

Qualitative Research Report

Stage 3: Regional Migrant Settlement Health Lens Project

**Report for Department of Trade and Economic
Development, SA Health and Multicultural SA**

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of qualitative research on the experience of migrant settlement in regional South Australia. The research was part of the Regional Migrant Settlement Health Lens Project, a collaborative initiative between the Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED), Multicultural SA and SA Health. The research was jointly funded by DTED and SA Health.

The qualitative research explored migrant settlement experiences from the perspectives of migrants, employers of migrants and community members to identify factors that influence settlement outcomes for migrants located in rural and regional areas of South Australia. The research objectives were to:

- identify facilitators and barriers to positive settlement experiences and outcomes;
- describe how settlement experiences impact on the wellbeing of migrants; and
- identify strategies for positive settlement of migrants in future.

Methods

Qualitative research methodology employing both focus groups and interviews was used to explore migrant settlement issues with migrants, employers of migrants and community members in Whyalla and the Limestone Coast (Mt Gambier and Bordertown). The research comprised eight focus groups, five with migrants and three with community members, as well as three interviews with employers of migrants.

In total 111 participants took part in the research, including migrants from 12 distinct ethnic groups. The skilled migrant focus groups included a Filipino group and two mixed ethnicity groups (Indian, Fijian Indian, Fijian, Zimbabwean, South African, Dutch, and French). The two humanitarian groups were a mixed ethnicity group (Sudanese, Eritrean, and Pakistani) and a Burmese group of Karen ethnicity. Focus group attendance of both migrants and community members averaged approximately 13 participants per group.

Local service providers and cultural community leaders provided crucial advice for the composition of groups and in recruiting participants. The research received formal ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Health. The sessions were digitally recorded with participants' written consent.

Findings

Effects of settlement on migrant wellbeing

Some migrant participants, especially humanitarian migrants, had experienced improved wellbeing through moving to a safer place where they did not need to feel fearful. This had a large positive effect on their wellbeing.

In contrast, other participants had experienced difficult settlement issues that impacted on their mental health and wellbeing, especially unemployment, work problems and prolonged separation

from family. Community members showed a high degree of concern about migrants' wellbeing and experiences of financial hardship, consistent with reports from migrants themselves. Migrants in several focus groups talked about a gap between their pre-arrival expectations and the reality of the new location, which impacted on their wellbeing in the initial settlement stage. Participants felt there were some issues with representatives from Australian government agencies (both state and federal) or employers misleading migrants by giving unrealistic information before they arrived, especially about job opportunities.

Access to health care was a key factor that affected migrant wellbeing. Both migrants and community members raised concerns about access in regional and rural areas of South Australia, including waiting times to access both specialist care and, in some cases, primary health care. Community members reported there were cultural communication barriers affecting migrants' access to health care. The high cost of health care for people on temporary or provisional visas was a significant area of concern.

Settlement and integration into local communities

While settlement experiences varied, migrants commonly faced a challenging period especially in the first three to six months. Initial support and orientation was a crucial determinant of a migrant's overall settlement experience. Many participants intended to stay in South Australia, and indicated strong commitment to the local area. Other participants planned to move elsewhere, generally within Australia. The main reasons for intending to move were the need to find suitable employment or to do further training.

Overall, migrants, employers and community members gave a largely positive picture of migrants' integration into regional communities. Nonetheless participants from all three perspectives agreed there were "pockets" of negativity and discrimination. While the skilled migrants mostly said they felt well integrated, the Filipino group said they felt less integrated because of cultural differences although there was some involvement in the community through church and workplaces. The humanitarian migrant groups faced larger barriers to integration, especially language and communication problems. Consistent with reports from migrants, community members felt the local communities were improving over time in their openness to new migrants, and also acknowledged it took time for new migrants to settle and integrate.

Community members and employers said migrants contributed positively to local communities. Greater cultural diversity was a fundamental contribution, which community participants and employers felt had become part of the local identity, especially in Whyalla and Bordertown. Another common contribution from migrants, according to community members as well as employers, was filling crucial employment roles and financially investing in regional and rural towns. In particular, employers emphasised the contribution of migrants in the workplace as highly motivated and committed workers. Other areas where migrants contributed to the community were sporting or church/religious involvement and cultural celebrations.

Factors that facilitate positive settlement

Participants in all migrant groups emphasised the central role of support from people of their own ethnicity in promoting a good settlement experience. Suitable and fulfilling employment was

another widespread contributor to migrants' positive settlement experiences and was raised in all migrant groups.

A strong theme in this research was the role of migrant support services in facilitating positive settlement outcomes. Participants in all groups and interviews (migrants, community members and employers) emphasised the importance of migrant support services in helping people settle. Migrant support programs were noted for their role in networking and introducing people to the right services and community supports. Another critical role was to link people with potential jobs. The importance of one-to-one connections in finding work was raised by many migrants.

Success factors for recruiting and employing migrants

Employer interviews highlighted several critical factors for positive migrant recruitment and settlement, congruent with the views of migrants and community members:

- Provision of a support/orientation package for new migrants, if possible to include housing.
- Recruitment of migrant families rather than single individuals and consideration of the needs of the family as a whole, including seeking employment for the spouse.
- Linking migrants with the local migrant support program and collaboration between employers and the migrant support program to ensure appropriate support packages are in place.

One of the employer interviewees had had considerable success with 100% retention of migrant employees and increases in productivity and work performance since the migrants were employed. This employer advocated recruitment of migrants with permanent residency approved prior to moving to Australia. He felt it was unsatisfactory, for both the company and workers, to recruit on a temporary basis due to uncertainty and the need for long term job commitment and workforce stability.

Issues for employers

In employing migrants, the main challenges for employers were problems with bureaucracy and visa delays, and social and cultural issues including language and communication barriers. All three employers were frustrated with bureaucratic immigration requirements, especially the length of time it took to secure visa approval. One employer said recent changes to the 457 visa rules had removed employers' ability to bond migrant employees for a particular length of time. He said this was a significant disincentive for employers, as there was no certainty that employees would stay.

Specific issues were raised on occupational coding for federal immigration purposes, as a major problem for one company. For permanent residency approval for 457 temporary visa holders, the current ASCO¹ codes for skilled occupations did not include all skill levels relevant to the company's workforce. This meant the company could not offer workers with certain occupations sponsorship for permanent residency. The employer said it considered that the workers in these occupations had skills equivalent to the other workers in the company, and this was reflected in equivalent pay rates. However, workers with the skill in short supply could not be considered for permanent residency due to the coding issue, whereas other workers, whose supply was more plentiful, could be. This policy meant there was greater uncertainty for the workers who could not

¹ Australian Standard Classification of Occupations

apply for permanent residency and were reliant on the company seeking renewal of their temporary visas.

Issues for community members

The community focus groups reported that a major challenge of increasing regional migration was the impact on local services and infrastructure. As small regional and rural towns, greater migration brought new capacity challenges such as primary school teachers needing to teach children with low English language skill. Problems were compounded by difficulties for regional towns in accessing support and appropriate funding to meet migrants' needs. A significant shortage of interpreters in regional and rural towns was emphasised.

Barriers to positive settlement

Participants in the research raised a wide range of barriers to positive migrant settlement. The following page sets out the main barriers in a table (Table 1).

Table 1: Barriers to positive settlement

Theme	Specific barriers	Examples/comments
Work-related challenges	Experiences of unemployment	Unemployment had a large effect on migrant wellbeing. Migrants reported that prospective employers would often require Australian experience. Participants described getting “that first break” as very difficult and said being turned down for basic-level jobs was “heart-breaking and demeaning”.
	Experiences of underemployment (having to work in a lower skilled job)	Some migrants in all of the focus groups said they were working (or had worked previously) in roles beneath their skill level. A common concern was the lack of recognition of some overseas qualifications in Australia.
Financial challenges	High financial costs of settlement	It was common for both skilled and humanitarian migrants to talk about financial struggles and the high costs associated with settling in a new country.
	High costs for temporary and provisional visa holders	Migrants and community members raised concern about lack of access to government support such as Medicare for temporary and provisional visa holders. Education was a particular concern, as temporary visa holders who wanted to retrain to be able to get appropriate Australian employment or to have their professional registration recognised were faced with international student fees for tertiary education.
Red tape	Bureaucracy and inconsistency	Concerns were expressed about the length of the visa application process, especially for family members who travelled to Australia after the primary applicant, and the length and requirements for applying for permanent residency.
	Changes in immigration policies	Participants felt there should be more consistency and stability of immigration policies. Changes in policy made life difficult for migrants.
Problems with accessing information or services	Lack of knowledge of local community or services for migrants	Many participants highlighted a gap where new migrants often did not receive adequate or timely information about their new location or services to support migrants.
	Lack of information about qualifications requirements	A frequently raised concern was a lack of information about qualifications requirements prior to moving to South Australia.
	Problems with Centrelink and job services	The Burmese migrant group raised several problems with Centrelink and job services, including a lack of interpreters.

Theme	Specific barriers	Examples/comments
English language problems	Difficulties in learning English	The two humanitarian migrant focus groups highlighted problems with English language as a fundamental barrier for them in moving to Australia. Difficulty with English, and the effect on people's capacity to find work, was the predominant theme in the Burmese focus group.
	Problems with TAFE English classes in Mt Gambier and Bordertown	In the Limestone Coast a key problem was a current shortage of English language teachers and lack of access to sufficient hours for language learners. A migrant gave an example of one person's wife having to learn English over the phone with a teacher in Adelaide, which was seen as impractical and difficult.
Housing	Housing shortage in Bordertown	Bordertown participants (migrants, community members and the employer) agreed housing shortages were a key barrier to positive settlement. Significant overcrowding and use of substandard temporary housing by migrants was reported and was also an issue for other residents in the community.
Transport	Limited public transport services in regional towns	Public transport services were very limited in all three regions. Transport barriers were often significant during the early settlement time, when migrants did not have access to a car, and were reliant on public transport.
Separation from family members	Prolonged separation due to lengthy visa approval processes	There was concern from both migrants and community members about significant difficulties and delays in arranging visas for close family members to move to South Australia. Prolonged separation from family members had adverse effects on migrants' mental health and wellbeing.
Training or tertiary education barriers	Limited tertiary education and training opportunities in regional areas	Limited tertiary education opportunities in regional South Australia were a barrier to migrant settlement. Bordertown participants said there was a lack of computer training and only limited public access computers available in their town.
Lack of religious infrastructure	Lack of a mosque in the Bordertown area	The Bordertown migrant focus group emphasised the lack of a mosque as a key barrier for them, and for potential future settlement of Muslim migrants.

Suggestions for future settlement of migrants

Research participants made a range of suggestions for improving migrant settlement in the future. These included:

- Improve long term strategic planning for regional settlement of migrants to better meet migrants' needs.
- Require employers to provide a package of support for sponsored migrants, including clear and realistic pre-arrival information, information on migrant support services and welcome programs, and accommodation advice or support.
- Greater scrutiny of employers recruiting migrants to ensure that vulnerable people are not exploited.
- Improve current processes for visa approval for spouses and close family members of migrants to move to Australia, especially for migrants who are permanent residents.
- Migration and settlement policies should take a greater focus on the whole family, rather than individual primary visa applicants.
- Ensure that realistic and appropriate information is provided to new migrants prior to moving to South Australia, including information on qualifications transferability and registration requirements.
- Improve information for local community members including business people on ways to assist or support new migrants.
- Address shortages in English language tuition and interpreter services in regional areas.

Discussion

The qualitative research highlighted a need for integrated strategic planning to ensure infrastructure is in place to meet migrants' needs. Regional communities had a good understanding of the positive contribution of migrants to their economies and local community. However many community members stressed that the regional migrant recruitment policy risked being undermined by a failure to plan properly for services, infrastructure and social environments to fully support new migrants and their families.

This research found it was common for non-sponsored migrants in regional South Australia to have difficulties finding suitable employment, especially in the early stages of settlement. While humanitarian migrants faced significant employment barriers due to a lower level of English language proficiency (a fundamental problem for the Burmese migrants in this research), many skilled migrants also experienced challenges in securing jobs appropriate to their qualifications and skills. Limited recognition of overseas qualifications and prohibitive registration requirements, leading to underemployment of migrants, was a widespread concern among migrants and community members.

Compared with permanent residents, temporary or provisional migrants were disadvantaged as they faced greater uncertainty and higher costs by failing to meet entitlement criteria for

government support such as Medicare and education. Access to training and tertiary education was a key barrier for these migrants, and access to essential health services was affected, both of which have major implications for migrants' health and wellbeing. The research suggests that for temporary migrants who wish to apply to settle permanently, it is optimal to initiate the permanent residency process early and to secure permanent status as rapidly as possible.

Challenges for migrants in accessing services and support were often magnified through being based in a regional or rural area where there were fewer locally based services available, especially specialist health, education and interpreter services. Access to adequate English language tuition was a major problem in the Limestone Coast area.

Social and cultural support was a fundamental determinant of positive settlement in regional and rural areas. In particular, support on arrival from migrants' own cultural communities was critical to settlement and more rapid integration into the new location. The crucial role and valued contribution of migrant support services was emphasised repeatedly by migrants, community members and employers in this research.

A key message from the research is the need to recruit migrants as a family unit, rather than single individuals, and to consider the family as a whole (such as job placement for the spouse). Research participants expressed significant concern about situations where there had been long delays in approving visas for family members to move to Australia from overseas. Prolonged separation from family diminished the mental health and wellbeing of migrants through stress, anxiety and depression.

Integration of migrants into regional and rural communities had sometimes been difficult at first, with tensions or separation between locals and new migrants, but integration had improved significantly over time as people got to know each other as individuals and co-workers. An emergent theme was that people living in these regional South Australian towns appreciated the increasingly multicultural flavour of their communities, and saw cultural diversity as a core part of the community's identity.

Limitations of the research

The main limitation of the research was that participants were largely self-selecting. The research sample may be comprised of participants with different experiences to those who did not choose to take part. In particular this may have been a problem with the community participants in this research. Many of the community members who chose to participate held largely positive views of migrants and were involved with migrants in some way.

The research tended to attract articulate migrant participants, although there was some variety. The local service providers who assisted with recruitment made an effort to invite a wide range of migrants. Unfortunately the work and family commitments of people working in trades or lower skilled jobs may have constrained their ability to participate.

