



# Insights into Regional Settlement in Practice **Addendum**

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NSW  
Settlement  
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**SSI**  
settlementservices  
international

## Family and social support

**Many migrants, being new to the community, need more social support to help them build relationships, particularly if they have not interacted with people outside their own cultural group.**

Learning English is important for migrants and humanitarian entrants to develop their social and life skills, but some clients are unable to access AMEP classes due to their visa class.

One of the challenges for newcomers, particularly in regional areas, is finding long-term accommodation. The requirements of many real estate agencies are quite difficult for newly arrived families to meet, which poses barriers to settlement.

### What is needed

English language programs and conversational English classes should be accessible and free for newcomers.

Parents of children under 5 should be able to access subsidies for their children to learn English.

Settlement providers are supporting social cohesion and harmony among CALD, host and Indigenous communities by holding local events, partnering with schools, etc. to create community harmony and minimise racism, but more funding is needed in this area.

Settlement providers are also raising awareness about domestic and family violence (DFV) in CALD communities. For many newly arrived clients, this is having good outcomes as clients are becoming more comfortable to talk about their experiences with DFV.

### Challenges

English lessons and childcare centres for some settlement clients are very expensive and families cannot afford it.

Lack of housing stability and inaccessibility of long-term accommodation is another problem.

Some migrant and newcomer communities face discrimination from host communities who may not be used to interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. Efforts to bring different groups together through community events and celebrations like Harmony Day are vital to breaking down these barriers.

## Case study

**Sarah\*, 28, arrived in Australia from Lebanon on a temporary partner visa.** She arrived with her five-year-old son. Sarah registered as a SETS client with Connecting Community Services (CCS). She was having difficulty accessing transport and did not know how to enrol her son in school.

She was supported through information sessions to help her understand the process of school enrolment in Australia and was referred to a local driving school so that she could get a driving licence. Subsequently, she was able to enrol her son in school for the academic year beginning 2021 and, in January 2022, she passed her driving test and received her driver's licence.

*\*not their real name*

## Finance

**Finance is important from a client perspective and regional community perspective because newcomers generally find it difficult to understand the Australian financial system.** That can be due to lack of confidence, having less knowledge of the requirements and, in some cases, lower English proficiency.

In regional areas, many migrants are ineligible for government financial support due to their visa subclass, which adds more pressure on them.

Many newcomers struggle to find work because they cannot get their qualifications recognised and lack local experience, which leads to financial struggles.

Many migrants must pay for medical insurance, childcare services and any relevant study that could support them in the job market, which also affects them financially.

### What is needed

Successful regional settlement requires that newcomers gain access to job seeker payments or other relevant support they may not otherwise be eligible for.

Free education and training opportunities could help in securing employment.

The provision of health care services for migrants who are ineligible for Medicare is necessary because private health insurance is too expensive for many migrants.

Settlement providers are providing information sessions on a broad range of issues and topics and referring newcomers to different services to assist them in developing their knowledge of the Australian financial system, including banks, ATO, Centrelink and emergency relief providers.

Settlement providers also continue to advocate for people experiencing domestic and family violence to be able to access financial support to assist their recovery.

## Challenges

Some visa holders cannot access Centrelink payments due to the Newly Arrived Resident's Waiting Period (NARWP) which applies for four years. This should be lifted so that people can receive the financial support they need to become financially independent.

High interest rates for home loans for temporary visa holders can affect their settlement.

Completing studies for newcomers seeking to have their qualifications recognised in Australia is very expensive for some migrants, which affects their ability to get a job in their field.

## Case study

**Michael\*, 28, arrived from the Philippines and Hari\*, 32, arrived in Australia from Nepal.** Both were in financial stress and were supported by Connecting Community Services (CCS), the local SETS provider in Dubbo.

Michael knew of the CCS and turned to the organisation when he was in dire financial straits. The migrant support worker there referred him to the Red Cross for emergency payments.

Similarly, Hari was struggling to find a job and had to spend most of his savings, making him feel depressed and frustrated. Like many migrants in regional areas, Hari's visa made him ineligible to access job seeker payments. Through CCS, he was assisted to prepare job applications and understand the job market. He is now working casually while continuing to look for a meaningful, stable job that could support his settlement in Dubbo.

