



**REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA**
INSTITUTE

 **POPULATION**



REGIONAL MIGRATION EXPERIENCES

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The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) is the nation's first and only independent think-tank dedicated to empowering Australia's regions. We are a not-for-profit organisation that undertakes research to inform, educate and activate our rural and regional communities.

The RAI celebrates 15 years in 2026. We are proud of the vast array of research, data, and detailed insights the RAI has provided into many of the significant issues and challenges facing regional Australia. The work of the Institute is made possible through research partnerships with federal, state and territory governments, the national Regions Rising event series, regional consultancy projects, membership, and philanthropic funding.

In 2022, the RAI launched the [Regionalisation Ambition 2032 - A Framework to Rebalance the Nation](#). The Ambition is a 10-year plan for regional Australia that seeks balanced growth across our nation's regional towns and cities. It outlines key targets, actions and benefits that will contribute to building prosperous regional communities, and a stronger Australia.

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We care about the regions, because when our regions are strong, Australia is strong.

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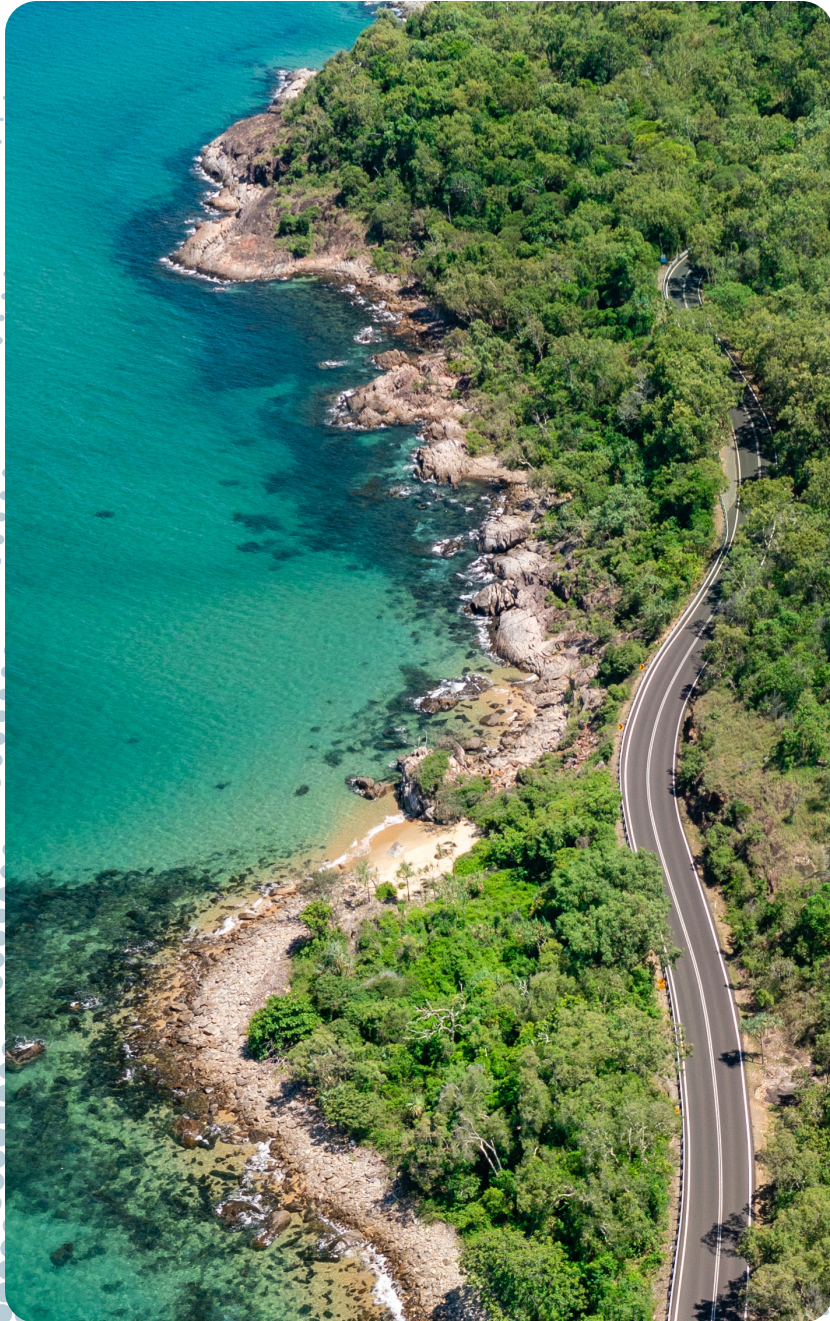
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The RAI acknowledges Traditional Owners throughout Australia and the continuing connections to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all traditional custodians of this land.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Migration plays a significant role in the story of regional Australia, shaping our social, cultural and economic landscapes.

However, while internal migration to the regions is strong and the population of regional Australia is growing, only 16.5% of international migrants move to the regions (RAI 2024a).

Many regional communities are facing a skills shortage and the challenge of meeting labour needs in the regions is complex and multifaceted. Attracting more international migrants to regional Australia will play an important role in addressing skills shortages, delivering local services and building vibrant, sustainable regional communities.

In December 2023, the Australian Government's Migration Strategy announced a fresh vision for Australia's migration program, introducing new objectives and principles to govern policy making in this area. The Department of Home Affairs has commenced a program of work to respond to the challenges of regional migration, seeking to reduce complexity in the regional visa system and address labour market shortages through regional migration.

Within this context, this report, *Regional Migration Experiences*, explores the barriers and facilitators of regional migration and settlement success for migrants, employers and regional communities. The report also has findings on the effectiveness of the visa system.

The report reviews recent research on migration experiences and presents case studies from four regions that have experienced significant migration: Katanning in Western Australia, Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, and Dalby and Bundaberg in Queensland.

The case studies explore the perspectives of migrants, employers and service providers, with the aim of increasing our understanding of the factors that contribute to migration and settlement success.

The report finds that regional Australia offers many benefits that attract migrants. These include strong communities, increased liveability and meaningful employment opportunities – ingredients for a better life.

However, the regions also face a range of attraction and retention challenges. These include limited access to housing, educational opportunities and career pathways, poorer access to services, cost and complexity of the regional visa system, and fewer established cultural and social networks for migrants compared to metropolitan areas.

Importantly, many of the migration and settlement needs identified in this research align with the broader needs of all regional residents and communities. The report's key message is that migration and settlement policy must include both targeted settlement support and action across the full spectrum of policies that empower our regions and their residents to thrive.

The report recommends key actions for governments and communities to increase regional migration and settlement success. These include coordination across all levels of government to address regional migration challenges, regional infrastructure investment, reform of the regional visa system, and strengthening settlement services and communities to build thriving, connected and sustainable regions.



KEY FINDINGS

Migrants come to Australia for a better life.

Australia's contemporary regional migration system is largely designed to address labour shortages, support population growth and drive regional development. However, migrants' aspirations often extend beyond employment to include safety, liveability, education and employment opportunities, pathways to citizenship, and a sense of belonging. Creating the right conditions for individuals and families to thrive is central to successful regional migration.

Regional Australia offers many benefits that attract migrants.

Research participants described many benefits related to living in regional Australia. Regions were described as peaceful and safe, with strong community connections. Many participants also valued the natural environment, lifestyle opportunities, perceived amenity and, in some regions, lower cost of living. Local organisations, community groups and volunteers helped to build welcoming environments in the case study regions.

Strong infrastructure and accessible services are essential for attracting and retaining migrants.

Social infrastructure and affordable services, such as housing, transport, childcare, health and education facilities, are critical to sustained settlement. Schools, libraries, museums, community centres, places of faith, arts and cultural venues, sporting clubs and volunteer groups all contribute to successful settlement outcomes.

Access to meaningful employment is a key driver of migrant relocation decisions.

While migrants move to regional areas for a range of reasons, access to employment opportunities is a key driving factor.

Despite workforce shortages, some migrants experience barriers to employment in regional areas.

Although many regional areas face chronic workforce shortages, there are often barriers to migrant employment in the regions. Key barriers include the cost and complexity of visa and overseas skills recognition processes, with almost half of all migrants in Australia working below their skill level.

The regional visa system would benefit from a more tailored approach.

Australia currently applies a concessional, uniform model for regional migration, which does not fully reflect the varied needs of regional communities. A more bespoke system, including occupation and skills lists that align with specific regional workforce needs and regionally-based wage thresholds, would provide more effective outcomes for employers and communities.

A holistic approach to migration is essential for long-term settlement success.

Reform of labour market and visa settings must be supported by targeted settlement services. Migration and settlement considerations should be integrated across regional development policy including jobs and skills, education, and social and cultural initiatives to help build vibrant, sustainable communities.

A place-based approach is fundamental to an effective migration system.

The success of regional migration depends on the quality of local experiences. This research highlights the importance of local people and organisations in shaping welcoming communities. A place-based approach requires federal and state governments to prioritise meaningful engagement with local government and community actors when planning and delivering migration-related policies and programs.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Coordinate planning across all levels of government to support the regional migration system

- Establish a national regional migration steering committee to advise the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on regional migration priorities and support the delivery of placebased solutions. Regionally-based advisory groups could collect and share local insights for consideration by the national committee.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen integrated planning and funding for settlement services.

- Embed migration and settlement considerations across social, economic, cultural and workforce planning at all levels of government.
- Provide funding for regional settlement services that support all migrants, regardless of visa type. Where services are limited, invest in building the capacity of community organisations to deliver settlement support.
- Extend the duration of program funding for community organisations to enable capacity building and the delivery of high quality, consistent settlement services.

Recommendation 2: Continue to reform the visa and skills systems to meet regional needs.

- Implement strategic reforms to the regional visa system that address the specific needs of regional locations. This could include establishing regional market-based wage thresholds and bespoke skills and occupation eligibility lists for regions.
- Make overseas skills recognition faster, fairer and more affordable by establishing a single national governance system in line with the recommendations of the [Activate Australia's Skills](#) campaign.

Recommendation 4: Support regional communities to deliver welcoming practices and build vibrant, diverse and inclusive communities.

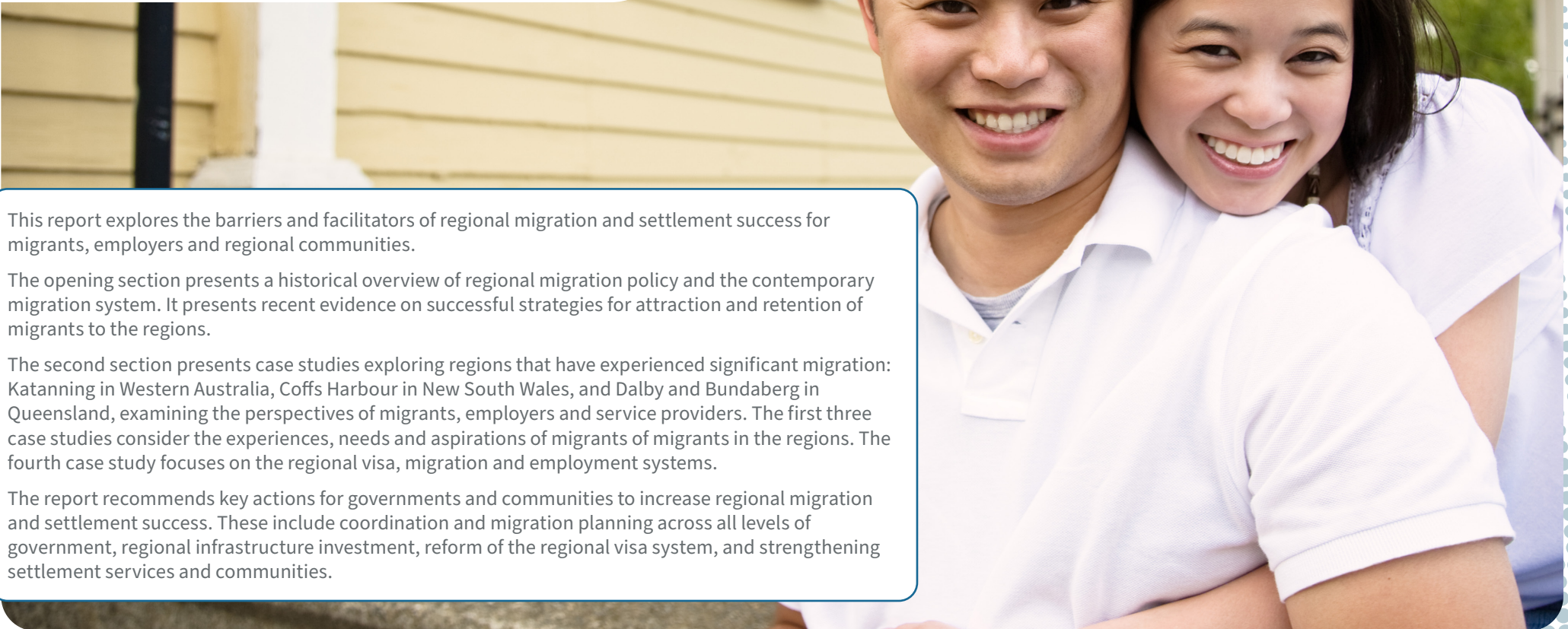
- Support regional communities to implement the RAI's [Steps to Settlement Success: A Toolkit for Rural and Regional Australia](#). This toolkit identifies leading practice for regional settlement and provides guidance for communities to welcome new arrivals.
- Develop local policies and programs that promote inclusion, cultural diversity and welcoming practices. Local governments may use the framework provided in Welcoming Australia's [Welcoming Cities Standard](#) to benchmark current processes and assess progress over time.
- Apply the principles of connection, identity and belonging, and inclusion, as set out in the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs' [Multicultural Framework Review](#), to regional settlement policy, planning and service delivery.
- Facilitate multicultural representation and participation in local governance and decision-making, local events, and institutions such as schools, libraries, art galleries, public art, museums and community hubs, in line with the pillars of the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy, [Revive](#).





1.0 INTRODUCTION

Attracting international migrants to regional Australia is important to address chronic skills and labour shortages in many regions and build vibrant and sustainable regional communities.



This report explores the barriers and facilitators of regional migration and settlement success for migrants, employers and regional communities.

The opening section presents a historical overview of regional migration policy and the contemporary migration system. It presents recent evidence on successful strategies for attraction and retention of migrants to the regions.

The second section presents case studies exploring regions that have experienced significant migration: Katanning in Western Australia, Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, and Dalby and Bundaberg in Queensland, examining the perspectives of migrants, employers and service providers. The first three case studies consider the experiences, needs and aspirations of migrants in the regions. The fourth case study focuses on the regional visa, migration and employment systems.

