Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training

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Australian Government
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Publisher's note

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About the research

Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training

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Skilled migration is an important source of population growth and labour supply in regional Australia. However, it can be difficult for the families of skilled migrants to integrate into the local labour market socially and into the community more generally. The purpose of this report is to investigate how vocational education and training (VET) can assist in achieving 'social inclusion' for the families of skilled migrants, using the Greater Shepparton region of Victoria as the basis of the research.

This work is one of three projects undertaken by the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training at Monash University, as part of its three-year (2011—13) research partnership with NCVER exploring the geographical dimensions of social inclusion and vocational education and training in Australia.

Key messages

- Settlement and securing employment commensurate with skill levels and previous employment histories are particularly difficult for the spouses of skilled migrants; in particular, non-recognition of qualifications and lack of family support for domestic responsibilities make it difficult for migrant women to get work commensurate with their skills.

- VET institutions can assist the spouses of skilled migrants by offering recognition of prior learning and providing advice on how educational opportunities relate to jobs.

- Resilience on the part of migrants, assistance in job seeking and finding Australian work experience or volunteering improve labour market outcomes.

The authors argue that, in order to achieve social inclusion, policies need to acknowledge the difficulties that the families of skilled migrants face and support the engagement and contribution of migrants to the communities in which they settle — support that exists for humanitarian migrants but not for skilled migrants and their families.

Rod Camm
Managing Director, NCVER

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Executive summary

This report investigates how vocational education and training (VET) might contribute towards socially inclusive outcomes for migrant women and their families in regional Australia. *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training* is part of a wider program of work researching the role of vocational education and training and geographical location in securing employment in Australia. The focus is on how individuals and groups make transitions through training and work and across locations in ways that are equitable; it also examines how migrants' capacities are affected by community and neighbourhood factors and social capital.

The implementation of Australia's skilled migration program since 1996 has seen rising numbers of migrants settling in regional areas of Australia. These migrants are expected to participate in the labour force and contribute to economic growth. Migration policy is designed to attract skilled migrants as individuals with capacities to be utilised to improve Australia's economic performance. In contrast, other family members are designated as dependants, rather than considered as possessing the capabilities that could contribute to their new communities. Analyses of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data suggest that skilled migrants, particularly secondary applicants (mostly but not always women), may be more likely to be unemployed or inappropriately employed, highlighting the challenges that migrants, especially secondary applicants, face in finding employment that utilises their skills and qualifications (ABS 2009b, 2010b).

Concurrent with Australia's skilled migration program is a policy aim of social inclusion, defined as the provision of opportunities to all to enable them to participate and succeed in society, with education a key means to achieve such ends (North, Ferrier & Long 2010a, 2010b). Policy assumes that the high levels of education and work experience of skilled migrants preclude the possibility of exclusion. However, if these levels of education and experience do not permit fair access to the Australian labour market, exclusion may result. Research (albeit predominantly quantitative) to date (see for example, Boese & Phillips 2011; Colic-Peisker 2011; Cully 2010; Griffiths, Laffan & Jones 2010; Hawthorne 2008; Hugo 2008; Lovat et al. 2011; Massey & Parr 2012; Syed 2008) suggests that particular groups of skilled migrants may be excluded, but less attention has been given in this research to understanding the processes giving rise to this state of affairs. This project sought to fill this gap by investigating the processes which limit participation for some skilled migrant women, thereby leading to their exclusion.

The main contribution of this project is the finding that, in order to achieve social inclusion for new skilled migrants, policies need to acknowledge additional indicators of disadvantage and support the engagement and contribution of migrants to the communities in which they settle. While such policies exist for humanitarian migrants, there are few settlement support policies for skilled migrants and their families. The rising numbers of migrants moving to the regional areas of Australia encounter limited labour markets, with few strategies in place to support their transition. The experiences of skilled migrant women also challenge conventional understandings of social inclusion. Their education and proficiency in English may seem to guarantee a smooth transition into the labour market, but non-recognition of their skills or lack of adequate family support for domestic responsibilities can work against their securing professional-level employment, equivalent to that held pre-migration.

The location for the study was a regional area in Victoria — the Greater Shepparton region — which was selected to reflect an area that has seen expanding numbers of migrants; it is also an area that is not experiencing the boom in employment opportunities associated with the mining and extraction

industries or a lifestyle sea change. In this regard, the area may be comparable with other so-called 'inland cities', which expanded significantly in the 1970s, but now are generally growing at a slower rate than capital cities, their satellites and coastal cities (Daley & Lancy 2011). Arguably, understanding the process of skilled migration and the role of vocational education and training in promoting social inclusion in inland cities in regional Australia is important: '4.1 million Australians — nearly one person in five — still live in these smaller regional towns and rural areas' (Daley & Lancy 2011, p.14). The opportunities migrants are able to access, the difficulties they encounter and the processes that contribute to or work against social inclusion may well be different from those in the more rapidly expanding areas of Australia.

The project employed a qualitative research methodology, whose aims were to explore and understand the settlement experiences of migrants, particularly skilled migrant women, who arrived in Australia as principal or secondary applicants through skilled migration and humanitarian settlement programs as well as via other relevant visa categories. More than 70 interviews were conducted with skilled migrant participants and members of a range of groups that work with migrants in the regional centre of Greater Shepparton in Victoria. These groups are education and training organisations; employers and employer groups; departments and agencies across government levels; non-government organisations and community groups.

The interviews revealed that settlement and securing employment commensurate with skill levels and previous employment histories are particularly difficult for secondary applicants and those skilled migrants who have broken with their previous social and employment networks. Since the overwhelming majority of secondary applicants are women, the effects of skilled migration are gendered, although our findings noted that male secondary applicants sometimes also experienced difficulties in securing appropriate employment. The research found that settlement is a complex and difficult process. A range of factors can facilitate settlement and thereby assist social inclusion, or can hinder settlement, leading to outcomes that may contribute to exclusion for these women and their families. The study found that migration should be considered as a family enterprise rather than an individual one, and it has identified a number of strategies and practices likely to enhance settlement and thus contribute to inclusion.

With regard to how vocational education and training can promote social inclusion, the research found that increasing numbers of skilled migrants in the Greater Shepparton region have education and training needs not yet recognised by the VET sector. The findings suggest that:

- There is a gap in provision, with no education and training aimed specifically at skilled migrants.

- Skilled migrants do not consider vocational education and training as offering suitable education and training opportunities.

- Education and training provision in the region lacks coordination and qualification pathways.

- Systemic measures are not in place to consider the ways by which local educational and training institutions can meet the needs of skilled migrants.

Nevertheless, our findings identified some good practices that enhanced individual migrants' employability skills in both the VET and university organisations. These practices involved support in relation to job seeking and local work experience and to understanding specific professional networks and labour markets. In particular, within the TAFE (technical and further education) sector, a strategy of encouraging skilled migrants to participate in the organised volunteer programs developed for humanitarian migrants facilitated the skilled migrants' transition into a new field of professional employment in human services and human development.

In terms of social inclusion, the findings suggest that, as well as focusing on the personal development of migrants, institutions and organisations should analyse the comprehensiveness of their practices for including migrants as employees, as clients and as members of the wider civil society in which the institutions and organisations operate. The research has identified that it is not always straightforward for migrants to move into employment or housing because of the discriminatory practices of some organisations. In addition, the conclusions highlight that the migration experience needs to be considered in a holistic way. Aspects other than employment contribute positively to the experience for families: greater safety and security and better opportunities, particularly for children, are highly valued and contribute to a feeling of belonging to Australia.

The potential for social inclusion is increased for skilled migrants when migrants have opportunities to:

- maintain and develop their professional networks and social capital

- acquire Australian work experience, including through volunteering

- move into paid employment with the potential to use their skills and knowledge

- feel safe and secure, and imagine a better future for their children.

Finally, this executive summary concludes by identifying the policy implications for stakeholders seeking to develop more socially inclusive practices in regional communities. The following suggestions are made for each stakeholder group who participated in the research:

Skilled migrants could:

- recognise the need to become familiar with the Australian labour market

- investigate the opportunities available, which may be in unfamiliar industries or sectors

- consider which skills are generic in terms of the labour market

- adopt an open approach to building Australian experience.

Educational institutions could:

- identify skilled migrants as a target group in regional areas

- develop progression opportunities between vocational education and training and universities in ways which articulate to local labour market needs

- develop relevant programs for skilled migrants, for example, high-level job-search courses, local labour market intelligence and employability skills

- provide independent career advice and information about educational pathways and which will achieve the desired outcome

- provide for the recognition of prior learning and experience.

Employers could:

- give greater recognition to overseas experience

- ensure selection processes are open and accessible

- provide more systematic settlement assistance and which acknowledges migrants' families

- value diversity by employing migrants locally, particularly secondary applicants

- recognise the skills and attributes that migrants possess and utilise these to increase the stock of knowledge, thereby strengthening organisations.

Supporting organisations could:

- publicise their ability to provide local information to skilled migrants

- ensure that local networks offer welcoming opportunities to enable migrants from different backgrounds to connect to others, as well as to the wider community

- put in place governance arrangements that reflect community diversity.

Government:

- Local government could:

  - enhance the accessibility of selection criteria and application processes for employment within the sector.

- State government could:

  - reconsider the role of skilled migration coordinators in regional areas on the basis that they provide independent advice for employers and prospective migrants

  - consider the provision of advice on overseas qualifications and the ways these qualifications can be utilised in the labour market.

- Federal government could:

  - develop skilled migration policies with an awareness that resources may need to be provided to assist families.

Introduction

Rationale for the research

Education and training are seen as key drivers for economic activity and social improvements and form a fundamental plank of economic and social policy at the level of national governments and with international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and World Bank (Farrell & Fenwick 2007). The growth of a global knowledge economy has witnessed the development of a mobile workforce of skilled migrants, including highly qualified knowledge workers from countries of the emerging regions, for instance, India, China and Southeast Asia, who emigrate seeking better career opportunities and living conditions in developed countries such as the United States, the European Union and Canada.

