

# From 'Attraction Points' Towards Retention: What do We Know about International Immigrants Who Come to Stay in Non-Metropolitan Australia?

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Since the mid-1990s regionalisation of Australian immigration policy has become more apparent since a number of initiatives encouraging new immigrants to settle in non-metropolitan areas have been introduced. Experts on immigration studies (Wullff and Dharmalingam, 2008) argued that the sole focus of immigration policy should not be on the attraction of an increasing number of skilled immigrants in rural and regional Australia, but their retention in these areas. Similarly, Hugo et al. (2006) point out that the retention of immigrants in regional areas is an even greater challenge than attracting them. However, most of the empirical studies within the Australian context tend to focus on the

attraction factors without in-depth exploration of how newly arrived immigrants adjust over time to living and working in non-metropolitan areas.

This presentation is based on the results of the longitudinal survey of almost 1,000 new immigrants in regional and rural Australia (Collins and Krivokapic-Skoko, 2011). The survey was designed to answer the questions of what it would take to keep the new immigrants in small regional townships and rural areas. The main topics covered by this survey were: (a) migrant decisions and mobility, (b) labour market experience, (c) migrant satisfaction and (d) community participation. We also selected five regional and rural towns in New South Wales and Western Australia with a significant number of new immigrants for closer fieldwork involving interviews with new immigrants, key business, government and community stakeholders and long-term residents.

The retention of the immigrants in rural and regional Australia is very strongly related to 'constructed' attractors - the availability and quality of the public transport, social and professional networks, recreational, entertainment or cultural activities. While friends and family attract new immigrants into rural areas, the quality of life, friendliness of the people, environment, and relaxed atmosphere play more significant roles in retaining them.

According to this longitudinal survey, the three most important reasons for living in a current place were: life style, family connections and job opportunities. Half of the respondents living in regional and rural Australia identified the life style as the main reason for staying in a current place.

*Immigrants living in regional areas single out friendliness of the people, a peaceful and safe environment without pollution and traffic, a relaxed atmosphere and climate as the main features they liked about the place they were living in. However, the new immigrants moving into regional Australia also talk very strongly about isolation, conservatism, and parochialism of small rural communities which all together can make their integration more difficult.*

These new immigrants tend to experience the disadvantages and challenges which are also faced by everyone living and working in non-metropolitan Australia. Limited labour markets in terms of size, career advancement and diversity of occupational possibilities were particularly difficult for the new immigrants settling in regional areas.



Immigrants moving in regional and rural Australia tend to continue with their education. More than a third of the respondents included in this longitudinal survey received further qualifications after moving to Australia. Most of the respondents (45%) obtained different trade qualifications which improved their employability in the labour market or helped them remain and get promoted in their current job. According to this longitudinal survey, one in five immigrants living and working in regional areas received a postgraduate degree after moving to Australia. Importantly, a half of the participants in this survey still intend to undertake further study or training at a university, TAFE or other education institution. These findings of clear intention of immigrants to acquire new skills and obtain additional formal qualifications should be welcomed by policy makers and addressed by regional educational providers. There are a number of ways to provide pathways to acquire additional training and work experience, such as partnership between local employers and education institutions in developing an internship program to provide work placements for immigrants each year in regional areas.

New immigrants are more likely to stay in the same community if they are economically successful and meaningfully engaged in all aspects of community life. According to Wullf and Dharmalingam (2008) communities wishing to retain immigrants need to have “*well-developed social support structures including religious activities meeting places, sporting facilities and so forth, all of which give migrants an opportunity to build links with the community (Ibidem, p. 149)*”. These structures can anchor people to places and therefore the retention factors can be located within the social and cultural milieu of the community.

The experience from some regions in Canada - a country with much longer experience in the regionalisation of immigration- may be very relevant in the Australian context. The key to success of one of Canada's most successful regional migration programs in terms of retention of new immigrants (the Manitoba Provincial Nominee programs, which achieved the retention rate of 80 per cent after 5 years of settlement) was involvement of communities and local employers in settlement planning, and their greater control over the nomination and selection of immigrants (Carter et al. 2008). Improving the communities' competitive advantage in retaining new immigrants has been also on the agenda for Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) which released *A Toolbox of Ideas for Smaller Centres*. Some of the ideas in that document include encouraging intercultural harmony, educating the local population about cultural diversity and antiracism, and including the local Indigenous communities in promoting non-metropolitan areas as a preferable destination for new immigrants.

Rural and regional communities have to be consulted and included in settlement planning. “*Communities must display an adequate desire to explore immigration as a component of a development plan based on an assessment of needs and appropriateness, rather than having immigration ‘forced’ upon them*”

(Silvius and Annis 2005, p. 5). Also, communities which are more welcoming and inclusive, with vibrant and diverse art and cultural life, and involve local Indigenous people, and the communities which embrace creative thinking, innovation and tolerance, are more likely to retain professional, globally linked and highly mobile new immigrants.

### **Recommendations:**

Strategies for retaining new immigrants settling in non-metropolitan Australia should be developed through a partnership between government, employers and community organisations. That partnership can lead towards the following activities:

- Establishing an Immigrant Employment Network or an Immigrant Employment Council to bring together representatives from business, immigrants, governments, education institutions and community-based organisations (based on the positive experience these institutions achieve in the Atlantic region of Canada)
- Providing new immigrants with wage subsidy placement in rural areas for a six-month period in order to gain experience of living and working outside of the major urban centres; this policy proved to be very effective in the context of Canadian regional migration programmes (Akbari and Sun, 2006)
- Establishing a National Rural Think Tank in order to have public debate around the issues surrounding regional immigration and strengthen the capacities for regional settlement planning

Taking into account that new immigrants settling into non-metropolitan Australia tend to be highly educated and skilled, cosmopolitan and professionally mobile, local communities should:

- Develop a plan on how to make community a creative place through the promotion of arts and culture, local heritage, as well as economic development, healthy life style and environment
- Encourage intercultural harmony, educate the local population about cultural diversity and promote the presence of new immigrants as "Perhaps a Blessing"; use community newspapers, media, community leaders and interpersonal communication to support and promote positive attitudes towards new immigrants

## **Negotiating Social Division: Challenges for Cohesion in Bendigo**

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### **Introduction**



This paper highlights issues of leadership, democracy, social networks and communication when different publics seek to control the political agenda over new developments. The case presented below focuses on a development application for a mosque in an industrial area three kilometres from the centre of town. Data for this paper were obtained through a document review of publically available Council files, Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal (VCAT), Victorian High Court and Supreme Court rulings; 19 interviews with representatives from local government, Victoria Police multicultural and health services, business and community leaders; and 183 articles from the ABC, SBS, Age, Herald Sun,

Bendigo Advertiser and social media posts on Facebook. Stakeholders ideologies, beliefs, rationales and aspirations were identified as were their contributions to organisational and communication strategies.