The report recommends key actions for governments and communities to increase regional migration and settlement success. These include coordination and migration planning across all levels of government, regional infrastructure investment, reform of the regional visa system, and strengthening settlement services and communities.



2.0 REGIONAL MIGRATION OVERVIEW

A brief history of regional migration

First Nations peoples were the original inhabitants of regional Australia, maintaining deep cultural, social and economic connections to the land for over 65,000 years. Following colonisation, British migration transformed the cultural, social and agricultural landscape of regional Australia.

Migrants and migrant labour have shaped the story of regional Australia. From Chinese migration in the gold rush era, to the forced farm labour of Pacific Islanders in Queensland, to seasonal workers across the 20th century, early waves of migration laid the foundation for Australia's diverse regional communities (Boese and Moran 2021).

Following World War II, the Australian Government actively encouraged European migration to boost economic growth and strengthen national security (Hugo et al. 2015). Large numbers of migrants from Italy, Greece, Poland and other European countries were directed to regional areas to support major infrastructure projects such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. These migrants played a vital role in regional development, providing much needed labour in agriculture, construction and manufacturing (Krivokapic-Skoko et al. 2023).

By the 1970s and 1980s, regional migration policies became more structured, particularly in response to humanitarian needs. The Australian Government facilitated the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in regional centres such as Whyalla in South Australia (Viviani et al. 1993). While some migrants settled in regional areas, most migration remained concentrated in metropolitan centres, where employment opportunities and social networks were more established. In this period, the Australian Government established a framework for multicultural policy that lasted several decades, based on the guiding principles of equal opportunity, maintenance of culture without prejudice, and the provision of targeted programs and services (Keddie 2014: 410-411).

Since the mid-1990s, regional migration policy has evolved to address regional population and labour shortages. The introduction of regional visas created pathways to permanent residence for skilled migrants in the regions (Hugo 2008). These initiatives were later complemented by humanitarian programs, which prioritised refugee resettlement outside major cities. By 2019, the Australian Government aimed to settle 40% of humanitarian entrants in regional areas, supporting both economic and social development.





Australia's regional migration system

Australia's contemporary regional migration system is designed to address labour shortages, support population growth and promote economic development through a mix of visa programs, concessional arrangements and targeted incentives.

Concessional arrangements within the skilled migration program

Concessional arrangements for regional migration have been in place since 1996, with exceptions to the requirements for skills, occupations and salary thresholds under the subclass 457 visa. Since 2008, Australia has introduced a range of dedicated programs to facilitate increased migration to the regions.

Regional Visas

There are several dedicated regional visa pathways to encourage long-term settlement of skilled migrants. These include the Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa (491), Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa (494) and Permanent Residence (Skilled Regional) visa (191).

These visas require migrants to live and work in regional areas for three years before applying for permanent residency. Additionally, the Skilled Nominated visa (190) allows direct permanent migration based on state or territory nomination. Other visas provide incentives for regional study.

Designated Area Migration Agreements

Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs) are formal agreements between the Australian Government and a state or territory government or regional authority that allow regions to access overseas workers to meet local labour market needs. DAMAs are intended to simplify the labour agreement pathway for regional employers by creating an umbrella agreement that means individual employers do not need to apply directly to the Department of Home Affairs. DAMAs provide concessions on occupation lists, English language, and salary thresholds.

Despite their potential, uptake of DAMA's has been limited to date. The Australian Government's Migration Review notes that there has been 'low uptake [because of] the relative recency of some agreements and the fact that processes within agreements are very hard for employers to navigate' (Commonwealth of Australia 2023:127). The Tasmanian Government's submission to the review stated that 'tailored labour agreements are complex and resource intensive to negotiate, limiting use to larger bodies or regions with the knowledge and administrative capacity to negotiate' (Public Submission, Tasmanian Government, cited in Commonwealth of Australia 2023:133).

Continued refinement of the DAMA program is needed to reduce administrative complexity while meeting the nuanced and complex needs of regional areas (Howe 2024).

Industry-specific programs

Two major programs support low- and semi-skilled labour needs in regional industries. The Working Holiday Maker Program, while originally focused on cultural exchange, is now a major source of regional labour, with second and third year visa extensions available to those who complete a minimum number of hours of 'specified work' in designated regional or rural areas (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs 2025). Similarly, the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme allows businesses in rural and regional Australia to hire migrant workers from Timor-Leste and nine Pacific islands to address labour gaps in any sector.

Despite targeted regional migration policies, regional areas often face challenges in attracting and retaining new migrants.

Challenges and opportunities in the regional migration system

The Australian migration program is currently designed as a single overall program that accommodates the needs of regions through a range of concessions and incentives. This approach does not sufficiently meet the nuanced and complex needs of regional areas which have different wage levels, occupational and skills needs. This challenge could be met more effectively through a robust, data-driven approach that establishes wage levels and skills lists tailored to specific regional areas and coordinates processes across the three levels of government (Howe 2024).



Conclusion

Despite targeted regional migration policies, regional Australia continues to face challenges in attracting and retaining new migrants. As the regions become a key focus for population growth and economic expansion, future migration policies must ensure regional areas are equipped to attract and support international migrants and foster thriving and diverse regional communities.



3.0 DRIVERS OF REGIONAL MIGRATION

This section summarises recent evidence on successful strategies for attracting and retaining migrants to the regions.



What attracts migrants to the regions?

Migrants move to regional areas seeking a better quality of life (AHURI 2022).

Regional areas have a range of features that are valued by both domestic and international migrants. These include safety, community connection and proximity to natural environments. A national longitudinal study of almost 1,000 immigrants settled in non-metropolitan Australia identified that skilled migrants tend to move to rural areas because of the ‘natural beauty, lifestyle and community spirit, as well as the idyllic image of peacefulness and a relaxing environment associated with these areas’ (Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins 2016:176). Around 95% of participants in that study reported that they felt welcome in their community, participated actively in community activities and felt a strong sense of connection to place.

Employment opportunities are another major drawcard to the regions. Employment is central to migrants’ economic wellbeing, satisfaction and integration into a community (Krivokapic-Skoko and Collins 2016). Many regional communities face chronic labour shortages, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education and manufacturing. Migrants are actively recruited to fill these gaps, and the regional visa system seeks to incentivise regional skilled migration. In some cases, migrants may undertake low-skilled or physically demanding employment in regional areas to achieve broader aspirations such as home ownership, educational opportunities for children and to provide support for family members in Australia and overseas (Curry et al. 2018, Boese, Moran and Mallman 2020).

Housing affordability is another economic attraction factor, with lower property prices making home ownership more accessible in the regions than in metropolitan centres.

And what encourages them to stay?

Successful settlement refers to the process by which migrants achieve meaningful participation and belonging in their new society. It encompasses objective indicators of economic and social participation, as well as subjective experiences of wellbeing, inclusion and belonging.

Settlement outcomes are often measured using indicators including employment status, income and job satisfaction, access to housing and home ownership, citizenship, English proficiency, social connectedness, physical and mental health and education participation and outcomes (Klocker 2021, SCOA 2023).

Definitions of settlement success also incorporate subjective perceptions and experience. For example, recognition of skills and qualifications, being treated well by the local community, and participation in formal and informal social interactions all contribute to settlement satisfaction (Amin, 2002).

Key enablers of settlement success in the literature include meaningful employment and education opportunities for individuals and their families, access to secure housing, the presence of friends and networks, and the ability to practice culture.

A known barrier to successful settlement is the absence of key infrastructure, like housing, transport, childcare, health and education. A lack of access to suitable housing and rental accommodation impacts both migrants and employers seeking to fill local labour market needs (Howe 2024). Limited access to retail, recreational, entertainment and cultural activities are also barriers (Wickramaarachchi and Butt 2014) along with perceptions about feeling welcome in a community and a sense of being poorly treated (Radford 2016).

Settlement is a dynamic process, rather than a finite event. Boese, Moran and Mallman (2020) argue that settlement often involves periods of staying or moving in different geographical locations depending on needs and circumstances. Understanding the dynamic nature of settlement can inform how we formulate policy and measure success.

The following section presents case studies of four regions that have experienced significant migration, with the aim of increasing our understanding of the factors that contribute to migration and settlement success.



4.0 REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with regional migrants, employers and service providers in four regional communities that have experienced significant migration.

Three case study regions – Katanning in Western Australia, Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, Dalby in Queensland - were selected to represent a variety of locations and community sizes. Each place has different migration stories, economic and social characteristics, and levels of settlement support services. A fourth case study in Bundaberg in Queensland explores regional migration and employment challenges through the experiences of employers and migrant workers.

Across the four regions, interviews were conducted with a total of 73 participants including permanent and temporary visa holders, local government representatives, regional development organisations, chambers of commerce, regional employers, settlement service providers and community organisations. All data are presented at the Local Government Authority (LGA). A detailed methodology is at Appendix 1.





4.1 CASE STUDY 1: KATANNING, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Geography	
RAI regional type	Heartland Region
Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Areas category	Outer Regional
Distance to metropolitan capital	284 km southeast of Perth.
Demographics	
Population (2018)	4,162
Population (2024)	4,294
Overseas arrivals (2018)	28
Overseas arrivals (2024)	59
Multicultural Backgrounds	
Overseas-born population (2021)	32.3%
Country of birth, top 3 responses (other than Australia, UK, Ireland and New Zealand) (2021)	Myanmar 3.3%, Thailand 1.8%, Vanuatu 1.0%
Households where a non-English language is spoken (2021)	19%
Language spoken at home (other than English), top 3 responses (2021)	Malay 5.0%, Karen 4.8%, Burmese 1.4%

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Education	
Post-school qualification rate (2021)	35.5%
Bachelor's degree attainment rate (2021)	10.2%
Employment	
Overseas-born unemployment rate (2021)	5.8%
Overseas-born participation rate (2021)	66.9%
Major employment industries (total population) (2021)	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing: 14.4%, Health Care and Social Assistance: 10.9%, Retail trade: 9.3%
Major employment industries (permanent migrants) (2021)	Manufacturing: 25.3%, Health Care and Social Assistance: 8.3%, Retail Trade: 4.5%
Major employment industries (temporary migrants) (2021)	Manufacturing: 29.9%, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing: 11.3%, Health Care and Social Assistance: 3.6%
Liveability and Wellbeing	
Housing price-to-income ratio (2024)	5.3
Public transport access (2023)	1.9 out of 7
Personal Wellbeing Index (2023)	76.7
Sense of community (2023)	3.5 out of 7

Source: See Appendix 1: Methodology



Demographics



Katanning's population has grown steadily from 4,162 in 2018 to 4,294 in 2024, an increase of 3.2% over six years. This growth has been accompanied by a rise in overseas arrivals, up by 110.7% from 28 in 2018 to 59 in 2024 (ABS 2025).

Cultural diversity



Katanning has a highly multicultural population. While 67.7% of residents were born in Australia at the time of the 2021 Census, the range of languages spoken at home highlights the community's diversity with significant populations from Myanmar, Thailand and an established Malay community from Christmas and the Cocos Islands. Of residents, 5.0% speak Malay, 4.8% speak Karen, 1.4% speak Burmese and small groups speak Iranian and Dutch (ABS 2021). This cultural variety shapes Katanning's social and cultural landscape.

Economy and employment



Katanning's economy is relatively specialised, relying heavily on the key industries of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (14.4%), Health Care and Social Assistance (10.9%), and Retail Trade (9.3%). Manufacturing is a critical sector for migrant employment: 25.3% of permanent and 29.9% of temporary migrants work in manufacturing. Agriculture is another important sector for temporary migrants (11.3%), indicating a dependence on migrant labour for these essential industries. However, overseas-born residents in Katanning face a slightly higher unemployment rate (5.8%) despite a relatively high participation rate (66.9%) compared with regional Western Australia's overall unemployment rate of 4.2% and participation rate of 59.4% (ABS 2021).

Liveability and wellbeing



Katanning's post-school qualification rate is 35.5%, with a 10.2% bachelor's degree attainment rate. Housing is comparatively accessible, with a price-to-income ratio of 5.3. Public transport access is limited, which may impact migrants' mobility and social engagement. However, community indicators are positive: the Personal Wellbeing Index sits at 76.7, and the Sense of Community is rated 3.5 out of 7, reflecting a moderate level of community cohesion that could support migrant integration (University of Canberra 2025).

Katanning is a vibrant and diverse regional town in Western Australia, known for its rich agricultural history and multicultural population.

Migration context



Katanning experienced an influx of Polish and Italian migrants in the 1950s, attracted by job opportunities in farming and food processing. At that time, Katanning was a well-established regional town, counting its history from the 1890s. The opening of the Great Southern Railway from Perth to Albany in 1884, the exploration of sandalwood and gold resources, and the subsequent establishment of the farming industry (wool, meat, dairy and cropping) put Katanning solidly on the map. Italian and Polish migrants found their niche providing services for the existing industries, such as mechanics and builders (Shire of Katanning 2026).

In the 1970s, a large local farming co-op, now known as the Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative (WAMMCO), found a prospective international market for lamb production. The production of halal meats for export to Islamic countries required professionals of relevant religious and cultural backgrounds to produce and certify local meat production. Malay Muslims from the Cocos and Christmas Islands were invited to settle in the area. The Katanning Mosque opened in 1981. This was the first regional mosque in Western Australia and is now a popular attraction for local and international tourists in Katanning (Shire of Katanning 2026).

WAMMCO continues to be a large-scale employer of international migrants, providing job opportunities for the local population, Working Holiday Maker visa holders, permanent residents and secondary migrants relocating from urban areas. Great Southern Migrant Services (managed by Rainbow Coast Neighbourhood Centre) has a two-day per week presence in Katanning, acting as a conduit between skilled workers, local employers and services.

In addition to formal settlement services, community volunteers provide migrant support, organise English lessons and children's activities in the local library, and help with obtaining driver licenses, citizenship tests and other issues (RAI research interviews 2024). The Katanning Shire Council initiates and supports an annual Harmony Festival celebrating the multicultural community of Katanning.



INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

A safe and welcoming community

Katanning was viewed as a safe and welcoming community by research participants:



What holds me here? It's my family, strong family values. I'm also a parent. I believe in raising my kids in a rural town. Growing up in Katanning, I know, it's a very safe environment, very family-orientated environment. All my family's here. So, all my roots are here.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Safety was identified as a key community attribute. This encompassed a combination of environmental, social and cultural factors including small and easy-to-navigate areas, short distances from work to home, lack of congestion, and low levels of crime compared to urban areas. These factors were particularly important for research participants from Malay and Burmese backgrounds who expressed a strong family and community orientation.

Cultural safety, defined by research participants as the ability to practice cultural identity and pass it on to future generations, was identified as an anchor for multicultural residents to stay in the area. Katanning has a mosque and a range of churches that provide meeting spaces for social and cultural interactions including English lessons and playgroups. Equally, the culturally safe environment was reported as an attraction for secondary migrants from urban areas. Some residents commented that after living in urban areas for education or work, these regional qualities were key factors in their decision to come back to Katanning.



