



Submission to the Inquiry into Temporary Migration

Select Committee on Temporary Migration

Settlement Services International (SSI)

Settlement Services International (SSI) is a community organisation and social business that supports newcomers and other Australians to achieve their full potential. We work with people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, to build capacity and enable them to overcome inequality. In our work we also work to engage with communities and businesses at the local and regional level in order to build capacity and enable successful settlement and integration.

Formed in 2000, SSI is also an umbrella organisation for 11 Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) and multicultural organisations across NSW including two in regional NSW. SSI recently merged with Access Community Services in Queensland which significantly extends our service footprint and reach.

SSI and its subsidiaries provide a range of services mainly in the areas of humanitarian and migrant settlement, services to people seeking asylum, employment support and enterprise facilitation and social inclusion initiatives and programs in the area of disability. These programs are mainly funded by the Australian, Queensland and NSW governments.

SSI is the largest provider in NSW of the Humanitarian Settlement Program, funded by the Australian Government, to newly arrived refugees and other humanitarian entrants. SSI is also the lead organisation in a consortium, the NSW Settlement Partnership, of 21 partner agencies which deliver the Settlement Engagement and Transition Supports program, also funded by the Australian Government, to refugees and eligible family stream migrants in the first five years of settlement across NSW. Access Community Services Ltd in Queensland is also a provider of the Settlement Engagement and Transition Supports program in Queensland and also delivers the program in regional areas.

SSI and its subsidiaries are pleased contribute to the Committee's inquiry into temporary migration in Australia.

Authorised by: Greg Benson, General Manager, Client Services and Operations
Date: 25 March 2020

Contact: Tadgh McMahon, Research and Policy Manager
Email:
Web: www.ssi.org.au
Phone:

Recommendations

SSI recommends the Australian Government:

1. **Adopt a longer-term view of temporary migration:** SSI supports the view of the Productivity Commission that the Australian Government take a stronger stewardship role in determining the policy settings around temporary migration and ensure it is aligned to Australia's long-term interests. Currently, the temporary migration policy settings appear to be largely ad hoc and focussed on short-term needs with new visas created or visa conditions extended or cancelled in response to vested interests.
2. **Allow settlement support, in exceptional cases, for temporary migrants transitioning to permanent residency and access to support for dependents of the primary temporary visas:** New permanent residents, including temporary migrants who are granted permanent residency, should be able to access settlement services in exceptional circumstances and based on need. To facilitate the integration into Australia of the dependents of temporary migrants, there should be greater access to family reunification, employment, English language training and social connections.
3. **Recognise and establish clear and transparent pathways to permanent residency for temporary migrants:** The supply of migrants is not assured and for Australia to remain a preferred destination for temporary migrants, there needs to be clear and transparent pathways to permanent residency for those who meet the criteria. Many of these are likely to have been temporary residents for a number of years and are ready to take the next step towards full social, economic, cultural and civic participation.
4. **Ensure that sectors benefiting from temporary migration make every effort to prevent exploitation and promote social and economic inclusion:** Governments, employers, tertiary institutions, and other sectors benefiting from temporary migration should make every effort to ensure that temporary residents are not exploited in the labour market or any other sector and are given opportunities to feel part of the Australian community. The rights, welfare and wellbeing of temporary residents should be safeguarded by governments at all levels. They are part of our collective future, accounting for 50 per cent of the people granted permanent residency each year.
5. **Undertake further research into temporary migrants which looks at the social, cultural and civic outcomes of temporary migrants:** The sheer scale of temporary migration, the differing objectives of the temporary migration streams and the impact of temporary migration on the Australian community warrants deeper research to understand the long-term impacts on social, environment and economic measures.

Discussion

Australia's migration program, like many other OECD countries, has shifted to one where there are large numbers of temporary residents at any given time. Despite evidence pointing to the positive fiscal impact of temporary migration, further research and on-going monitoring around the social, environmental and economic impacts of temporary migration on the Australian community is needed.

The dramatic increase in temporary migration, in all its forms in Australia, has transformed Australia's migration program. Australia's uncapped temporary migration program far outstrips permanent migration with an estimated 1.6 million temporary migrants in 2018 and increasing to almost 2 million temporary migrants in early 2019 (The Australian Government, the Treasury and the Department of Home Affairs, 2018; CEDA, 2019). Internationally, Australia ranks second among OECD countries, after the United States, for the number of temporary visas issued and also ranks second, after New Zealand, on temporary visas issued on a per capita basis (OECD, 2019). The growth in the temporary migration program has been primarily driven by student, skilled and working holiday visas each of which has different objectives and key stakeholders (Productivity Commission, 2016). For example, the skilled work temporary migration visa aims to provide businesses with a flexible tool to address short-term skill shortages to remain internationally competitive while also protecting Australian workers (Migration Council Australia, 2013). The student visa program aims to support the growth of the Australia's international education sector and provides potential applicants for permanent immigration (Productivity Commission, 2016, p. 371).