*\*not their real names*



## Justice

### **When settling in a new country it is important to know your legal rights and have your legal rights respected.**

It is also important for service providers to not assume that individuals know their rights or the law in their new country of settlement.

This is especially important in cases of domestic and family violence (DFV). In DFV situations the victim-survivors are often told by their abuser that they have no rights.

Individuals who know and understand their basic human and legal rights in a new country can make informed decisions to keep themselves and their children safe. A community that is well supported and informed of their legal rights will feel more confident to adjust to a new way of life and have trust in the legal process.

The promotion and delivery of legal information to newly arrived communities presents challenges in regional areas. Lack of services and resources, appropriate and effective service delivery, travel distances and isolation from other community members can hinder education and knowledge of the justice system for many living in remote areas.

### **Legal rights in successful regional settlement**

Culturally responsive delivery and effective communication from community and legal services supports continued engagement and trust from community members in the legal system and process. Culturally responsive training as well as training in the effective use of interpreters is essential.

Regular, accessible legal outreach, consultations and other related services are a necessity in regional areas.

Other important considerations include access to Legal Aid for DFV survivors who are deemed ineligible for the service because they cannot immediately take advantage of, or access, available assets and funds, and the provision of free migration information, in addition face-to-face and online sessions with migration agents and support with immigration law.

### **Challenges**

Challenges that need to be managed for new arrivals to understand their human and legal rights in a regional area include:

- Limited use of interpreters by police and legal services from both public and private agencies and not using interpreters effectively.
- Long wait times to access accredited interpreters for important legal statements.
- Limited settlement resources on the ground to promote, support and distribute information to the community, including the ability to access free legal advice.
- Limited outreach centres for face-to-face consults on legal support. Trust is important when supporting a person on a legal matter. Phone appointments are not as effective.
- Lack of support for single women and mothers whose children are in OOHC on information, legal rights and understanding court orders.
- Lack of referral process in regional areas from police to support services.
- Police distributing AVO orders to survivors without translated or interpreted content.
- No legal information and resources made available immediately on arrival, such as essential services to contact.

## Case study

**Lim\* was a new arrival on a Temporary Spouse Visa who landed in an isolated regional area of NSW to be with her husband in November 2021.**

She had very limited English and was reliant on her husband for all sorts of information and support. One month after her arrival, Lim started to experience domestic violence (DV). One evening, after being assaulted, she decided to contact her husband's friend for help. Although her husband destroyed her phone, his friend arrived and called the police.

When the police arrived and asked Lim if she had been hit, she said no. However, she also showed them a picture of an injury she sustained the previous month. Police then spoke to Lim's husband, after which it was decided that she would go to his friend's house for the night. At no time did Lim understand the police or what was happening.

Lim later disclosed many forms of abuse including sexual abuse, digital abuse, and physical abuse to a settlement caseworker after her husband's friend helped get her a referral. The caseworker referred Lim to a women's DV service, but she could only be assessed and supported over the phone. Disclosing personal information this way was not easy.

While waiting to give her statement to the police, Lim enrolled in online English language classes. As each session based English conversation around a different settlement standard, Lim was able to learn about justice and healthy relationships and understand more about her rights and what she could ask for and question.

Ten weeks later, Lim was able to make a statement of her ordeal but, two months on, she had not heard back from the police. Feeling vulnerable and isolated, she decided to move to a bigger city where she could connect with people from the same cultural background.

Lim's husband still intimidates her through social media and text messages but, thanks to the classes she took and knowledge she gained about her legal rights, she is now preparing her DV application to the Department of Home Affairs.

*\*not their real name*

## COVID-19 and Regional Settlement in Practice

### **Restrictions and lockdowns due to COVID-19, and the associated border closures, were felt in different ways in different regions with some common themes.**

For example, Wollongong and the Central Coast were in the lengthy lockdown along with Sydney, while Taree and Dubbo had shorter lockdowns. However, settlement service delivery was affected across regional NSW by reduced access to face-to-face services like Centrelink and Department of Housing, and no access to schools for external agencies to deliver programs.