Finally, research participants appreciated the community's welcoming attitudes and celebration of cultural diversity. Some commented that this reflects an intentional and continuous effort by multicultural communities to engage and share culture over time:



I think Katanning was welcoming to the generation before me. When they first came, I think they did the hard yards by, you know, introducing our culture, religion, our language, clothing. So, when I grew up, I didn't feel like an outsider or like I didn't belong. I felt like I really belonged here. Katanning is very welcoming.

(Community stakeholder)

Research participants emphasised that promoting multiculturalism requires ongoing engagement and activities such as sports, community barbecues and open-door events at the mosque to build and maintain understanding and trust. Leadership, and leading by example, as some participants noted, is a vital mutual step to build genuine multiculturalism.



Education opportunities for young children

Educational and community engagement opportunities were among the factors appreciated by research participants in Katanning. Research participants celebrated the local primary school's diversity and cultural competence in engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse students. The role of schools was recognised as essential for migrant families, as a place where newly arrived parents can interact with other parents.

For some, raising small children in Katanning was also associated with lower costs compared to urban areas. The local education and recreational ecosystem includes state-funded educational institutions, sporting facilities and community activities that contribute to liveability for young families (RAI research interviews).



Teenagers and young adults have different needs

In contrast, the lack of tertiary education and social opportunities for teenagers and young adults in Katanning was identified as a significant factor in outmigration.



The governments think that there should be job opportunities. So, they're thinking purely from the job perspective, which is fine, which is OK, but it's not enough. What about the family? What about children? What happens when they become older? We really need to think ... holistically about all the aspects of life. How [am I] gonna socialise? Are there any sports clubs? And if I'm not in the sport, is there any alternative to that? My kids [live] in a bigger city so they're not coming back. They have cinemas, they have ice skating, they have the beach.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Community spaces with educational, social and entertainment activities were considered formative for young people, defining their personal growth and future life trajectories.



There is a lot here for kids. And then, we will be losing the teenagers. Pretty much once you get to high school or even year 6 or 7 here, there's nothing for them. There's nothing to keep them interacting.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Higher education institutions were not only seen as providing good educational opportunities, but also as an opportunity for professional and personal growth. In Katanning, the lack of diversity in regional industries was recognised as limiting young people's career options. The provision of youth spaces and education options could be a powerful incentive for regional migrants to stay in the area longer.

The lack of social spaces and limited health infrastructure were also noted in relation to older migrants. Participants expressed that sometimes families needed to move to a larger region to take care of older parents.



Liveability factors

Social and recreational opportunities were noted as key factors that support migrants in regional areas. For local employers desperate to find professional workers, a lack of social and recreation options was sometimes a barrier to recruitment:



I offered a lot of money to the last guy that I tried to bring in, and he just said, ‘Look, I’m sorry, the money is good, but there’s nothing for me in Katanning.’ OK, oh, but he could earn money and move somewhere else, but he just wanted to live his life at the same time while he’s working. And it’s OK, because there’s got to be a reason to be in Katanning and work.

(Employer, migrant)

The quality of transport and retail infrastructure were also recognised as factors impacting migrants’ experiences:



I do have friends visited that [live in another] country and have never been here before, and they don’t like it. ... They [say] things like, ‘How do you guys have one shop here to go and do shopping?’ - which is Woolworths. A lot of them have come from towns that are actually smaller than this and have a lot more.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)



Employment and housing are interlinked

Employment was considered a strong attracting factor for regional migration. For some research participants on permanent or skilled employment visas, employment in the local meat industry represented an opportunity to achieve a ‘better life’ and provide for their families in Australia and overseas, with a particular focus on the goal of home ownership:



It’s not a fun job. It’s a hard job. It’s a manual [job] that doesn’t develop you as a person. I don’t think that many people enjoy that, to be honest. But it’s a deal. I’m doing it because I really want to buy a house. But it’s a tough deal.

(Settlement service provider)



Housing is a big thing for people to move because they want to move and settle here.

(Settlement service provider)

Local employers interviewed commented that a lack of rental properties is a barrier for attracting new workers. Some employers, such as WAMMCO, have arranged camp-style accommodation for employees. One research participant questioned the acceptability of crowded houses and basic conditions of living for new migrants:



Getting a house [in Katanning] is difficult. Now, when migrants come, they come and stay with somebody, in somebody’s house for three, four, five, weeks. Then this [local] person helps them share [a house]. Now, it’s good for them, because they have been used to a hard life. So, it’s normal for them. But it’s not really normal. Is it really a democratic method to doing this?

(Settlement service provider)

Importantly, affordable housing is required for local workers with low and medium incomes. The cost of building in regional areas and the accessibility of bank loans for migrant workers with low incomes negatively affect migrants’ ability to settle in the area. At the same time, the local economy heavily relies on migrant workers taking ‘hard jobs’ in local industries.



Local actors play an important role in facilitating migrant experiences

Migration support forms a fragmented tapestry in Katanning, with settlement service providers only partially present in the area, providing targeted support for skilled and humanitarian migrants. Research participants noted the important role played by local employers in supporting new arrivals to access housing, transport and English lessons.

Coordination and liaison roles can provide valuable support for new multicultural residents. Maintaining engagement over time may provide a foundation for multicultural representation in local decision-making processes.



Game changers

Regional Study Hub initiated by Regional Development Australia (RDA) Great Southern

The Katanning Regional Study Hub offers a campus-like study environment to support regional students undertaking higher education, including university, TAFE or VET courses online at any Australian institution. The Hub provides facilities such as study spaces with high-speed internet, video conferencing, academic support, administrative assistance and pastoral care, helping students to succeed while remaining in their communities.

The facility is available 24/7 for registered students and is embedded within the Katanning community. It is supported by the Commonwealth Department of Education and operated by RDA - Great Southern and the Great Southern Universities Centre.

The Regional University Study Hubs model has received positive feedback in recent academic literature as one that 'has disrupted dominant narratives around how RRR (regional, remote and rural) students can engage with higher education. These include: the idea that residents need to leave regional areas to engage with higher education, that universities are best placed to determine how to engage RRR communities, and that online learning is second-best and isolating' (Baker et al. 2025:1).

Conclusion

The Katanning community has actively embraced the economic, social and cultural opportunities of multiculturalism across several generations. Research participants identified a range of factors impacting liveability including access to transport, services and educational pathways. However, these factors were outweighed by a strong sense of community and belonging for many research participants.





4.2 CASE STUDY 2: COFFS HARBOUR, NEW SOUTH WALES

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Geography	
RAI regional type	Regional City
Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Areas category	Inner Regional
Distance to metropolitan capital	532 km north of Sydney and 383 km south of Brisbane
Demographics	
Population (2018)	76,887
Population (2024)	81,248
Overseas arrivals (2018)	890
Overseas arrivals (2024)	942
Multicultural Backgrounds	
Overseas-born population (2021)	21.6%
Country of birth, top 3 responses (other than Australia, UK, Ireland and New Zealand) (2021)	India: 1.7%, Myanmar: 0.6%, South Africa: 0.5%
Households where a non-English language is spoken (2021)	9.8%
Language spoken at home (other than English), top 3 responses (2021)	Punjabi: 2.3%, Kurdish: 0.5%, Mandarin: 0.5%

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Education	
Post-school qualification rate (2021)	55.2%
Bachelor's degree attainment rate (2021)	20.7%
Employment	
Overseas-born unemployment rate (2021)	5.7%
Overseas-born participation rate (2021)	57.0%
Major employment industries (total population) (2021)	Health Care and Social Assistance: 19.2%, Retail Trade: 10.7%, Construction: 10.0%
Major employment industries (permanent migrants) (2021)	Health Care and Social Assistance: 15.3%, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: 8.5%, Accommodation and Food Services: 5.9%
Major employment industries (temporary migrants) (2021)	Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: 23.3%, Health Care and Social Assistance: 19.4%, Accommodation and Food Services: 5.3%
Liveability and Wellbeing	
Housing price-to-income ratio (2024)	14.7
Public transport access (2023)	3.27 out of 7
Personal Wellbeing Index (2023)	76.4
Sense of community (2023)	3.3 out of 7

Source: See Appendix 1: Methodology



Coffs Harbour is a growing regional city on the New South Wales Mid North Coast. The natural environment, proximity to the coast and employment opportunities are a strong attraction for new residents.

Demographics



The population of Coffs Harbour grew 4.7% from 76,887 in 2018 to 81,248 in 2024. This growth includes a notable rise in overseas arrivals - 942 in 2024 compared to 890 in 2018 - representing a 5.84% increase over six years.

Cultural diversity



Coffs Harbour is home to a small but diverse migrant population, with a substantial, established Sikh community in the suburb of Woolgoolga. The main languages spoken at home other than English are Punjabi (2.3%), Kurdish (0.5%) and Mandarin (0.5%).

Economy and employment



Coffs Harbour has moderate economic diversity, with Healthcare and Social Assistance (19.2%), Retail Trade (10.7%) and Construction (10.0%) the leading industries. Overseas-born residents have a slightly higher labour force participation rate (57.0%) and higher unemployment rate (5.7%) than the general population, which has rates of 55.5% and 3.8% respectively.

Permanent migrants predominantly work in Healthcare and Social Assistance (15.3%), Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing (8.5%), and Accommodation and Food Services (5.9%). Temporary migrants are particularly active in Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing (23.3%), Healthcare and Social Assistance (19.4%), and Accommodation and Food Services (5.3%).

Liveability and wellbeing



Although access to public transport is rated as moderate (University of Canberra 2024), public transport between villages and the hinterland is limited. As a regional city, the area has a higher-than-average rate of medical practitioners, with 481.2 per 100,000 people supporting essential healthcare access, compared to the regional NSW rate of 315 medical practitioners per 100,000 people. The post-school qualification rate of 55.2%, along with a 20.7% bachelor's degree attainment rate, lags slightly behind metropolitan rates. Housing availability remains a challenge, with a house price-to-income ratio of 15:1 (RAI 2024). Migrants may find these factors influential in their overall settlement experience, particularly when seeking stable housing and opportunities for professional development.

Community Integration

Indicators like the Personal Wellbeing Index (76.4) and Sense of Community (3.3 out of 7) (University of Canberra 2023), suggest residents of Coffs Harbour experience moderate wellbeing and a developing sense of community connectedness.

Housing

The housing market in Coffs Harbour has seen significant growth in both median asking rents and median sales prices since 2019. From October 2019 to October 2024, median asking rents increased by about 47.5%, rising from around \$400 to over \$590 per week, highlighting a sharp rise in rental demand. Similarly, median sales prices grew substantially, climbing from around \$550,000 in October 2019 to nearly \$770,000 in October 2024, representing a 40% increase (CoreLogic 2024).

The estimated median income in Coffs Harbour for the 2023–24 financial year is \$52,296 (ABS 2021). This translates to a price-to-income ratio of around 14.7, which is higher than in most regions. On the supply side, data also highlights the tightness of the housing market. For instance, rental listings in Coffs Harbour decreased by 24.9% over the course of a year, falling from 923 in October 2023 to 739 in October 2024 (CoreLogic 2024).

These figures underscore the increasing affordability pressures faced by both renters and buyers, particularly new arrivals who may lack secure employment and strong financial capacity.



Migration context

The City of Coffs Harbour is home to a vibrant multicultural community. In the late 1960s, a group of Sikh farmers settled in nearby Woolgoolga to work on banana and blueberry farms. In 1968, the Sikh community established the first Sikh Gurdwara, or temple, built in Australia, which is of profound significance to the Sikh faith. A second temple, Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, followed in 1970 with the construction of the new Pacific Highway.

In 2008, Coffs Harbour was designated a Refugee Welcome Zone, subsequently welcoming migrants from Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Togo, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan to support local agricultural businesses. Settlement Services International and North Coast Settlement Services provide settlement support for humanitarian migrants, addressing essential settlement requirements such as housing, connections with social and health services, connections with local employers, and education services at the local TAFE. The state-funded Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) delivers community engagement programs, including youth arts and music.

The Coffs Harbour Neighbourhood Centre runs a range of programs and provides food support, legal advice, information and referral support. In addition to government-appointed organisations, multicultural support is provided through English lessons in churches and faith-based community organisations. Settlement support for skilled migrants is provided through the Welcome Experience program run by Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast.

INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

A coastal lifestyle with great amenity

Coffs Harbour was considered an attractive coastal city by research participants. Participants who moved to the region on skilled visas commented that living near the beach, surrounded by nature and wildlife, was a positive factor in their decision to relocate with their families. For many, a combination of natural amenities, small communities and skilled employment options were viewed as great opportunities for themselves and their families.

Housing and accommodation

However, the city’s coastal lifestyle appeal has a downside. Population growth driven by retirees, seasonal tourism and urban-regional migration since the COVID-19 pandemic has created pressure on the housing market, reducing housing affordability for residents on low or medium incomes:



[The housing market] inflated at the same rate that it did in Sydney. We’ve seen at least a 40 to 50% jump in house prices in this region. That’s a significant jump. I was lucky enough to buy in 2021 just before it jumped again. We bought [for] \$500,000 and it’s now \$750,000 value.

(Employer)

For migrants in low- and medium-income industries, or casual or part-time employment in agriculture, health, aged care or hospitality, the lack of affordable housing represents a significant challenge:



If some people they move out, you know, there are a few reasons that we hear from the Myanmar community. They move into the bigger city. You see, even though they like Coffs Harbour, the rent is quite high. [...] It’s like a three to four-room flat, it’s \$700. It’s quite high for a rural area.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

For many involved in the agricultural and hospitality sectors, seasonal and often casual employment, such as blueberry picking, offers a precarious and inconsistent income. For many employers, the scarcity of affordable housing represents a real threat to keeping their staff in place. Some employers provide rental opportunities to keep their employees. Retaining workers in the growing aged care industry faces challenges:



There is a lot of opportunity there. It’s just not that easy because local businesses don’t know where to turn. And when they do know, there is a huge dollar figure attached to it. And [migrant employees] will likely move out of the region because your services support from an infrastructure level doesn’t exist.

(Employer)



Transport and Services

The availability and accessibility of transport was identified as a gap impacting migrants' access to employment, services and community engagement. For newly arrived essential workers, navigating regional life without transport is challenging. Many migrants rely on public transport because they do not have a drivers' licence or cannot afford to purchase or maintain a car:



The flip side for us is definitely public transport, or the lack thereof. Of 15 skilled workers that were brought across, none of them have a car or a licence in Australia yet, and they are looking at all of that. It's the cost. I can see why. I wouldn't want to live here, versus Brisbane or Sydney, which has incredible public transport, and you can call an Uber without having to speak English.