Australia is one of a number of countries that has capitalised on these migration aspirations, recruiting large numbers of skilled migrants to satisfy real or perceived skills shortages across industries and occupations. An important aim of the migration program is economic: to 'fill gaps in the labour market where they currently exist' (Phillips & Spinks 2012, p.16). Changes to Australia's migration policies since 1996 reflect this trend. From a migration program that favoured family reunion and permanent settlement, Australia has shifted to a marked preference for skilled migrants in both permanent and temporary visa categories, with most of the growth in the temporary categories. A corollary of this focus is a shrinking intake of family migrants and, until recent policy announcements, a static level of humanitarian migration. A significant number of skilled migrants now enter Australia (see figure 2 and table 1) and it is expected that they will participate in the labour force and contribute to economic growth. This migration policy positions such skilled migrants as individuals with skills and capacities to be utilised to improve Australia's economic performance, which means that other family members, including spouses, who may be as well qualified as the skilled migrant, are designated as dependants rather than as people with the capabilities to contribute to their new communities.

Changes to the visa categories in 1996 mean that regions and regional employers who require certain skills or occupations considered in short supply are able to recruit overseas-trained workers on employer or regionally sponsored visas for defined periods of up to four years (see Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements 2006). While most migrants choose to settle in metropolitan areas, from 2001 to 2006, about 96 000, or 11.2%, of migrants settled in areas outside metropolitan regions (ABS 2006). Many regional organisations, such as area health services, are reliant on overseas-trained professionals to provide basic services to the communities they serve (Hugo 2008). And while the recent Scanlon Foundation report on social cohesion found that the most positive attitudes towards migrants according to visa category were for those admitted on the basis of skill, on the negative side, the lowest level of agreement in regard to the value of immigration was amongst residents outside capital cities (Markus 2010, p.31). Recent commentary by the newly formed Association of Skilled Migrants in Australia (ASMA; Rance 2011) supports other evidence that suggests that skilled migrants, particularly secondary applicants (mostly, but not always women), may be more likely to be unemployed or inappropriately employed, highlighting the challenges migrants face in finding employment that utilises their skills and qualifications (see for example ABS 2009b, 2010b; Hugo 2008). This represents a productivity loss for the communities in which migrants settle and may contribute to migrants' social exclusion.

In the light of this policy push to encourage skilled migration to regional Australia and the evidence that many skilled migrants are employed in essential professional and trade services in regional areas while others, especially their family members, are experiencing discrimination and under-employment, the *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training* project was developed to investigate how this sector might contribute towards socially inclusive outcomes for migrant women and their families in regional Australia. The location for the study was a regional area in Victoria, the Greater Shepparton region, which was selected to reflect an area that has seen the arrival of an expanding number of migrants; it is also an area that is not experiencing the boom in employment opportunities associated with the mining and extraction industries or the lifestyle sea change. In this regard, the area may be comparable with other so-called 'inland cities', which expanded significantly in the 1970s, but are now generally growing at a slower rate than capital cities, their satellites and coastal cities (Daley & Lancy 2011). Arguably, understanding the process of skilled migration and the role of vocational education and training in promoting social inclusion in 'inland cities' in regional Australia is important because '4.1 million Australians — nearly one person in five — still live in these smaller regional towns and rural areas' (Daley & Lancy 2011, p.14). The opportunities that migrants are able to access, the difficulties they encounter and the processes that contribute to or work against social inclusion may well be different from those in the more rapidly expanding areas of Australia.

Definitions of social inclusion

Investigating whether the practices and outcomes for skilled migrant women in regional Australia are socially inclusive or exclusive requires an understanding of the term 'social inclusion'. A set of principles designed to achieve social inclusion has been adopted by governments, the aim being to enable the full participation of all people in Australian society (North, Ferrier & Long 2010b). 'Social inclusion' in this context is focused on alleviating disadvantage and its effects, which can lead to social exclusion. Education and training, particularly in the VET sector, are perceived as one instrument to enhance the prospects for social inclusion (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2011).

The approach to social inclusion adopted in this report is that of North, Ferrier and Long (2010a), who draw a distinction between disadvantage and social exclusion, arguing that 'social exclusion can be understood as a process (or a set of processes), while disadvantage denotes a state or a condition' (p.45). Conceptualised in this way, the two can be examined separately, 'to provide a different perspective on the same issues' (p.45). While there is some evidence to suggest that particular groups of skilled migrants may be excluded, less attention has been given in research to understanding the processes giving rise to this state of affairs. This research has sought to fill this gap by investigating the processes which limit participation for some members of Australian society, thereby leading to their exclusion. The aim of social inclusion, by contrast, is the provision of opportunities to all, opportunities to allow them to participate and succeed in society, with education a key means to achieving these ends. For education and training, this means that 'all people have fair education opportunities and access to the services and supports they need for successful participation in, and good outcomes from, education and training' (North, Ferrier & Long 2010a, p.45). A requirement for achieving inclusive outcomes is the identification of both the 'active' and 'passive processes' that continue to reproduce exclusion (North, Ferrier & Long 2010a, p.45).

Skilled migrants are not considered by government as being at risk of exclusion (Boese & Phillips 2011). When social exclusion is construed as a state of disadvantage, with a key indicator of such disadvantage being a low level of education, policy assumes that the high levels of education and work experience possessed by skilled migrants preclude the possibility of exclusion. However, if these

levels of education and experience do not permit fair access to the Australian labour market, exclusion may result. In particular, the experience of skilled migrant women challenges conventional understandings of social inclusion. Their education and proficiency in English may seem to guarantee their smooth transition into the labour market, but non-recognition of their skills or the lack of adequate family support for domestic responsibilities may work against them. In regional areas, there may be a mismatch between their existing skills and the available job opportunities. Alternatively, they may be employed but in positions which underutilise their skills.

In order to achieve social inclusion for new skilled migrants, policies may be required which acknowledge additional indicators of disadvantage and which contribute to supporting the engagement and contribution of migrants to the communities in which they settle. While such policies exist for humanitarian migrants, there are few settlement support policies for skilled migrants and their families. Migrants to regional areas of Australia, whose numbers are rising, face limited labour markets, with few strategies in place to support their transition. Research to date (ABS 2009b), which has been predominantly quantitative, has demonstrated that that there are higher numbers of skilled female migrants unable to obtain suitable employment. However, the processes through which these women may be excluded from full participation remain difficult to identify.

For the reasons outlined above, we employ a qualitative research methodology for our project to explore the experiences of migrants in a regional area, the opportunities they are able to access, the difficulties they encounter and the processes that contribute to or work against social inclusion.

Definition of 'region'

There are different understandings of what constitutes a 'region' in Australia. In the context of this report, 'regional' is used to refer to areas outside the major capital cities and their peri-urban perimeters. However, in terms of regional migration, the capital cities in some states and territories have been denoted regional or have been excluded from this definition at different times, with the capital cities of Victoria and South Australia, for instance, sometimes considered to be regional for the purposes of migration schemes (Withers & Powall 2003).

The structure of the report

The research literature reviewed provides the theoretical framework for the development of the research design and foregrounds issues of significance in relation to the research questions. Relevant literature from a range of sources is considered from the perspectives of gender, migration theory, policy settings and geographic location.

The chapter, 'Research methodology and design', outlines the qualitative approach of the research design and the methods employed to collect and analyse data, as well as setting out relevant contextual information about the selected case study area.

In the chapter 'Findings', the analysis is framed by the conceptualisation of the migratory journey. Developed from the literature reviewed, this theoretical framework is employed to interpret the data to highlight the processes which enhance or hinder the migratory transition, including the role of vocational education and training.

In the final chapter, some implications for policy are presented, along with concluding thoughts.

Literature and contextual review

Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training sits at the intersection of a number of different fields of research and policy, including social inclusion, migration, policy, education and training, and regional development. The literature that focuses specifically in this field on skilled women and their migration is limited and we seek to understand better the conditions for women migrants through an analysis of related literatures. The review has two purposes: on the one hand, it discusses the literature and concepts that inform the design and analysis for this research; and on the other, it brings together current knowledge and understandings about skilled migration and the policy context in Australia in order to provide a context for appreciating the contribution of this new research in regional Australia.

Women and migration

Women's experiences as migrants, as are men's, are shaped profoundly by their gender. Gender is a factor in access to education and work in many migrants' home countries. Their migration status is often as the dependant of a male applicant, which means that their skills and existing knowledge may not be recognised in their new country (Iredale 2005). However, the existing literature on migratory flows tends to tell a story of male migration: 'women (dis)appear' or they are relegated to the family reunion flow (Kofman & Raghuram 2005, p.149). As a consequence, the aspirations, needs and outcomes for migrant women in regard to work and learning are frequently under-recognised in skilled migration policies in many countries (Curran et al. 2006; McCall 2000).

Research into the settlement experiences of skilled migrants, particularly women, in regional Australia is sparse, although what there is suggests the lower participation of skilled migrant women in the labour force compared with the Australian-born or those migrants from countries where English is the main language (Colic-Peisker 2011; Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012b). The underutilisation of these migrant women's skills represents a productivity loss for regional communities, which may result in the skilled migrant and his or her family leaving the region (Hugo & Harris 2011).

Migratory journeys

The ideas from the literature we have drawn on to inform the development of the research design conceptualise the migratory journey as a process that can be enhanced for individuals and their families by the:

- policy frameworks, particularly the visa categories through which they enter

- geographies of their new location and the opportunities available

- way migrant households negotiate their new contexts and learn and build new capabilities

- inclusionary practices employed by the range of organisations and networks within this location.

Specifically, we have drawn on the international migration research literature that has focused on the study of social networks. Families are often seen as the starting point for examining individual decision-making because they mediate between a micro-level understanding of how individuals and groups are connected to specific social networks over space and time and the structural factors that affect individual decisions (Fawcett 1989; Hagan 1998; Portes 1997; Portes & Böröcz 1989). The

research literature stresses the need to regard the process of migration and settlement as a two-way relationship between individual migrants and the inclusionary or exclusionary practices of various gatekeepers, such as employers and professional agencies (Castles et al. 2002). For example, in the context of highly skilled refugees in the labour market in the United Kingdom, Bloch (2008) has argued that focusing alone on building individuals' capacity to integrate in a new country through employment by paying attention to job-seeking strategies, language training and local work experience and information is important, but the role of discrimination and structural barriers should not be neglected.