During the lockdown, many essential services were under strain. Between March 2020 and April 2021, Centrelink temporarily suspended the Newly Arrived Resident's Waiting Period (NARWP), which allowed migrants to access financial support. The lifting of the NARWP was of significant benefit for people facing financial hardship, including SETS clients. However, many SETS-eligible clients found the multilingual phone line difficult to navigate as it required a moderate level of English, and they often could not speak to the right person. While this was a pre-existing issue, there was a much more intense burden on services during the lockdown. Settlement providers experienced large numbers of temporary visa holders turning to them for support. There were also lots of requests from residents living in areas not traditionally served by our providers.

Ensuring dispersed multicultural communities had accurate and up-to-date public health information was very challenging. To support multilingual communities and disseminate key health messages to them, regional settlement providers devised innovative strategies with the help of technology. Northern Settlement Services (NSS), for example, convened a weekly evening online forum which ran from August to December 2021.

The Active Community Members gathering allowed NSS, Hunter New England Health and Newcastle Police to connect with a range of new and established migrant and refugee cohorts in the Greater Newcastle area. The meeting participants included informal leaders from non-English speaking communities who were involved in supporting their communities who were newly arrived, including SETS clients, such as those from Afghanistan,

Iraq, Syria and Tibet. Longer-term refugee communities from Burundi, Liberia and Sudan who were significantly impacted, were also represented, in addition to Chinese and Filipino communities.

Some of the informal community leaders were also working in the community sector in various roles. Participants were able to hear locally relevant information and updates from health experts and Newcastle Police about cases, restrictions, vaccinations and any other COVID19 related topics. The Department of Education and Services Australia also spoke. The questions and discussion helped give community members a clear understanding of issues, and helped NSS, Health, Police, STARTTS and Hunter Multicultural Communities understand what issues and concerns were being expressed by the community.

The active community members would then take the information they gained and share it with their communities. Similarly, another regional SETS provider, Nepean Multicultural Access (NMA), adopted a coordinated and practical approach to supporting multicultural communities by organising weekly meetings with representatives from local government as well as non-government agencies to disseminate important public health information to clients.

As we continue to deal with COVID-19 and its subvariants, regional settlement providers in the NSP continue to draw on what we have learnt from the past two years. We know that clients have struggled to access services online – whether due to language barriers, lack of familiarity with digital service provision or not enough devices. But we are responding to these challenges, keeping updated on online service provision, and we have developed crisis response policies and procedures that leave us well-placed to adapt to almost any critical circumstance. With the help of social media and a better understanding among clients of how to access services online, we can support people remotely as and when needed.

The long-term effects of the pandemic are more complicated to address. In certain parts of regional NSW, the biggest challenge was the closure of international

borders and the impact that had on regional economies. The border closures had a devastating impact on the agricultural sector, especially in Dubbo and Tamworth, which are serviced by Connecting Community Services and Northern Settlement Services respectively. The shortage of seasonal migrant workers during the period of border closures resulted in large economic losses for agricultural businesses in those areas.

In addition, for many of our SETS clients choosing to live in regional areas as a pathway to permanent residency – such as skilled visa holders – the disruption to their migration journeys has caused a great deal of anxiety and stress. Some temporary visa holders arrived in regional areas to set up a small business, and then faced economic hardship because their businesses could not operate in lockdown. They then had to endure being separated from their families and spouses waiting overseas to reunite with them. To add to this, in many countries outside Australia the pandemic took a far greater toll, leaving clients extremely concerned and fearful for their families' health and wellbeing.

While trying to address some of these long-term challenges, settlement providers across NSW have also been crucial to efforts to get CALD communities vaccinated. Settlement providers have made great strides to dispel myths about the vaccine, obtain information from the right sources and relay it back to communities, and support clients to book vaccine appointments. Through these efforts, they have played a hugely positive role in the vaccine uptake within migrant and refugee communities. Within the NSP, providers in both regional and metropolitan areas can attest to this.

As we continue to prioritise the health and safety of our clients, we remain hopeful that in-person service provision will resume in 2022.