Australia's temporary migration program is structured so that temporary migrants, across the different streams, generally contribute more to the economy than they receive through government services and benefits. For example, temporary skilled migration provides businesses the flexibility to meet short-term labour demands (Migration Council Australia, 2013). The OECD calculates that temporary labour migrants add 0.5 to 1 per cent to the resident employed population (OECD, 2019). The contribution of other temporary visa streams is limited by restrictions in accessing the labour market (OECD, 2019) and issues around research and data collection (Productivity Commission, 2016).

Temporary student migration is another example. The expansion of temporary student migrants has resulted in education being Australia's third largest export industry in 2016. According to Treasury figures, education export values reached their highest level in 2016-17 at \$28 billion, accounting for 7.5 per cent of total exports (The Australian Government, the Treasury and the Department of Home Affairs, 2018, p. 26). The Productivity Commission notes that student visa holders "have characteristics that predispose them to make a positive contribution to the Australian community" (Productivity Commission, 2016, p. 372). Despite their contributions, temporary migrants have extremely limited or no access to government and subsidised services. That is, temporary residents are not eligible for income support, Medicare, settlement support or other universal services. Thus, temporary migrants are expected to have an overall positive fiscal

impact on Australia (The Australian Government, the Treasury and the Department of Home Affairs, 2018).

The sheer scale of temporary migration, the differing objectives of the temporary migration streams and the impact of temporary migration on the Australian community warrants deeper consideration, monitoring and analysis of all the temporary visa streams (Productivity Commission, 2016; Migration Council Australia, 2013). While temporary migration is a short-term policy measure, further work is necessary to understand the long-term impacts on social, environment and economic measures.

The policy settings of the temporary migration program can have negative implications for social cohesion and integration. This arises due to the mismatch between the longer-term process of integration and the short-term perspective of stakeholders in relation to temporary migration.

As noted above, temporary migration is part of an international shift to a two-step, demand-driven and responsive migration program (Migration Council Australia, 2013). As such, temporary migration aims to support the education, agriculture and business sectors who are key beneficiaries of temporary migrants and seek to influence the criteria of the temporary migration streams. In many cases, such as with skilled temporary migrants and international students, these sectors are critical actors in selecting and endorsing visa applicants while the Australian Government retains the power to issue visas. However, the short-term interests of these stakeholders are not always aligned with the long-term social, economic and environmental interests of the Australian community.

The policy settings around temporary migration have potentially significant implications for long-term social cohesion and integration, especially as about half of our annual permanent migration intake is made up of those who have already been resident temporarily in Australia. In Australia, social cohesion has been facilitated by a policy of multiculturalism which has underpinned a move towards supporting newcomers to integrate and participate rather than placing the onus on migrants to assimilate. However, we know that integration is a journey involving multiple domains requiring mutual adaptation by everyone in the community, strong social connections and a foundation upon which rights are respected and mutual expectations are established (UK Home Office, 2019). Crucially, there is a mismatch between the gradual and multi-dimensional process of integration; and the short-term, demand-driven nature of temporary migration. In a world where the supply of temporary migrants is not assured (The Australian Government, the Treasury and the Department of Home Affairs, 2018), ensuring that the rights of temporary migrants are upheld and that they have a sense of welcome and belonging is critical.

The impact of this mismatch is felt by temporary migrants in a number of ways. First, temporary migrants and their dependents may have variable levels of English proficiency in the short-term. Social cohesion is often associated with English-language acquisition (Productivity Commission, 2016, p. 255). According to a study into the experiences of temporary migrants, while a relatively high proportion of temporary migrants reported experiencing racism or prejudice, the rate was

higher among those had poorer English proficiency (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2016, p. 134). Racism and prejudice are problematic on a number of levels including that these experiences threaten Australia's 'brand' overseas. We have seen instances where a relatively localised issue can have far-reaching international ramifications in a digitally connected world. For example, the verbal abuse of two Chinese students on a train in Sydney in 2012, posted on Weibo, warranted a high-level Australian and NSW Government response to counter significant mainstream and social media interest in the story in China and across Asia.^{1,2} Ensuring that temporary migrants are provided with greater support to learn English and are aware of their rights to address racial discrimination under Australian laws protects our 'brand' as a nation that welcomes people.

Second, temporary migrants who have been granted permanent residency are not eligible for settlement support, such as access to subsidised learning in the Adult Migrant English Program, or settlement programs that enable them to build links with the broader community. However, temporary migrants comprise about half of the permanent visa grants in Australia (Productivity Commission, 2016). SSI, and our member organisations in Migrant Resource Centres, have seen first-hand the difficulties faced by some who are granted permanent residency after an extended period of insecure residency status, a status which undermines the capacity to establish roots and connections in Australia. In essence, we are not preparing some of our new permanent residents to integrate and fully contribute to the Australian community. Thus, temporary migrants who are granted permanent residency, should be able to access settlement support, based on need, to ensure that they have every opportunity to achieve social, economic, cultural and civic participation.