Australian migration policy assumes that skilled migrants' transition into the workforce and the broader society is smooth because of their high levels of education, skills and their English language proficiency. However, for many migrant families, the transition is not as smooth as expected. In our conceptualisation of a migratory journey and the role of social networks to characterise the migratory process as both a personal and structural transition, the transition can be envisaged as ranging from 'untroubled' to 'risky'. An 'untroubled' transition implies a smoother process to settlement, while 'risky' may mean that an individual and his or her family must take more risks than they had imagined. We do not consider these terms as implying judgments on the happiness or personal satisfaction of individual migrants about the outcome of the migratory journey, but view these terms as illustrating systemic features which assist or hinder the migration trajectory. Migrants themselves might tend to think in terms of their individual happiness and satisfaction and might describe the experiences we are conceptualising as a risky transition in negative terms; however, other migrants may be very positive about the outcomes of this journey even though they have undertaken risks in the migratory process. Whether or not migrants' perceptions are positive or negative does not diminish the fact that for some the journey is risky, while for others who are more socially, ethnically and economically well positioned to make a successful transition, the journey is less troubled. Thinking of settlement in terms of untroubled or risky trajectories, or on a continuum between these, helps bring into focus significant elements in the settlement process that can work against the successful transitions envisaged in policy.

The terms 'untroubled trajectory' and 'risky trajectory' draw on the concepts of 'normal biography' and 'choice biography' from the literature on the transition from school to higher education (for example, Ball et al. 2002, p.57, citing Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Ball 2006). These writers draw on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital, which is a term to describe 'accumulated labor' or the powerful resources that, when held privately, enable some people or groups of people to influence the context or structures in which they are operating so that they can maintain or improve their social position. For Bourdieu, people's accumulation and control of different forms of capital are 'what makes the games of society — not least the economic game — something other than simple games of chance' (Bourdieu 1986, p.241). For Bourdieu, the different forms of capital include:

- economic capital, comprising people's varying financial resources, which have become institutionalised in the form of property rights or their means to create more wealth

- cultural capital, comprising a hierarchy of different dispositions, objectified in specific cultural goods, and institutionalised in an unequal distribution of qualifications and skills obtained by families' differential investments in the education of their members; this definition is in contrast to human capital theorists' understanding of how qualifications and skills are the rational and meritocratic outcome or rewards from public and individual investment in education and training

- social capital, comprising people's networks of social obligations and the resources these give rise to, which can enable people to accumulate more economic capital and develop cultural capital.

The operation of these forms of capital in terms of higher education, for instance, has been characterised as follows. In a 'normal biography' the progression to higher education is an expected and smooth transition when it is enabled by the capital of family and class. For students who lack the same access to the powerful forms of economic capital to create more wealth, to cultural capital, which takes for granted the value of a higher education, and to social capital, which ensures access to networks that facilitate progression to higher education, the negotiation of social structures from a weaker position against others leads to a higher risk of failure. These concepts also illuminate facets of the migratory transition. Migrants with the capital to negotiate the regulatory process and to build networks in the new context, particularly those linked to their profession, are more likely to have an untroubled progression, one that mirrors a 'normal biography'. For others, the migratory experience may be much riskier, leading to downward mobility, a loss of professional status and a foreclosing of future possibilities. Their status as skilled migrants in the policy frameworks encouraging migration works to assure migrant households that their transition will be smooth, but the nature of the process for some families is riskier than the language of policy would suggest.

The terms 'untroubled' and 'risky' work to depict the factors in the individual's migration narrative which interact with the different levels of the migratory system and advance or limit their inclusion more broadly. Figure 1 represents the processes that members of a migrant family must navigate. These are mediated by gender, class and race, but individual family members negotiate these in different ways rather than being determined by them.

Figure 1   Migratory journeys

Migratory journeys
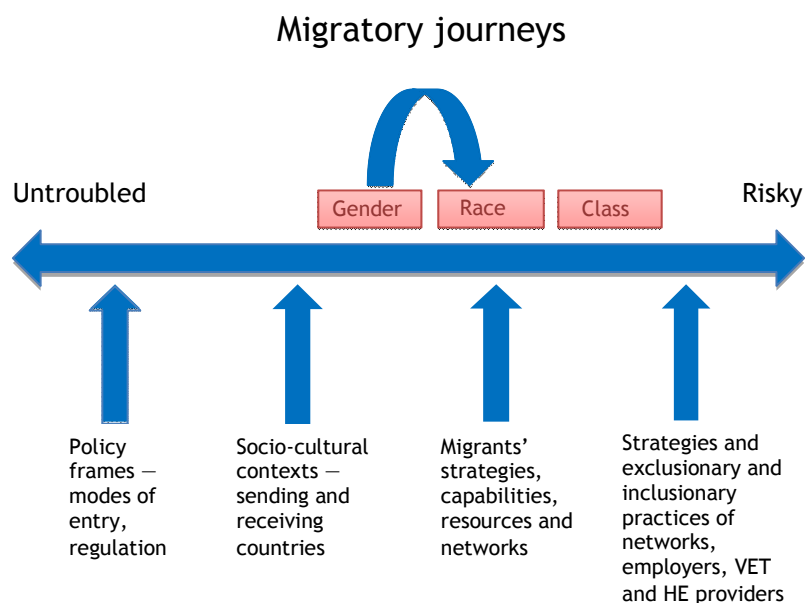
Through the research, we sought to understand the trajectories of individual migrant participants in relation to the different factors (set out in figure 1) and the ways by which these were manifested in the regional location:

- migration policy: the policy frameworks and the modes of entry they permit and the regulations which apply

- the context of regional migration: the socio-cultural contexts and opportunities of sending and receiving countries

- migrant capabilities: migrant households' own strategies, their resources and networks, which facilitate or hinder their pathways to employment and inclusion

- practices for inclusion: the strategies and the exclusionary or inclusionary practices of networks, employers, VET and higher education (HE) providers.

Policy frameworks

In important ways policy settings structure the options available to individuals and their families, for instance, through the regulations permitting flows of international migration from particular countries and the visa categories through which migrants enter Australia. Below, we provide a brief summary of Australian visa categories and an overview of regional migration policy.

Summary of Australian visa categories

Migrants may enter Australia on a permanent or temporary visa. Figure 2 summarises the visa categories as at 30 June 2012.

Figure 2   Categories of visas
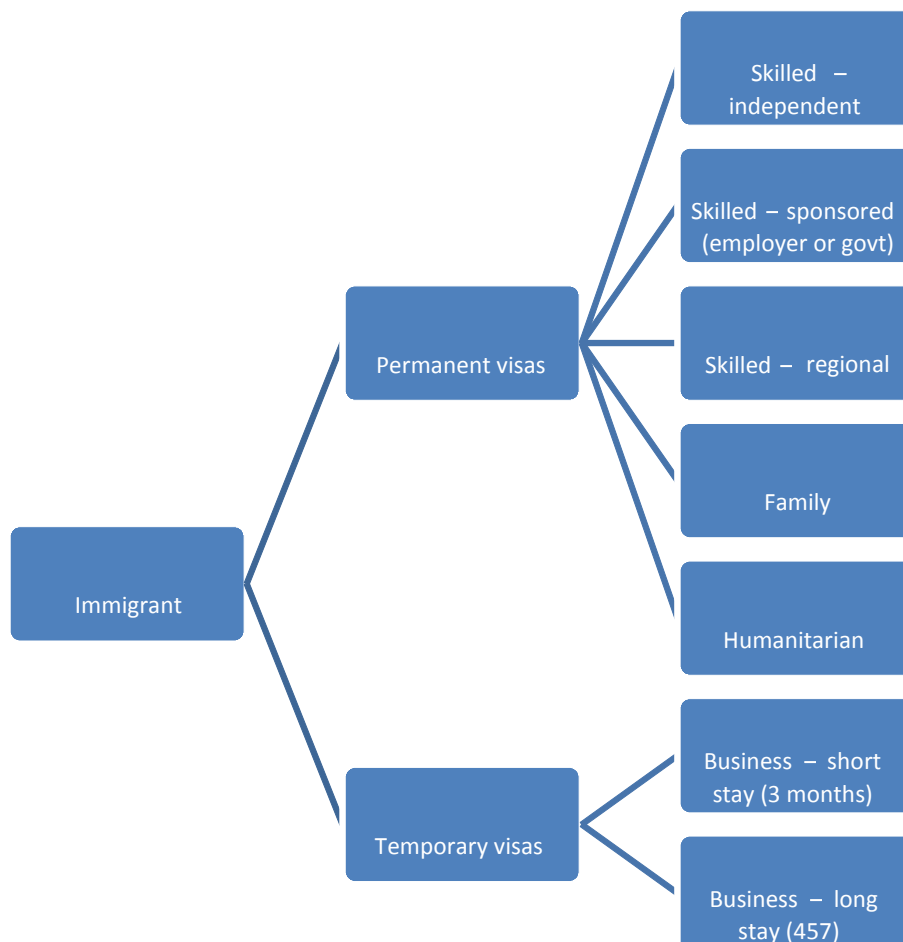
Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2010).

Skilled migrants who gain permanent residence can be accepted on an independent basis, according to their skills, age and English language ability, or through sponsorship. They may also bring their immediate families with them. Migrants can be sponsored by an Australian employer; by a state or territory government; or under a Labour Agreements program. For skilled migrants in any of the above categories, their occupation must be listed on Australia's Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List as

skills that Australia requires (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012a). The Temporary Work (skilled) (subclass 457) visa, known formerly as the Business Long Stay, allows the visa holder to work in Australia for up to four years (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012a). Table 1 shows the numbers of visas granted under the main permanent and temporary categories between 2005 and 2011.

Table 1   Visa grants 2005–06 to 2010–11

Visa type		2005–06	2007–08	2010–11
Temporary Business (Long stay) 457s		71 737	111 019	90 145
	Skill stream	97 340	108 540	113 725
Permanent	Family stream	45 290	49 870	54 543
	Humanitarian	14 140	13 014	13 799

Source: Phillips & Spinks (2012).