# Regional Settlement - Policy Recommendations

We welcome the strong commitment to regional settlement of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds made by federal, state and local governments.

## We recommend:

- Support for this commitment through resourcing of regional communities and service providers to deliver additional, culturally responsive services for the medium to long term as part of positive settlement and retention of multicultural community members in regional areas

The process of settlement of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds requires a level of change and responsiveness from all local services in a region, not simply settlement services. Everyone from banks, utility companies, councils, neighbourhood centres, family support services, employment service providers, medical services, Centrelink, Medicare, soccer clubs, swimming centres and the wide range of government and community services need to upskill, adapt and have additional resources to effectively respond when a significant influx of people from new cultural backgrounds settle in their community. This includes funding to access interpreter services that may not have previously been budgeted.

- An articulated model for regional settlement services delivery, which recognises the different contexts and responses required, including a tailored regional funding model. Key elements for the model would include:

### The importance of community building and social cohesion

Recognise in work plans and allocate additional funds for community development and engagement activities, as these are tremendously beneficial for building relationships and mutual understanding between multicultural and mainstream communities. Events marking International Women's Day, Harmony Week and Refugee Week create a welcoming environment and foster social cohesion and a sense of belonging among community members, as do community barbecues and volunteer support programs.

### The value of collaboration and partnerships to pool resources for effective program delivery

Many regional settlement workers are only funded part-time, often as sole workers, covering a wide regional area involving significant travel. Larger regional organisations have also had to engage a number of part-time staff, rather than full-time, in order to deliver across a wide service region with limited resources. Consequently, collaboration and partnerships are essential in order to run events and group programs.

### Longer term, more intensive engagement of some clients with SETS providers, in the context of a limited local service sector

In regional centres the number of local service providers is smaller, and the presence of staff with CALD backgrounds and/or experience working with CALD communities is limited. Some specialist services may be visiting services to a region, not local.



High numbers of people who access one-off information and referral by phone, or who participate in community building activities (and may appear in reporting as unidentified clients)

Quality data is increasingly important for reporting outcomes of community services activity. Understanding the story behind the data is important. Regional providers may appear to have lower numbers of clients than in reality due to the nature of their work, where capturing details required for extensive demographic data entry may not be possible.

Wider eligibility for settlement support in regional areas, especially where an organisation is the lone specialist multicultural services provider and where temporary regional visas are a pathway to permanency

Local communities and service providers in regional areas expect settlement service providers to assist and respond to issues and needs for anyone from a multicultural background, regardless of length of time in Australia or visa type, as they are the organisations with expertise and knowledge in this field. Some of these are simple inquiries and others are complex needs where settlement providers' skills are required. Regional settlement service providers are a local resource that provides security and a check-in point for multicultural communities at different life stages as they encounter new issues or concerns on their long-term settlement journey. Broadening the range of visa categories and timeframes for SETS eligibility would give more flexibility to work with clients based on need and capture some of the nuances and complexities of settlement work that are not fully captured within the current SETS framework.

- **Greater recognition and value placed on the role of regional settlement workers, including funding accessible professional development, training and support for lone and remote workers**

Settlement providers play an important role in regional areas, often being the only link newcomers have to connect them to mainstream and essential services. Regional settlement workers have to dedicate much of their time to building relationships with mainstream services because they work in smaller organisations with fewer resources. They spend more time on community outreach because they cover wide distances that often span multiple local government areas (LGAs).

Regional settlement workers make great partnerships with local volunteer organisations, and provide significant support and capacity building for the work they do with multicultural communities.

Regional settlement workers' access to professional development and training opportunities, and engagement with other regional settlement workers in workshops and conferences, is important to sustain and support their valuable work.

- **Research into the regional settlement experiences of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and the settlement workers who work with them, to inform ongoing development of regional settlement activity**

Regional settlement as an option for migrants and refugees should be valued and respected with clear evidence and research undertaken to highlight its importance. A long-term, comprehensive research project that looks into the settlement needs of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, alongside the work of regional settlement workers, would provide a holistic understanding of both sides of settlement and create an evidence base for government to inform relevant policies.



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