The cancellation of one focus group meant a low number of migrants in Bordertown were included. This would have been a problem for the research if there was a need to directly compare across the three regions, but this was not the case. The information from employers was gained through three interviews with four employers in the three regions. These interviews

were considered as case studies as usually in qualitative research a greater number of interviews would be held. Ideally it would be useful to conduct a survey of a larger number of employers in regional South Australia to seek a broader range of views and experiences. Lastly, it should be noted the research was carried out in a relatively short timeframe (approximately six weeks in total).

Conclusion

With government promotion of regional migration, migrants are increasingly settling in regional towns such as Whyalla, Mt Gambier and Bordertown. These regional communities showed understanding of migrant issues and appreciation for migrants' contribution to the region. The community members also understood the importance of migration for the sustainability of their region and the need to retain migrants in the long term.

However, this research indicates that not all migrants' needs are being met. Particular gaps include difficulties in securing appropriate employment and in accessing basic services and infrastructure such as health, education and English language tuition. Some migrants had experienced significant and sustained hardship, for instance through unemployment, financial stress or separation from family, which affected mental health and wellbeing both individually and of their families. Furthermore, it was common for migrants (both humanitarian and skilled) to have experienced some difficulties with settlement, especially in the early stage.

The central message of the research is the need for integrated planning and infrastructure development to aid settlement of migrants in regional South Australia. Improved and more holistic planning and capacity building will help to create the conditions for positive settlement of migrants in future.

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Disclaimer:

This report contains the views and suggestions of the research participants and the author for consideration by decision makers.

The report does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Trade and Economic Development, Multicultural SA or SA Health.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of qualitative research with migrants, employers of migrants and communities on the experience of migrant settlement in regional South Australia. The research was part of the Regional Migrant Settlement Health Lens Project, a collaborative initiative between the Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED), Multicultural SA and SA Health. Quigley and Watts Ltd, a New Zealand based public health research consultancy, was contracted to carry out the qualitative research in collaboration with SA Health and these other agencies. Quigley and Watts Ltd was selected based on previous experience and understanding of the Health In All Policies process (described below).

2. Background

Regional and rural towns in South Australia face challenges of slow population growth, a rapidly ageing population, and young South Australians leaving to pursue career paths in Adelaide, interstate and overseas. Consistent with federal immigration policies, recent state government policies have promoted migration to regional and rural areas outside of Adelaide. Migration to South Australia, and increasingly to regional areas, has increased significantly in recent years with a particular focus on the migration of skilled workers to counter persistent skill shortages. Nonetheless, all migrant groups (humanitarian as well as skilled) can contribute to workforce shortages and skill needs.

Although regional migration schemes have been growing, relatively little is known about the settlement experiences of migrants in regional areas of Australia. The Regional Migrant Settlement Health Lens Project aimed to identify and examine factors which may improve the overall settlement experience of migrants and their attraction to, and retention in, regional and rural areas. The project sought to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between settlement and wellbeing for migrants in regional South Australia. One important outcome is a set of recommendations for policies and programs which are likely to improve settlement for migrants and the communities they settle in.

A literature review was undertaken which considered international, national and local literature, including the research undertaken by Margaret Piper and Associates on behalf of the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The literature found the major influences on migrant settlement experiences were acquiring/having English language skills, employment, social support and access to appropriate services. Australian research on regional migrant settlement shows families are more likely than single individuals to settle in regional areas. This indicates a need for the smaller regions to focus on the settlement and integration of whole families rather than individuals (Hugo, Khoo and McDonald 2006).

Settlement experiences can have significant implications for the health and wellbeing of migrants. Challenges for new migrants to Australia may include language barriers, cultural differences, unfamiliarity with the Australian service environment and the loss of familiar support structures. The impact of these challenges can be exacerbated in regional and rural areas due to difficulties accessing support services, transport or employment opportunities; resourcing constraints; and differing community and migrant expectations. Poor settlement outcomes result

in high rates of departure by migrants. Studies suggest migrants tend to have poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes than the general Australian population. One study demonstrated that migrants, including skilled migrants, can exhibit symptoms of significant psychological distress, at about three times the general rate (Birrell and Edwards 2007). This is often related to the stress and disruption of moving countries, and having reduced social, cultural and material support.

A health lens is part of the broader Health in All Policies approach adopted by the South Australian government. It is a collaborative process between SA Health and other government agencies to assess and analyse proposals, plans and policy decisions for their implications for health and wellbeing. Its goal is to optimise population health goals in tandem with the goals of other agencies. In this case, a health lens was applied to settlement services, programs and policies to help identify the complex interplay between factors influencing settlement outcomes and the effects of settlement experiences on migrant wellbeing. A health lens seeks to deliver evidence-based recommendations that inform the decision-making process; to maximise gains in health and wellbeing; and to reduce or remove negative impacts or inequalities. It also aims to support the development of sound policy outcomes for all agencies involved, in particular the joint lead agency, in this case DTED.

In 2008 SA Health was approached by DTED to partner on a health lens project to assess the health and wellbeing impacts of current regional migrant settlement processes. To facilitate the access to multicultural communities and multicultural regional agencies, Multicultural SA was asked to become a partner agency in the project in January 2009. A Joint Expert Working Group advised the project. It included representatives from DTED, Multicultural SA, SA Health, Department for Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST), and Department for Education and Children's Services (DECS), and also enlisted the expertise and support of Professor Graeme Hugo, Adelaide University.

The Joint Expert Working Group selected Whyalla and the Limestone Coast as the two regions in which to undertake the research. These two regions were chosen as they are remotely located, comprise substantial recent migrant populations including representation of migrants with different visa sub-classes (i.e. humanitarian, skilled, provisional and temporary), and there is diversity of ethnic groups within these regions.

Building on a literature review, development of a migrant settlement wellbeing framework and regional data collection, the qualitative research aimed to inform the Health in All Policies project by exploring the more specific interactions between migrant settlement experiences and health/wellbeing in regional South Australia.

This research was carried out with both skilled and humanitarian migrants. In this report a *skilled migrant* refers to a migrant with qualifications, work experience and English language proficiency who may hold one of a range of specific visas such as independent, employer sponsored or regional sponsored. This reflects that some migrants are formally sponsored by an employer or the state of South Australia, whereas others migrate on an independent basis. A *humanitarian migrant* refers to a number of visa categories including refugees, asylum seekers, women at risk and special humanitarian program visa holders. The use of these terms does not imply that humanitarian migrants do not have skills or experience for employment in Australia.

3. Methodology

The project commissioned Quigley and Watts Ltd, a New Zealand public health research consultancy, to conduct the qualitative research, including facilitation, analysis and reporting. The research comprised eight focus groups, five with migrants and three with community members, as well as three interviews with employers in the Whyalla and Limestone Coast regions. Staff from DTED and SA Health assisted with organisation and administration, while regional migrant service providers played a key role in recruiting participants for the research. The qualitative research received formal ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee for SA Health.

Aims and objectives

The qualitative research explored settlement experiences from the perspectives of migrants, employers and community members to identify the factors that influence settlement outcomes for migrants located in rural and regional areas of South Australia.

The research objectives were to:

- identify facilitators and barriers to positive settlement experiences and outcomes;
- describe how settlement experiences impact on the wellbeing of migrants; and
- identify strategies for positive settlement of migrants in future.

The research objectives were developed by the project team in conjunction with the researcher and the service providers working closely with migrants in Whyalla and the Limestone Coast.

Research questions

1. How have migrants to South Australia experienced settlement?
2. What has facilitated positive settlement experiences?
3. What has hindered positive settlement experiences?
4. To what extent do migrants feel integrated into their local communities?
5. What are the issues for employers in employing migrants?
6. What type of contribution do migrants make to the community and the region?
7. How has settlement affected the wellbeing of migrants?
8. What suggestions do participants have for settlement of migrants in the future?

Method

To better understand the complex influences on settlement outcomes and interactions with health and wellbeing, qualitative research methodology using both focus groups and interviews was used. A mixed method approach was appropriate for this exploratory research. It elicited detailed information from three target groups (migrants, employers of migrants and community members) to answer the research questions.

Question schedule

The discussions were semi-structured and enabled participants to explore issues as they arose. A copy of the broad questions asked of migrants, community members and employers is attached as Appendix 1.

Focus groups

The focus group discussions each took approximately 2 hours. Focus groups were held at a location identified by the service provider (or a community leader) which was familiar and comfortable for participants. A community interpreter was used for the Burmese migrant group and all participants including the interpreter were of the Karen ethnic group. She was a community leader and was also employed part time in a migrant support role. Due to the need for interpretation, the Burmese focus group lasted 2½ hours.

Focus groups were run separately with groups of migrants and groups of community members. Several of the migrant groups were ethnic-specific, comprising participants of one cultural group only. Other migrant focus groups included participants of various cultural identities. Both approaches enabled useful and open discussion.

In most cases focus group participants knew each other, especially in the single ethnicity groups. In the cases where not all participants were familiar, the focus group discussion helped to form new bonds and people seemed open and positive with each other. There was a supportive aspect to the focus groups as in a few cases where migrants were currently experiencing difficulties, other participants were extremely supportive. While some migrants were in the midst of dealing with significant challenges, the majority were over the most difficult time so could speak about their past experiences from a different perspective. The migrant focus groups also provided a space where participants could share information and help to link each other with services or supports.

A meal was provided at each of the focus groups to offer hospitality and a welcoming environment. Generally the meal was shared at the beginning of the session, which helped to create a positive and relaxed environment for the focus group. For the migrant groups the local contacts organised culturally appropriate food in most instances.

The focus groups were facilitated by an independent facilitator from Quigley and Watts Ltd. It was appropriate that the facilitator was not an employee of the South Australian government or federal immigration services as participants were more likely to speak freely about their views and experiences. The facilitator was new to the South Australia regional areas and therefore had no pre-conceived ideas or assumptions about the communities. As the facilitator was not based in Australia, the project team gave extensive briefing and background information prior to the research so the facilitator was thoroughly prepared.

The facilitator gave a comprehensive introduction to the research at the beginning of each focus group or interview. The research's purpose and the research process were fully explained. All participants were advised they would receive a summary of the research findings.

Dissemination of the summary was arranged by SA Health through the local service provider contact in each of the three regions.

A focus group method was suited to this research as focus groups are especially useful for:

- investigating common experiences, identities, concerns, attitudes and experiences about a particular topic such as settlement
- investigating people's different perspectives
- giving voice to groups that are typically unheard or marginalised such as migrants.

Interviews

The interviews were of 1-1½ hour duration and were held at the employer's workplace. Interviews rather than focus groups were used to seek information from employers of migrants. Service providers in Whyalla and the Limestone Coast suggested that individual interviews were more appropriate with this target group due to the limited time availability of employer interviewees and the need to seek specific information on particular employment practices and policies.

A semi-structured interview allowed investigation of settlement and employment issues from the perspectives of employers. This included beliefs and attitudes, decision-making processes, employment policies, practices and support mechanisms, and the various meanings given to events or actions.

Recording of sessions

The focus group and interview discussions were digitally voice-recorded with written consent from participants to ensure accuracy in analysing participants' comments. A research assistant from SA Health attended each research session to take written notes of the discussion on the researcher's laptop computer. These notes provided an important starting point for the written record of the discussion, backed up by the digital voice-recording. The researcher discussed expectations for note-taking including the appropriate level of detail with the research assistant prior to each group.

Description of fieldwork

The research fieldwork was carried out in three locations in Whyalla and the Limestone Coast (Mt Gambier and Bordertown) over a three week period from late October to mid November 2009. The fieldwork aimed to include as wide a range of participants as possible and ensure that the voices of people of different ethnicities and geographical areas were included. The composition of focus groups and interviews was informed by local service providers and initial data collection for the project.

The research sessions comprised 5 focus groups with migrants (3 skilled, 2 humanitarian), 3 focus groups with community members and 3 interviews with employers. Table 2 (on the following page) shows the breakdown of the research sessions with the number of participants who attended each session.

Table 2: Summary of Research Fieldwork

Town	Session	Ethnic make-up of migrant groups	No. of participants
Whyalla	1. Skilled migrants	Indian, Fijian Indian and Fijian - mixed cultural group	15
	2. Skilled migrants	Filipino - single cultural group	7
	3. Community members	-	11
	4. Employer interview	-	2
Mt. Gambier	5. Humanitarian migrants	Burmese (Karen ethnic group)	32
	6. Skilled migrants	Indian, Zimbabwean, South African, Dutch, French - mixed cultural group	10
	7. Community members	-	15
	8. Employer interview	-	1
Bordertown	9. Humanitarian migrants	Eritrean, Sudanese, Pakistani - mixed cultural group	4
	10. Community members	-	13
	11. Employer Interview	-	1
TOTALS:			
3 towns	8 Groups and 3 Interviews	12 Ethnic Groups	111 Participants

Research participants

Migrants

The cultural groups included in the research were identified by the regional service providers. Service providers were particularly important in providing guidance on cultural issues based on advice from community leaders. The size of the focus groups varied from 4 to 32 participants, with an average of 14 participants. Only one of the migrant focus groups undertaken required an interpreter.

The migrant focus groups were asked to fill out a brief questionnaire to give demographic information. The Burmese group did not fill out a questionnaire as it had not been translated into the Karen language. A summary of the demographic information from the other four migrant groups is given below.

The Whyalla skilled migrant focus group comprised 13 participants who were either Indian, Fijian or Fijian Indian. The length of residence in Australia ranged from several months to 5 years. More than half of participants had lived in Australia for two years or more. Five participants held provisional or temporary visas and the remaining eight had permanent residency. The majority were married.

The Whyalla Filipino group comprised five females and two males. The majority of the group had lived in Australia for three years. With the exception of one temporary migrant, all had permanent residency.

The Mt Gambier mixed skilled migrant group comprised ten participants from a mix of ethnicities including Zimbabwean, South African, Dutch, Indian and French. The period of residency in Australia ranged from 8 months to 4½ years. Half of the group had lived in Australia for 18 months. Four participants were on temporary visas and the remaining six were permanent residents. Most participants were either married or de facto.

The Bordertown humanitarian group only had four participants due to difficulties with shift work and the timing of the group. A community leader participant expressed disappointment that more people had not attended, as he had thought that several other migrants had intended to come. Three of the attendees were humanitarian migrants with permanent residency, and the other was a skilled migrant on a temporary visa. Two members of the group had been in Australia for 2-4 years, while the other two had lived in Australia for a longer period. The participants were all male Muslims. As the facilitator was female, the project team discussed this issue with the local contact people prior to the research being confirmed, and the community leader had said it was acceptable to their community to have a female facilitator.