(Employer)

Despite attractive employment opportunities and employers committed to retaining their workers, employers in Coffs Harbour struggle to compete with larger cities that offer better access to services:



Access to healthcare services for themselves or for their family members because specialists aren't available. We [business owners] can't solve this. I can't pull a specialist out of thin air. So, this is something that we need to address from the national level for why people aren't staying in region[s].

(Employer)

Employment and career opportunities

Employment was reported as the primary attraction factor for skilled migrants moving to Coffs Harbour:



In [a] regional area, there weren't many options for what you want to study for getting a profession. So, there was teaching or nurses. And then you need [to] choose - what interested me? And, at that time, you need to think about when you graduated, there has to be a job. So, there was teachers always needed, and the nurses always needed.

(Employee, migrant)

For some migrants, working in the agriculture industry was viewed as a way to provide opportunities for their children:



Some of the refugees from Myanmar are doing well, in the sense that they've been here 20 years, and they're blueberry picking ... It's very hot in December, like 40 degrees, but they are still doing it, so that job pays well. I mean, they can own a house as well, they own the car and they're quite OK, but they keep on doing the job. They put their children in a private school, and then all the children are doing quite well in school. And they finished high school, and they studied medical science or law or whatever.

(Settlement service provider, migrant)

For skilled migrants wanting to progress their careers, opportunities might be limited. For instance, medical professionals wanting to progress to a more senior level in management may find there are not enough available opportunities in regional centres and wages may be lower than in urban centres:



People sometimes may not come [into a regional area] because - is it affordable to live here? For us, we have no savings. I've taken a big pay drop; I dropped \$2,000 a fortnight from my previous job [in the UK] to come to this one and we have nothing left at the end of the fortnight. That's with mortgage, your bills, your kids... but I find that the people I know that have moved out from Sydney they all come with money, so they don't seem to be struggling.

(Employee, migrant)



Language barriers and skills recognition

Language proficiency was cited as a key barrier to employment and settlement outcomes for many new migrants.



I mean the language... I think is probably the biggest barrier, and [newly arrived migrants] can't learn enough in TAFE, or they're learning, but it takes time.

(Settlement service provider, migrant)

Research participants mentioned a range of barriers to learning English efficiently and fast. These included clashes with work obligations, lack of access to childcare and transport, unsuitable hours for English lessons, and English language training methods that do not reflect migrants' everyday needs. In situations when English proficiency is necessary to receive skills recognition and secure better employment opportunities, insufficient language training can restrict migrants' employment options and earning capacity.

Education

Educational opportunities for children and inclusive, affordable schools were identified as barriers to settlement for some multicultural residents in Coffs Harbour. One research participant weighed the quality of education against other lifestyle factors in their decision to move to the region:



[A skilled migrant] told us that one of the reasons they didn't want to come here was the education system. [For] their daughter it wouldn't be good enough. But they did move. They did change [their mind] because still, the environment is better [than in urban areas].

(Settlement service provider)

While Coffs Harbour hosts a regional university campus, limited course offerings combined with social and cultural motivations prompted some residents to move to urban areas:



When we were doing the Afghan settlement here, most of the single mums with young children left Coffs Harbour because of education, because there were less university prospects here. And there wasn't enough community. As the kids are growing, they got into the mindset that the kids need to be married in the same community.

(Settlement service provider)





Community spaces in Coffs Harbour

Welcoming spaces for social, cultural and religious engagement were important to research participants in Coffs Harbour. Temples and churches (such as the Salvation Army and Presbyterian Church) function as informal community centres for residents and provide opportunities for practicing culture through music, dance, events and celebrations.



When we have a temple, it's not about religion, it's about culture and mindfulness. People need it you know, 'Don't forget your cultural upbringing'. It's a cultural centre, together with the religious centre, one thing goes into another. This matters how you grew up, how you're evolving your life, you know, that's how you see [life] here.

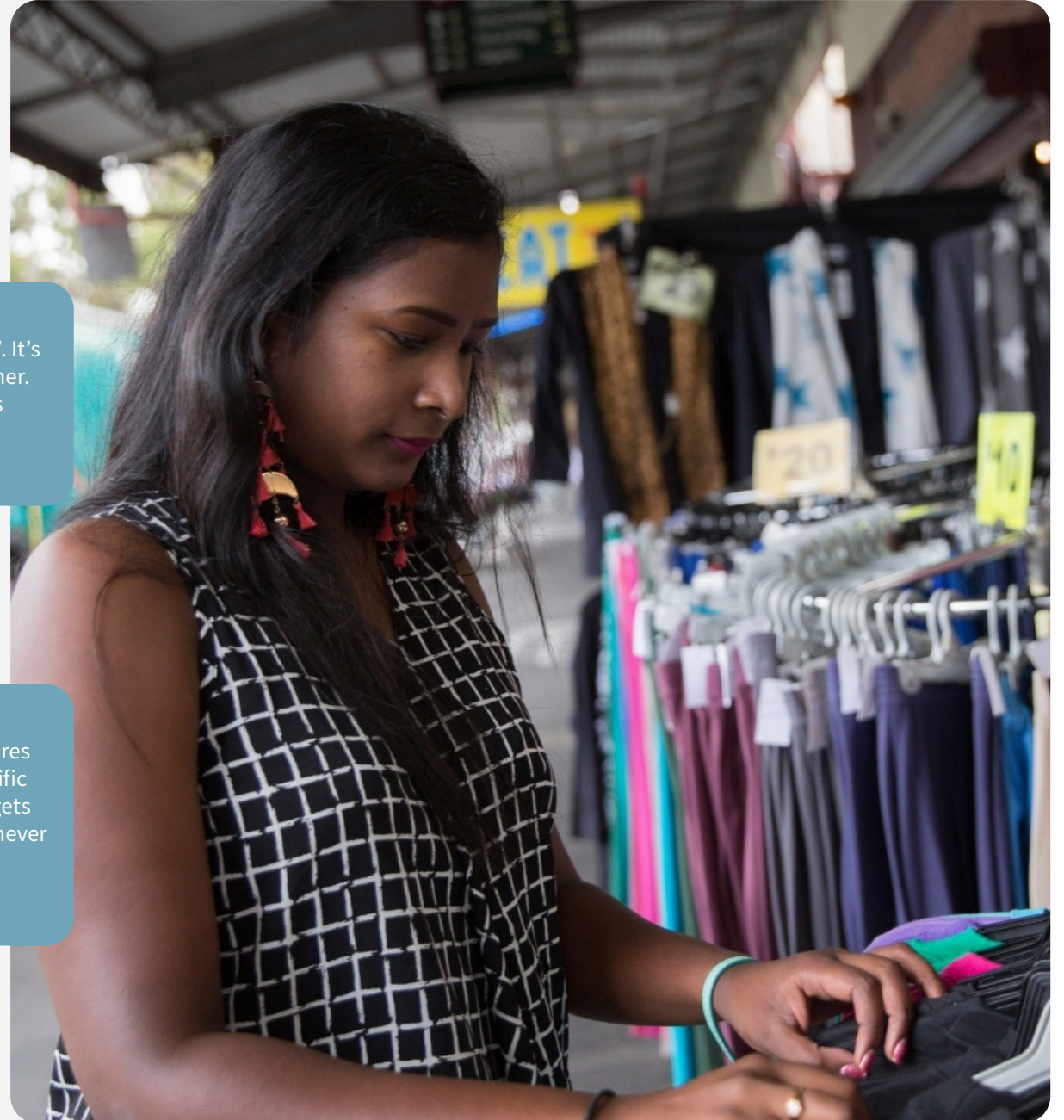
(Employee, migrant)

Employers interviewed explained that they were learning about the importance of cultural spaces and services for newly arrived workers:



Rural Australia doesn't have access to the same services, particularly around [different cultures], you know. We're working with people from different cultures and religious backgrounds. One of our staff here has already asked for a specific time off to go to [the] Gold Coast where there is a church that specifically targets the region that they're from in the Philippines. So, things like that, which we never even thought of.

(Employer)





Community connection is the key to settlement success

Research participants identified relationships with neighbours and community attitudes towards new residents as pivotal for migrants to feel welcomed. For some participants, positive and supportive relations provided them with confidence to start their new lives, feel safe and be motivated for professional and personal growth within the community:



Generally, a regional area is great to start your life, because you will meet a lot of very, very good people. Can I tell you, many immigrants here have their own parents or brothers and sisters locally. But they are not blood relatives. Those [local] people are helping them. [It's a] very good brotherhood. They are taking care of you. Because when the migrants start knowing their neighbours or a local person, they will be asking, consulting, 'Oh, I'd like to buy this. Oh, I want to buy a car. Will you come and help me?' Everyone says yes.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

However, despite a long multicultural history in the area, some research participants spoke about a lack of acceptance in Coffs Harbour:



People are different... but sometimes they may say, 'Well, I don't know him. He looks differently. Probably I should be afraid of him.' Those sorts of things happen. The reason is... communication is very basic in every aspect of the society. You will see someone sometime, not welcoming you. I face them too. People face them. That's not because of the migrants' matters. It's because those individuals have maybe [a] lack of education. Maybe they have never travelled to other countries.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Furthermore, social cohesion and welcoming capabilities in Coffs Harbour are being tested by growing pressure on local households and scarcity of available infrastructure and services. For instance, the regional housing crisis was named as impacting fragile social cohesion in the area:



In a regional town [social acceptance of migration] can be very fragile. Somebody can receive a wholehearted welcome and then others can just feel isolated ... If you have a housing crisis, probably you don't want to see newcomers.

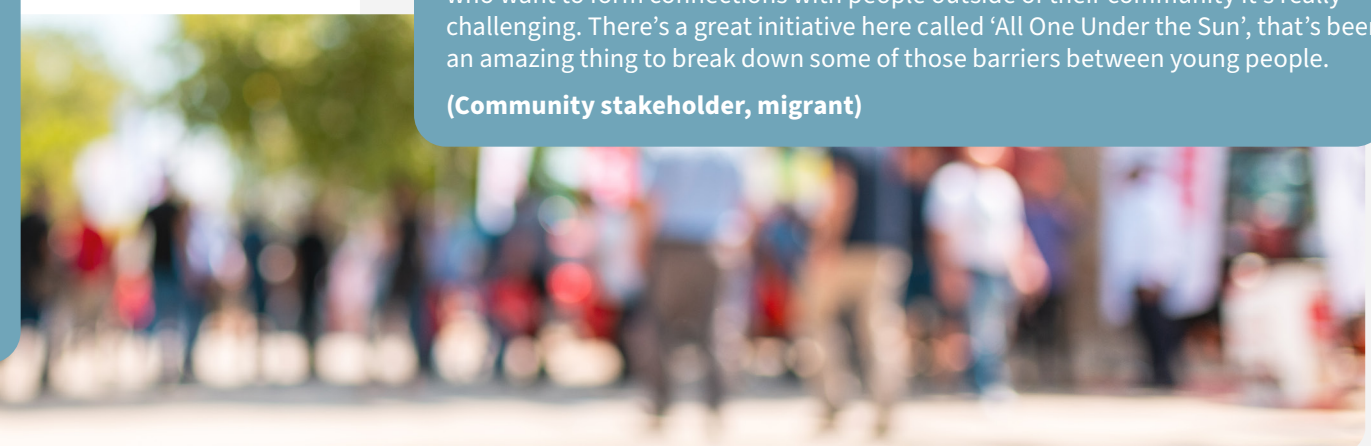
(Settlement service provider, migrant)

Community programs and inclusive spaces that support community engagement need to be adequately resourced. For example, a state-funded program, 'All One Under the Sun,' addressing racism and youth engagement through multiple creative projects, almost ended in 2024, but in early 2025 it was successful in receiving joint funding from the New South Wales Government and Coffs Harbour City Council to continue for a further three years. For many multicultural residents, such engagement helps to build social connection:



Because the Yazidi community is very closed, very close, I think for young people who want to form connections with people outside of their community it's really challenging. There's a great initiative here called 'All One Under the Sun', that's been an amazing thing to break down some of those barriers between young people.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)





Social and political representation

Multicultural representation within local and state governments was noted as important by participants to ensure the needs of multicultural groups are better reflected through funded projects and programs:



We have a member of state government that is proudly Sikh in background. So, his priorities obviously keep the city community active and strong. People will stay from that community far more likely in our area. I guess to a degree it's about representation. Once you get residency [...] you are becoming a [part of a] voting bloc from a political standpoint. The reason we have a very strong seat is because we have a voting bloc.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)



Local actors in Coffs Harbour: how to maintain an ecosystem that services all types of migrants?

Multiple and diverse actors make up the local migration ecosystem in Coffs Harbour. These include settlement service providers and organisations, education and health services, community organisations and cultural and religious institutions. RDA Mid North Coast works with skilled migrants who come to the area to address skills shortages in critical industries such as aged care, education, early childhood and disability support. Coffs Harbour City Council also plays an essential role in connecting services and supporting migrants.

Employers are also a critical part of the ecosystem that facilitate migrant experiences. Employers are acutely aware of the importance of supporting migrants' broader settlement needs as a tool for workforce engagement and retention. Research participants mentioned employers paying for medical bills, driving lessons and helping to find accommodation to support their workers. The role of business as a key part of the local community was mentioned by one employer:



Why wouldn't you as a local government that's wanting to put on an event for a specific purpose ... connect with local businesses and say, 'We would really like you to come to this event and talk a bit about who you are and things like that.' ... Businesses are built into the community they're operating in, even if we're a profit focussed business.

(Employer)

As this example shows, some businesses view social participation as integral to their business goals. More business leaders can engage in local settlement ecosystems to create connections with migrants and drive cultural change within local industries, resulting in better migrant and employer experiences in the area.