Migration policy and changing opportunities

The settler migration program in Australia is structured around two primary categories, the skilled stream and the family stream, with a smaller humanitarian program. Skilled migrants and temporary migrants form the bulk of permanent settlers, 67% in the 2010–11 financial year, excluding humanitarian migrants (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012b). Skilled migrants are considered as the main applicants, while their partners are classified as secondary applicants and thus positioned as dependants. Australian skilled migration policy categorises individuals, whether male or female, as possessing skills that will contribute to the economy. This is a policy which is apparently gender-neutral in principle but in practice is less so. Males form the majority of principal applicants in the General Skilled Migration category (ABS 2009b; Hawthorne 2011). While the number of women who are primary visa holders under skilled migrant categories is growing in Australia, the majority of skilled migrant women arrive as dependants or secondary applicants under the skill stream. These women are often well educated and skilled in their own right (ABS 2009b).

Since 1996, through a variety of regional migration schemes, policy has attempted to encourage the settlement of both temporary and permanent migrants away from the major capital cities, where the majority settle, and into the regional areas of Australia (Cully 2010). The aim is to fill perceived skills shortages, to contribute to economic development in areas affected by population decline and to lessen the demands on major cities (Hugo 2008). Regional migrants can be sponsored either by an employer under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme or by a state or territory government under the State Specific and Regional Migration initiative (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2011).

The numbers of migrants entering the regions under these schemes have increased substantially. In 2003–04, 2183 visas were granted under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme. In 2011–12, over 16 000 visas were granted (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012b). Another 22 247 migrants entered under other State Specific and Regional Migration schemes, which include both permanent and temporary categories (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012b). Since 2004, planned regional settlement of small numbers of humanitarian migrants has also been undertaken by the federal government (McDonald et al. 2008). In 2011, migrants to regions outside the capital cities comprised 22% of all migrants, excluding the humanitarian stream, compared with 2% in 1997–98 (Phillips & Spinks 2012, citing Hugo 2010). While some of these migrants enter on temporary visas, temporary migration has increasingly become a pathway to permanent residency. Of the migrants settling in regional areas in 2009–10, 73% arrived originally on 457 temporary visas (Cully 2010).

Visa categories play an important part in restricting options or making available different opportunities for migrants. The relationship between migrants and employment opportunities and the services and support of different governmental and non-governmental organisations, including education and training, is generally constrained by migrants' skilled status. However, given the importance of access to education for enabling social inclusion, it is of concern that difficulties have been identified for people living in regional locations and those from language backgrounds other than English, especially women, in accessing vocational education and training suitable to their needs (Considine, Watson & Hall 2005).

The context of regional migration

The research literature has suggested the need to look at the political, social and economic contexts in which migration and settlement decisions are made, in both the sending and receiving countries, and the role of mediating networks and institutions (Castles et al. 2002). Given this, we now review research about regional migration in Australia and identify what is known from existing population data analysis and government reports on regional migration. We begin with a discussion of employment, because the ability to gain employment is a vital factor in enabling a smoother transition to settlement, and when employment is related to the skill level of a new migrant it contributes to a sense of belonging (Ager & Strang 2008; Syed 2008). We follow this review by examining education and training, as this is the key aspect that may shape migrants' experiences and contribute to their settlement in a new location. For example, research in the United Kingdom has shown the value of informal learning structured through networks of associations: it can provide another kind of connection with migrant women's experiences and ways into gaining a sense of belonging (Jackson 2010). Yet the knowledge and credentials migrant women bring are not always recognised in ways that enable them to access suitable work in their new country. For example, research in Canada has shown that skilled migrant women are rendered 'valuable knowledge workers prior to migration, but in need of remediation post-migration' (Gibb & Hamdon 2010, p.195).

Employment

Workforce participation by skilled migrants is reported to be relatively high following their arrival in Australia. An investigation of employment outcomes for skilled migrants in 2005 and 2006 suggested that more than 90% of principal applicants were employed. In regional areas, 97% of principal applicants were participating in the labour market (Australian Government 2007), particularly those who were employer-sponsored (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2012b).

However, migration can cause a significant rupture in previous careers. New migrants may find it more difficult to gain employment at their skill level than those who have been resident for a number of years, despite the fact that most are better educated than the Australian-born (Massey & Parr 2012). The recognition of overseas qualifications and experience is often difficult to achieve and local work experience is valued over that gained overseas, which is routinely dismissed (Foroutan 2008; Hawthorne 2008; Syed 2008). Skilled migrants may have high-level skills and experience prior to migration but following migration, they are treated as new entrants to the workforce; that is, 'novice workers', as Australian work experience is highly valued (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012, p.63). This is consistent with the findings reported by the ABS (2010a), where, of those new migrants who found it difficult to gain employment, 64% pointed to the importance of local work experience and a reference.

Women are more at risk in the job market, with newer arrivals twice as likely to be unemployed than those born in Australia (Massey & Parr 2012; Ressia 2010). The limited data suggest that secondary applicants are more likely to be unemployed than primary applicants and, if employed, take longer to find employment: nearly 20% of secondary applicants take over 12 months to find employment (ABS 2009a). Secondary applicants are almost twice as likely as primary applicants to be employed part-time and secondary applicants employed part-time are more likely to be female (ABS 2010b). If employed, secondary applicants can experience significant downward mobility (Hawthorne 2008; Ho 2006). Gaining suitable employment in regional areas, where there may be limited work and career options can be difficult for secondary visa applicants, in addition to the issues associated with the recognition of their skills, qualifications and prior work experience (Hawthorne 2008; New South Wales Government 2008). Opportunities for education for the purpose of gaining accredited Australian qualifications are not always as accessible in regional areas and, if accessible, may not be affordable, depending on visa category (Hugo & Harris 2011; Ressia 2010).

The retention of skilled migrants in regional areas cannot be taken for granted (Hugo 2008; Miles et al. 2006) and depends largely on the availability of employment opportunities, including for partners (Griffiths, Laffan & Jones 2010; Hugo, Khoo & McDonald 2006) and other support services, in particular, housing (Griffiths, Laffan & Jones 2010; Hugo 2008).

Education and training

For skilled migrants in the regions, vocational education and training may be one avenue through which they can gain further education that is directly relevant to the Australian context. Vocational education and training is promoted as central to achieving higher levels of skills for workers and to enabling the participation of those not in the workforce, including women. Until recently, VET in Australia privileged male-dominated industries, a reflection of the highly gendered labour force with its historical and cultural underpinnings (Butler & Ferrier 2000). By 2006, while women were participating more in education and training than previously, their participation tended to be in already feminised sectors, continuing the gender segregation which shapes the Australian workforce. Despite this, with women comprising 48% of all VET students (Butler & Ferrier 2006, p.581), such access means that at a policy level, the 'problem' of women in vocational education and training has been deemed fixed (Butler & Ferrier 2006). The argument that women 'as a whole … are doing well' relies on the categorisation of women into one homogeneous group, based on broad non-disaggregated statistics that focus on total enrolment numbers. This has led to 'self-congratulatory gender neutrality', which disguises the impact and issues for specific groups of women in vocational education and training (Butler & Ferrier 2006, p.581). Skilled migrant women form one such specific group for whom the VET sector may not be encouraging participation, or participation in programs relevant to their existing skills and educational level.

The few studies in Australia that explore the experiences of skilled migrant women and their participation in learning and in the workforce in regional areas have identified several processes which work against the successful inclusion of skilled migrants in the education and training sector. Visa categories and their entitlements or restrictions are influential (for example, Dabic 2008; Devos 2011), as are the impacts of funding structures on the VET sector. Funding for courses can be tailored towards benefits' claimants who are obliged to participate in education and training to enhance their employability (Townsend 2008), but skilled migrants are unlikely to fall within this target group even though they may struggle to find appropriate employment. Few studies in Australia have investigated the positive impacts of participation in vocational education and training and the ways such study can assist some migrant women to gain employment (Saffu 2010).

Migrant capabilities

The emerging research on capability as a framework draws attention to the opportunities, skills and resources, or 'capabilities', that migrants and migrant families bring with them to their new location, as well as their 'freedoms' to attain those things they value (Sen 1992). If social inclusion, as defined by North, Ferrier and Long (2010a), rests on the ability to access public services, such as education and training in one's local area, and to participate fully in social and economic life through employment and engagement in civil society, the corollary is that social inclusion depends on a person's relationship with the local area and what Sen calls one's freedom or capability for movement within this area (Gasper & Truong 2010, p.340). Crucially, the capabilities approach to human development and human rights identifies not only the different abilities people have for exercising their freedom to 'move' around and participate in different activities within their locality and beyond, but also the freedom to value aspects other than the standard economic measures. Finally, in relation to the capabilities approach, the experience of transnational movement may in itself create transnational communities and social networks, which enhance the capabilities of people to have greater freedom to flourish in new contexts. The experience of migration may act as a form of informal learning in ways that are similar to how Nussbaum (2000) values education for its all-round impact on learners' capabilities.

Networks of support

Transnational migration calls into question migrants' relationship to their departure point and their new location, how they might view their freedom for local movement and how other locals might support or hinder their freedom. A full discussion of the transnational theoretical turn[1] as an aspect of the effects of globalisation in migration theory goes beyond the needs of this literature review. The main relevance of this literature is in aiding recognition of the proliferation of transnational communities and the complex ways by which migrants may continue to interact intensely with people in a number of countries across the world in retaining their pre-migration social networks or in forming new networks post-migration. Such thinking undermines simple binary understandings of cross-border movements; instead, it results in acknowledging that, for migrants, the concept of belonging and identity are often complex and multiple, embracing different localities and people and cultures in the local/global. In turn, the complex relationship that migrants may have with communities beyond their locale may affect the way that others in the new locations view the opportunities, capabilities and freedoms that should be made available to migrants. In other words, the complex identifications of migrants and the actions of other people both pre- and post-migration can affect the networks of support available to migrants.