The research team had planned to hold a focus group with Chinese participants in one regional area. This had been arranged with the local contact person as part of the original research schedule. However, one week prior to the scheduled group the research team was informed the focus group would need to be cancelled as the potential participants said they no longer wanted to take part. Reasons for this were not clear but there may have been some privacy concerns. It was important in this situation to respect the wishes of potential participants and to accept their

decision to withdraw from the research. Reported views on the experiences of Chinese migrants from the perspectives of employers and community members were included in the research.

Community members

Community support and acceptance has been identified as playing a significant role in influencing migrant settlement outcomes. It was therefore important to talk with community members to identify their attitudes towards migrants, what they saw as positive and negative consequences of the increasing migrant populations in their region, and how the SA Government could better support them.

The three groups averaged 13 participants from a variety of backgrounds and roles including local retailers, representatives from sporting clubs, Rotary and Lions Club and churches, school teachers, health workers, librarians and visitor centre staff. Some service providers who worked directly with migrants attended the groups, but this was not the core target group. The Mt Gambier community group included a greater proportion of service providers than the other two groups.

Like the migrant groups, the community focus groups included some important exchanges of information between participants, and an opportunity for community members to increase their understanding of migrant issues.

Employers

Employment is a significant issue for new migrants and an important determinant of positive settlement. Employers can play a key role in influencing settlement outcomes. This research sought to understand employers' experiences in recruiting and retaining migrants, the impact of migrants on workplaces, and suggestions to improve processes for employers and migrants.

Interviews were conducted with three employers of migrants in Whyalla and the Limestone Coast, allowing investigation of migrant settlement and employment issues from the perspectives of employers. The employers were identified by the regional service providers as key employers of migrants. Four participants were interviewed (in three interviews), two human resource managers, a migrant liaison officer and the owner/manager of a small company.

Appendix 2 provides more information about each employer case study, with a description of their experiences in recruiting and employing migrants.

Recruitment of participants

The regional service providers were an integral part of the research as they advised on and participated in the recruitment of the research participants, particularly the migrants, as well as providing significant logistic support such as booking venues and organising catering. Local service providers liaised with leaders of the migrant communities on behalf of the project team to assist with the recruitment of migrants for the focus groups sessions. In many cases personal invitations were sent out to the participants on behalf of the project team.

For the community member groups, invitations (written and verbal) were made to a variety of existing key community groups within each region such as the Rotary, Lions Club, sporting clubs, church and parenting groups. The groups were sourced from local phone books, as well as in discussion with the service providers. This strategy enabled a broader representation of the community than if a particular established group was approached.

Employers were invited by local service providers to participate in an interview. All three companies approached were willing to take part.

Attendance of Multicultural Service Provider agencies

In general, the migrant focus groups were run exclusively with migrants, with no Multicultural Service Provider agencies or other service providers present. There were two exceptions due to local circumstances. In Mt Gambier, a local Multicultural Service Provider agency worker sat in on the Burmese humanitarian migrant focus group. In this group only a minority of participants spoke English, and a local interpreter was used for the entire group discussion. The research team, the Multicultural Service Provider agency worker, and the interpreter all felt it was appropriate for the worker to attend the group. Her presence helped the participants to feel more comfortable, and in several instances she helped to clarify an issue or to provide an answer to the group. For instance, she was able to explain to participants why new migrants currently needed to travel to a health clinic outside Mt Gambier for their initial health check. In this situation, where the participants were from a very different cultural and social background to the facilitator, it was useful to have both the interpreter and the migrant worker present to help with minimising any cultural misunderstanding and to enhance communication and safety.

In another case, a local Multicultural Service Provider agency worker requested that she attend a migrant focus group as an observer, as she felt it was important for her to hear participants' issues first hand. She sat away from the table in a corner of the room to emphasise that she was not a participant in the discussion. However, she decided she did not feel comfortable with being present for the discussion, and chose to move into another room during the focus group.

Ethical considerations

The research received formal ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Health.

Informed consent process

The project team worked to ensure participants were fully informed about the research, their involvement, and how the research information would be used. The invitations sent to participants by the regional service providers included an information sheet (plain language guide) written in plain English explaining:

- The purpose of the research
- Details of participants' involvement in the research, including an outline of what would happen at the focus group or interview, and issues regarding consent free of coercion
- Assurance that participants' identity would remain anonymous and that all information they provide would be treated as confidential
- Notification that, with their consent, the session would be voice recorded and that participants would be asked permission to be recorded
- Contact details so participants could call or email with any queries about the research. Queries in the first instance were directed to the service provider, with the research team as backup if any questions could not be answered by the service provider.

At the beginning of each session, the researcher distributed the brief information sheet (which participants had already received) and discussed this verbally with participants. Participants were asked at the beginning of the interview or focus group if they had any questions in order to ensure they were fully informed. All questions about the research were answered in a full and accurate manner.

Informed consent was sought from each participant at the beginning of the focus group/interview, including permission to be recorded using a digital voice recorder. This was both written and verbal – each participant was asked to sign a brief consent form to agree to take part and to be recorded for the purposes of the research. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time. The project team agreed that if any participants did not wish to be voice recorded, the digital voice recorder would not be turned on, however all participants gave their consent to be recorded.

Migrant participants were asked to fill out a brief questionnaire at the focus group which included: gender, ethnicity, length of time in Australia, visa category and family status. The researcher and research assistant were available to help people fill out their forms if required. The community leader or interpreter was also able to assist with this. Names were not attached to this form so data could not be matched to individuals. This information is presented above to give an overview of the demographic and ethnic spread of participants.

Storage and security of information

Names and contact details were stored separately by the local service provider and were not obtained as part of the research. All information from the research was reported in aggregate form so individuals could not be identified.

During the fieldwork in Whyalla and the Limestone Coast, the interview and focus group transcripts and notes were stored in a secure data file on a private laptop computer which only the researcher and research assistants could access. All hard copies of research information will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet within the Department of Health, 11-14 Hindmarsh Square, Adelaide, SA for a period of seven years. The electronic research information will be securely stored by Quigley and Watts Ltd for a three month period following the completion of the research, and then destroyed.

Potential cultural issues

As the migrant focus groups comprised participants from a diverse range of cultures, there was potential for miscommunication and cultural misunderstandings. The potential for this was minimised to an extent through engagement with and advice from community leaders on the composition of groups and any potential cultural issues, and the participation of these community leaders in the groups. Each focus group had a migrant community leader attend as a participant and to provide any support required to the migrants. This helped to reduce any concern or stress about participating in the focus group and to create a supportive and safe environment. Community leaders were briefed on the importance of not coercing the participants' attendance or responses during the sessions. In addition, the facilitator had extensive experience in facilitation of focus groups and workshops with people from a range of ethnicities including Maori, Pacific and Asian peoples.

Analysis of data

After each focus group or interview the researcher listened to the voice recording and added further detail and quotes to the initial notes by the research assistant. The focus groups were not fully transcribed due to the time and budget constraints of the project, however detailed notes were taken from the voice recording and quotes were recorded extensively to ensure the analysis was closely grounded in participants' own words. Every effort was made to create a true and faithful written record of the discussions, although a few parts were paraphrased rather than recorded word for word. The voice recording was crucial in supplementing the written notes, clarifying points that were not clearly captured, and to provide direct quotes where useful.

After initial analysis of the focus group notes, key themes were identified in consultation with the project team. The notes from the transcripts were coded according to broad thematic headings and the research questions. Analysis was conducted using Word documents rather than qualitative analysis software due to the size of this project. The analysis used a thematic approach where themes were sought in the coded data. An iterative process was used where themes/headings were suggested or emerged from the data under each question, and as new information was added from later groups, the headings were refined or reordered.

Once all the focus group data had been recorded, each stream (migrants, employers, community members) was analysed separately, based on the research questions. Headings and sub-headings were refined and compared, and data regrouped as appropriate where there was crossover of information.

Findings for the three streams of work were analysed collectively and then reported as a whole, with identification of themes where there was strong agreement across participant groups. The draft report was peer reviewed by Celia Murphy, Quigley and Watts Ltd.

Limitations of this research

Selection of participants

A potential limitation was that participants were largely self-selecting. While the local service providers invited potential participants in a range of ways (including general advertising, word of mouth and individual invitations), participants then 'self selected' in their decision to volunteer to participate. This is often the case in qualitative research. An advantage was that participants were motivated to take part in the discussion and had relevant views and experiences to articulate. A potential disadvantage was that the research sample may be comprised of participants with different experiences to those who did not choose to take part. In particular this may have been a problem with the community participants in this research. Many of the community members who chose to participate held largely positive views of migrants and were involved with migrants in some way. If the research had included other members of the community with less involvement, there may have been quite different views expressed. Indeed, people with negative views, limited knowledge or no contact with migrants were unlikely to volunteer to take part in the research.

The local service providers who assisted with recruitment made an effort to invite a wide range of migrants. Unfortunately the work and family commitments of people working in trades or lower skilled jobs may have constrained their ability to participate. For example, in one region a group of tradespeople were invited to participate, but they did not turn up on the night as their work schedule had changed. Similarly, in another region several migrants who had confirmed their attendance previously did not attend the focus group as they were placed on night shift at their workplace. Community members reported that some migrants were working long hours to make a living in South Australia and had limited time for activities other than work or family commitments.

Lower level of participation from migrants in Bordertown

As one focus group had to be cancelled, only a low number of migrants in Bordertown were included in the research. There was just one focus group held with only four migrants. This would have been a problem for the research if there was a need to directly compare across the three regions, but this was not the case. A focus group with four participants is at the lower end of the range acceptable for focus groups, but it is considered an acceptable number.² Some researchers use the term 'mini focus group' for groups with less than five participants. Qualitative research seeks in-depth information from participants and does not need to achieve the large numbers required for quantitative research.

The views and experiences of the four migrants in Bordertown were useful additions to the research findings from migrants in the other two locations and it was useful to compare the migrants' views with those of community members and employers in Bordertown. In both cases

² Dawson S and Manderson L (1993) A Manual for the Use of Focus Groups. WHO Social and Economic Research, available at: <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/food2/UIN03E/uin03e04.htm> (accessed 14/1/10)

the findings were broadly consistent. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the small number of migrant participants from Bordertown and to emphasise conclusions cannot be drawn specifically for that town on the basis of one small focus group.

Employer interviews

The information from employers in this research was gained through three interviews with four employers in the three regions. These interviews were considered as case studies for this research as usually in qualitative research a greater number of interviews would be held. It is important to note the findings from employers are drawn from just four individuals. Ideally it would be useful to conduct a survey of a larger number of employers in regional South Australia to seek a broader range of views and experiences.

Community member focus groups

There was some variety between the three community groups in the roles of participants and the level of involvement with migrants. The research project sought a broad cross-section of the community rather than only people directly working with migrants. The community group in Mt Gambier included more service providers than the other two groups.

Timeframe of research project

Lastly, it should be noted the research was carried out in a relatively short timeframe. The fieldwork was conducted over a three week period and the analysis and report writing was completed in a subsequent three week timeframe. The time constraints meant that a replacement focus group could not be organised when the one focus group was cancelled.

4. Findings

The qualitative research findings are discussed below, structured by the research questions. Verbatim quotes from participants are presented in italics or quotation marks (depending on the length of the quote). Some participants had limited English language proficiency. In these cases the quotes have not been adjusted or edited for grammar or clarity as it was important to retain the meaning and tone of participants' own words. A summary of findings by location is attached as Appendix 3.

4.1 Migrant settlement experiences in regional South Australia

Overview of migrant settlement experiences

Settlement experiences of migrants in this research ranged from positive to extremely difficult and challenging. While experiences varied, migrants commonly faced a challenging period especially in the first three to six months. Many participants said that after tackling the initial hurdles of finding jobs, housing and social support, they settled in well. Many comments indicated satisfaction with the new location, for example:

I'm contented now, I have no complaints with this place, people are really good (and)...supportive (skilled migrant, Whyalla).

Australia is a good country for me (skilled migrant, Whyalla).

Some participants reported facing significant difficulties, especially challenges with finding suitable work and learning English. Several spoke of taking a long time to feel settled. For instance, one migrant said it took her five years to settle.

Difficult settlement experiences had a large impact on people's wellbeing and their subsequent settlement. A participant said she would have delayed her migration to Australia by at least a year if she had known beforehand how hard it was going to be (Whyalla skilled migrant). She felt her settlement experience would have been better if she had stayed longer in her home country to save more money, as her initial period in South Australia was marked by substantial difficulties in finding any type of work and financial hardship.

A participant in Mt Gambier (skilled migrant) was still seeking work after six months, and was finding unemployment extremely difficult. He talked about the challenge of moving from his comfort zone to a "harsh environment" in terms of finding work. He said it made him doubt whether his decision to move to Australia had been the right decision.

Participants in the Burmese focus group gave a more divergent picture of their overall settlement experience. A participant spoke about feeling "happy and not happy at the same (time), half and half". This participant said by living in Mt Gambier, he did not need to be afraid of Thai or Burmese police and could have a "better life", so he felt happy. But at the same time he felt unhappy with living apart from his family and friends who were still living in refugee camps.

Another Burmese participant said:

I'm not happy yet, I don't know what to do. But if stay in the future, like understand the language, have a job or has a house, what you need, so maybe I'll be happier then than living in the camp (humanitarian migrant, Mt Gambier).

The challenge of learning English was a central issue for the Burmese migrants. It had a significant impact on their overall settlement experience, especially in affecting the ability to secure employment and to feel more integrated into the Mt Gambier community.

Experiences of arrival

Initial support and orientation was a crucial determinant of a migrant's overall settlement experience. A state-sponsored skilled migrant worker described his arrival experience as receiving a "VIP" service with which he was "more than satisfied" (skilled migrant, Whyalla). Positive arrival experiences were characterised by practical support with housing, groceries and transport, social support (especially from others of the same ethnic group), orientation to the local community and being linked in with the local migrant support program. Many migrants, in all the focus groups, talked about the challenges of accessing services and finding out about the local community's resources during the early establishment period.