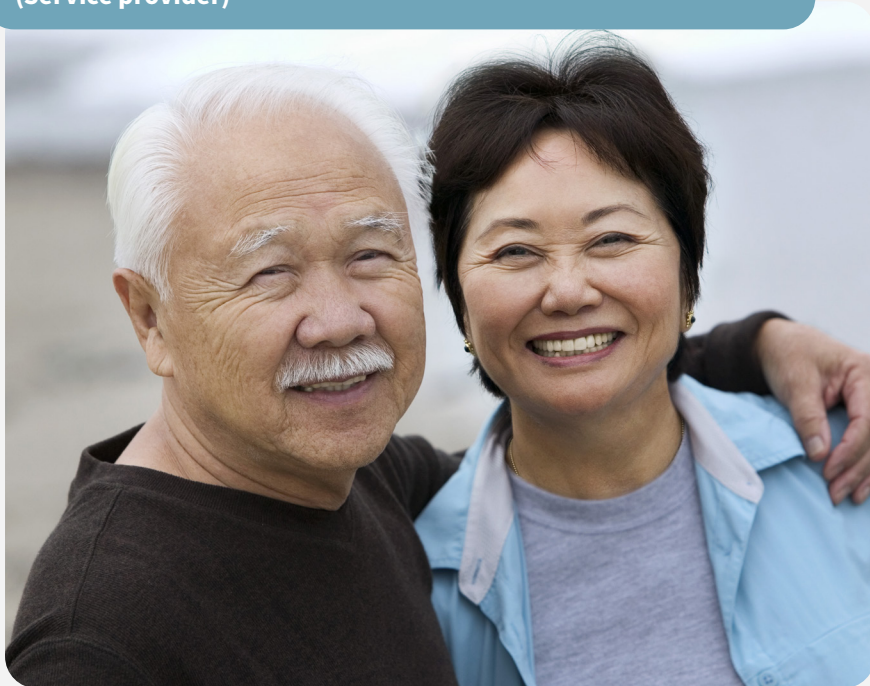
Funding for community hubs needs to change

Research participants called for a new approach to funding service providers working with multicultural residents regardless of their visa types. Neighbourhood Centres, for instance, receive short-term grants that target particular cohorts of residents rather than generalised funding:



[Neighbourhood Centres] need funding to do more of the work in that generalist space, where [they] can support everyone and anyone without being compromised. A library, they get a set amount of money for being a library. [Neighbourhood Centres] should get a set amount for being a neighbourhood centre, which is a one-stop shop where people can come in and access information and referral. But we just don't have that currently.

(Service provider)



Game changers

Entrepreneurial growth in Coffs Harbour

In 2018, a Coffs Harbour resident from Myanmar opened a market stall in Woolgoolga. With six empty stalls nearby, he recruited a friend who opened a grocery store. Gradually, a coffee shop opened and then a barber shop, creating a thriving business collective. The business eventually relocated to the central business district (CBD) of Coffs Harbour, where a similar situation unfolded, with multicultural residents establishing businesses in nearby vacant shops.

Today, Coffs Harbour is filled with bustling cafés, shops, restaurants and grocery stores that represent rich multicultural communities. These include Thai, Yazidi, Ethiopian, Vietnamese and Japanese eateries, as well as Afghani, Burmese, Chinese, Indian and Filipino shops, creating a vibrant scene enjoyed by residents and tourists.

The Ignite program created by Settlement Services International (SSI) was instrumental in supporting these start-ups. The program helps participants to shape their ideas into business propositions, navigate necessary legal requirements and develop business roadmaps. Market stalls are an initial first step, with many participants then moving on to bigger ventures.

The city market stall was set up. People missed market stalls, and a Myanmar cooperative was formed because many of our clients came from farming backgrounds. The ability, the skill is there, and it's a game changer for them because they are business owners. (Settlement service provider)

Entrepreneurial potential, however, still needs to have support and maintenance systems in place:



It went really well until we found out that the Ignite funding has gone. It's just a question of how to create the support system for the longer term rather than just, you know, 12 months and we just run out of funding.

(Settlement service provider, migrant)

Conclusion

Coffs Harbour is an expanding coastal city with emerging industries and an acute demand for skilled workers. Established multicultural communities, together with cultural and social hubs like temples, churches and businesses, make the area attractive to migrants. However, a shortage of infrastructure including housing, education and programs that foster multiculturalism negatively impact the experience of migrants and the community as a whole.



4.3 CASE STUDY 3: DALBY, QUEENSLAND

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Geography	
RAI regional type	Industry and Service Hub
Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Areas category	Outer Regional
Distance to metropolitan capital	208km west of Brisbane, proximity to the Western Downs towns of Chinchilla, Tara, Miles and Toowoomba
Demographics	
Population (2018)	34,338
Population (2024)	35,285
Overseas arrivals (2018)	178
Overseas arrivals (2024)	217
Multicultural Backgrounds	
Overseas-born population (2021)	18.1%
Country of birth, top 3 responses (other than Australia, UK, Ireland and New Zealand) (2021)	Philippines: 1.5%, South Africa: 0.5%, India: 0.3%
Households where a non-English language is spoken (2021)	5.3%
Language spoken at home (other than English), top 3 responses (2021)	Filipino and Tagalog: 0.6%, Spanish: 0.4%

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Education	
Post-school qualification rate (2021)	45.5%
Bachelor's degree attainment rate (2021)	12.8%
Employment	
Overseas-born unemployment rate (2021)	4.6%
Overseas-born participation rate (2021)	64.7%
Major employment industries (total population) (2021)	Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing : 18.4%, Retail trade: 9.5%, Health Care and Social Assistance: 8.9%
Major employment industries (permanent migrants) (2021)	Health Care and Social Assistance: 17.4%, Accommodation and Food Services: 13.3%, Retail trade: 10.7%
Major employment industries (temporary migrants) (2021)	Construction: 17.4%, Agriculture: 9.0%, Utilities: 8.1%
Liveability and Wellbeing	
Housing price-to-income ratio (2024)	6.9
Public transport access (2023)	2.3 out of 7
Personal Wellbeing Index (2023)	65.8
Sense of community (2023)	3.4 out of 7

Source: See Appendix 1: Methodology



Dalby, located in Queensland's Western Downs region, is becoming a hub for migration and cultural diversity, attracting both international workers and domestic movers drawn by its strong agricultural economy and welcoming regional community.

Demographics



Dalby is located in the Western Downs local government area of Queensland, 80 km northwest of Toowoomba and 170 km northwest of Brisbane, with a population of 12,758 people. The population of Western Downs increased by 2.8% over the six years between 2018 and 2024, from 34,338 people to 35,285. This steady growth includes contributions from overseas migration, with overseas arrivals rising from 178 in 2018 to 217 in 2024 – a 21.9% increase.

Cultural diversity



Western Downs has a diverse population, with notable migrant communities from the Philippines (1.5%), South Africa (0.5%), and India (0.3%). Residents bring a mix of languages into households, with Filipino and Tagalog spoken by 0.6% of residents and Spanish by 0.4%. This blend of cultures and linguistic variety adds depth to Western Downs' social environment, with migrants from Southeast Asia and other regions contributing to a culturally enriched community.

Economy and employment



Western Downs' economy has a relatively specialised structure, led by Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing (18.4%), Retail Trade (9.5%), and Health Care and Social Assistance (8.9%). The overseas-born community has a labour force participation rate of 64.7% and an unemployment rate of 4.6%, reflecting active migrant engagement in the local economy. Key employment sectors for permanent migrants include Health Care and Social Assistance (17.4%), Accommodation and Food Services (13.3%) and Retail Trade (10.7%). Temporary migrants are highly represented in construction (17.4%), agriculture (9.0%) and utilities (8.1%), highlighting the importance of migrant labour across essential industries.

Liveability and wellbeing



Western Downs has a post-school qualification rate of 45.5%, with 12.8% of residents holding a bachelor's degree. Housing is relatively accessible, with a house price-to-income ratio of 6.9 (RAI 2025). Public transport access is limited (rated 2.3 out of 7) (University of Canberra 2023), though community health services are supported by 170.8 medical practitioners (FTE) per 100,000 residents. Community indicators show moderate cohesion, with a Personal Wellbeing Index of 65.8 and a Sense of Community rating of 3.4 out of 7 (University of Canberra 2023).



Migration context

Dalby was established in 1854 and proclaimed a shire in 1863. Historically, Dalby has been an important agricultural and wool-producing centre, with an established public school, local newspaper and several churches. Before World War II, Dalby's economy mainly relied on agricultural produce and livestock. Railroad connections with Tara, Ipswich, Bell and Chinchilla made Dalby a key district hub. Manufacturing and agricultural machinery diversified Dalby's economy in the postwar period, gradually turning the town into a service hub for the wider Western Downs region.

Today, Dalby has a strong profile as a service and population centre of Western Downs, with a focus on agriculture, energy and manufacturing. Western Downs Regional Council promotes the region as the 'energy capital of Australia' due to its rich endowments of thermal coal and coal seam gas, and recent advancements in renewable energy technology' (Deloitte 2021). With a range of renewable energy projects underway locally, accessing a skilled workforce is a challenge for the region. Despite growing employment opportunities, a lack of affordable housing and access to local education, training and other services have been identified as factors preventing skilled workers' relocation from urban areas (Deloitte 2021).

Dalby's multicultural population has grown recently due to a wave of secondary migrants moving from larger regional cities or urban areas to work in local industries (agriculture, meat processing, manufacturing, engineering and aged care). Western Downs represents a case of recent and growing migration, with new residents attracted by the existing and emerging industries. The nearest settlement services are based in Toowoomba. However, workforce organisations focused on international migrants are actively present in the area, such as Multicultural Australia, Workforce Australia and the Employment Working Group of Western Downs Futures. Dalby Welcoming Community Inc. is a community-based organisation providing educational and art projects, with a focus on multicultural residents. The organisation hosts a landmark Delicious and Delightful Festival that attracts 7000 visitors per year. Dalby is also home to a Filipino Association – a regional community-led organisation, joined by migrants from Philippines, Indonesia and Hong Kong. Multiculturalism in Dalby is visibly manifested through the hospitality sector, with many coffee shops and restaurants in Dalby's CBD owned by multicultural residents. The local council plays a proactive role in the regional migration landscape by creating and commissioning research, workforce and community programs to attract migrants to the region. At the end of 2024, Western Downs Regional Council entered a partnership with Welcoming Australia to deliver a Welcoming Cities program.

INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

'I can see myself staying here for a while': opportunities for secondary migrants

Research participants described Dalby as a peaceful place offering safety for children, a close-knit community and the opportunity for work-life balance:



I think that [it's] a peaceful place. I tell you that honestly. When I go back to Sydney, after all the years that I've been living here ... those places look gloomy to me. It's dark and all those graffiti in the cities. Even if the grass is brown during some summer, I still like the [Dalby] area.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Expanding retail, manufacturing, aged care, agriculture and public services sectors create attractive opportunities for secondary migrants relocating to the area from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Notably, secondary migrants include many young adults and families seeking meaningful employment:



I guess in the end, why I left or why I've moved out here, for me, it's actually values. I do care where I work, you know, the sort of work that I do, the sort of impact I can have with my work. In accounting, the work is not that exciting or may not be that impactful in people's lives. So, I feel like I'm making a difference. I'm contributing to my community by doing my work.

(Community stakeholder, secondary migrant)

Multicultural food and hospitality businesses in Dalby are gradually changing not only the business but also the cultural landscape of the community.



‘We came here for a better life’: family considerations shape migrants’ motives for work

Opportunities for children, access to services and safety were identified as the primary motivators for skilled migrants in essential professions to come to Dalby:



Actually, it’s good opportunities for kids, for the young ones especially. Like my kids, for example, from the country where we came from, at their young age, you know, it’s impossible to buy a house, a car and have a good job. But they all had it here.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

These considerations have a complex interplay with employment. Migrants engaged in intense physical occupations, such as work in abattoirs, report that family motives, like relocation of the entire family or purchase of a house, keep them within these occupations. They are more likely to consider a change of profession once they achieve their goals:



You probably saved money, or you got your visa. What’s the reason why you changed your work, [to] something different because there’s some story behind it. It’s in that particular company, you can earn a lot of money, if you are really breaking and breaking and breaking [yourself], there’s a matter. But when you already establish yourself here, you already have achieved your goal.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Relocation often involves a migrant’s extended family, so opportunities for children and partners in a regional area are important in the decision-making process:



One of our students, she came out as the primary visa holder. She was a school worker [in Philippines]. She and her husband had made up their mind that they wanted a better life for their children and that they were prepared to do whatever, to do that. So, she came out here leaving behind a six-year-old, a four-year-old and a six-month-old. She was here for two years, could not afford to go home. She was sending money home to her husband and her mother, who were caring for the children, and she was madly saving to be able to pay for them to actually come out with the visas and things that they needed.

(Community stakeholder)

These motives need to be considered in workforce and infrastructure planning, as they affect migrants’ lifestyles and their workforce mobility. Saving money for a family means essential workers will rely on affordable renting options. Equally, as they save for relocation of family members to Australia, and the purchase of a house, housing availability will likely be a key factor in their decision to remain within an area.





Supporting social infrastructure: affordable housing and education

Housing availability is a significant motivation for migrant relocation. An opportunity to buy a house locally constitutes an 'established life' in Australia for many skilled migrants:



When we got stable, we're earning enough money, you could buy house here, it took years. [...] After a few years, we got a family here.

(Community stakeholder, skilled migrant)

However, this opportunity is changing as regional housing costs increase:



I told my husband, I'm not happy here [in Sydney]. I said I wanted to find a place that would be safe for the girls. I said as long as there is a little shopping centre with a school. My husband has to drive from Sydney, he tried to look around the coastal area [to find a place to live]. It is a bit expensive. What we earn, we put [aside], we are really saving. Now, [costs are] catching up with the city. It's still more expensive in the city, but I think that we are catching up, especially if you have a mortgage to pay.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)



The growing scarcity of affordable housing is recognised as an issue for the entire Dalby community. For instance, aged care providers face a similar challenge finding accommodation:



One of our clients lives in a unit. He's lived there for four years now. It started at \$180 a week, it's now at \$265, and in October it's going to \$400. And there's no chance in hell that he can pay that. So, we've had to source alternative accommodation for him. But the scary part... if accommodation becomes available, is it still going to be affordable? Availability and affordability are different things.

(Service provider)

The education opportunities in Dalby, as in Katanning, were considered a positive feature. One difference, however, is that local schools may have less experience working with culturally and linguistically diverse children. Higher education opportunities and career development opportunities for young people and skilled professionals were considered less available in Dalby than in urban areas:



I've spoken to a young woman, a doctor. And she said after she finished [her current employment], she wants to move. She wants to work in a hospital where it has a complete facility. It says that our hospital here, [...] don't have enough facilities.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Providing educational opportunities for international students was identified as a way to increase the local population of qualified professionals, which would also be supported by the local migrant community. Research participants commented that they often find and utilise educational opportunities, however, most of them are outside of the Western Downs region. The lack of local opportunities was acknowledged as impacting prospective migrants' relocation choices.



Inclusive workforce practices define migrants' experiences of place

Multiple research participants mentioned workforce environment as an important factor impacting their experience. For many skilled workers, especially in essential occupations, work occupies much of their time, limiting social interactions with the community as well as with family to weekends.