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[1] In the era of globalisation, new forms of temporary as well as permanent migration have been facilitated by new communication technologies and easy transport links. Under these new conditions, migrants may maintain close links with friends, family and professional colleagues worldwide and form new linkages between sending and receiving countries. Castles and Miller (2009, p.30) contend that these new forms of migration have led to 'the emergence of a new body of theory on *transnationalism and transnational communities*', premised on the argument that the nation-state is a less relevant concept and organising principle for understanding migration and migrants' identities. However, the extent to which the nation-state has influence over migration and transnational communities and trans-migrants remains empirical questions to be investigated further.

For new migrants to Australia, networks of support are vital to the settlement process (Hugo 2008). Yet, in regional areas of Australia, institutional support for skilled migrants and their families appears to be very limited, with an analysis of ABS data finding that skilled migrants rely on their own resources. Informal networks of family and friends provide the most significant support and help to build a sense of connection between recent arrivals and their new location. They also provide information about settlement as well as crucial emotional support (ABS 2012b) and may assist new migrants to find employment (ABS 2010a). Institutional support is most often provided by religious and cultural groups — spiritual, or for maintaining traditional cultural practices for specific communities — and these groups have the capacity to create links to the wider community (ABS 2012b; Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005). More than 50% of recent migrants in a study by the ABS (2012b) were involved in such groups. Active involvement in more purposeful groups, such as in sporting clubs and children's schools, is something some migrants engage with and offers another avenue to enable migrants to engage with others in the community and to construct new connections (ABS 2012b).

Regional communities which support and value cultural diversity and develop strategies to assist inclusion are more likely to gain the economic and social benefits which flow from such inclusion (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005). However, while encouraging migrants to build networks of support is important for developing a sense of belonging (Griffiths, Sigona & Zetter 2005), such networks are not sufficient to facilitate integration and may not provide pathways to employment (Lewis 2010; Mahuteau & Junankar 2008). This is particularly concerning in relation to Ager and Strang's (2008) framework of refugee integration, which views employment as a key indicator of integration and social inclusion.

Practices for inclusion

In this final section of the literature review we discuss existing practices for social inclusion in order to identify some criteria for assessing the practices found in the case study. Within regional locations, the literature suggests that a range of inclusionary practices supports migrant households. Strategies established by organisations that welcome new arrivals signify openness but also help to orient newcomers and point them in the direction of social supports which can be of assistance (Griffiths, Laffan & Jones 2010). The existence of employment opportunities is vital but so too are fair and accessible employment recruitment and selection processes. Gaining suitable work that utilises migrants' qualifications, skills and experience is an important foundation on which to build inclusion (Colic-Peisker 2011). Enhancing access to services through the provision of interpreters, for instance, enables new arrivals to meet their needs. Enabling migrants to access existing networks that are not specifically targeted to ethnic communities assists in the development of ties between new arrivals and the wider community (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005). Accepting cultural diversity and valuing the resources that migrant households bring to new locations in terms of entrepreneurialism and vibrancy contribute further to inclusion (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005).

The obverse of these inclusionary practices is those that work to exclude new migrants from achieving a sense of belonging in their new location. Boese and Phillips (2011, p.194) note 'the silence of the social inclusion agenda on racism'. Discrimination in terms of access to employment, services, affordable housing, and education and training significantly erode the opportunities for migrants to become part of the community, which may result in their exclusion as they become relegated to lower-skilled or contingent work because of their difference (Griffiths, Laffan & Jones 2010; Hawthorne 2008). Within the job market, migrant job seekers can be discriminated against on the basis of their religion, their English language skills or their accent, and their expression of cultural or

religious beliefs through their adoption of specific attire (Lovat et al. 2011). Education and training institutions may focus on language provision for particular groups who attract specific funding rather than consider the needs of other groups such as skilled migrants (Townsend 2008). Their requirements may be for more advanced programs to create a bridge to local employment practices rather than for lower-level programs aimed at specific groups (Lovat et al. 2011). Such exclusion represents a loss for migrant households but also for the wider regional community, which is deprived of the benefits that migrants can bring in terms of diversity, new economic opportunities and improved services for other residents (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005). The costs of such exclusionary practices can be high for both migrant households and regional communities.

Initiatives taken by local communities are powerful in developing structures and supporting frameworks for migrants (Nsubuga-Kyobe & Hazelman 2007). Cultural festivals and events act as welcoming meeting places for new migrants and provide bridges to the wider community (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005). Strategies that focus on individual employability as well as measures to overcome both personal and structural barriers are necessary for achieving positive outcomes (Bloch 2008, p.34).

To summarise, the literature discussed above suggests a range of good practice examples that can be employed in regional communities to bring about positive change. More specifically, these examples of good practice are beginning to acknowledge that migrants are not just individuals with different levels of skill to be treated as human capital and rationally allocated to appropriate jobs. They are men or women with spouses, partners and dependants, who may each have different needs in their new situations as well as resources for use. Skilled migration is often a family, rather than an individual, endeavour and migrants do not migrate in vacuums. Migration is a social process. In other words, this literature review has drawn attention to two major issues. Firstly, the analysis of skilled migration needs to move beyond regarding migration as an individual process, in which human capital (skills and qualifications) are moved from one place to another, to an analysis that employs a wider understanding of the role of capital (such as economic, cultural and social) in skilled migration. Secondly, migrant journeys need to be understood as processes that may range from relatively untroubled to risky trajectories and which depend on the following: the policy frameworks, particularly the visa categories through which migrants enter Australia; the geographies of their new location; the opportunities available; the inclusionary or exclusionary practices operating in the organisations migrants encounter; and the capital resources and social networks migrants can draw on pre- and post-migration to develop their career capabilities.

Research methodology and design

This chapter gives an overview of the research methodology. A more detailed account is provided in appendix A of the support document.

Research questions

Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training aims to contribute towards our understanding of these issues by asking the following questions:

- How can vocational education and training contribute towards socially inclusive outcomes for migrant women and their families in regional Australia?

- How can the cultural capital and assets of migrant women be harnessed in the context of regional industry, community development and social cohesion?

The project employed a mixture of methods to achieve its aims, including:

- a review of the literature on women and vocational education and training, and women, migration and learning

- an analysis of existing quantitative data, mainly drawn from ABS census data and Department of Immigration and Citizenship surveys on the demographic features, geographical location and human capital of temporary and permanent skilled migrants in regional Australia

- a case study of one regional area in Victoria with highly skilled migrant populations

- fieldwork using qualitative methods, including individual interviews and workshops.

Research design and methods

We adopted a case study approach to the research with an in-depth study of a Victorian city and its wider region at three levels of inquiry. We aimed to consider the 'demand drivers' such as migration policies, regional and state policies and labour markets; the supply-side organisations and networks that support new migrants and provide education and training to assist the migrant into employment; and the perspectives and experiences of individual skilled migrant women, and a smaller number of male partners and the role of learning for skilled migrants in the regional location.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork utilised face-to-face focus groups and individual narrative interviews with 24 skilled migrant women and 12 male skilled migrant partners. The participants were volunteers who had undertaken post-secondary education, even if not completed, and had entered Australia under one of the visa categories covered by the skilled migration schemes discussed above. In addition, a small number of humanitarian migrants, self-identified as those who had entered Australia with high-level skills, were also included as participants. Their inclusion ensured that the sample reflected the range of countries and regions of origin indicated by the census data on recent arrivals to the case study area of greater Shepparton.

Interviews were also conducted with 34 members from 20 different organisations who worked with skilled migrants in a variety of capacities, including government, employer and service organisations, voluntary groups and educational and training institutions in the region. Members of these organisations were contacted by the researchers and invited to participate.

The preliminary findings were presented to groups of migrant participants and members of participating organisations in workshops conducted in the region. Their feedback enabled refinement of the findings. However, funding cuts across a range of organisations meant that a number of earlier participants, particularly from the education and training organisations, were unable to contribute to the final workshop.

Data analysis

Before interviews were conducted, semi-structured prompts were drawn up and formed the basis of the interviews. Interviews were transcribed, a coding framework was constructed and the interview transcripts were coded according to a series of emerging themes. These themes were checked with participants during the workshops and refined. They form the basis of the findings presented in this report.

The regional site

The region of greater Shepparton and beyond was selected as the site for the research as it has a rich history of immigration from other parts of the world, and more recently has been selected for planned immigration programs. The Local Government Area of Greater Shepparton is located in the northern central area of Victoria, and had a population of 60 449 in the 2011 census (ABS 2012a). The designation of the Greater Shepparton Local Government Area implies a political or legal boundary, but our focus was wider than the local government area. Therefore we employ the term the 'Greater Shepparton' region to suggest a socio-cultural understanding of a wider region, one which reflects people's movements as they cross the legal or administrative boundaries in their daily lives for work or other purposes. However, the city of Shepparton, as the regional city for this area, contains a concentration of services with responsibilities for the wider environs. Therefore, although the research was conducted across and beyond the political and legal boundaries of Greater Shepparton, many of the organisations that participated in the study were based within the city.

An indication of the growing ethnic diversity of the region can be seen in the numbers of those born overseas, provided by the statistical data on the Greater Shepparton Local Government Area. In the 2006 census, 10.9% of residents were born overseas. Between 1990 and 2006, a larger proportion of the overseas-born in Shepparton came from North Africa and the Middle East compared with the rest of Victoria, excluding Melbourne, reflecting the numbers of humanitarian migrants who have settled in Shepparton (see appendix A, support document). In the 2011 census, the countries of birth of new arrivals showed a marked shift. The most striking feature is the number of overseas-born from South Asia arriving in Shepparton compared with other regions of Victoria, consistent with a significant rise in the number of migrants arriving from that region Australia-wide (ABS 2012a) (see appendix A, support document). The area health service and hospital rely on overseas-trained health professionals mainly from the Indian sub-continent, the Philippines and the United Kingdom (source: notes from interview transcripts with key area health personnel, see appendix A, support document). Growing cultural diversity has been recognised in the region, with strategies developed to assist the inclusion of new migrants (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005; Greater Shepparton City Council 2012).

The extensive history of international and internal migration to this region and the experience that different government, non-government and education and training organisations may have gained in aiding successive waves of settlement suggest that there may be much to learn from this region. At the same time, recent census data indicate that the migration flows to this region have been changing significantly during the past decade. Nevertheless, census data still point to some underemployment and skill underutilisation of skilled migrants, especially women (see appendix H, support document), confirming the need for research that investigates the process of social inclusion in such a location. In the next section we turn to that research and present the findings from the fieldwork.

