

The Hon. Julian Leaser, MP
Committee Chair
The Joint Standing Committee on Migration

19 September 2019

Submission to the Committee by Regional Opportunities Australia (ROA)

Dear Mr. Leaser,

Regional Opportunities Australia (ROA) is a not-for-profit organisation that helps migrants and refugees move from cities to welcoming regional communities where it connects them to long-term employment and small business opportunities.

ROA's role is twofold; on one hand it identifies and onboards migrants and refugees in cities who are unemployed or underemployed and prepare them for regional jobs and lifestyle. On the other hand, it identifies employment opportunities within right and ripe regional communities.

ROA Provides bespoke and end-to-end assistance to migrants and refugees including resume preparation, interview skills, guidance on qualification recognition, cultural training, identification of jobs and small business opportunities in regional areas, placement into those opportunities, help with relocation, connection with regional mentors and services in regional areas.

As a result of ROA's work, migrants and refugees become economically active and contributing members of the Australian society. When a migrant/refugee gets involved in the workforce or start their own small business, they have to interact with people which helps them develop English language skills, understand the norm and the culture of the new country they call home, come off Centrelink benefits (if they are on welfare benefits), become financially independent and pay taxes to contribute to the economy. Furthermore, it helps them become physically active, mentally active, live with a purpose and set a good precedence for their children and younger generation. In fact some of ROA's clients were recently the subject of a TV news story which can be viewed in [this](#) video clip.

The objective behind ROA is to positively transform the lives of migrants and refugees by helping them obtain employment, build successful businesses and fulfilling lives, so they can make meaningful contributions to the regional economy and society.

ROA welcomes the parliamentary inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration and regards it as a very timely initiative.

Based on our recent work with our migrants and refugee clients and regional communities, we have identified the following as key areas where government support is needed to enable more and more people to move from cities and permanently settle in regional areas:

1. Pathways to permanent residency through regional visas:

Many of ROA's migrant and refugee clients are currently on non-permanent visas such as Graduate Visa (sub-class 485), Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (sub-class 790), Temporary Protection Visa (sub-class 785), Bridging Visas etc. One of their interests, amongst others, to settle in regional areas permanently is to obtain permanent visas (such as sub-class 191 Permanent Resident – Skilled Regional) through the newly announced regional visas (sub-class 490 and 491).

However, the process of how various non-permanent visa holders who are already in Australia and are living in non-regional areas (i.e. cities) can follow the pathway to permanent residency in regional areas needs more clarity. This can be achieved by the Department of Home Affairs putting in place Visa Transfer Guides/information sheets.

This would assist and encourage additional migrants and refugees, who are keen to permanently settle in Australia to move to regional areas and obtain permanent residency. Furthermore, this approach also allows the government to guide skilled refugees and migrants to fill the skill gaps identified in regional areas.

2. Central directory of regional schemes:

There are various federal and state government schemes that assist and encourage people to move to and settle in regional areas. For example, Regional Skills Relocation Grant of the NSW Government that aims to increase the availability of skilled and experienced workers for businesses setting up in, relocating to, or existing in regional NSW.

In the absence of a central directory of all the regional schemes, it is very difficult to understand what schemes and support are available for people who want to move to regional Australia. Ideally, ROA would like to inform every one of its clients if they are eligible for any schemes to help them move to regional Australia.

Having all that information in a central directory would make it easy for the wider public interested to move to regional Australia and organisations like ROA who are dealing with clients on daily basis and want to play a major role in renewing regional Australia.

3. Complexities with the processes of overseas trained medical doctors:

It is widely known that some of regions in Australia are in desperate need of medical doctors. However, the process for those medical doctors who have arrived in Australia to be eligible to practice in Australia is overly complex and not designed to meet the country's needs.

After getting their qualification recognised, overseas trained doctors need to set for a medical examination and English test. Then they must work under the supervision of a qualified Australian medical doctor to become eligible to practice as doctors in Australia. However, usually when an overseas trained doctor gets their qualification recognised, set for the medical board and English exams, it takes so long that they are then categorised by the Australian medical system as those who don't have "recent" experience as medical doctors. This then prevents them from even getting an internship opportunity to meet the last step of their pathway to become eligible practicing doctors.

This cumbersome process is in dire need of a thorough review as there are hundreds of overseas trained doctors in Australian big cities (including some of ROA's clients) who would love to go to regional areas and serve those communities, however, are stuck in the complexity of the process.

4. Lack of funding:

ROA is a not-for-profit organisation that is already have great initial success. There are hundreds of applicants who have registered with ROA to move to regional Australia. However, ROA's current funding is very limited and hence unable to serve all clients who are very keen to call regional Australia home.

ROA plays a unique role as it provides end-to-end support to migrants and refugees right from the very start in the cities all the way to placement and post-placement in regional communities. The process starts by informing migrants and refugees of the opportunities in regional Australia, onboarding them, upskilling and preparing them for the move, helping them move and providing them support in the post-placement stage.

There are multiple players/organisations who are involved in some aspects of the value-chain. However, ROA brings all together into one single platform. In addition to services directly provided by ROA, it brings together a range of stakeholders to ensure that migrants and refugees receive services throughout the whole value-chain.

There is an urgent need for organisations like ROA, who are already showing great success, to be supported so that more and more migrants and refugees can be assisted to move to regional Australia.

Because ROA's leadership include people with lived migrant and refugee experience and have deeper ties to the migrant and refugee communities in the big cities, they are trusted in the community and are able to attract and convince migrants to settle in regional Australia by providing them accurate information and by taking them on regional bus trips. Often, migrants and refugees think that regional Australia is like the regional areas of their original countries and hence initially are not very keen to move. However, when they are provided adequate information and taken on regional trips, they find it more appealing because of the welcoming nature of regional communities to move and settle there.

ROA would like to welcome an opportunity for the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to meet with those migrants/refugee clients of ROA who have registered their interest with ROA to move to regional Australia and are currently being placed into regional jobs and communities. This would provide a firsthand opportunity for the distinguished members of the committee to explore further challenges that exist in the way of moving to regional Australia.

Yours Sincerely,

Mahir Momand
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Regional Opportunities Australia
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