In some sectors, such as aged care, cultural diversity is used as an asset in events and creative activities for clients. Culturally different approaches to treating vulnerable clients, described as 'caring cultures', were praised by employers. Furthermore, some employers actively support migrants' needs outside of the working environment, aiming to create a strong inclusive culture:



We looked at innovative ways to keep employees. So, for example, one business here, they had a lot of shift workers and often at home there were lots of jobs that weren't done because they were on call and then they really [didn't] feel like mending the fence or whatever. That employer actually employed an extra person in his business on Monday, who would go around and mow your lawn, and on Tuesday would rock up to your place and clean out your garage that you've been thinking about doing for two years. And it was very interesting that we had lots of our employees who did stay with their businesses rather than move on. So, we learned quickly that it wasn't just the money that attracted people, but it was what you could give them in terms of lifestyle.

(Employer)



Employers were noted as helping with local services such as rental, education, labour force systems, and visa applications, and providing employees with additional time off to visit migration-related services. Employers concede such an approach benefits the recruitment process and worker retention.



I want them to be happy. I want them to stay working for us. So yeah, we are going to accommodate them.

(Employer)

Relationships with supervisors and colleagues can be a key to feeling welcomed. A lack of multicultural competencies was noted as an issue for newly arrived migrants in the workplace.

Some research participants in physically demanding jobs described being treated poorly in their workplace, leading to transactional relationships and impacting attitudes to work and their sense of belonging.





Skills recognition preventing career progression

Skills recognition and transferability are other important considerations in Dalby migrants' experiences. There is often a discrepancy between local market demand and migrants' unrecognised skills. Even though they still perceive this compromise as worthy, it affects their sense of satisfaction:



...They actually [have] professions from their place, but they forgot it, and work at a diner, work in the farm, work anywhere because that's what is available. But here you have skills. They are managers of the bank in the Philippines. I am a teacher. Most of the Filipinos that I know here, they end up in McDonald's. So, in the cleaning company [in Dalby], 95% are Filipinos, they are offered Certificate III. I'm not saying that it's not a good job. Because you know, what matters when you come here, it's not the positions. It's just that we have to earn money for the family regardless of your [previous job experience]. Even if you're doctor in the [Philippines], you can be a cleaner here... it's very difficult to have that recognition [of qualifications].

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

The pursuit of skills recognition, requiring time and financial investment, was less of a priority for research participants compared to other settlement issues such as securing a permanent visa or reuniting via family reunion. Skills recognition barriers not only create unequal opportunities for new residents in labour markets but also prevent migrants from entering other sectors and professions in demand. While it is important to fill existing vacancies, finding affordable ways to recognise existing skills to enable career progressions needs to be considered.



Language barriers

The provision of spaces for social connections and intercultural exchanges should be seen as a priority for regional communities with migrants.



And it's just the little things about saying, 'Hello, how are you going? How about you come over for to my place for dinner?' Or 'We're going to the football, do you want to bring your family?' that we take for granted. It's about welcoming people into what you do. I think as Australians and as small rural communities, we struggle with that a bit. There's nothing bad intentionally, it's just we probably, one, we're not used to it, and two, we just don't know how to do it.

(Local government stakeholder)

Creating new social connections is a process that must be learnt in some regional areas, and their success in becoming a multicultural community will be dependent on residents embracing that.



Community experiences in Dalby: when do you begin to be a local?

Dalby represents a case of a community in transition, gradually shifting its population profile to a multicultural one. This brings new practices and initiatives to a region, such as ‘welcoming committees’, changing the community itself:



Maybe [local people] need that encouragement to be welcoming. Small rural communities are not necessarily [unwelcoming] to migrants ... it’s just sometimes if you’re not born and bred ... there’s a bit of a saying out here, you’ve got to live in this place for 25 years before you’re a local.

(Local government stakeholder)

Research participants reported witnessing this cultural shift in their local community, reporting friendly conversations with residents about their culture and background. Creating new relationships between different cultural groups can lead to a transformation in a community:



When I come up here, I worked at the abattoir. And there are some old people, they were a bit racist, but I understand, because especially during the Japanese time [WWII], they said they associated [Filipinos] with that job. And I understand that. I actually talked to the old lady, and I said, ‘Why are you upset?’ She said, ‘Because you are Asian, you are [a] communist.’ I said, ‘Oh, I’m sorry, ma’am, during that time, I wasn’t born yet’. We had a little talk, and she became [relaxed]. If people have a fear of something or they don’t know you, sometimes this personal conversation can change things.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Even though these perceptions were attributed to older generations, this example signifies the importance of communicating with an entire community. Welcoming programs play a critical role as orientation services for newly arrived migrants and also as a conduit between different community members.

The Dalby Welcoming Community program was established out of recognition that community engagement is critical to a migrant’s experience:



We were noticing that we had people from different countries that were here, so we decided that often when people come to a new community, they’re not made to feel welcome. They, they sit on the fringes. We decided we would form a welcoming community in Dalby.

(Community stakeholder)

Welcoming initiatives were positively regarded by migrants, who viewed them as opportunities to engage with the community and showcase their cultures and arts. The Delicious and Delightful Festival represents a whole-of-community approach, in which Dalby’s cultural ancestry is celebrated through parades, music and dance. Throughout the festival, a local street is transformed into a giant table, welcoming all visitors to sit together and share their food.

The festival also seeks to address isolation and employment issues, providing volunteer opportunities for migrant women and enabling them to interact with community members and future employers.

Social connectedness also provides an opportunity to learn more about the wider region, creating further opportunities:



Even [across] the Western Downs itself, you’ve got Dalby, Chinchilla, Miles, Tara. Tara had the camel races, which is really celebrating country lifestyle [...].Fifteen thousand people rushed into our region for that community event. Those major events like ‘One Long Table’ or [the] camel races are pretty easy [to find about]. They are advertised everywhere, but if you need to go to markets or something like that, you need to actually look into it. There’s also social capital, from social intel, your friends.

(Local government stakeholder, skilled migrant)



Community engagement is critical to address ‘culture shock’

The importance of supporting new arrivals was noted by community stakeholders:



Moving to another country or even to another state brings that whole sense of culture shock. Even moving from the city to Dalby - there’s nothing here to do on a Sunday, there is no nighttime economy here. I think it’s a culture shock even for skilled migrants. They may not have gone through the same trauma that refugees have, but they come from environments which are very different to here.

(Community stakeholder)

For some newly arrived migrants, ‘culture shocks’ and feeling isolated, are often the first side-effects of moving from a large urban centre to a regional community. Women who arrived as partners on employer-sponsored skilled visas are at particular risk of disengagement and isolation. The Filipino community acts as a primary ‘settlement service provider’ for newly arrived migrants with volunteers arranging social events and gatherings:



The Filipino community here in Dalby is very strong. Although not all our members are Filipinos, we have a strong group of people [of other nationalities], but we support each other as much as we can.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

These strong social ties are spread out across different geographical areas (regionally, nationally and internationally) and form migrants’ networks and relations with other places:



People like to move where they have family already, maybe. It becomes a bit of a ripple effect. If you can hold onto one family, then you probably hold on to the next. And the same in Dalby with the Filipino communities. They have family bonds. So, you need to make them feel welcome and you need to, to make sure that they’ve got a community.

(Local government stakeholder)

Local actors: lack of mandate or resources to participate in addressing migration challenges

Employers, schools, places of faith, local cultural communities, Welcoming Community Dalby and Western Downs Council, were noted as being key players in the migration space locally by multicultural residents. Several challenges were identified as limiting the effectiveness of these individuals and groups. The local council has limited resources to impact housing availability and address related issues within the community:



It’s a real crisis. We were talking about childcare this morning in Chinchilla, and the comment was, ‘It’s a waste of time opening or getting childcare staff because there’s nowhere to house them.’ It’s a chicken and egg problem [...] As a council, we’ve put \$5,000,000 on the table in infrastructure relief. So, when a developer comes in to build houses, normally they pay infrastructure charges... So, it’s free infrastructure charges. What else can you do as a local council? There’s not a lot. We’re not developers.

(Local government stakeholder)

A lack of stable program funding also creates vulnerability for key organisations, such as Dalby Welcoming Community and the Filipino Association. The community festival, Delicious and Delightful, has shifted from an annual to a biennial event due to insufficient resources. Similarly, the Filipino Association of Dalby relies on outsourced funding to support its daily operations. Even though it is recognised as an essential multicultural institution, its work is constrained by available financial resources:



The local government are caring, [they have] community plans. In these community plans, they support the entire community, but also multicultural festivals. It’s all the budget [that they’ve got].

(Community stakeholder, migrant)



Multicultural representation

Similar to Katanning and Coffs Harbour, participants raised the challenge of building multicultural representation in local decision making:



If [someone from the Filipino community] wants to achieve something, grow [a] political career and represent our community, [it's] not going to happen ... There are a lot of Filipinos who are achievers, but why is it that there is no councillor, no MP, no Filipino something [in power]? That's a question.

(Community stakeholder, migrant)

Public spaces, such as festivals and other community events, clearly play a role in representing multicultural residents. The aspiration to grow multicultural communities in regional areas requires consideration of equity in representing these residents in public spaces, events and important decision-making, as they affect migrants' sense of fairness and belonging.

Game changers

Festivals can build social engagement for families.

Dalby's Delicious and Delightful Festival is a significant cultural event presented by Dalby Welcoming Community Inc.

Local organisers of the event observed that partners of skilled migrants who had relocated to the region had professional skills and capabilities but were often socially isolated.

Through funding from the Queensland Government's 'Skilling Queenslanders for Work' program, the program organisers implemented a program for festival volunteers that resulted in a vocational accreditation and led to employment for many volunteers.

In 2022, the Dalby Welcoming Community won the Queensland Training Award for Community Training Initiative of the Year for their program, 'Building Connections to Employment through Dalby's Delicious and Delightful Festival'.

Conclusion

Dalby has a growing multicultural community, predominantly consisting of secondary migrants and skilled workers fulfilling skills shortages in critical industries such as energy, agriculture, manufacturing, health and aged care. Research participants defined liveability as a combination of essential infrastructure, social and welcoming services, and the quality of everyday interactions. Cultural engagement through public events and opportunities to participate in local decision-making were noted as essential to migrants' engagement and sense of belonging.





4.4 CASE STUDY 4: BUNDABERG, QUEENSLAND

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Geography	
RAI regional type	Regional City
Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Areas category	Inner Regional
Distance to metropolitan capital	360 km north of Brisbane
Demographics	
Population (2018)	34,338
Population (2024)	35,285
Overseas arrivals (2018)	178
Overseas arrivals (2024)	217
Multicultural Backgrounds	
Overseas-born population (2021)	19.9%
Country of birth, top 3 responses (other than Australia, UK, Ireland and New Zealand) (2021)	Philippines: 0.8%, South Africa: 0.5%, Germany: 0.4%
Households where a non-English language is spoken (2021)	6.6%
Language spoken at home (other than English), top 3 responses (2021)	Mandarin: 0.4%, Italian: 0.3%; Vietnamese: 0.3%

Category	Number/Percentage/Rating
Education	
Post-school qualification rate (2021)	46.1%
Bachelor's degree attainment rate (2021)	13.4%
Employment	
Overseas-born unemployment rate (2021)	5.7%
Overseas-born participation rate (2021)	49.8%
Major employment industries (total population) (2021)	Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: 41.9%, Health Care and Social Assistance: 13.7%, Administrative and Support Services: 8.1%
Major employment industries (permanent migrants) (2021)	Health Care and Social Assistance: 67.8%, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: 17.8%, Accommodation and Food Services: 14.5%
Major employment industries (temporary migrants) (2021)	Construction: 17.4%, Agriculture: 9.0%, Utilities: 8.1%
Liveability and Wellbeing	
Housing price-to-income ratio (2024)	9.5
Public transport access (2023)	2.8 out of 7
Personal Wellbeing Index (2023)	68.1
Sense of community (2023)	3.3 out of 7

Source: See Appendix 1: Methodology



This case study explores the interactions between regional employment markets and the migration system from the perspectives of regional employers and migrant workers. A total of 11 interviews were conducted with five employers, three workers and four representatives from government, regional and industry bodies between April and August 2024.



Demographics

The Wide Bay-Burnett region, where Bundaberg is located, is the fastest growing region in Queensland (Queensland Government 2024). Although Bundaberg is famous for its rum, fruit and vegetables, its industry and workforce profile is multi-faceted. Its gross regional product of \$5.6 billion in 2023 continues to grow (NIER 2024). The three industry sectors with the largest share of the Bundaberg workforce are Health Care and Social Assistance (7,501 people or 19.3%), Retail Trade (3,970 people or 10.2%) and Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing (3,867 people or 10.0%) (NIER 2024). In combination, these three industries employed 15,338 people or 39.5% of the total employed resident population. The construction and education and training sectors have also experienced strong growth in recent years. The workforce needs of the area continue to grow with the number of employed people in Bundaberg increasing by 4,862 between 2016 and 2021.

This workforce growth has impacted Bundaberg's residency profile, amidst national and regional discussions about infrastructure needs and housing shortages. Of the 35,842 people who work in the Bundaberg region, 34,571 or 96.5% also lived locally (see Bundaberg Community Profile), indicating that one of the attractions of working in Bundaberg is the opportunity to reside in an area with natural beauty, good amenities and a strong community. Notably, the Wide Bay - Burnett region's labour market conditions were identified as 'poor' according to the Regional Labour Market Indicator tool developed by Jobs and Skills Australia, in part due to a relatively low employment rate and high proportion of the working age population on Jobseeker income support (JSA 2024).





INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

Serious labour shortages across the skills spectrum

The employers who participated in this study had a palpable sense of insecurity that they would be unable to meet their labour needs now and into the future. As one horticulture employer noted, ‘Workforce shortages are so dire. Two feet and a heartbeat – we’ll take anyone we can get’. Although recruiting workers with limited skills or those with no or little employment experience may be an option for low skill harvest work such as picking and packing roles, for other employers, the demand for highly skilled workers with specialist skills is critical. A hospital administrator noted:



Generally, in any health service a lot of the roles available require a university education. These are doctors, nurses, allied health roles and they all require qualifications. We can’t take someone off the street and teach them how to do the job. There’s education and registration requirements and we struggle to recruit people with specific skill sets, such as senior doctors in diverse fields such as psychiatry and gastroenterology.

(Employer)

For this hospital administrator, the lack of career pathways and opportunities in the local health sector meant that many doctors ultimately move out of Bundaberg to progress their career. Noting that most junior doctors are ambitious and career driven, she stated:



Although they’ll start in a regional area, they will move to a metro area once they have permanent residency and there’s not much we can do about that because our facilities are only accredited for certain specialties.