Findings

Migratory journeys

Australia's skilled migration policy, premised as it is on the gender-neutral individual, does not attempt to be socially inclusive of family members who enter as dependants. Yet, visa categories were one element that played a significant role in the trajectories experienced by our participants. The maintenance of professional links and career capital which occurred when an individual entered under an employer-sponsored visa and with employer-provided settlement support contributed to a less troubled trajectory than that of those who had entered Australia and sought employment through other routes such as under a permanent skilled category, the humanitarian category, or as a spouse, whether female or male. Secondary applicants, who for the most part are women, are most likely to have broken with their previous employment in order to migrate to Australia and therefore they find the transition more difficult, particularly in relation to gaining relevant employment and taking up education and training. Our findings suggest the same holds true to a similar extent for those skilled migrants, whether female or male, who enter under all visa categories, other than employer-sponsored.

The process of gaining permanent residency from a variety of temporary categories was also often difficult and protracted. It could also involve more than one change in migration status and changes in entitlement to different types of public support for education or other benefits. Therefore the migration process was experienced as a less troubled trajectory by those migrants who were able to limit the risk of not finding appropriate employment because they maintained their professional networks and received some form of support from employers or independent advisers. Nevertheless, those who ultimately successfully navigated the system and found employment, even if this had not been immediate, found that the process of managing a risky trajectory without the support from formal agencies resulted in the building of migration career capabilities.

Countries of origin for skilled migrants in the greater Shepparton region mainly include India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, with small numbers of Europeans, Africans and people from the North and South American continent. Relatively few of our participants arrived directly in Shepparton. Many arrived in Greater Shepparton following internal migration and they had diverse reasons for locating to the region. For some, previous global mobility provided a resource for them to draw on to enable them to cope with the difficulties of moving into new locations. For others, the information they received pre-migration did not match up with their experiences immediately post-migration. Sustaining networks of support pre- and post-migration proved more difficult for some migrants than others.

The themes explored below identify factors that influenced the trajectory of skilled migrants. Since our focus was primarily on the experiences of women, the findings have implications for women and suggest that the effects of a skilled migration policy focused on individuals, rather than families, are gendered. However, our sample included male secondary applicants and some female primary applicants, and the findings show that factors applied in greater or lesser ways to all secondary applicants.

Support from organisations

Migrants on employer-sponsored visas are assisted by support provided by their employer, which enables a smoother transition. As one male respondent who had entered under an employer-sponsored visa noted:

> There's no difference for me, I get into the car and come to work.
>
> (Vinayak, male, primary applicant)

> It was easy, because the hospital had the house ready for us, they had the furniture ready for us, the utensils ready for us — everything was there, we just had to come with our clothes and then settle into the house.   (Manjula, female, primary applicant)

This support also assists their families, as they have immediate income continuity. While their partners may find it difficult to gain employment, there may well be less financial pressure for them to do so. They could also draw on established networks within their workplace, where some gained friends. For one female participant, they became more than this:

> All my friends and my colleagues, they are my family.   (Fauzia, female, secondary applicant)

One organisation which sponsored skilled migrants pointed out the connection between earning a salary and their inclusion in the wider society.

> They're not like a number of other segments of the migrant community in Shepparton, which are perhaps financially disadvantaged. These guys are all earning money. They have some economic competence and that makes a big difference. They're not marginalised.
>
> (Bernard, employer and employer organisation)

On the other hand, employer sponsorship also presented challenges, particularly for those who did not have permanent residency or those who found the position did not suit them, because their eligibility to remain in the country depended on the retention of that position.

> I was on a temporary business visa with them, so that was a little bit of a worry, because I couldn't just walk away. [...] I wasn't happy in that job. It wasn't a very nice working environment. I was struggling a bit, and they weren't treating me very well, and I felt that they tended to almost own me, because they got my visa, and I didn't really know how to move forward.   (Elisabeth, female, primary applicant)

Organisations within the region recruited migrants through employer-sponsored visas primarily when they were unable to gain workers via other means.

> Zero applications for advertised roles. That's still the case, and we advertised recently for these roles.   (Bernard, employer and employer organisation)

> There's no alternative.   (Rhonda, employer and employer organisation)

The benefits of this form of migration were clear to employers. Employers and managers gained fully trained and experienced workers, who began to contribute to the organisation following their commencement.

> It's bringing in trained staff who you don't have to train again a lot, which makes it worthwhile.
>
> (Rhonda, employer and employer organisation)

> The benefits of it is you've got a workforce, you've got a full-time workforce. When you recruit these types of people you've got a five-year retention process. You know these people are here to stay because they need to go through a whole heap of things to get their residency stuff. And then by that time they've got family, they've got a community based in Shepparton, they're building houses.
>
> (Nelly, employer and employer organisation)

In a number of cases, these workers were perceived as filling gaps and were envisioned as fitting into organisations rather than being perceived as possessing different skills and resources on which the organisation could draw. Even when some managers and employers saw the need to alter their practices to support migrant workers from different cultural backgrounds in more inclusive ways, the emphasis remained on fitting in.

> So then it's about how they fit in. We ran a barbecue day. We did meals, vegetarian-based stuff.
>
> (Nelly, employer and employer organisation)

Some organisations regarded the provision of settlement support for migrants as part of their recognised responsibility, particularly those employers recruiting skilled migrants under employer-sponsored visas, although this support tended to be focused on the primary applicant. Support in terms of airfares, accommodation and orientation to Shepparton was provided, although this was status-differentiated.

> There's the usual orientation to the organisation, and there's assistance with their accommodation in the first sort of month. We've given information about schools for people bringing their kids out with them; we link them in with appropriate real estate agents.
>
> (Allison, employer and employer organisation)

> You try and link them with people from the same country as well.
>
> (Annette, employer and employer organisation)

> We're just trying to keep an eye on them. It's pretty informal, a lot of it, but we just try and keep them as part of the broader family.   (Bernard, employer and employer organisation)

Within the workplace itself, support in terms of orientation and training opportunities was not generally considered as necessarily different for migrants.

Support for primary applicants and even more so the level of support for secondary applicants depended crucially on individual employers and managers rather than consisting of systemic support. And the level of support did not necessarily include assisting the secondary applicant into employment, although this may have occurred as a result of the actions of an individual employer or manager.

> It's a question that always needs to be asked, about partners, and what careers, and what opportunities there might be for them, and if they are from a health discipline, we'll do everything we can to snaffle them up as well. You've got to be opportunistic, you really have to be.
>
> (Allison, employer and employer organisation)

Secondary applicants had to depend largely on their own resources, regardless of whether they were male or female. For the majority of these participants, it was difficult for them to find their way into the local workforce. Migrants were often unaware of the local procedures, formal and informal, for job recruitment. When they came from countries where they had previously used personal networks as their main source of labour market intelligence and job searching, they struggled to find a job in a region where they found themselves to be the outsiders.

> I really struggled, I really, really struggled. No one would give me a job, Shepparton being a small place, and then I started working with McDonalds making burgers in the morning at six o'clock!
>
> (Vijay, male, secondary applicant)

> I phoned the person who said they wanted pizza makers. And I said, 'Yeah, can I come and meet you?' He said, 'No, I have 200 applications, don't even bother to come'.
>
> (Damayanti, female, secondary applicant)

Yet, within government organisations, and among those employers and managers who considered migration as a family and household practice, it was widely understood that a family's successful settlement was important to retain skilled workers in the region.

> It's okay to get your workers working, but you need to retain their families so you need to set up some sort of support system in place, to get the family involved so they want to stay and they feel part of the community.
>
> (Frances, government organisation)

> The ones that end up staying, it's because the wife and kids are happy or the husband and kids are happy.
>
> (Annette, employer and employer organisation)

Of further note, at some of the more significant workplaces and enterprises in the region, the existing workforce did not generally reflect the growing community diversity in Greater Shepparton. Few of these important employers recruited migrants, either newly arrived or already resident in the region, unless there were skills shortages. Selection processes were reported to work to exclude migrants and local employment practices appeared to favour the selection of candidates from established communities. The employees of some local organisations pointed out the difficulties of specific selection processes for migrants.

> It's a de-selection process.
>
> (Frances, government organisation)

> With our application processes if you just send in a resume and a cover letter you won't even be looked at whereas it's not really that clear that you have to address the key responsibility areas. It's not a clear process of how you go about applying and if you don't do that then your application isn't even looked at.
>
> (Amanda, government organisation)

> A lot of the partners are professionals in their own right. They have very high level degrees and experience in their own countries but employers largely think that their skills aren't easily transferred because the systems and processes don't match up with what we do here.
>
> (Evelyn, employer and employer organisation)

The limited labour market and low turnover amongst employees means that there are few opportunities for skilled migrants to gain employment at their skill level or which permit career development and advancement.

> Just so few of our jobs are actually full-time. Most are just part-time jobs.
>
> (Kathleen, government organisation)

> Being in a regional area I see that opportunities are very much less for skilled migrants. Those migrants who are not having education and backgrounds, they are happily settled here because they can work in farms doing picking and pruning and everything, they're happy. But we don't want to go into that field.
>
> (Shalini, female, secondary applicant)

Several service providers in the region are funded to provide settlement and support services for humanitarian migrants and also provide information and support which skilled migrants are able to access in some circumstances. While new migrants do not always access these services, the provision of settlement services to others provides important employment opportunities for skilled migrants,

particularly women. This type of work is fluid, project-based work with multicultural communities, and often short-term and part-time, but it provides valuable openings to enable skilled migrants to show how they can transfer their skills and knowledge from one setting to another. Thus the increase in new migrants to an area, especially through humanitarian migration, creates a new labour market opportunity in the field of migration services, for which the transnational experiences of migrants are seen as valuable resources.