A skilled migrant in Mt Gambier reported a very difficult arrival to South Australia as the sponsoring company failed to meet him at the bus station and did not provide adequate initial support or orientation. He said the lack of welcome would "always stick in my mind, always, that was bad news...that was a bad experience for me when I first came here". The initial problems had coloured his future settlement and overall experience of South Australia.

A common theme for migrants with difficult arrival experiences was a lack of contact with people from their own culture. A participant in the Burmese group said when she first arrived in Adelaide there was not much support for her as there were no people from the Karen ethnic group. She said when she lived in Adelaide, "I feel very lonely." She contacted her Karen friend who had moved to Mt Gambier, and chose to move there to be with her Karen friends. Similarly, two participants in another focus group said it was "really hard" for their wives when they arrived in South Australia, as they were the only women of their cultural group in the community. One of the wives had not yet fully settled in regional South Australia due to poor housing options and the lack of social support. At the time of the focus group she was choosing to stay mostly in Adelaide with others of her culture.

Commitment to staying in South Australia

Many participants intended to stay in South Australia, and indicated strong commitment to the local area. Others planned to move elsewhere, generally within Australia. The main reasons for intending to move were the need to find suitable employment or to do further training. In all four focus groups where some migrants indicated they planned to leave the area, the main reason for moving was to seek better career or training opportunities. For example, one participant said "I think it's more important for me to get [a] job in the cities. Here there is no career progression" (skilled migrant, Whyalla).

Satisfaction with employment was also a key factor in people's decisions to stay. A participant employed in the health system commented: "I feel I can contribute to Australian society, [I am] making progress, [I] feel I can make a difference and that makes me feel good" (skilled migrant, Mt Gambier).

Factors such as lifestyle and cheaper living costs were also important in people's longer term commitment to regional South Australia. Several skilled migrants in Mt Gambier said they wanted to stay in the town as they felt it was a safe and positive place to bring up children. One participant said moving to Whyalla from a large city had helped her to "escape the rat race and being too busy...[Whyalla is] really good for the soul for me, I'm really happy where I am and with [this] point in my life" (skilled migrant, Whyalla).

Some participants in all the groups said they planned to buy a house or start their own business in South Australia, signalling a longer term commitment. All four participants in the Humanitarian focus group in Bordertown indicated they wanted to stay in the town, with two giving a commitment to stay for the longer term future. For instance, they were considering their future health and religious needs, and the commitment to Bordertown of future generations of their families. These participants said a significant factor in their long term commitment to stay would depend on whether or not other family members from their home countries were able to move to South Australia. Another said he was committed to staying in Bordertown as long as he had job satisfaction and a supportive community. He said: "I feel relaxed here, this is my home."

Participants in the Burmese humanitarian migrant group reacted differently to the question of future intentions compared with the other groups. Participants gave a less positive response overall, which may indicate a sense of having less control over future decisions than other participants.

Community members' attitudes

Community members expressed largely positive attitudes toward new migrants and reported they felt most of the community was supportive of migrants although there were some exceptions. They emphasised a 'two-way' relationship between locals and new migrants, where the onus was on the community "to meet migrants halfway and help make friends". There was a strong theme of empathy in the focus group discussions where community members demonstrated a high degree of compassionate understanding of migrants' situations and challenges. An empathetic attitude often came from a common understanding that most Australians are migrants themselves. For example, a participant said that aside from the indigenous community, "the rest of us, we all come from somewhere else – underneath we understand where [migrants are] coming from". Empathy was frequently expressed towards humanitarian migrants, for instance: "the [migrants] on the protected visas have had pretty awful times in their own country".

4.2 Effects of settlement on the wellbeing of migrants

Some migrant participants, especially humanitarian migrants, had experienced improved wellbeing through moving to a safer place where they did not need to feel fearful. This had a large positive effect on their wellbeing.

In contrast, other participants had experienced difficult settlement issues that impacted on their mental health and wellbeing. For instance, a recent skilled migrant said his current experience of unemployment affected him deeply and he was suffering from low self-esteem. Another participant, who was the wife of a migrant who had difficulties with his employer, reported her husband was experiencing depression linked to his work problems. Several other participants spoke about their own experiences of depression and hardship when they first arrived. These problems had lessened over time, as they became more settled and financial problems eased.

Migrants in several focus groups talked about a gap between their pre-arrival expectations and the reality of the new location, which impacted on their wellbeing in the initial settlement stage. For instance, participants in a skilled migrant focus group in Whyalla said they had not realised beforehand how different the work culture would be in Australia compared to what they were used to. These participants also said they were given misleading information about Whyalla before they arrived, where it was shown to be a 'rosier' picture than the reality. Several participants said in their first few days they wanted to return to their country but with more time became used to their new home.

Mt Gambier skilled migrants also raised the issue of new migrants' expectations about employment opportunities being unrealistic and associated with significant effects on wellbeing and mental health. Participants felt there were some issues with representatives from Australian government agencies (both state and federal) or employers giving unrealistic information before they arrived, especially about job opportunities.

Community members' perceptions of migrant wellbeing

Participants in all three community member groups showed a high degree of concern about migrants' wellbeing and experiences of financial hardship, consistent with reports from migrants themselves. A community worker explained she dealt with both humanitarian and skilled migrants in significant material hardship:

We certainly see migrants in dire need, either who have just arrived with absolutely nothing and no finance to be able to purchase food, or migrants who have been here for short time, have come out with a job, and that job has ceased and they have nothing, literally nothing (community member, Mt Gambier).

Community members in Bordertown expressed concern about the economic circumstances and wellbeing of migrants. They felt it was common for some migrants to work double shifts. As one participant said:

To me, it's like they've become a portal to send money back, and they're being used up to send money to their family at home. And it seems a little bit unfortunate for them, because they're probably working a pretty horrid job, very long hours, and not living a very good life themselves, it's unfortunate, they don't look very happy. The ones I see in the supermarket look generally exhausted, [they] sleep all day, work all night. It doesn't seem that some of them are very happy or have a good life (community member, Bordertown).

Another participant said she felt concerned about the mental health of migrants, especially when migrants are separated from their families and home cultures, and they are used to a close family structure. Similarly, another said she was worried about a migrant who had faced a long battle seeking approval to bring his immediate family to Australia from his home country. She said he had not seen them for five years, and the prolonged process was affecting his mental health:

He got really depressed...he finally went back [to his home country], [his family members] were [there] but they didn't have any papers [to move to Australia]... He was actually depressed, a really nice man, you don't know what they've been through...It takes such a long time, all the red tape before they get to that stage where they might be able to bring their family across. And he got to the stage where he thought it was his fault...And you wonder what the effect on their mental health is (community member, Bordertown).

Access to health care services

Access to health care was raised by both migrants and community members as a major factor that affected migrant wellbeing. Migrant participants in Whyalla agreed there was poor access to specialist health care in the town. One migrant had chosen to fly back to her home country to seek earlier specialist treatment for a child. She said: “when it comes to health there are things that need to be attended to immediately, you can’t just wait six months”. Another participant said she felt people needed to be “pushy” to access health services.

Mt Gambier migrant participants raised similar concerns about a lack of specialist health services but they also said there were long waiting times to access primary health care. They gave examples of having to wait three or even six weeks for an appointment with a local GP and said “it’s a nightmare”.

The Burmese participants said they needed to travel from Mt Gambier to Adelaide to get specialist treatment for themselves and their children. One person said: “[going to Adelaide] will be [a] problem for us”. Burmese participants were also concerned new migrants could not go to the local GP centre for their initial health check. The migrant resource centre worker clarified that this was a temporary policy as the local centre was currently short-staffed. The local clinic had been struggling to cope with the large influx of new Burmese migrants, and had decided they could not take any new patients until they secured new staff in the following new year. The need to travel to another clinic in a neighbouring town was a barrier for the new migrants, but the migrant resource centre assisted with transport.

Both migrant and community participants acknowledged these issues were related to limited health capacity in regional towns, and would affect the general population as well as migrants. However, they also raised barriers specific to new migrants such as the high cost of health care for people on temporary or provisional visas. This was a huge issue for migrants and was also raised in the community member groups. Participants commented that as temporary migrants were not eligible for Medicare, medical care was expensive. Several participants commented it was a disincentive for young couples to start a family in Australia and they felt this was unfair.

Cultural communication and language issues

Community members in all three focus groups reported there were cultural communication barriers that affected migrants' access to health care. A community participant commented local health services were on a 'learning curve' in developing more appropriate ways to ensure migrants had access to appropriate services. A health professional in Bordertown felt that apart from pregnant women and new mothers, the regional health services did not see many migrants, as health needs were overtaken by higher priorities such as earning money and making ends meet. She said: "I think health gets put on the backburner for them".

In the Burmese migrant focus group, one participant described how when she first arrived in Adelaide she had to go to the Emergency Department for a health problem, and found it difficult without English. She had not realised the treatment would be free, and was extremely worried about the cost at the time. It was not until later that she found out the service was free.

Another access barrier for the Burmese migrants was the challenge of making health-related appointments with little or no English language proficiency. They were reliant on migrant resource centre staff to make appointments for them and often more experienced English speakers in the Burmese community acted as interpreters during appointments.

Lack of information

Migrants spoke about a lack of information and understanding of the health system in Australia. A skilled migrant in Mt Gambier said: "[the health system is] very complex, it's very obscure, I still don't understand it...and the difference between private and public isn't clear." She gave an example of being advised to take out ambulance insurance, which cost very little but potentially could save a large ambulance bill. She said she only knew about this through being specifically advised, and was concerned there were other areas like this where migrants could face large bills through a lack of knowledge of the system.

4.3 Extent of integration into local communities

Overall, migrants, employers and community members gave a largely positive picture of migrants' integration into regional communities. Nonetheless participants from all three perspectives agreed there were "pockets" of negativity and discrimination. According to a community member:

There are pockets of resistance to migration and multiculturalism, pockets of discrimination, but as a general rule the response is very positive and supportive...Very few people here wouldn't accept multiculturalism (Community member, Whyalla).

Participants in the skilled migrant groups tended to say they felt well integrated into their local community. For instance, Whyalla participants in the mixed skilled migrant group said they felt part of the community, and thought locals and migrants mixed well. Comments included: "everyone has got time for each other here" and "there's a real togetherness".

However other skilled migrants' experiences differed from this. In Whyalla one cultural group tended to socialise together and reported cultural differences that made it difficult to mix more widely. For instance, some participants said they were not interested in taking part in sport or

going out to the pub, which they saw as common pastimes for Australian locals. These participants spoke about both work and church as settings where they felt able to become integrated with the local community. These participants said events such as Australia Day celebrations or cultural festivals for the wider community were an opportunity to become more integrated and to celebrate being multicultural.

In Mt Gambier the skilled migrant group said they felt accepted by the wider community and found it a friendly and safe environment. One participant said she felt the migrant support program had played a major role in helping to integrate migrants into the local community and that without this program it would be a less cohesive community.

The humanitarian migrant groups faced larger barriers to integration, especially language and communication problems. Nonetheless, the Bordertown participants felt they had become integrated over time, and described the process of integrating into their workplace over the past four years. When they first arrived there were some tensions and difficulties. They tended to socialise as one group and had very little social contact with the other workers. There was a separate room which only the humanitarian migrants would use during breaks. However, over time, the situation had significantly improved to the point where they now frequently mixed with other workers, and felt they were accepted. A participant described the current situation as “today we are part of the group”. He also said:

There is a lot of houses here open for us from the locals, they [give assistance to us]. There is a few guys to be honest with you that feel like a family to us - always their houses is open, and they always help (humanitarian migrant, Bordertown).

Factors that helped change this situation were a commitment to greater communication on both sides, and the locals’ increased exposure to a multicultural mix of workers. In addition, the migrant workers showed considerable tolerance and understanding of the locals, as they felt they were simply inexperienced in relating to people from cultures different to their own. Over time, each group ‘got to know each other’ and barriers were broken down through better communication and effort on both sides including sharing food with each other. One participant described the two-way effort as being like two hands clapping, that each side needed each other:

One hand can’t clap, you know, to make the clap you need another. You need the other hand, you always need help. You don’t expect help from others unless you provide help (humanitarian migrant, Bordertown).

The Burmese group appeared the least integrated into the local community, as they faced major language barriers and many were not employed. They explained:

When we speak [to others] on the street we cannot speak their language, [we] don’t know how to talk to them, they also don’t know how to talk to us so it’s hard (humanitarian migrant, Mt Gambier).

However, community members reported that the Burmese children seemed to be integrating well and interacted positively with local children, especially through playing sport together. The Burmese community was close-knit and members provided much support to each other.

Community members felt the local communities were improving over time in their openness to new migrants, and also acknowledged it took time for new migrants to settle and integrate. In the Bordertown and Mt Gambier community groups, participants said they often did not see migrants 'out and about' in their everyday lives, and that some migrants were only really noticed by the service providers who worked with them. In Bordertown this invisibility was compounded by the high rate of migrants doing shift work and by a lack of ethnic restaurants due to the small size of the town. All three community groups spoke about examples of migrants who tended to socialise with people of their own culture, and who were socially isolated from the wider community. Community members described the Burmese migrants, for instance, as a close-knit cultural group who were often reserved and shy, especially at the beginning.

In each of the three community focus groups, some community members said they personally had very little contact with migrants in their everyday lives. They were interested to hear more about what was happening for migrants and to learn how they could offer support or assistance to help migrants to integrate more effectively. Some community members in each of the three regions noted there had been mostly positive changes in the local community resulting from increased arrivals of migrants. For instance, community participants in Whyalla and Bordertown said local shops had started to stock a wider range of ethnic foods in response to migrant demand. Mt Gambier community members said they had noticed a marked increase in the cultural diversity of health professionals in the region over the past few years.

Community focus group participants identified several impacts of increased migration on community members.

- Greater cultural diversity was viewed as having a positive impact on locals' tolerance, understanding, awareness of other cultures and social skills, especially for local children.
- Increased arrivals had a positive impact on small schools as new migrant students boosted the population and attracted resources.
- Increased arrivals meant there were capacity problems such as a greater need for ESOL teachers and increased demands on schools.
- It was sometimes challenging learning to deal with people from a very different culture and new skills were needed for this. Interacting with a variety of cultures was also viewed as positive and interesting.
- Economic impacts for the local community were discussed as being both positive (e.g. when migrants shopped locally or invested in housing or business) and negative (e.g. when migrants chose to shop elsewhere for some goods and when earnings were sent overseas).

