouraging and supporting industry and large employers to take a part in providing opportunities for NESB jobseekers. It can also lead by example by offering work experience and employment opportunities within government.

⁹ Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) Skills Survey 2006