Related to this, is the integration into Australia of the dependents (secondary visa holders) of temporary migrants, typically women and children. There is growing concern internationally about access to family reunification, employment, host language training and social connections for the dependents of the primary temporary visa holder (OECD, 2019, p. 129). The OECD notes that delays in family reunification remains an issue across OECD countries and has the potential to negatively affect the dependent's integration outcomes (OECD, 2019, p. 168). Once in Australia, families and dependents of temporary migrants are not entitled to settlement support and other services such as English classes, apart from some exceptions in regional areas. SSI and our members see the hardships faced by the dependents of temporary migrants when their circumstances change unexpectedly (e.g. family breakdown, loss of a job) and they are unable to access the services they need to get through these unexpected circumstances. SSI argues that temporary migrants and their dependents should be able to access settlement support such as the Settlement Engagement and Transition Supports program, in exceptional circumstances based on need.

¹ *'Rudd in damage control as media storm over Sydney bashing of Chinese students escalates'*, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April 2012.

² *'This city is so dangerous': outrage in China over Sydney train assault'*, Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April 2012.

Another issue with the short-term policy settings around temporary migration is that it can result in unclear pathways to permanent residency. Transparent and clear pathways to permanent residency are desirable as it ensures that young, productive and well-educated individuals, who are predisposed to contribute positively to Australia, are able to continue to do so (CEDA, 2019; Productivity Commission, 2016). The lack of a clear pathway or timeframe can inhibit temporary residents from developing a sense of belonging to Australia as they feel permanently ‘temporary’ (Mares, 2016). This has potential negative ramifications for long-term social cohesion in Australia.

Finally, migrant worker exploitation harms social cohesion by impacting the functioning of the labour market and social relationships in the community. The 2019 Report of the Migrant Workers Taskforce notes that the “underpayment of temporary migrant workers has become more visible in recent years as the number of temporary visa holders in Australia has grown substantially over time” (Australian Government, 2019, p. 13). Stakeholders such as governments, universities and employers that benefit from temporary migration should be proactive in implementing initiatives that ensure that temporary migrants are not exploited in the labour market. SSI argues that labour market exploitation, which has been well-documented, may be just one of the most visible areas of temporary migrant exploitation and other areas of exploitation may exist. Consequently, SSI recommends that the guiding principle behind temporary migration in all its forms should be for governments at all levels to safeguard the rights, welfare and wellbeing of temporary residents.

Concluding remarks

The dramatic increase in temporary migration, in all its forms in Australia, has transformed Australia’s migration program. The growth in the temporary migration program has been beneficial to Australia and driven primarily by student, skilled and working holiday visas. However, limited research or study has been undertaken to understand the long-term social, environmental and economic impacts of these temporary migration streams.

Temporary migration stands to benefit the education, agriculture and business sectors who are key beneficiaries of temporary migrants and seek to influence the criteria of the temporary migration streams. These sectors need to do more to implement initiatives that ensure that temporary migrants are not exploited in the labour market. Governments at all levels need to ensure that the rights, welfare and wellbeing of temporary migrants are protected. The Australian Government should take a stronger stewardship role in determining the policy settings around temporary migration and ensure it is aligned to Australia’s long-term social, economic and environmental interests.

Temporary migrants receive extremely limited access to support if they experience hardship while they are in Australia and extremely limited access to settlement support, when they become permanent residents. This has implications for long-term social cohesion given that temporary migrants comprise about half of the permanent visa grants in Australia. Settlement support and other services should be able to be accessed, based on need, especially for the dependents of temporary migrants to improve long-term integration outcomes across the Australian community.

References

- Australian Government. (2019). *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce*. Australian Government.
- CEDA. (2019). *Effects of temporary migration: Shaping Australia's society and economy*. Committee for Economic Development of Australia , Melbourne.
- Department of Immigration and Border Protection. (2016). *Experiences of Temporary Residents Report*.
- Levitt, P., & Jaworsky, B. (2007). Transnational migration studies: Past developments and future trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33(1), 129-156.
- Mares, P. (2016). *How temporary migration is changing Australia - and the world*. Retrieved from The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/how-temporary-migration-is-changing-australia-and-the-world-63035>
- Migration Council Australia. (2013). *More than temporary: Australia's 457 visa program*.
- OECD. (2019). *International Migration Outlook 2019*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Productivity Commission. (2016). *Migrant intake into Australia*. Inquiry Report No. 77, Canberra.
- The Australian Government, the Treasury and the Department of Home Affairs. (2018). *Shaping a nation: Population growth and immigration over time*. Canberra.
- UK Home Office. (2019). *Indicators of Integration framework*. UK Home office.