Consistent with migrants and community members, the three employers generally reported positive integration of migrants into the local workforce and community. Employers agreed there had been some initial negativity or tensions in the workplace, but these teething problems resolved with time.

Examples of tension

Despite participants often saying their local communities were supportive and accepting of migrants, there were still stories of tensions or discrimination in all three regions. There were several reports of new migrants being confronted by local Australians shouting at them to speak in English when they were using their own language with each other. A humanitarian migrant group described “big tensions” at their place of employment when they first arrived and a lack of contact between the migrants and other workers. One of the participants told of being yelled and sworn at by a group of locals and told to go back to their own country.

Migrant, community and employer participants reported there had been significant problems in Bordertown with a group of humanitarian migrants several years ago, but this appeared to be the exception as no participant reported any ongoing problems. Community members said many locals felt wary and intimidated by that particular group of migrants, who had had social and behavioural problems, and there were some serious impacts with crime. The community group felt while this experience had “left a bad taste in the mouth”; the community had moved on and was generally accepting and positive towards migrants now.

Mt Gambier community members gave an example where other locals had called the police when several migrants were simply gathered in the town without causing any problems, which suggested some in the wider community were less tolerant than the focus group participants.

Despite the increasingly multicultural flavour of each of the three communities, community members felt some locals lacked awareness of migrant issues and cultural diversity. According to community members and employers, a negative attitude was a concern from locals that migrants may be ‘taking Australian jobs’. Community members said they were frustrated by this attitude and generally challenged people who made this claim. Employers reported that although some local workers had expressed this view, most could see there were skill gaps and all three companies had tried unsuccessfully to fill vacancies with local labour. As one employer said:

The reason why we employ visa holders is that we don't have enough Aussies to do the work. It isn't queue jumping – we don't have enough people to do the jobs (employer, regional South Australia).

Another employer said there was resentment expressed by some locals over the policy to seek employment for migrants' spouses within the company.

In Whyalla community participants reported some resentment about higher paid migrants choosing to house their families in Adelaide and commute to work in Whyalla. A community member said she was concerned about some migrants' decisions to purchase goods outside Whyalla rather than investing in the local community.

One community group noted there had been a deliberate approach to integrate new migrants in a “low key” way, without drawing much attention from the wider community. A participant said: “we have made a real conscious effort to keep it low key”. This approach was based on the experience of other regional towns in Australia that had had problems with the settlement and integration of new migrants.

4.4 Factors that facilitate positive settlement experiences

According to migrants, the two most common facilitators of positive settlement were social support, especially from people of the same ethnic group, and positive employment experiences.

Participants in all migrant groups emphasised the central role support from people of their own ethnicity played in promoting a good settlement experience. For instance, a participant in Whyalla (skilled migrant) said her local cultural community was critical in helping her settle. She said her company introduced her to the older women, who then introduced her to the rest of the cultural community, and with their help she felt she settled in quickly. One woman in particular had ‘adopted’ her and gave crucial support: “without her support I really probably wouldn’t survive.” Community members and employers supported this view and emphasised the key role of support from other migrants. Employers also played an important role in supporting migrants practically such as initial provision of housing or food, and linking them with community and migrant services.

Finding suitable and fulfilling employment was a common contributor to migrants’ positive settlement experiences. The importance of finding appropriate work was raised in all migrant groups. For instance, participants in the Burmese group repeatedly said having a job was important to them. However, due to the language barrier, most of the group had not yet found ongoing employment. Several participants in the group had been doing seasonal work at a local nursery, which they said they enjoyed. The ability to earn money independently from Centrelink was especially valued by the Burmese.

A strong theme in this research was the important role migrant support services had in facilitating positive settlement outcomes. Participants in all groups and interviews (migrants, community members and employers) emphasised the importance of migrant support services in helping people settle. Migrant support programs were noted for their part in networking and introducing people to the right services and community supports. Another critical role was to link people with potential jobs. A migrant who had recently got a job credited the local migrant support program with helping her to get the job. She had previously searched unsuccessfully on her own, but said with the recommendation of a worker from the migrant program she was able to secure a job. The importance of one-to-one connections in finding work was raised by many migrants: “if someone tells [an employer] they know someone with the skills, then that works”. In Mt Gambier the migrant resource centre had also played a key role in finding work for humanitarian migrants.

Another facilitator to migrant settlement, raised less frequently, was support from other services, such as language or health services. A skilled migrant said some health providers such as GPs had chosen to offer services for free or at a reduced charge for temporary or provisional migrants, as these groups did not have access to Medicare. One migrant participant, for example, had been charged half price. Migrants felt this approach was possible because it was a regional, community-focused town where “we understand each other, they recognise needs, [and] know people” in contrast to a city environment where price reductions may be less likely.

This relates to an additional theme of the advantages of a small town in helping people to settle positively, compared with a large city. A migrant in Whyalla said: “I think regional areas like Whyalla give people like us a chance, in the cities we get lost”. The opportunity to have a relaxed lifestyle and to experience the outdoors was highlighted as a benefit of settling in a smaller town. A migrant who had moved to Whyalla from an eastern city said she was able to go camping or driving in the countryside which was not possible when she lived in the city. Similarly, community members said a positive ‘small town identity’ helped migrants to settle. Multicultural celebrations or community days and locals’ openness to new experiences and embracing differences also helped. Community members noted that small towns could encourage positive migrant settlement because they were not large enough for ‘ghettos’ or separatism to occur. As a Whyalla participant said: “everybody has to blend in just by the geography of the place”.

Migrants and community members said support from church or religious groups helped migrants to settle. Community members also highlighted the positive role of involvement in sport, especially of children, in assisting with integration into the local community.

Factors that helped facilitate integration in workplaces

In each employer case study, the motivation and hard-working attitude of migrants was the main contributor to resolving initial tensions. The experience of individuals getting to know each other as people was also important.

As one employer expressed it:

[The migrants] soon won over the trust and confidence of all our staff here just through the way they conducted themselves...their attitude to work, their willingness to work has gained everyone’s respect (employer, regional South Australia).

One company with a high proportion of migrant employees said the cultural diversity of the workplace helped to ensure positive integration. This employer said integration had improved over time with better communication and improved expectations, less segregation of ethnic groups and the willingness of already established migrants to welcome new arrivals. The company had introduced clearer policies on workplace interactions and attempted to prevent problems escalating by intervening early when there were tensions. This employer also said local workers were grateful to new migrant arrivals as they eased the workload for others.

4.5 Barriers to positive settlement experiences

Overview of barriers

In all five migrant focus groups, the main barrier to a positive experience of settlement was the challenge of finding appropriate employment. This was confirmed by community members, who commonly expressed concern about the difficulty of finding employment for many migrants. Other common barriers, emphasised by both community members and migrants were financial challenges, dealing with bureaucracy and inconsistent policies and problems with accessing information or services.

Burmese migrants and local community members agreed poor English language skill was the major barrier to positive settlement and integration for the Burmese community. Housing was raised as a significant barrier for migrants to Bordertown, and was emphasised by migrants, community members and the local employer. The humanitarian group in Bordertown, all Muslims, also said a key barrier for them was the lack of religious infrastructure as there is no mosque in the area. Other barriers identified were prolonged separation from close family members at home (and the length of time of the visa process) and training or tertiary education barriers.

The next section discusses each of the barriers beginning with the most common.

Experiences of unemployment

As the unemployment experiences of skilled migrants were different to those of the humanitarian migrants, these will be discussed separately.

Skilled migrants

Despite being qualified and experienced in various professions and trades, some of the skilled migrants had an initial period of unemployment after moving to South Australia. While some of these people were the spouse of a primary visa recipient (who did have a job), others were single skilled migrants who had not been sponsored by an employer or the state.

One example was a journalist with ten years' experience who took several months to find a job. Her first job after being unemployed was as a hotel cleaner: "I used up all the money I had and didn't have anyone to call back home, so I agreed to go into a hotel cleaning job". She commented that in order to move to Australia she had emptied her bank accounts and sold her house and possessions. She knew of many others in a similar situation and said "that first few months of trouble you go through can drive a lot of people back home". Eventually she found work in her profession.

Another example was given by a highly qualified information technology professional with a twenty year work history. He was the spouse of a 457 temporary visa holder. He had been in regional South Australia for six months and had struggled to find any job let alone one in his area of expertise or in any other role. Prior to arrival, his wife's employer had told him that IT skills were in demand and he would have no problem finding work. However, once he arrived, every potential employer told him he was overqualified for the role and most jobs required applicants to have permanent residency. He found the experience of unemployment extremely difficult to accept as he had never been unemployed before.

Humanitarian migrants

Many of the participants in the Burmese focus group were unemployed, or doing casual or seasonal work. Limited English language proficiency was the main barrier to paid work. The interpreter in the Burmese group reported many stories of unemployment within the group, and emphasised "It's very hard [to get a job] if you can't speak English". One participant talked about her unemployed husband who was very experienced in forestry work but had no qualifications and only limited English.

Lack of Australian experience

Participants in all three skilled migrant groups reported prospective employers would often require Australian experience of job seekers: “the first question they ask when you put in an application is ‘have you got any Australian experience?’” Migrant participants often felt frustrated at this attitude, as new migrants clearly could not have Australian experience. They described getting “that first break” as very difficult, and being repeatedly asked for Australian experience was “heart-breaking and demeaning”. Community members shared the perception that some employers were reluctant to take on migrants without Australian experience.

One migrant participant who was a skilled professional had applied for a job washing cars in her initial period of unemployment, and the employer requested Australian experience. She said “it’s very demeaning for people who’ve held jobs elsewhere and then you want to wash a car and they ask you for your experience”.

Community members agreed it was “very hard [for migrants] to get a foot in the door”. They reported some employers felt migrants would make errors and language barriers would affect work. A community participant said they understood that one group of migrants was being gradually replaced at a workplace by another cultural group with better English language proficiency.

Experiences of underemployment (working in a lower skilled job)

Some participants in all migrant groups said they were working, or had worked, in roles beneath their skill level or that did not use their qualifications. For instance, a migrant participant spoke of her husband who had worked in the steel industry in their home country for ten years, but who now was working in a job beneath his level of expertise. He had to start as a trainee and was still working in a job requiring a lower level of skill than his experience. She said “he’s not working at the level he deserves to”.

Participants said it was especially concerning when people with skills on the local skill shortage list, such as information technology or aged care skills, had difficulties in finding appropriate work. A woman who was qualified in aged care was working in another area because she could not afford to undertake the further study required to get her qualification recognised in Australia. She was sending money back to her home country to support her family there and felt she had to keep working to earn money.

Lack of recognition of qualifications and tertiary education costs

A common concern was a lack of recognition of some overseas qualifications in Australia and limited information about this. Both migrants and community members expressed concern over a lack of information on qualifications requirements prior to moving to South Australia. Several migrants reported that to be able to apply for registration in their profession, they were required to attend tertiary education and pay full international student fees (as they were on temporary or provisional visas). This could be up to \$40,000 per year, on top of paying visa fees. Participants said they felt it was inconsistent that a person could be successful in getting a visa approved for a particular profession, but on arrival be told there were additional requirements to become registered which included more money and training. For example, the wife of one migrant said

her husband was given a visa based on his trade certificates from his country, but when they arrived he had to sit another assessment and was unsuccessful. She reported he then had to travel to Adelaide and pay \$300 to sit another test (which he passed).

Another shared concern was that some professionals were required to travel to eastern Australian cities to undertake their training for registration, while their families were based, and settled, in South Australia. Several participants expressed concern at being potentially separated from their families. A health professional migrant had found her qualifications were not recognised in Australia. To continue working in her profession she was required to attend a three month full time course in Melbourne but this was not feasible with her family commitments. She described her first two years as “very depressing for me, I had a quite busy life over there in [my home country] and then you came here, without any job you know, but I am coping now” (skilled migrant, Whyalla).

Barriers in the workplace

Particular barriers within the workplace were identified in the migrant focus groups. One challenge for several participants on employer-sponsored visas was the situation where they were bonded to a particular employer with whom they had problems. One participant was extremely unhappy with his work situation. He reported the employers regularly swore at employees and frequently fired workers.

You don't want to leave anywhere under a bad cloud...but you say to yourself, I've never been treated like this in my life. [The employers] are rude, arrogant and they don't give a damn about you. They know they have you for two years, so they squeeze every drop of blood out of you...They want you there 24/7...they don't care about the families...I'm not the only one, there's a lot of us out there that are unhappy (skilled migrant, Mt Gambier).

Migrant participants raised the issue of control or an imbalance of power when employees were sponsored by a company for visa purposes. They felt this gave employers too much power, and that it was the employee who carried the risk and uncertainty of being on a temporary visa.

Work was seen as a critical aspect of life that affected all other decisions: “The nucleus of your life is your work, without your work you can't go anywhere, you can't buy a home, you can't raise a family” (skilled migrant, Mt Gambier).

Financial challenges

Participants in both the skilled and humanitarian migrant groups said financial challenges affected the settlement process. Community members and employers were also aware of migrants with financial issues. Many participants in the skilled migrant groups reported they had initially experienced financial problems, sometimes severe, in their move to South Australia. It was common for participants to speak about ‘struggling’ or ‘trying to survive’ financially. A migrant participant pointed out that many migrants come from countries where the currency was worth much less than the Australian currency: “we come with all our life savings and we spend it on the house, rent, car” [just surviving]. The length of time that it took to settle was often longer than people expected and this had financial implications.

Financial barriers were significant for many of the humanitarian migrants, who come from situations of extreme poverty and disadvantage. A participant in one of the humanitarian migrant groups said:

To be honest with you, I didn't come here with a lot of money, you know.... I was a student and I didn't come from a very rich family... Unfortunately we left our home...and when you flee the war, you flee with nothing, and you start to rebuild yourself in a different area. So when I had the opportunity to come here, I had not much money" (humanitarian migrant, regional South Australia).

Skilled migrants and community members raised similar concerns about the current situation where temporary and provisional visa holders did not have access to Medicare or other government support. There was agreement that temporary and provisional visa holders had a "raw deal" as they were paying taxes in full, but not receiving the associated benefits. For instance, in one participant's words:

Yet people on the temporary visa don't get Medicare and it is very expensive, but [these] people are paying taxes, what are they paying taxes for? You don't get anything, you have to pay more fees for school, for private health insurance (skilled migrant, Mt Gambier).