(Employer)

The opening of a new Bundaberg Hospital in 2027 will somewhat address this as it will require new advanced specialities and therefore provide new opportunities for career progression. However, it will also create further health workforce needs, with an anticipated 2,887 new jobs created (Queensland Government, 2024b). Even with new health specialties being introduced, for some workers, the lack of career or integration opportunities for their partner was a reason they had chosen not to relocate their family to Bundaberg but instead work as a fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) worker. As one highly skilled healthcare worker stated:



I fly back to Brisbane after my hospital shifts finish for the week. It’s not ideal because I don’t like being away from my family, but my wife came to Bundaberg and she didn’t like it. The schools are better in Brisbane, the lifestyle is better, and my wife has friends from the same community we had back home. I work ungodly hours, so it’s really hard on my wife and kids and I feel better knowing they’re happy in Brisbane where there’s more for them to do and it’s less lonely because they have more friends.

(Employee)

Although this worker did not indicate they would be looking to find a job in Brisbane once the visa incentives to work in a regional area were no longer present, the failure to settle and integrate their family into the Bundaberg region is a real risk factor for long-term retention. Speare has referred to this as the principle of ‘cumulative inertia’ because ‘the effects of duration of residence are clear. Social bonds take time to build, and the longer people live in an area, the more friends they are likely to have’, leading to increased likelihood of staying in a particular place (Speare 1974 cited in Wulff et al. 2008:151).





In the context of acute labour shortages, Bundaberg employers had proactive retention strategies to address the challenge of workers leaving their employment and to help them integrate into the region and establish social bonds. Some employers spoke of trying to recruit workers from the same country to create a natural community within the workforce. This can be highly effective in ensuring workers and their families feel at home away from home. One community stakeholder, however, noted that recruiting specific nationalities was not without challenge, stating:



We have Indians, Filipinos, South Africans, African communities. Encouraging diasporas is good, but in order to ensure we don't have a community divided along racial lines there has to be the ability for all members of the community to engage.

(Community stakeholder)

Another employer spoke of a local meatworks that had sought to recruit Nigerian migrants with the help of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This was ultimately unsuccessful with the workers leaving Bundaberg and returning to Logan in the wider Brisbane metropolitan area, because 'there was nothing [in Bundaberg] to support them'.

Employers in the study appreciated the significant need to facilitate support and integration for partners and spouses. Another employer stated:



We support the partners and families as well. We introduce them to other families from the same nationalities. A lot of it is the partners are feeling isolated and stranded so we try to integrate them in the community.

(Employer)

A further challenge for the partners of sponsored migrant workers is to find a job themselves commensurate with their skills and experience. As Boese notes:

Secondary applicants also enjoy work rights, and they may be qualified as the primary visa holders but lack the certainty of a skills-based job with an employer sponsor. In practice, secondary visa holders often compromise their career in order to stay with their partner whose job is the condition of their residency right. The regional residency condition of the visa can become a detriment for the skilled visa holder's partner when they are unable to source a suitable employment position in the same regional town as their partner or spouse. (Boese, 2023).

Creating a strong sense of welcome was a priority for the employers and community stakeholders that participated in the study. Each of the employers told of organising specific welcome events, accommodation, schools and even cars for the families of their new recruits. These actions are reminiscent of the established requirements within the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme which require employers to proactively address the needs of workers from the Pacific to settle into the community. A government stakeholder stated:



PALM is good in terms of support for groups of workers coming in as there are certain things approved employers must provide. Pastoral care is a broad concept and encompasses many things, a connection to community sports, local events and information about a local health provider. The concept of that program could be expanded. PALM is a very expensive process for employers to operate in as providing pastoral care is resource-intensive and time-consuming but if employers do it right, it provides an incredible return on investment.

(State government stakeholder)

In their study of regional labour markets and local communities, Boese et al. note that although 'the very act of having "brought" migrants to the location often came with a sense of responsibility', it did not mean that employer responsibility for migrants' welfare equated with accountability in terms of compliance with labour standards (Boese and Moran 2021). Boese et al. noted that in their regional case studies, albeit not in Bundaberg, 'the lack of accountability emerged in examples where migrants described being underpaid or discriminated against, which most tolerated without complaining' (Boese and Moran 2021:7).



Insufficient and inadequate accommodation and housing

A striking corollary of the dire labour shortages were significant shortages of accommodation. This has been recognised by Bundaberg Regional Council, which seeks to address the housing shortage through developing responses to immediate, emerging and long-term housing needs. All eleven interviews identified housing as the primary challenge they faced, which is consistent with the literature on how housing supply challenges can impact upon the ability of regional and rural employers to attract and retain migrant workers (Taylor et al. 2014). The importance of suitable and accessible housing for attracting and retaining migrant workers in Bundaberg was noted in all the interviews in the study.

With 96.5% of Bundaberg's workforce living locally, the growth in its workforce has placed significant strain on the supply of available housing. A community stakeholder observed:



The biggest problem we have is housing. We have the tightest housing market in Australia. There's been very little new housing builds. Very little government action as to how this might be solved. We raised the issue with council five years ago. We were told it was a state government problem and they weren't going to get involved. State government blames the feds. The buck passing has meant nothing has been done.

(Community stakeholder)

Another community stakeholder also observed the lack of coordination between different levels of government in planning for the housing and infrastructure needs of the rapidly growing Bundaberg area. This stakeholder stated:



One of the biggest barriers in addition to a limited amount of accommodation was local council working with state government to find disused or under-utilised facilities to change their purpose and create temporary accommodation. There's a lot of disconnect from cities and regional areas.

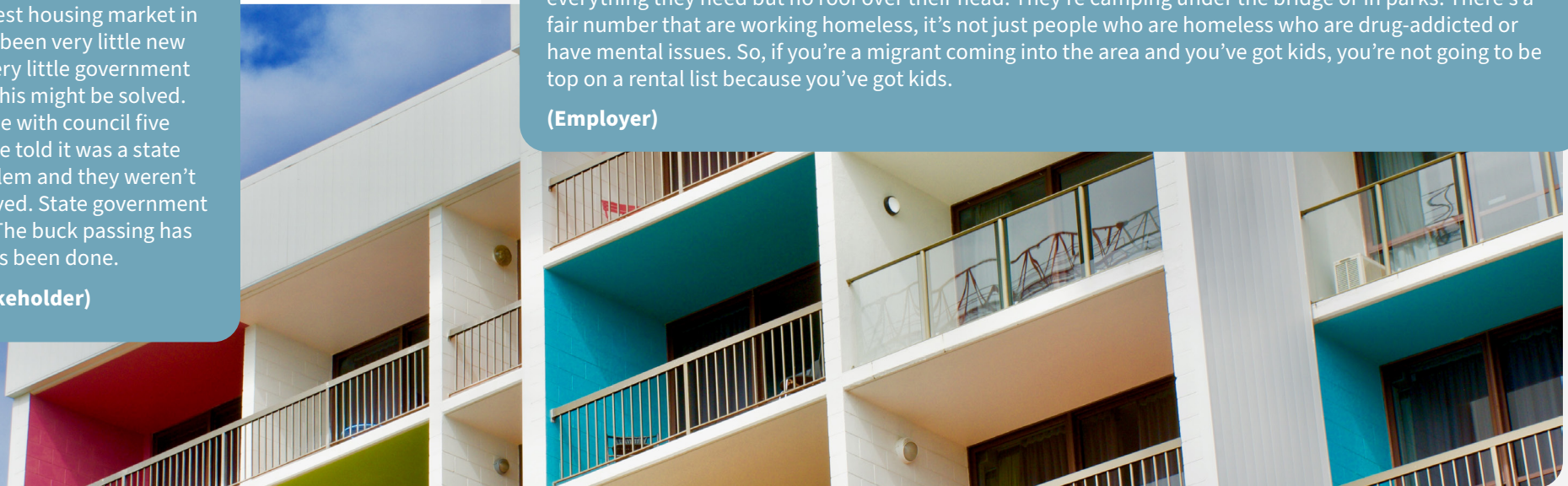
(Community stakeholder)

Although most employers in the study proactively sought to arrange housing for their sponsored migrant workers, they reported significant difficulties in finding suitable housing. One employer told of a new phenomenon of 'working homeless', with migrants living in substandard, temporary and even unsafe accommodation in order to get by:



The biggest problem we have is that we've got working homeless – they've got jobs, cars, phones, everything they need but no roof over their head. They're camping under the bridge or in parks. There's a fair number that are working homeless, it's not just people who are homeless who are drug-addicted or have mental issues. So, if you're a migrant coming into the area and you've got kids, you're not going to be top on a rental list because you've got kids.

(Employer)





One of the health workers interviewed in the study told a similar story of her difficulties in finding suitable accommodation for her and family, stating:



Even though I was employed as a highly qualified ER nurse and was on a good wage, I couldn't get any sort of accommodation, and the hospital was forced to put me up and my husband and our two kids in a one-bedroom apartment. It was so cramped and stressful trying to live there, but at least it was an apartment. Some of my friends have been put up in hotel rooms for weeks on end where they have to buy all their own food because they don't have cooking facilities.

(Employee)

The challenges in finding suitable accommodation for health workers was also echoed by the hospital administrator who participated in the study, stating:



Buying a house or even renting a house is extremely difficult in Wide Bay. So, we've had people decline offers of employment because they can't get housing. The rental market is a large factor in our labour challenges. Housing opportunity is a number one issue for why we can't get workers or retain them. The housing market is one that is impacting whether we can get people here. For the doctors we provide housing for up to a month for them. But we encourage them to look at housing straight away. It's a real challenge for us.

(Employer)

It is not just migrant workers but international students in Bundaberg who face difficulties in arranging accommodation. As a government stakeholder reported:



We don't have university accommodation so our students are relying on hostels and group housing situations which are often overpopulated, so it can be challenging to even attract people to study in regional areas because of that limitation.

(Local government stakeholder)

Employers reported finding creative solutions to the housing challenge. One employer said his strategy to get around the housing crisis was to invest in local workers by identifying bright students in high school. He stated:



I'm not the only one trying this 'grow your own' strategy. A lot of local businesses are now recruiting local school kids and developing pathways for them. The problem with immigration is we don't have the housing for the immigrants so even if I can get an immigrant to come here, I've got nowhere for them to stay.

(Employer)





Transport

Transport is a related challenge that facilitates access to support services and involvement in the community (Wilson et al. 2023). Given the geographical dispersion many Australian regions, the ability to access public transport or to have access to a licence and vehicle are important aspects of being able to work. A horticulture employer noted this was a particular challenge to them given that workers lived in share houses at some distance from the farm:



Most [employees] don't have cars or even a licence. Our farm isn't walking distance to public transport and the bus system is not reliable or regular here anyway. Our biggest issue is transport and finding a way for our workers to get to the farm and home again at the end of the day.

(Employer)



The impact of visa and skills policy frameworks

Although there was considerable appreciation for the role of regional visa programs in incentivising migrants to live and work in Bundaberg, employers identified several barriers that inhibited the successful operation of these programs. These pertained to complexity, cost, suitability and responsiveness of the system. Accessibility issues related to the regulatory framework around minimum wage levels, skills lists and skills recognition were also mentioned. Cumulatively, these barriers had the effect of locking out many regional employers from accessing migrant workers through the Australian migration program, despite the presence of significant labour shortages in their business.

Some employers reported that the upfront costs of applying for sponsorship and the time and resources involved in navigating the application process were beyond them. This was particularly true for smaller employers who participated in the study, one of whom stated:



I had a look at the employer sponsored visa a few months back when I was desperate, but it was too complicated. Too many hoops for me to jump through. I wear so many hats in my business and I just couldn't get my head around this one as well.

(Employer)

Other employers noted that requirements around age and experience often excluded migrant workers they would have liked to sponsor and employ. In contrast, the only large employer in the study spoke positively about the hospital's reliance on the migration program and the ability of its dedicated human resources department to recruit migrant workers through the employer sponsorship program. For larger employers who use employer sponsored visas more regularly, the employer sponsorship process is a less challenging process to navigate. The hospital administrator stated:



In Wide Bay we have over 900 visa holders in our health service. The main visa we use is the subclass 482. The government has been doing a great job of inviting 482s to apply for permanent residency through the 190. The increase in offerings has been really good. From a visa candidate point of view they're all interested in permanent residency, and for the junior doctors there's often no straightforward pathway to permanent residency unless they specialise; but with the recent changes to the subclass 186 visa after three years there's now a pathway to permanent residency which has been a big help to us keeping them on.

(Employer)



Several community stakeholders observed that smaller employers relied on recruiting migrants who were already in Bundaberg because they had been sponsored by the state government via the subclass 491 program. Although this meant these employers could not recruit as directly from workers overseas as under the employer sponsored program, it did increase the overall supply of migrant workers in Bundaberg. As one employer noted:



We like visas which tie people to regional areas; where people get more points for working in a regional area. Once they've come here they do often want to stay because of the lifestyle. Some kind of forced regional and rural service for international students would be really good.

(Employer)

Other employers noted the difficulties of meeting the minimum salary level requirement and skill thresholds to access migrant workers. Some employers said it was not realistic to pay the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT) which is the minimum wage for sponsored migrants because it was set at a higher level than they would ordinarily pay. Other employers noted the inflexibility of skills lists and that the occupations they wanted to recruit were either not on the list or did not have a pathway for permanent residency. As one employer noted:



We need an urgent review of the ANZSCO (Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations) codes in terms of the health sector. Even an anaesthetist is a short-term code and there's no pathway to permanent residency. This stops us recruiting people on a long-term pathway. That's the big one. All of the ANZSCO codes for nursing and allied health are fine; so a review of the ANZSCO codes for doctors needs to happen urgently.

(Employer)

Another reported issue was the failure to properly map and project regional skill needs. A government stakeholder noted a lack of awareness among migrants of job opportunities in regional areas and said that more needed to be done to properly advertise vacancies:



International students in regional locations will often leave straight away and go to a larger metropolitan area under the assumption there's no need for their skills in that region. In Toowoomba for example there's a need for agricultural graduates, but many would graduate from agriculture and go elsewhere. There's a lack of information about regions and regional needs.