> Others have been doing a bit of work in our programs with young people and our experience has been that if people can get some work experience then we can say in a reference when they apply for another job, 'Yes, they've been volunteering with us' or 'They've been working part-time with us', 'This is what their responsibility was', 'This is how they worked in the workplace', 'Yes we can recommend them for that job'.
>
> (Marilyn, non-government organisation)

Until recently, the Victorian Government funded local councils to assist employers to recruit skilled migrants to the regions and this position also assisted some skilled migrants through the provision of information and advice about visa categories and settlement in Shepparton. The loss of this role hollows out support structures for both employers and skilled migrants. The shrinkage over some years of the Overseas Qualifications Unit in the Victorian public service further attenuates the support and advocacy available to skilled migrants, particularly in relation to their search for suitable employment.

> Now there's no more funding for employment, there's no more support for skilled migrants.
>
> (Zaina, government organisation)

Governance arrangements within the local area did not work to foster inclusiveness or to reflect the growing community diversity. A number of organisations were governed by appointed or elected boards, for example, education and training organisations and non-government organisations amongst others. However, interviews with senior members of these organisations acknowledged that these boards lacked diversity in their representation. The boards are important because strategic decision-making takes place within them and they can be linked into other networks, such as different levels of government.

> One of our big aims is to try and increase the number of participants from the more diverse backgrounds, not only on the program but on our board. We have got a very white Anglo Saxon board and the board are very aware of that and we are trying to recruit on to the board to reflect what's in Shepparton.   (Robert, non-government organisation)

Networks of support

Our findings suggest that it is necessary to consider migration as a family endeavour, rather than a project undertaken by individuals, and to consider the nature of the social networks in place in both in the pre-migration and post-migration locations that are able to provide support to the family as a whole. Successful settlement in regional areas such as Shepparton depends as much on the networks in place to support secondary applicants, as on the experiences of the primary applicants. These secondary applicants were male, as well as female, and accompanied partners who had gained jobs in the region on either employer-sponsored visas or as the partner of a principal applicant through the permanent skilled stream. Yet few formal agencies provided services for skilled migrants and their partners.

> I don't think for skilled migrants there are many support services. For refugee migrants, for
> others, we have many agencies working for them, but I don't know whether they have the
> assumption in their mind that skilled migrants will manage themselves.
>
> (Shalini, female, secondary applicant)

For these migrants, family and friends are the primary source of encouragement both pre- and post-migration. For many of our participants, these personal social networks provided valuable support to enable migrants to integrate socially and culturally into new communities and locations.

> We had this friend from India, who we had known for many years before coming here. So he and
> his wife were here. So it was no problem at all because they were there. We just settled in.
>
> (Roshan, female, secondary applicant)

> The first day I was here, I was thinking okay, how do I meet Filipinos and I just thought I have to
> go to church because we're all Catholics, most of us are Catholics in the Philippines so I went to
> church that Sunday and met a couple of Filipinos and from there I got phone calls from everyone
> saying, come to this, come to that so it was very easy for us.
>
> (Cecilia, female, secondary applicant)

In Shepparton, a number of religious and cultural groups offer newer migrants information, advice, referrals to services and links to other organisations that contribute to assisting settlement. They also afford the opportunity to develop new friendships.

> The Mosque is one of the main places. And you'd pray for five minutes and after it you'd go and
> talk to them and we'd meet many people from that way.
>
> (Fauzia, female, secondary applicant)

> What else do I do at the club? I do volunteer brunch. I do applications for grants and things like
> that and help with those new ones coming here or anything they want to know.
>
> (Daphne, female, partner visa category)

However, while these cultural and social networks provided opportunities for migrants to feel included in their new locations, migrants who moved beyond these groups or took on voluntary leadership roles connected more easily with the broader civic and employment opportunities in the region. For example, a number of participants were active on a voluntary basis in a variety of religious and cultural groups that supported new migrants. Existing migrants worked actively and reciprocally with others in such groups, as well as with new migrants, in ways that enhanced their own capacity and agency. Their activities in these groups enabled them to build connections with other groups in the community, including in the wider non-migrant society, with the aim of developing new networks. Our findings suggest that the development of individual capacity within these groups contributed to a heightened engagement with the wider Australian community, with several participants becoming involved with the political process at a local level as a result of their experiences over time in these religious and cultural groups.

> I'm running for council, because I know a lot of people and a lot of people have encouraged me to
> do that. It's just a good chance to have someone on the council that actually represents the
> actual community, a woman from a different country.   (Abida, female, humanitarian visa)

For others, participation in social networks can be described as instrumental. Migrants who engaged with groups centred on specific and purposeful activities such as parents' groups at schools and sporting clubs found that these provided networks that linked them to others in the wider regional community. However, participation in these activities was often highly gendered, with women more frequently mentioning schools and men more frequently (although not exclusively) mentioning

sporting clubs. And noteworthy is that when these connections did lead to employment for women, the work opportunities associated with schools and children's networks tended to be in traditional, more female-dominated, and lower-level labour markets, than relating to the work opportunities that arose through networks and labour market intelligence obtained through sporting clubs.

> And then first of February, the children went to school. And then the school … had organised a morning tea with six other new mums, which was very, very nice. They were all in my circumstances. They'd all come here because of their husbands' jobs.
>
> (Damayanti, female, secondary applicant)

> For a year I did some running for the footy club, what they call a trainer. That meant that I know every plumber, every electrician. I know them all from the footy club.
>
> (Robert, male, secondary applicant)

In a small city, information can be transmitted through these social networking routes rather than through public outlets. By becoming part of such a group a migrant can pursue a particular interest, by which they may gain contacts with others who share the same interest, but within these circuits they also hear about opportunities in relation to employment or to other networks from which they may otherwise be excluded. Often these social networks were the main sources of information for a migrant's transition into employment in her new country, thereby representing a continuation of the informal methods of job seeking and routes to employment that may have been used prior to migration.

> One of my friends she works here, so I just talked to her … luckily they had that position, because she was working there and she was to reduce her hours, so then she said that if you are interested I can talk to someone in my office. (Shalini, female, secondary applicant)

However, for those who lack family or friends on arrival in their new environment, it can be difficult to establish new networks, especially beyond their immediate cultural group, and particularly if they have family responsibilities and have lost the support they may otherwise have had in their country of origin. Our findings were that it was female secondary applicants who were most likely to report that the first years can be very difficult, increasing the risk of a less successful transition.

> When we came here, I felt so isolated. And I was a stay-at-home mum for more than two years and in the meantime, I had my second baby. After I had my second baby, when my in-laws were here to support us, then I started to work. (Aanchal, female, secondary applicant)

> Coming from such a huge city I was lost, cried for months together that I want to go back, and didn't have anything much to do here. (Pranjali, female, secondary applicant)

Transition into the workforce

Most participants acknowledged that there are relatively few high-level skilled job positions in the region and there is a still a skill mismatch between job vacancies and the available skilled migrant workforce. Unemployment is also high amongst young people without high-level skills, among Indigenous people and amongst some humanitarian migrants.

> We have a lot of people unemployed, and we have a lot of vacant positions. So we've got sort of this plateau of all these people unemployed, and all these positions vacant.
>
> (Phil, government organisation)

Skilled migrants can have difficulty gaining recognition of their educational qualifications and also their work experience.

> I think one of the big issues that I had at the start was the recognition of my degree.
>
> (Valentina, female, partner visa)

> The biggest problem you face is that when you come here they do need experience and the experience that you have is from overseas. Probably is not considered as important or relevant to here.
> (Satwinder, female, secondary applicant)

Opportunities in their field may not be available in the region, where the labour market is more limited.

> This is not what ideally suits me as per my qualifications, but I'm not really going to pursue what I'm qualified for, just because it's not possible in Shepparton.
>
> (Aanchal, female, secondary applicant)

Migrants' lack of knowledge of local recruiting and employing practices works to disadvantage them.

> It's not what you know, it's who you know.　　　(Damayanti, female, secondary applicant)

Employers may also consider them overqualified for the positions for which they apply.

> I kept on trying and then I used to try for other types of jobs apart from teaching and from everywhere I used to get the thank you letter back. When I came to know about this concept that I am overqualified I am not getting jobs, then I my alter my resume and made it under-qualified in order to get a job.　　　(Shalini, female, secondary applicant)

Access to childcare is difficult for many women, who have lost the extended family support they may have had in their country of origin.

> I've asked my mum to come and stay with us for a year. She's going to retire this year in September, and then in December, she'll come stay with us. Then my in-laws will come and stay with us. It's just not possible for me to pay the childcare, work part-time and pay the fees and study.　　　(Aanchal, female, secondary applicant)

Gaining an Australian reference through Australian experience was vital to success in the labour market for our participants, particularly secondary applicants. Participants in the research employed a variety of pathways to gain a reference, with voluntary work in the community sector being one avenue. In some cases, the employer later offered the volunteer a job or recommended them to other employers. Some of these voluntary pathways were developed to support the settlement of humanitarian migrants, for instance, the volunteer refugee tutoring program at Goulburn Ovens TAFE, which provides training for English-speaking volunteers and enables them to gain experience as well as a reference. This voluntary pathway to support humanitarian settlement and community development was both gendered and culturally specific. It was identified as a route to employment by several of our women participants and a small number of men, all of whom came from non-Western countries.

> It is really hard when you don't have an Australian reference. This is what I learnt. If you don't have an Australian reference, you can't get a job. But if you don't get a job, how will you get a reference? And that's how I was introduced to volunteering.
>
> (Aanchal, female, secondary applicant)

> Then I started, did the volunteer tutoring TAFE for the refugees and to teach, help them in the English. So I did the six-week training and then started helping out, and that's how I ended up working. Then I got this job, although I didn't have the experience and now I'm here for around four years now.　　　(Archana, female, secondary applicant)

> The initial four or five months it was very difficult for me to find a job because I don't have any
> Australian experience. Most of the employers won't accept my qualification because I got an
> international qualification; everyone is saying that you don't have any job experience in Australia
> you cannot work here.   (Moncey, male, secondary applicant)

Another pathway which some participants used successfully to gain experience and a reference was through casual or part-time work or work at a lower level in the desired industry. This can be regarded as a risky strategy if the entry point to employment has few opportunities for progression. However, for our participants these jobs led in some cases to more permanent jobs or jobs at a higher level.