A skilled migrant participant described private medical costs as "nearly the straw that broke the camel's back" for a friend who was on a 457 visa.

Bureaucracy and inconsistent policies

Problems with bureaucratic requirements ('red tape') and inconsistencies in policy were frequently reported in the migrant focus group discussions, especially by skilled migrants (Whyalla and Mt Gambier) and the Bordertown humanitarian group. In particular, there were major concerns about the length of the visa application process, especially for family members who travel to Australia after the primary applicant. Concerns were also raised about the length of time it takes and the requirements for applying for permanent residency. These concerns were shared by community members.

A skilled migrant in Mt Gambier said she felt there was a perception from local Australians that it was easy for migrants to move to Australia: "Australian people don't realise the difficulties that there is and all the hurdles". Several participants reported there was duplication of some requirements, for instance, a participant said he had had full medical exams and a police check recently to be approved for a 457 visa, and now that he intended to apply for permanent residency, he understood he would need to repeat those tests.

In addition, participants said there were challenges in being based in a smaller regional centre. For many immigration requirements, such as applying for permanent residency, people needed to travel to Adelaide for appointments and that could be difficult to organise around work.

Skilled migrants raised the issue of policy changes affecting migrant settlement experiences. Participants said they felt there should be more consistency and stability of immigration policies. An example was given by a woman whose husband was on a student visa where the time of study required to seek permanent residency changed (from a 1.5 year Masters course to a two

year minimum). She said this placed extra pressure on people and there was an additional \$10,000 cost to extend the course of study. She said:

They keep changing the rules, people come here and there's something different, and then the policy changes, and sometimes its quite stressful, because you don't know what's coming up for you...I mean my situation was not too bad, but I've seen people where it was really really tough for them (skilled migrant, Whyalla).

Problems with accessing information or services

Difficulties with accessing information or services were common themes in all focus groups with migrants and community members. Many participants highlighted that new migrants often did not receive adequate or timely information about their new location or the services available to them. For example, some migrants said they had not been aware of migrant support programs before they moved to South Australia, and they felt there was a general lack of awareness of migrant services. There was a view that employers did not always pass on appropriate information about support services to migrants. There was also some lack of awareness of other health and/or social services.

Skilled migrants in Whyalla (457 visa recipients) said when recruited they were given minimal information from employers about the job they would be doing. One participant said she felt she was “baited” to South Australia with a job offer where the salary was much higher than her salary in her home country, but there was a lack of detail from the employer about the job. Another said: “normally the employer doesn’t care about your career progression sometimes, they just grab you because they need people to fill in (gaps) in that organisation”.

The Burmese humanitarian migrant focus group raised several problems with Centrelink and job-related services. The key issues were:

- A shortage of interpreters – at the time of the focus group, Centrelink was using an unpaid interpreter from the Burmese community on a regular basis to help with interpreting for Burmese clients with Centrelink. The local migrant support service was working with her to advocate to Centrelink that she should be paid for her interpreter role. Community members in Mt Gambier and Bordertown also highlighted a lack of interpreters.
- Challenges in dealing with the impact of seasonal work on Centrelink payments – e.g. being paid the incorrect amount by Centrelink at times and the challenges of managing the household budget during income fluctuations. The Burmese families felt they had ‘done the right thing’ in informing Centrelink of upcoming paid work, however they all had to pay back money to Centrelink which was difficult when living on a tight budget.
- Participants said they felt the local job network service had not helped them to get jobs.

English language problems

The two humanitarian migrant focus groups highlighted poor English language skill as a key barrier for them in moving to Australia. Difficulty with English, and its effect on people’s capacity to find work, was the predominant theme in the Burmese migrant focus group. Burmese participants pointed out that many of them had little schooling, and there were major

grammatical differences between the Karen and English languages, which made learning English especially challenging.

The Burmese participants raised several specific issues about the current English language classes at the TAFE. A fundamental problem was a shortage of teachers. Local community members backed up this concern in the community focus group. Migrants raised concerns that the classes tended to be at a higher level than most people could cope with, and classes were not separated into beginner and intermediate levels. This was affecting learning, as the more experienced English speakers were held back at a more basic level and used as unofficial teacher aides to assist the beginners. These more experienced English speakers were concerned that their funded 510 hours of language lessons were not being used to improve their own English. As the Burmese interpreter reported, “he helps them but is then worried his hours will run out or he won’t be able to focus on his lessons”.

One of the more competent English speakers said he felt many other Karen people in the class may not understand English instructions, or they may be too shy to ask questions or admit they did not understand. Some Burmese participants said they found the teacher hard to understand and that having a Karen person who could speak English as an assistant would be useful in helping to interpret for the beginners.

Burmese migrants agreed the funded 510 hours was not sufficient for people to progress adequately in their language skills. A participant who could speak conversational English said:

I have been learning English for many years but I cannot speak English very well so 510 hours is not enough, [it] takes a long time (humanitarian migrant, Mt Gambier).

Community members in Bordertown and Mt Gambier also said the number of funded hours was not sufficient for some migrants.

The humanitarian migrants group in Bordertown also spoke about initial language barriers, but to a much lesser degree than the Burmese group. Bordertown participants said there were not enough English language services currently available (due to low numbers), and gave an example of one migrant’s wife having to learn English over the phone with a teacher in Adelaide, which was seen as impractical and difficult.

While participants in the skilled migrant groups tended to be proficient in English (and often were from countries where English is widely spoken), some participants said it was challenging at first to understand the Australian accent and use of Australian ‘lingo’.

Housing

The humanitarian migrants group in Bordertown raised housing shortages as a key barrier to positive settlement. A participant described housing as “the biggest challenge we’re facing”. One migrant said his wife was living mostly in Adelaide partly due to a shortage of appropriate housing for families in the town. Bordertown migrants said they had friends in larger cities who would like to move to Bordertown but could not because of the lack of housing. Community members and the employer in Bordertown also noted the current housing shortage and problems of overcrowding. The community focus group included much discussion on exploitation of migrants related to housing. Community members expressed concern about high

rental costs and overcrowded accommodation for many migrants. They felt some unscrupulous locals were exploiting migrant workers and felt a sense of community responsibility to address this situation. A community member said:

I mean everyone has a story about these people living in houses that are too small for the number of people that are there...it shouldn't be happening, people are making money....it's illegal to have ten or twenty people in a house with one bathroom, and it's not healthy" (Bordertown community member).

While local employers rented a few houses on behalf of employees, this was not sufficient to meet the housing needs of all the workers. One migrant reported there were currently 20 migrant families living in one transit house, as they had recently arrived and there was no suitable housing for them.

Transport

Migrants in Mt Gambier and Whyalla said there were some problems with transport, although it was not seen as the biggest settlement barrier. This was consistent with the views expressed by community members. Many migrants used cars as their main form of transport but there were problems for migrants without licences or cars. Community members pointed out that many jobs in regional areas were located outside the town centres, so transport problems could affect job opportunities. Transport barriers were often significant after arrival, when migrants did not have access to a car and were reliant on public transport. In the words of one Whyalla skilled migrant: "it's really hard when you don't have a car actually...it's just terrible."

Public transport services were very limited in all three regions. Taxi services were available but tended to be expensive. Participants in Whyalla and Mt Gambier spoke of sparse bus services where there were often long delays in waiting for buses. A participant in Whyalla said:

Initially we had only one car, my husband used it to get to work, it was very difficult for me to get a bus, I had to change two buses...if I miss it I have to wait an hour and a half, sitting at the bus stop waiting with my little son (skilled migrant, Whyalla).

Several participants (both skilled and humanitarian) raised the point that it was challenging to learn to use the bus system in a new location.

While the Burmese migrants described transport problems as a "small" problem they did talk about difficulties in transporting groups of migrants to events. They said there was a need for a dedicated bus that they could use now the Burmese community had grown in size. In general, most Burmese migrants either walked or biked within Mt Gambier, which was seen as a good way to get around the central town area. Transport to the TAFE was mentioned as a problem, as the bus service was intermittent. The bus to the TAFE provided limited service (9-5 Mon-Fri during school term) and the two different buses people had to catch were not well connected.

Separation from family members

Two participants in the humanitarian group in Bordertown spoke about significant difficulties and delays in arranging visas for their close family members to move to South Australia. They had experienced many years of separation from their wives and parents, and had had to invest

heavily in regular trips to visit their families in their home countries. Both participants had permanent residency and had ongoing full time employment with a local employer. However they were still experiencing significant delays in the visa application process for their family members. One of them had recently been advised his wife had approval to move to Bordertown and was expecting her shortly. They felt the government should be supporting migrants more by improving the process for family members to move to Australia.

Educational barriers

Many provisional or temporary migrants had difficulty accessing education due to the higher costs. Some participants reported that limited tertiary education in regional South Australia was a barrier to migrant settlement. Migrants said there was a lack of computer training and computer access in Bordertown. The Bordertown migrant group also raised concern about a training gap for their wives. They said the women in their community did not have enough to do during the day. Participants felt their wives should be able to access training, in English and in other skills, but they currently could not. One participant said:

they need to assess their skill and see what we can provide them, so [the wives] can become a functional part of the community, instead of just sitting and being bored, or unproductive or still having a communication gap and not being part of the community.

A lack of qualifications was also a barrier for the Burmese people in securing employment, as many had only had very limited education. For instance, the interpreter described one person's situation as:

He is still at TAFE [learning English] but maybe in the future, he doesn't know where to get a job, how to get a job, in Australia it's really too hard to find a job, they ask for qualifications, but he has no qualifications – if they ask that we never get a job!

According to the interpreter, some of the Burmese participants were educated to the equivalent of Year 10, but others only had schooling to Year 5 or 6 and some families had no schooling at all. Living in refugee camps had often disrupted education or prevented people from access to adequate schooling.

Lack of religious infrastructure

The Bordertown migrant focus group emphasised the lack of a mosque as a key barrier for them, and for future settlement of Muslim migrants. They had recently negotiated provision of a prayer room at the local TAFE, with the support of the migrant program and the council. While they saw this as a step in the right direction, they said not having a mosque was a significant problem for them and advocated for one to ensure migrants' religious needs were met. One participant described a mosque as a potential "magnet" to attract new migrants and build a stronger Muslim community in the region. He said "a worship place is very important". Participants said they currently had to travel to Adelaide or Melbourne for some religious celebrations, whereas "if we had a mosque we could celebrate and show our culture, be part of our culture, here [in Bordertown]."

4.6 Issues for employers in employing migrants

The main challenges for employers in employing migrants were problems with bureaucracy and visa delays, and social and cultural issues including language and communication barriers.

Visa approval process

All three employers were frustrated with bureaucratic immigration requirements, especially the length of time it took to secure visa approval. One employer said it had taken between three and six months to go through the process of getting a 457 visa, and that was a long time for a business to hold vacancies open. Another said the process was 6-8 months from the interview to the new migrant's arrival, "and that makes it hard to plan as a business, you need staff to keep business productive and it's difficult when the process takes that long".

One employer said recent changes to the 457 visa rules had removed the employer's ability to bond migrant employees for a particular length of time. He said this was a significant disincentive for employers, as there was no certainty employees would stay. He said his company would not be able to consider recruiting migrants unless they could bond them to the company.

Another employer raised a specific federal immigration issue of job coding for immigration purposes, as a major problem for the company. For permanent residency approval for 457 temporary visa holders, the current ASCO³ codes for skilled occupations did not include all skill levels relevant to the company's workforce. This meant the company could not offer workers with certain occupations sponsorship for permanent residency. The employer said it considered these workers' skills to be equivalent to other workers in the company, which was reflected in equivalent pay rates. However, workers with the skill in short supply could not be considered for permanent residency due to the coding issue, whereas other workers, whose supply is more plentiful, could be. This current policy meant there was greater uncertainty for the workers who could not apply for permanent residency and were reliant on the company seeking renewal of their temporary visas.

Cultural and communication issues

For employers, the other most significant barrier was dealing with cultural and communication issues. The two main cultural issues faced by employers were language barriers and a need to control the working hours of some employees. Even in cases where the migrants were from English-speaking countries, there were communication challenges with differing accents, speed of verbal communication, and use of slang. Employers said generally the initial communication challenges had been worked through in a constructive way. One said it helped to have a supportive workforce where there was a tolerant culture and openness to resolving communication issues. Two employers said they needed to control the work hours of some migrant employees, who would willingly do double shifts or "unrelenting hours". These employees were sending money back to their families overseas. Other cultural issues raised by

³ Australian Standard Classification of Occupations

employers were the need to understand employees' cultures and particular food requirements, which would help to integrate them into the workforce better.

Social issues

One of the employers reported there were a number of social issues for migrants which the company, as the employer, had some involvement. This could be challenging at times. In particular, some migrants had backgrounds with serious trauma and psychological problems, which at times were challenging to deal with in the workplace. This employer also reported housing difficulties, with some migrants living in a caravan park for several months at a time. One employee had recently left the company stating they were tired of living in the caravan park.

Success factors for positive migrant recruitment and settlement

The three employers all highlighted five critical factors for positive migrant recruitment and settlement:

- Provision of a support/orientation package for new migrants, including housing
- Recruitment of migrant families rather than single individuals
- Consideration of the needs of the family as a whole rather than the primary employee, including seeking employment for the spouse
- Linking migrants with the local migrant support program and working collaboratively with the migrant support program to ensure appropriate support packages are in place
- Recruitment of migrant employees with pre-existing English proficiency.

One of the employers interviewed had had considerable success, with 100% retention of migrant employees and increases in productivity and work performance since the migrants were employed. In addition to the factors above, this employer identified several other factors that were critical to his company's success with employing migrants. These were:

- Recruitment of migrants with permanent residency approval prior to moving to Australia
- Visiting the country of origin to increase the employer's understanding of cultural issues and the lifestyle of the migrant's home country
- Bonding migrants to the company for two years
- Ensuring migrants were treated equally with other employees on all employment matters
- Preparation and information for other employees prior to the migrants' arrival.

This employer said he rejected the option of recruiting migrants on a temporary basis as he was seeking long term job commitment and stability of his workforce. He felt it was unsatisfactory to recruit on a temporary basis for both the company and workers, due to the lack of certainty. He said:

I am convinced that people coming in as permanent residents is the way it should be done.... it gives [the migrants] more security...It was in the best interest of everyone...I

wouldn't do it any other way. From day one they are part of Australia and are here on a long term basis. I know they won't be a burden on Australian society, and as far as Medicare goes they won't use it much (employer, regional South Australia).