(Local government stakeholder)

A final point of concern that came through strongly was the problem with skills assessments. Workers reported these were a barrier to gaining employment as they could be expensive, difficult to organise and pass, unnecessarily bureaucratic and time-consuming. As one worker reported:



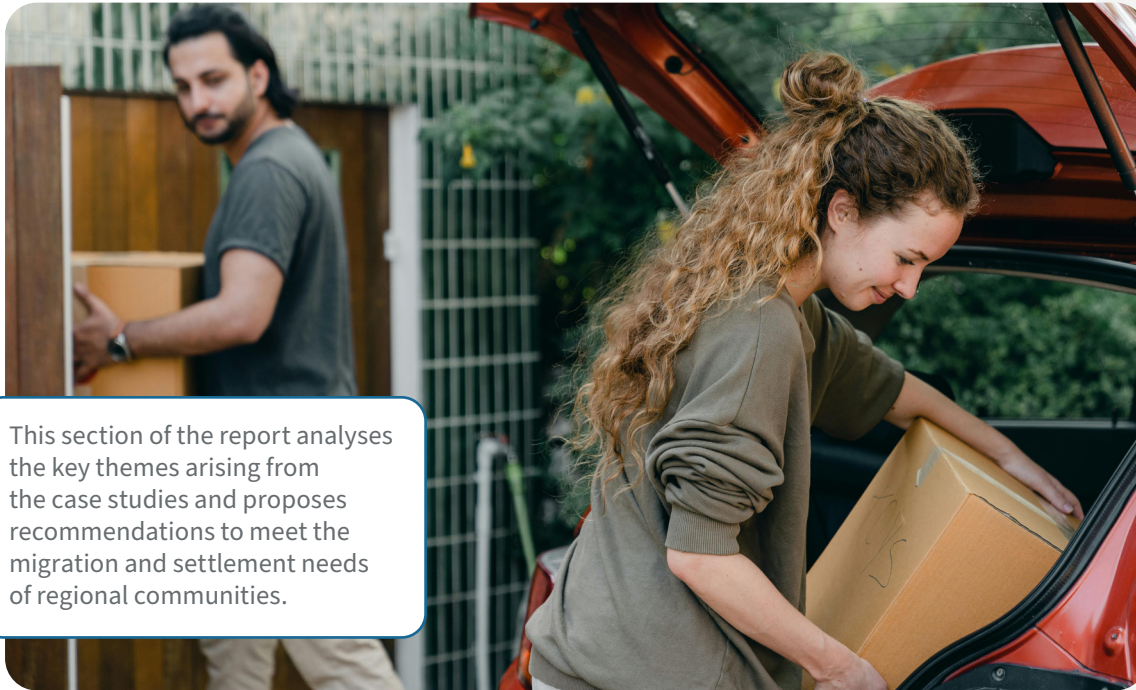
I am trained as a doctor and have worked as a doctor for many years back home but when I got here APHRA (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency) asked me to do more training and there were more supervision requirements. I had to go back to the start and become an intern again despite being a well-respected doctor back home and getting the supervision I needed in a regional area to satisfy the APHRA requirement was another stumbling block.

(Employee)





5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



This section of the report analyses the key themes arising from the case studies and proposes recommendations to meet the migration and settlement needs of regional communities.

Moving to the regions

Research participants described a range of motivations for moving to regional areas. These included safety, liveability, employment and education, opportunities for home ownership, freedom to practice religion and culture, and a sense of belonging. These themes were relevant for migrants across all visa categories and align with findings in literature that migrants relocate to achieve a better quality of life.

Research participants described the regions where they lived as peaceful, safe places with a strong sense of community. Small communities, ease of navigation and access to the natural environment were recognised as positive regional attributes. However, despite these regional attractions, only 16.5% of international migrants move to regional Australia (RAI 2024a). This suggests the need for coordinated policy intervention to promote regional migration attraction and retention.

Addressing regional labour needs

Many regional communities face chronic labour shortages, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education, and manufacturing. Migrants are actively recruited to address labour market needs. The regional visa system provides incentives for skilled migrants to live and work in designated regional areas, offering a pathway to permanent residency. However, complexities in the system can make this process difficult to navigate for regions, employers and migrants.

For regional employers, securing a sustainable workforce has its challenges. Regional employers interviewed described proactive retention strategies to support workers to access housing and services and establish social bonds. While positive experiences in the work environment support settlement success, direct or subtle discrimination and a lack of multicultural competencies and inclusive workforce practices within a business can have an exclusionary effect, which negatively impacts migrants' relocation decisions (Colic-Peskier 2006, Boese 2015).

The research highlighted the need for reforms to simplify the regional visa system and provide a tailored approach to skills, occupations and wage thresholds that meets local needs.

Barriers to meaningful employment

Recognition of skills was a key challenge for research participants. The cost, time and complexity of processes for recognition of overseas skills and qualifications formed a barrier to meaningful employment for many migrants. Almost half of migrants in Australia are working in roles below their qualified skill level (SSI 2025).

The report recommends reforms to make overseas skills recognition faster, fairer and more affordable by establishing a single national governance system in line with the recommendations of the [Activate Australia's Skills](#) campaign.

English language proficiency was also identified as a barrier to employment. Research participants mentioned difficulty balancing work and education obligations, lack of access to childcare and transport, unsuitable hours for English lessons, and English language training methods that do not reflect their everyday needs, as barriers to learning English efficiently and fast. In situations when English proficiency is necessary to receive skills recognition and secure better employment opportunities, insufficient language training can restrict migrants' employment options and earning capacity over time.



Housing

Regional housing supply is a key policy challenge that must be addressed within the migration and labour market systems. Many employers interviewed identified housing as the primary challenge to regional recruitment, which is consistent with the literature on the impact of housing supply challenges on regional recruitment and retention (Taylor et al. 2014). The provision of suitable and accessible accommodation plays an important role in sustaining regional industries and making them attractive to migrants.

At the same time, housing is more affordable in many regional areas than in metropolitan capitals (RAI 2024). Moving from expensive urban areas to more affordable regional locations is regarded as a strong regional attraction factor. Many research participants cited home ownership as a key aspiration. However, the regional advantage in housing affordability is waning as regional housing costs increase and rental vacancy rates decline (RAI 2025).

Transport, infrastructure and services

Access to social infrastructure and affordable services is essential to attract and retain migrants in regional areas.

Research participants identified limited access to transport as a barrier to accessing employment, services and community participation. Given the geographical dispersion of many Australian regions, the ability to access public transport or to have access to a licence and vehicle are important aspects of being able to work. Many migrants rely on public transport because they do not have a drivers' licence or cannot afford to purchase or maintain a car. However, public transport options are often limited in the regions.

Access to educational opportunities was a motivating factor for research participants. While some participants reported positive experiences, others reported that local schools lacked experience with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families. Barriers to accessing childcare were mentioned in all case studies, along with a limited range of tertiary education options. For many participants, educational opportunities were viewed as an opportunity to improve outcomes for families and children. This aligns with literature findings that education is central to a wide range of financial, social and wellbeing aspirations.

Other soft infrastructure including libraries, museums, community centres, health services, places of faith, art spaces, sporting clubs, charity and volunteer clubs all contribute to the migration settlement system. These spaces provide critical spaces for intercultural dialogue and social engagement and should be formally engaged in the settlement system for better economic and social outcomes.



Social connection and welcoming communities

Social and community connections enable settlement success. Research participants described a range of everyday social experiences such as work relationships, community shared spaces and local events fostering trust and building wellbeing.

Research on migrants' mobility in regional Victoria found that the availability of facilities to fulfil cultural needs and the proximity of friends were the most important factors triggering decisions to move (Wickramaarachchi and Butt 2014).

The availability of spaces and facilities for socialising is also crucial to settlement success. Facilities for cultural and social engagement foster opportunities for cultural expression and exchange, the development of social capital and a sense of belonging. The engagement aspect of life is particularly important in regional areas, where it depends on informal networks and word of mouth. Furthermore, this infrastructure nurtures a local welcoming culture, involving the entire community. Schools, libraries, museums, community centres, places of faith, art spaces, sporting clubs, charity and volunteer clubs can all contribute to the migration settlement system. These spaces provide critical spaces for intercultural dialogue and social engagement.

Local councils play an integral role in creating a whole-of-community approach to foster social cohesion and meaningful engagement for different community members. This role needs to be resourced as part of a coordinated settlement system.



Benefits of migration

The research highlights the multiple economic, social and cultural benefits that migrants bring to regions. Migrants bring new ideas, approaches and opportunities to the regions through their skills, experience and connections. For example, small businesses run by migrants contribute to local economies and build visible multiculturalism and diversity through their products and offerings. They create new businesses and contribute to making regional lifestyles more attractive for residents and newcomers. Models that measure migration outcomes should seek to measure the full scope of regional benefits from migration.

Coordination across levels of government

The report highlights the need to better coordinate regional migration across the levels of government. In the case studies, inadequate regional infrastructure planning, especially with respect to housing, was emblematic of the perceived lack of coordination between the three levels of government to design coordinated solutions to meet regional needs.

The report recommends the implementation of regional steering groups that feed into a national steering committee on regional migration. This would enable a tailored and coordinated approach to regional migration.

Policy reform in one part of the migration system, such as the labour market and visa system, is important but not sufficient to support the successful long-term settlement of migrants in the regions. The research highlighted the complex interplay between migration and settlement policy and other regional development policies including education and employment, social services and cultural policies. Increasing coordination across policy areas will achieve better outcomes for migrants and the regions.

A place-based approach

This research shows that success is facilitated by local actors using local resources and capabilities to meet the economic, social and cultural needs of new residents. A place-based approach requires federal and state governments to prioritise engagement with local government and non-government actors in the planning and implementation of migration-related policies and programs.





6.0 CONCLUSION

This report illustrates that a successful regional migration and settlement system requires a coordinated approach across the levels of government and the policy spectrum. This includes migration, regional development, jobs and skills, social, education, multicultural and cultural policies that address migrants' motivations for relocation and equip regional places with means to achieve successful settlement outcomes.

The Australian Government's Migration Strategy will play a vital role in creating a strong, accessible and fair system, leading to positive economic and social outcomes. However, undertaking change in one part of the migration system is not sufficient to support migrants' long-term resettlement to the regions. A holistic, coordinated, whole-of-government approach is vital to achieve national migration system outcomes.

Migration system success begins with successful local resettlement experiences. As many respondents in this research noted, it is employment that brings migrants to the regions, but it is community that makes them stay. This research shows that this success is facilitated by local actors, utilising their capabilities to address the economic, social and cultural needs of new residents.

Adopting a place-based approach means the migration system needs to go beyond government planning and communication to include local government and non-government actors in the migration system. It requires resource planning and implementation of migration attraction and settlement policies based on local data, capabilities, assets and challenges.

Many Australian regions provide a range of welcoming experiences, support and opportunities to build connections for new residents. However, a lack of holistic governance undermines positive regional experiences. The detrimental impacts from a lack of critical social infrastructure (housing, transport, health services and education) on migrants' experiences have been well-documented in academic and non-academic sources. Conversely, multicultural policy and settlement services have predominantly focused on metropolitan areas. Such a comprehensive overview of these issues unequivocally signals the historically existing gap in policies affecting regional migration process.

Regional areas are undergoing significant transformations, taking centre stage nationally in response to the net zero energy transition and economic development. Alongside economic transitions, these regions are experiencing various social changes, including population mobility, a cost-of-living crisis, challenges related to workforce and community resilience. One effect of these processes is a cultural transformation in the regions, where multicultural residents increasingly play a vital role in reshaping regional landscapes, lifestyles, perceptions and identity. Multiculturalism, once primarily an urban phenomenon, has become a prominent feature of regional life. Despite having much smaller demographic numbers compared to urban centres, the influence of migrants on regional life is becoming increasingly pronounced.

This report is a call for coordinated governmental action to support regional migration in the context of regional population growth. Now is the time to embark on a new migration chapter that benefits people and builds thriving and diverse regional communities.





APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

Method

This project used a mixed methods approach consisting of desktop research, descriptive statistics and semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

Definition of key terms

Migrant: A migrant is defined as a person born overseas who arrives in Australia with the intention of staying for one year or more (ABS 2021).

Secondary migrant: A person who, after initially migrating to Australia, relocates internally to another region or city within the country, often for reasons such as employment opportunities, housing affordability, family reunification, or improved quality of life (Boese and Moran 2025).

Visible migrant: Defined by Radford (2016) as those who may ‘stand out’ in their local communities due to their physical appearance, culture, religion, or clothing. This ‘visibility’ can influence peoples’ experiences of belonging, exclusion, and community integration (Radford 2016).

Liveability: The qualities and characteristics of a place that support wellbeing and quality of life. This concept is subjective but generally includes the key domains of built and natural environment, amenity, lifestyle, economic and social opportunity, access to services, and sense of safety and community.

Case studies

The first three case study locations were selected to represent a variety of locations and community sizes - a small town (Katanning), a mid-sized town (Dalby) and a regional city (Coffs Harbour). Each place has different histories of migration, economic and social characteristics, and levels of settlement support services.

Overall, 63 interviews were completed with participants including migrants, councils, RDA organisations, business chambers of commerce, regional employers, settlement services providers and community organisations. Multicultural residents of diverse ages (ranging from 20 to 65), professions, cultural backgrounds and visa status were the main cohort. Skilled migrants on employer-sponsored visas, skilled regional visas, permanent residents, former international student visa holders and humanitarian visa holders were interviewed. Interviewees included migrants from the Philippines, New Zealand, Indonesia, Myanmar, People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Uganda, Kenya, Togo, Portugal and the United Kingdom. A particular emphasis was placed on ‘visible’ migrants in the participant selection process, because this ‘visibility’ can influence people’s experiences of belonging, exclusion, and community integration (Radford 2016).

The fourth case study focuses on the regional migration and employment system in the Bundaberg region. This case study draws upon fieldwork conducted by the University of Adelaide between April and August 2024. A total of 11 interviews were conducted with five employers, three employees and four representatives from government, regional and industry bodies. To verify information obtained from the interviews, primary documents provided by stakeholders and reports from local media, industry and government were also analysed.



Community profiles

All indicators listed in the community profiles use the most recent data available from official and sources as outlined in the table below.

Indicator	Year (s)	Source
Population Growth	2018, 2024	ABS Estimated Regional Population (LGA level)
Overseas Arrivals and Change Rate	2018, 2024	ABS Estimated Regional Population (LGA level)
Country of Birth	2021	ABS Census 2021
Language Spoken at Home	2021	ABS Census 2021
Industry of Employment	2021	ABS Census 2021
Post-School Qualification Rate	2021	ABS Census 2021
Bachelor's Degree Attainment Rate	2021	ABS Census 2021
Price-to-Income Ratio	2024	ABS Personal Income 2021-2022; CoreLogic, March 2024
Access to Public Transport (1-7 scale)	2023	Regional Wellbeing Survey 2023, University of Canberra
Personal Wellbeing Index (0-100 scale)	2023	Regional Wellbeing Survey 2023, University of Canberra
Sense of Community (1-7 scale)	2023	Regional Wellbeing Survey 2023, University of Canberra

Limitations of the research

This project did not target temporary residents on PALM or DAMA temporary visas or international student visa holders. Secondly, the research did not include First Nations Australians' perspectives on migration and settlement policies. However, this research acknowledges First Nations peoples as critical community actors who impact, and are impacted by, local practices of inclusion, engagement, and belonging.

APPENDIX 2: RAI TYPOLOGIES

The Regional Australia Institute uses a framework of four regional types to describe different places in regional Australia. The typology recognises that socio-economic experiences vary according to location in relation to characteristics like population size, economic fundamentals and proximity to regional centres or capital cities. These typologies are:





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