Finally, several other success factors were mentioned by employers:

- Provision of comprehensive information to potential migrant employees from the very beginning (on the job, location/community and the local culture)
- Linking migrants with the local community and social support, especially from other migrants from their own culture
- Involvement from senior management staff, e.g. in welcoming migrants on arrival, to signal high-level commitment from the company as a whole
- Learning from feedback from migrants (both informal and through evaluations) and incorporating learning into the migrant employment program in future
- Having a dedicated migrant recruitment officer in larger companies.

4.7 Contribution of migrants to regional communities

Community members and employers highlighted several key contributions of migrants to their local communities. A fundamental contribution was greater cultural diversity, which community participants and employers felt had become part of the local identity, especially in Whyalla and Bordertown. For instance, Bordertown was thought to have 47 different nationalities in a total population of only 2500 people. Likewise, the Whyalla employer and community members agreed that multiculturalism was a core feature of the town. As one community member explained:

People see different cultures and faces and I think that's what Whyalla's got that a lot of places don't (community member, Whyalla).

A community participant in Mt Gambier commented that increased multiculturalism at the primary school had helped the children to discuss issues of racism and discrimination:

We are finding children are advocates for a 'fair go' in quite a different way because it makes sense to them, and I would say for Mt Gambier that's the biggest benefit. It changes the dynamics of the discussion to actually have migrants [in the school]. Some kids stand up to other kids and say 'this is not right, it's not okay to do that' (community member, Mt Gambier).

Other Mt Gambier community members agreed the multicultural flavour of the school was having a wider impact on the community's awareness of migrant issues for children, parents and the wider community. Schools were seen as a site where parents mixed, and children were often positive role models by mixing with children of various cultural backgrounds. It was common for employers to mention the rapid integration of migrants' children into school and wider community, and the positive impact on schools. Small schools in regional and rural areas greatly appreciated the effect of an influx of motivated children.

Another common contribution from migrants, according to community members and employers, was filling crucial employment roles and financially investing in regional and rural towns. In particular, employers emphasised the contribution of migrants in the workplace as highly motivated and committed workers. Community and employer participants said without migrants, small towns would not be able to provide health services or to sustain large businesses who were major employers of people in the community.

Cultural and international festivals, and opportunities to share ethnic foods, were another important contribution to regional communities. For instance, in Whyalla there was an annual international night at the school, and in Bordertown there had been recent celebration of the Chinese New Year. The Muslim community in Bordertown regularly invited the wider community to social events.

Other areas of contribution were sporting involvement, participation in churches and religious diversity. Participants in all three community groups, as well as employers, emphasised the important contribution of migrants to local sports teams. For instance, Mt Gambier community members noted the sporting achievements of the Burmese children in particular, and said they felt sport was a way for new migrants to become integrated into the wider community more quickly. Employers also agreed integration was often facilitated by migrants' participation in sport, music or dance activities, or through church involvement.

In Bordertown, Muslim migrants had made a recent contribution in working with community leaders and organisations to arrange a prayer room space at the local TAFE, which was being used by Muslim people across the wider region. Whyalla participants reported several migrants were taking leadership roles in a local church.

4.8 Issues for community members

The community focus groups reported that a major challenge of increasing regional migration was the impact on local services and infrastructure. As small regional and rural towns, greater migration brings new capacity challenges such as primary school teachers needing to teach children with low English proficiency and additional challenges for service providers in understanding cultural differences and assisting migrants to settle. Problems were compounded by difficulties for regional towns in accessing support and appropriate funding to meet migrants needs. As raised already, a significant shortage of interpreters in regional and rural towns was emphasised.

Lack of capacity to meet migrants' needs across services such as health, education or welfare meant there was a strong reliance on volunteer assistance. In some cases it was unrealistic for services to ask for volunteers for all the work that needed to be done. For instance, Mt Gambier community members said it was difficult to find enough volunteers to transport new migrants to all their mandatory appointments in the first six months after arriving. In Mt Gambier some support services routinely worked outside of their funded hours and in areas outside of their brief, as they felt no one else was providing this support. For example, a migrant support service was providing additional job support services as well as delivering their core work in settlement. Participants felt it was unsustainable in the long term to be heavily reliant on volunteers and overworked employees.

Mt Gambier community members were especially concerned about the challenges facing humanitarian migrants in learning English and the effects on their future employability. They said the funding structure for English language classes disadvantaged regional areas as they did not have the numbers to attract funding for classes. They felt this situation would have a negative impact on the whole community in future. A community member said:

In Mt Gambier in the long term we are going to end up with a whole group of people who are unemployable simply because of their lack of English, in the regional areas that is a huge, huge problem.

Finally, the high turnover of short term migrants in Bordertown presented some problems for various community members and businesses, for instance, private accommodation providers, the library and the bank were each affected by rapid turnover of student migrants.

4.9 Suggestions from research participants for future migrant settlement

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR REGIONAL MIGRATION

- Improve long term strategic planning for regional settlement of migrants to meet migrants' needs including health, education, religious, cultural and housing needs.
- The South Australian Government should take greater responsibility for migrant settlement especially matching migrants with suitable work e.g. through a better web-based database to link new migrants with available jobs.
- Ensure jobs are available for spouses of temporary or provisional migrants e.g. by relaxing the requirement for permanent residency for some government jobs in the regions.
- Ensure infrastructure is present – especially housing, transport and adequate capacity in local services:
 - Address the housing shortage in Bordertown (the community group in Bordertown made some practical suggestions for how this could be done such as prefabricated housing or upgrade of existing rural facilities such as disused shearers' quarters).
 - Increase training opportunities in Bordertown - funding for TAFE to be able to offer training across a broader range of subjects, for example computer training, electrical skills, technical skills, skills training for migrant women, more English language classes.
 - Ensure that local schools are funded adequately to meet migrants' needs.
- Take a holistic approach to strategic planning and policy making to ensure the social implications of migration and settlement as well as economic implications are considered.

POLICIES ON REGIONAL MIGRATION

Recruitment of migrant workers

- There should be requirement for employers to provide a package of support for sponsored migrants, including clear and realistic pre-arrival information, information on migrant support services and welcome programs, accommodation advice or support (e.g. help with finding accommodation or providing initial accommodation in some instances).
- There needs to be greater scrutiny of employers recruiting migrants to ensure that vulnerable people are not exploited
- There should be greater recognition of migrants' prior employment experience prior to moving to Australia (research may be needed to investigate how this might be implemented/encouraged)
- Review the federal immigration rules on occupational coding and permanent residency to removed any inconsistencies or unusual circumstances where skilled workers are precluded from gaining permanent residency
- Encourage recruitment of migrants with permanent residency, or encourage and support migrants on temporary visas to apply for permanent residency to meet workforce needs
- Shorten the length of time taken for processing visas for sponsored migrants.

Migration process for family members

- Improve current processes for visa approval for spouses and close family members of migrants to move to Australia, especially for migrants who are permanent residents.
- Migration and settlement policies should take a greater focus on the whole family, rather than individual primary visa applicants.

Greater support for people on temporary and provisional visas

- Consideration be given to introducing a subsidy, allowance or cheap loan scheme to assist temporary and provisional visa holders with medical and educational costs.

'Grandparenting' of policy changes

- Introduce a 'grandparenting' provision when immigration policies are changed so people who started under one policy are not disadvantaged by the change.

Support for cultural festivals

- Continue, and expand, cultural festivals and multicultural community events in regional and rural areas.

Driver licensing requirements

- Consider simplifying the process of getting a drivers licence for adult migrants in rural areas who already hold a drivers licence in their home country (an employer argued adult migrants tend to be mature and responsible people yet the rules are the same as for young people first learning to drive).

MIGRANT SUPPORT SERVICES

- Continue funding migrant support programs in regional South Australia as they play a crucial role in facilitating positive settlement of migrants. In small towns such as Bordertown there is a need to ensure these support services are accessible locally.
- Ensure there is adequate support for humanitarian migrants to help deal with social and psychological support needs.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information for migrants

- Pre-arrival information for migrants should be balanced, including both positive and negative aspects of life in Australia.
- Improve access to specialist immigration advice (e.g. visa application forms, requirements for visas) in the regions.
- Develop a website like 'Smart Traveller' aimed at new migrants to Australia (<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/> - which gives advice for Australians going overseas).
- Practical, readable information should be provided to new migrants about their new town (e.g. supermarkets, key services, businesses, transport, map etc.) in a form that people can use, such as a 'fridge magnet' style summary or a brochure, and using plain language or translations where appropriate.
- Introduce mentoring or buddy systems where new migrants are paired up with more established migrants from their own culture to promote sharing of information and advice.

Information for the community

- Improve information for local community members on ways to assist or support new migrants (for instance information on local welcome services and mentoring schemes, so potential volunteers are aware of migrant support activities)

- Implement awareness-raising campaigns for local businesses to encourage them to be welcoming to migrants and to highlight the contribution of migrants to the local area.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SERVICES

- Consider increasing funding for English language provision to allow more than 510 hours in cases where humanitarian migrants require additional hours to achieve proficiency. Provide a way for Mt Gambier-based English language learners to access the additional funded 600 hours over and above the initial 510 hours if needed (it was reported this was available in Adelaide but not in Mt Gambier).
- Address the shortage of English language teachers especially in the Limestone Coast
- Ensure TAFEs can offer separate-level English classes – i.e. separate beginner learners and intermediate English speakers' classes
- Address skilled migrants' needs for English language improvement (through evening classes)
- Ensure English language teaching covers vocational language (so migrants are better able to access private training courses which have English language requirements).

5. Discussion

The overarching theme of the qualitative research was the need for better and more integrated strategic planning to ensure infrastructure is in place to meet migrants' needs and that South Australian regional and rural communities are not stretched beyond their capacity.

It was apparent regional communities had a good understanding of the positive contribution migrants make to the local economy and community. However many community members stressed the regional migrant recruitment policy risked being undermined by capacity problems in small and regional towns, and by a failure to plan properly for services, infrastructure and social environments to fully support new migrants and their families.

The qualitative research findings are consistent with the literature review's identification of key factors that influence settlement for migrants. Critical influences on the settlement experience, highlighted both in the literature and in this qualitative research are:

- employment
- English language proficiency
- social support (especially from migrant's own culture), and
- access to appropriate services and supports such as health, education, transport and housing.

This research found it was common for non-sponsored migrants in regional South Australia to have difficulties finding suitable employment, especially in the early stages of settlement. This was the case for both humanitarian and skilled migrants. While humanitarian migrants faced significant employment barriers due to low English language proficiency (a fundamental problem for the Burmese migrants in this research), many skilled migrants also experienced challenges in securing jobs appropriate to their qualifications and skills. A lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and prohibitive registration requirements for professions and trades, leading to underemployment of migrants, was a widespread concern among migrants and community members.

Compared with permanent residents, temporary and provisional migrants were disadvantaged as they faced greater uncertainty and higher costs by failing to meet entitlement criteria for government support such as Medicare and education.

Access to training and tertiary education was a key barrier for these migrants, as well as access to essential health services, both of which have major implications for migrants' health and wellbeing. The research suggests for temporary migrants who wish to apply for permanent residency, it is optimal for the permanent residency process to be initiated early and for permanent status to be secured as rapidly as possible. There are substantial benefits of permanent residency for all parties; migrants, employers and the local community. It would give greater certainty for families and employers and an ability to make a longer term commitment to an area. One employer who had successfully recruited and retained overseas migrants had a policy of only recruiting migrants with permanent residency confirmed prior to arrival in South

Australia. He considered this to be a critical success factor in recruiting and retaining migrants and in promoting good settlement experiences.

Challenges for migrants in accessing services and support were often magnified because they were based in a regional or rural area, where fewer services are available, especially specialist health, education and interpreter services. Travel to Adelaide for such services caused significant hardship.

Access to adequate English language tuition was a major problem in the Limestone Coast area. Migrants in this research highlighted gaps in accessing information about local services and supports, and advocated for more comprehensive and realistic information to be provided to new migrants before arrival.

Social and cultural support was a fundamental determinant of positive settlement for migrants in regional and rural areas. In particular, support on arrival from migrants' own cultural communities was critical to settlement and rapid integration into the new location.

A key message from the research is the need to recruit migrants as a family unit, rather than single individuals, and to consider the family as a whole (such as job placement for the spouse). Migrants and community members both emphasised the suitability of regional and rural locations for families and that coordinated settlement of a family played a major role in smooth settlement experiences.

Research participants expressed significant concern about situations where there had been long delays in approving visas for family members to move to Australia from overseas. Prolonged separation from family diminished the mental health and wellbeing of migrants through stress, anxiety and depression.

The research highlighted the importance of arrival and initial settlement experiences to a migrant's ability to settle and integrate fully into a community. Initial support from migrant support services or employers, in the case of sponsored migrants, made a large contribution to positive settlement. The crucial role and valued contribution of migrant support services was emphasised repeatedly by migrants, community members and employers.

Integration of migrants into regional and rural communities had sometimes been difficult at first, with tensions or separation between locals and new migrants, but integration had improved significantly over time as people got to know each other as individuals and co-workers, and as workers 'proved' themselves.

A theme that emerged from the focus groups and interviews was that people living in these regional South Australian towns appreciated the increasingly multicultural flavour of their communities, and saw cultural diversity as a core part of the community's identity. Ethnic-specific and multicultural celebrations were appreciated and participants called for greater support and extension of these activities. Participants also underlined the role of sport, music and church/religious involvement in facilitating more rapid and smooth integration of migrants into communities.

6. Conclusion

While the South Australian government is committed to promoting regional migrant settlement with policies and programs, it is apparent from this research that not all migrants' needs are being met. Particular gaps include difficulties in securing appropriate employment and in accessing basic services and infrastructure such as health, education and in some cases, housing. Access to English language classes was a significant problem in the Limestone Coast.

A minority of migrants had experienced significant and sustained hardship, for instance through unemployment, financial stress or separation from family, which affected mental health and wellbeing. Although this group did not represent the majority, their challenges were substantial and affected the settlement and wellbeing of their families. Furthermore, it was common across all migrants (both humanitarian and skilled) to have experienced some difficulties with settlement, especially in the early stage.

Despite the multiple challenges in migrant settlement and integration, regional communities in South Australia expressed much support and understanding of migrant issues and appreciation for their contribution to the region. The central message of the research is the need to ensure integrated planning and infrastructure development for migration in regional and rural areas of South Australia. Improved and more holistic planning and capacity building will help to create the conditions for positive settlement of migrants in future.

References

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Appendix 1: Focus group and interview schedules

Questions for migrants⁴

- 1) What's it been like for you to move here? What help or support have you received?
- 2) In moving here and settling in, what types of services have you used?
- 3) What transport options are available to you in this local area?
- 4) How has it been for you with using English language?
- 5) What has been your experience of employment or training here? What have you found helpful? Are there problems?
- 6) Would anyone like to talk about finding it hard to get a job? What has your experience been? What would help in finding a job?
- 7) How have you been supported by other people in your settlement?
- 8) How much do you feel part of things here?
- 9) What do you think would improve things for people moving here in future?
- 10) How keen are you to stay here in the future?

Questions for employers

- 1) What has been your experience of employing migrants?
- 2) What process did you go through to recruit migrant/s? What improvements (if any) could be made to the recruitment process?
- 3) How important is migrant recruitment to your business?
- 4) What are the workplace outcomes from employing migrants?
- 5) What impact has employing migrants had on the rest of the workforce?
- 6) Would you employ migrants in the future? Why/why not?
- 7) What might you do differently and why?
- 8) What support is provided to migrants in the workplace? What support is provided for other staff about arrival of migrants?
- 9) What is your view on whether and how migrants contribute to this community? Please explain.
- 10) What works well in the settlement of migrants? What suggestions do you have for settlement of migrants in future?

⁴ Please note that the questions were worded slightly differently for skilled and humanitarian migrant groups, and there were prompt questions asked in addition to the basic questions provided here.

Questions for community members

- 1) Tell me about your interactions with migrants
- 2) Have you noticed any changes in the community from migrants moving here?
- 3) Has living in a community with people from other cultures had any impact on you personally? If so, what are these impacts?
- 4) What is your view on whether and how migrants contribute to this community? Please explain.
- 5) Are you aware of activities offered by migrants/migrant organisations or cultural organisations? Have you taken part in any of these activities?
- 6) Do you think you have a role in supporting migrants? Please explain.
- 7) How much do you think your local community supports migrants?
- 8) What suggestions do you have for the future integration of migrants into your community? (including what the government's role is)

Appendix 2: Summary of employers' experiences with recruiting migrants

The following gives a brief description of the three employers' experiences of recruiting and employing migrants in regional South Australia.

Employer 1

In the last four years the company saw a marked increase in the proportion of migrant employees compared with local Australian workers. In November 2009, the company had a workforce of 500 people, of whom approximately half were overseas migrants (including both temporary and permanent resident migrants). The most common countries of origin were the Philippines, China, Korea, India, New Zealand and Africa.

The main factors driving employment of migrants were a shortage of local labour and difficulties in retaining staff. The company's workforce had a very high turnover, for instance there had been 200 new employees during the two months prior to the interview. The high turnover was of considerable concern to the company, as it meant high costs in training and supervision.

The majority of the company's migrant workers were skilled migrants, but it also employed some humanitarian migrants. Most of the new migrant employees were on temporary visas (often 457 visas) rather than permanent. The company also employed a group of 417 visa holders (working holiday maker visa), which allowed the migrant to stay for a maximum of six months. Common reasons for employees leaving the company included personal or family issues or unsuitability to the job. The company said instances of termination, although uncommon, did occur.

The company took a generic approach to recruitment where it recruited for any workers rather than specifically for overseas migrants. However, in some cases it had recruited groups of single ethnicity migrants, for instance a large group had recently arrived from another state in Australia. The company had a labour agreement to sponsor people on temporary 457 visas, who were then bonded to the company for four years.

The company said that although the recruitment process was time-intensive in some cases, the end result was worthwhile. The employer felt migrants were highly motivated workers and intended to re-sponsor employees on temporary visas, and to encourage people to apply for permanent residency where it was possible.

Employer 2

A smaller sized company of 30 employees recruited ten migrants from the Philippines to work in animal husbandry. The impetus for the overseas recruitment drive was concern over high staff turnover and difficulty finding local people with the right skills and a longer term commitment to the company. Due to the experience and skill set of Filipino workers within animal husbandry, the employer travelled to the Philippines to recruit people with specific skills.

The employer interviewed approximately 35 applicants and visited various farms and factories in the Philippines. At the same time he recruited several workers for two other farms in the local area. While in the Philippines the employer learned about the Filipino culture and way of life

which he felt was valuable in assisting the migrant employees to settle. He selected workers that were well qualified and experienced.

The employer chose to recruit people as permanent residents from the beginning, rather than using a temporary visa option, as he wanted long term employees and permanent status gave both employees and employer greater security. At the time of the interview, the Filipino migrants had been employed in the workplace for 12 months. The company had retained all ten workers, and several had indicated a long term commitment (several decades) to the workforce. The employer said he was “absolutely delighted” with the experience and outcomes of migrant recruitment.

Employer 3

This employer had 3 years experience of recruiting migrant employees from overseas. The company recruited approximately 100 families in three different intakes. Most migrants were from South Africa, and a small minority were from Singapore and the Philippines. The driver for migrant recruitment was a need for labour during a period of business expansion and strong economic growth. It was intended to be a ‘stop-gap’ response rather than a longer term solution. Alongside the migrant programme, the company increased its apprentice numbers and introduced a cadet programme at the university to boost the future local labour pool.

In the initial recruitment drive, six staff from the company travelled to South Africa for two weeks to interview applicants. They had a set of agreed specific requirements for the number of people they needed for particular roles. The company recruited both tradespeople and professionals on different trips. For the second trip it chose to use a recruitment company based in South Africa to undertake the advertising and initial interviews, rather than delivering the whole process internally. Staff from Australia went to South Africa to interview the short-listed applicants. The company felt recruitment from the Philippines had been less successful. Only about seven people were identified as suitable from that recruitment drive.

Of the 100 migrants recruited in total, there were only problems with three or four people. The issues were poor work performance or diverse work styles based on differing work cultures. At the time of the interview, the company’s migrant recruitment programme was no longer in place, as there were no job vacancies and the earlier business development phase had ended. The employer said the company was unlikely to seek migrant employees in future as a policy change had meant it was unable to bond temporary (457 visa) migrants to the company, which was a major disincentive. The company intended to fill future employment needs with apprentices and cadets rather than migrants from overseas. Nonetheless, the employer described the migrant programme when it was in place as “working pretty well”.

Appendix 3: Summary of findings by location

Whyalla

In total 35 participants in Whyalla took part in the qualitative research on migrant settlement. Two focus groups were held with migrants – a mixed ethnicity group of skilled migrants (15 participants of Indian, Fijian Indian and Fijian ethnicity) and a single ethnicity group of Filipino skilled migrants (7 participants). A focus group with community members included 11 participants from local community organisations, businesses and services. An employer interview was held with two representatives from a local company.

Major themes from Whyalla participants

- Key factors that promote positive settlement for migrants are access to appropriate employment, English language skills, social support (especially from a migrant's own culture), and access to appropriate services and supports such as health, education, transport and housing.
- Many skilled migrants had experienced difficulties in finding work initially as employers wanted to employ people with Australian experience.
- A lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and prohibitive registration requirements for professions and trades leads to underemployment of migrants (working in jobs that do not use migrants' qualifications, skills and experience).
- Compared with permanent residents, temporary or provisional migrants were disadvantaged as they faced greater uncertainty and higher costs by failing to meet entitlement criteria for government support such as Medicare and education. There are substantial benefits of permanent residency for all parties; migrants, employers and the local community. It gives greater certainty for families and employers and an ability to invest and make a longer term commitment to an area.
- New migrants have problems accessing information on available services, employment opportunities and the local culture.
- Challenges for migrants in accessing services and support were often magnified because they were based in a regional or rural area, where fewer services are available, especially specialist health, education and interpreter services. Travel to Adelaide for such services caused hardship.
- There is a need for more realistic information for migrants that includes negative as well as positive aspects of life in South Australia
- The community has difficulty accessing information about migrant issues and ways to support or volunteer with migrants.
- The research highlighted the importance of arrival and initial settlement experiences to a migrant's ability to settle and integrate fully into a community. Initial support from migrant support services or employers, in the case of sponsored migrants, made a large contribution

to positive settlement. The crucial role and valued contribution of migrant support services was emphasised repeatedly by migrants, community members and employers.

- Integration of migrants into the community was described as largely positive, but there were some examples of tensions and discrimination.
- Whyalla residents appreciated the increasingly multicultural flavour of their community, and saw cultural diversity as a core part of the community's identity. It was thought that Whyalla had approximately 67 different nationalities represented in the town (with a population of 22,000).
- Ethnic-specific and multicultural celebrations were appreciated and participants called for greater support and extension of these activities.
- Whyalla participants also underlined the role of sport and church/religious involvement in facilitating more rapid and smooth integration of migrants into communities.
- Migrants and community members emphasised the suitability of regional and rural locations for families and that coordinated settlement of a family played a major role in smooth settlement experiences.

Mt Gambier

In total 58 participants in Mt Gambier took part in the qualitative research on migrant settlement. Two focus groups were held with migrants – a mixed ethnicity group of skilled migrants (10 participants of Indian, Zimbabwean, South African, Dutch and French ethnicity) and a single ethnicity group of Burmese (Karen) humanitarian migrants (32 participants). A focus group with community members included 15 participants from local community organisations, businesses and services. An employer interview was held with a representative from a local company.

Major themes from Mt Gambier participants

- The research identified a need for improved strategic planning and consultation with the community to plan and prepare infrastructure and services to meet migrants' needs.
- Key factors that promote positive settlement for migrants are access to appropriate employment, English language skills, social support (especially from a migrant's own culture), and access to appropriate services and supports such as health, education, transport and housing.
- Both skilled and humanitarian migrants had experienced difficulties in finding work initially as many employers wanted to employ people with Australian experience.
- Humanitarian migrants faced significant barriers to employment, especially limited English language skills. The challenge of learning English was a fundamental problem for the Burmese community.
- A lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and prohibitive registration requirements for professions and trades, leads to underemployment of migrants (working in jobs that do not use migrants' qualifications, skills and experience).

- Compared with permanent residents, temporary or provisional migrants were disadvantaged as they faced greater uncertainty and higher costs by failing to meet entitlement criteria for government support such as Medicare and education. There are substantial benefits of permanent residency for all parties; migrants, employers and the local community. It gives greater certainty for families and employers and an ability to invest and make a longer term commitment to an area.
- New migrants have problems accessing information on available services, employment opportunities and the local culture.
- There is a need for more realistic information for migrants that includes negative as well as positive aspects of life in South Australia.
- The community has difficulty accessing information about migrant issues and ways to support or volunteer with migrants.
- Problems with local English language services were highlighted, including limited access to services and additional hours (beyond the initial entitlement) and limited teaching capacity.
- Challenges for migrants in accessing services and support were often magnified because they were based in a regional or rural area, where fewer services are available, especially specialist health, education and interpreter services. Travel to Adelaide for such services caused hardship.
- The research highlighted the importance of arrival and initial settlement experiences to a migrant's ability to settle and integrate fully into a community. Initial support from migrant support services or employers, in the case of sponsored migrants, made a large contribution to positive settlement. The crucial role and valued contribution of migrant support services was emphasised repeatedly by migrants, community members and employers.
- Integration of migrants into the community had sometimes been difficult at first, with tensions or separation between locals and new migrants, but integration had improved significantly over time as people got to know each other as individuals and co-workers, and as migrants 'proved' themselves.
- Mt Gambier participants also emphasised the role of sports, music and church/religious involvement in facilitating more rapid and smooth integration of migrants into communities.
- Migrants and community members emphasised the suitability of regional and rural locations for families and that coordinated settlement of a family played a major role in smooth settlement experiences.

Bordertown

In total 18 participants in Bordertown took part in the qualitative research on migrant settlement. One focus group was held with migrants – a mixed ethnicity group of humanitarian and skilled migrants (4 participants of Eritrean, Sudanese and Pakistani ethnicity). A focus group with community members included 13 participants from local community organisations, businesses and services. An employer interview was held with a representative from a local company.

Major themes from Bordertown participants

- The research identified a need for improved strategic planning and consultation with the community to plan and prepare infrastructure and services to meet migrants' needs.
- Key factors that promote positive settlement for migrants are access to appropriate employment, English language skills, social support (especially from a migrant's own culture), and access to appropriate services and supports such as health, education, transport and housing.
- Shortage of housing in Bordertown was emphasised as a fundamental problem by migrants, employers and community members.
- Problems with local English language services were highlighted, including limited access to services and limited training opportunities at the local TAFE.
- Challenges for migrants in accessing services and support were often magnified because they were based in a regional or rural area, where fewer services are available, especially specialist health, education and interpreter services. Travel to Adelaide for such services caused hardship.
- Participants expressed significant concern about situations where there had been long delays in approving visas for family members to move to Australia from overseas. Prolonged separation from family diminished the mental health and wellbeing of migrants through stress, anxiety and depression.
- There is a need for more realistic information for migrants that includes negative as well as positive aspects of life in South Australia.
- The community has difficulty accessing information about migrant issues and ways to support or volunteer with migrants.
- The research highlighted the importance of arrival and initial settlement experiences to a migrant's ability to settle and integrate fully into a community. Initial support from migrant support services or employers, in the case of sponsored migrants, made a large contribution to positive settlement. The crucial role and valued contribution of migrant support services was emphasised repeatedly by migrants, community members and employers in this research.
- Integration of migrants into the community had sometimes been difficult at first, with tensions or separation between locals and new migrants, but integration had improved significantly over time as people got to know each other as individuals and co-workers, and as migrants 'proved' themselves.
- Bordertown residents appreciated the increasingly multicultural flavour of their community, and saw cultural diversity as a core part of the community's identity. It was reported that Bordertown had approximately 46 different nationalities represented in the town (with a population of only 2500).

- Ethnic-specific and multicultural celebrations were appreciated and participants called for greater support and extension of these activities.
- Bordertown participants also emphasised the role of church/religious involvement in facilitating more rapid and smooth integration of migrants into communities.
- Migrants and community members highlighted the suitability of regional and rural locations for families and that coordinated settlement of a family played a major role in smooth settlement experiences.