> When I went around to the job agencies to find a job they all told me well there's nothing here
> for you, you can do reception work but that's about it and I thought oh my God I'm not going to go
> back to that level. But then I sort of just convinced myself I just had to get that first job to get a
> reference so I did accounts payable for half a year and I got a good reference and from that then I
> got my current job.   (Valentina, female, partner visa)

> Luckily I got a part-time job, then that led to me a full-time job.
>   (Moncey, male, secondary applicant)

Knowledge of upcoming vacancies was circulated informally within the workplace, or contacts with other industries opened new possibilities for migrant job seekers who did not have an in-depth understanding of other industries and sectors in the city.

> A lot of jobs in this area are found but are not advertised either. And so I went through the job
> agencies because none of the jobs that I got were advertised because they usually were sort of a
> temporary arrangement which developed into something more permanent. I think through work
> that I became aware of other jobs, because when I came here I wasn't aware of where I could
> potentially find work. I would never have known about that whole industry if I hadn't worked
> there.   (Valentina, female, partner visa)

Another means to gain a job was to undertake training in a specific area of demand. In the Shepparton region, demand for childcare and aged care is high. At the same time, training for this industry has seen growth as new regulations have required more advanced levels of training for people in the childcare industry. The availability of jobs in the sector makes it attractive for new migrants. For migrants from some cultural groups, culturally appropriate childcare is difficult to find, increasing the attraction of training in this field for these groups, with the certainty of jobs or small businesses as the outcome. They are able to provide care for their own children and for those of others who now lack the extended family support they may have had before migration. Such work may be seen as an attractive option, one which offers flexibility, value and satisfaction and a degree of status compared with other forms of less skilled work. When established as a micro-business, it affords an opportunity for entrepreneurialism. Pathways from childcare to future careers such as teaching through continuing education are also options being pursued by some participants.

> For opening own business we need diploma, and I'm looking when I finish my diploma, I want to
> do my advanced diploma. So this year and next year, I'll do the advanced diploma, so I have a
> chance to apply for the university, do two years university, and from there, I can become a
> primary school teacher or kindergarten teacher.   (Farrah, female, humanitarian visa)

Permanent skilled migrants who entered the country without employment already arranged found it particularly difficult to gain work at their skill level, and either partner, or both, felt under financial

pressure to accept lower-level jobs. For some families, this was more acute for men, who were seen as the family breadwinner.

> He was going to low levels, trying to find a job. Because obviously, he had a wife and child to
> feed.   (Aanchal, female, secondary applicant)

Education and training

A number of participants have taken part in education and training, some to upgrade their qualifications to fit the requirements of professional bodies, others to develop a new field of work, for instance, in community development, childcare or aged care. Twelve of our female participants had undertaken studies since arriving in Australia, as had four males. Amongst the female participants, five had completed or were completing postgraduate courses designed to upgrade their qualifications to improve their access to a desired profession, as was the case for three male participants. Two females and one male had arrived as international students and completed courses at postgraduate, bachelor and diploma levels. Four female participants were studying diploma-level courses. These were undertaken in a range of different organisations, from VET providers in Shepparton and across Victoria, both public and private, to tertiary providers in the wider region, in Melbourne and interstate. Study was undertaken by different modes: face to face, distance and online, or a combination of these. However, for some participants, seeking further education and training in the Shepparton region was not their first option or priority on entering the region, although a number of participants have undertaken further education and training since locating in the region. Of the female migrants, four had undertaken or were currently undertaking VET courses and two, postgraduate courses. Of the males, one had undertaken or was undertaking a postgraduate course, while another two had engaged in VET courses. The decision to do so may have occurred after reflection and consideration of other options to find a way into employment, or after advice, for instance, from an employment agency.

> Like when we migrated to Australia and then came to Shepparton, I first worked here in a wool
> factory. So I did a few other odd jobs, I worked in a packing shed and things like that for some
> time, but then finally I decided that I needed to probably go back to uni.
>   (Satwinder, female, secondary applicant)

It may also have arisen after consideration of the jobs in demand within the local labour market.

> Well I thought it won't help me at all trying to fit into the other professions which may take me
> ages or never happen. So I thought no, this welfare work looks like it's open in a way to migrants
> and yes, it's accepted me as well even though I didn't have any knowledge of it or any
> qualifications to begin with so I thought, let me give it a go.
>   (Charles, male, secondary applicant)

The limitations of the local labour market may mean that further education and training is being used to pursue qualifications for jobs that are highly gendered, for instance, in all levels of caring for children and for the aged. There was evidence of considerable demand for workers in the aged care and childcare sectors.

> While I'm studying I'm also working as a carer. Now when I came into Shepparton I said what's the
> easiest thing to do? I did this personal Certificate III in Aged Care, which helps me to work. I've
> been working ever since. There's a lot of work and that's the first point of call if you're coming
> into a region or an area like this.   (James, male, secondary applicant)

Changes in regulations, particularly in the childcare sector, had increased the demand for further training in that field and in turn, for some participants, had heightened their desire to learn more.

> It was 2005, the policies changed that all carers need to do Certificate III, so I've done Certificate III because of the policy, and it was good for me to get more information and everything. So now I'd like to get more information and get more skills, so I'm doing my diploma.
>
> (Farrah, female, humanitarian visa)

While all institutions had some participation by skilled migrants, our interviews in the TAFE sector seemed to suggest a higher level of participation by migrants in some mainstream courses (for example, human services), although no data on their participation are collected by Goulburn Ovens TAFE itself. This is because education and training organisations in the region do not see skilled migrants as their focus, except for the group at the Multicultural Centre at Goulburn Ovens TAFE which is comprised largely of humanitarian migrants.

> We don't actually produce anything whether it's a strategy or a product specifically for CALD [culturally and linguistically different] customers. All our course guides and website, everything is all in English. We did a campaign last year, we ran info week right across all our campuses and I did notice in Shepparton that we had a high number of multicultural people attend the info session. So we didn't actually produce anything that was in multiple languages but they obviously found out about it and were in attendance at the info sessions.
>
> (Karen, education and training organisation)

Of further concern to some migrants was the need for an understanding of the opportunities available, the potential for recognition and assessment of prior learning and qualifications, and how education opportunities related to local labour markets. Some migrants whose journey to permanent residency had been via a visa to study in higher education recounted positive experiences of universities, where the focus was on the development of individual employability skills and networks by, for example, providing internships, mentoring and opportunities to work part-time in the chosen professional field. For those individuals who were already well aware of the value of developing their personal and professional capital, these institutions were considered significant in enabling the new migrant to successfully manage the transition to a regional area and to high-level professional work, in spite of often beginning the process on partner visas and relocating without a job. In contrast, others equally qualified but who had not studied at such supportive institutions found the pathway to employment more troubled.

> The university helped me and they did like a couple of workshops and stuff to understand how people in Australia would see your career and your skills and how would you assume you present those skills so they can sort of see them and take them or sort of recognise them assisted me in that process of like finding a job and do my profile that would feed this market, like this country, this culture, because I guess it's very different. So without that help I think it would have been hard for me to do that exercise. (Valentina, female, partner visa)

The resourcefulness of migrants

Skilled migrants are acknowledged to be resourceful, and our participants, both female and male, demonstrated this in a number of ways, including displaying persistence and the willingness to undertake a variety of different activities.

> Well you've got to get out there. Australians are just not going to give you a job here, even if they have a bachelor's degree in whatever. It's like that's nothing here. Get out there. Start from the

bottom. I started from the bottom, I started as a volunteer.

(Cecilia, female, secondary applicant)

When people invited me for anything, I was there. (Damayanti, female, secondary applicant)

Some were entrepreneurial, establishing businesses when it became clear that their pathways to employment were limited or difficult.

I was just at home and didn't know what to do with myself. Every single position that I would apply, even entry level, I'll be rejected or I won't be called for interviews and that was just getting to me. I started using my brain in terms of the business plan and that was satisfying.

(Antoinette, female, primary applicant)

They actively looked for ways to build new networks that would link them to social circles and/or to other organisations through which they could gain new contacts, potentially leading to employment.

I guess for me the key was to just keep that open mind and just sort of get that first job and get it over and done with. I got to know people and I guess it provided me with sort of entry level into a network so I benefited greatly from that. (Valentina, female, partner visa)

Some skilled migrants were building, or had recently built, houses, signifying a commitment to settling in the region.

So we desire to settle down in Shepparton and we are on the way to build a house. For the next 10 to 15 years we are planning to stay in Shepparton, because it's a small country town and not very busy, we like it, this type of life. (Moncey, male, secondary applicant)

Many participants stressed the importance of an open and flexible approach to the region and the people in it for finding opportunities, for gaining new friends and for feeling settled.

There are many opportunities, there are chances if you just get yourself in there and find those things. (Daphne, female, partner visa)

The point is you have to include yourself. Because if you don't make an effort it's not going to happen. (Fauzia, female, secondary applicant)

I think just to go out there, just to try new things. Just to even go to something, because if you go to something, you'll meet somebody, but if you stay at home, you won't meet that person. And try any field or anything. Just give anything a go and see.

(Damayanti, female, secondary applicant)

At the beginning I was — I did not have any hope, I said, I can't do it, I'm different, I'm different from you, my culture is different, the way I'm dressing is different … I can't work in this country. I can't learn the language. But the support I get, and I change. I change, because I say, I live in this country, I have to change, I have to cut my culture with this culture, I have to mix.

(Farrah, humanitarian visa)

The previous global mobility of some of our participants provided an important resource on which they could draw and which assisted them to cope with the difficulties presented in their new location. They applied their experiences of settling in other countries to the Shepparton region, understanding the process of developing new links.

I guess because it's not the first time I changed location. I was used to that, you know, things may be different but you still sort of find a way.

(Valentina, female, secondary applicant)

Also, existing international networks were a resource they could draw on to affirm their professional and personal capabilities.

> My university where I took my master's degree, I went back there in 2009 to present a paper. So when I went back there I discovered it was good to stay in touch. Just because I have become a housewife and just because I'm seen here as just a housewife who doesn't drive doesn't mean I'll lose touch with everything else. (Sylvia, female, partner visa)

Many participants acknowledged that the work of settlement was hard and required resilience and confidence.

> It's not necessarily that everyone is going to get there. I think you must have the resilience, you must have the confidence. (Chandni, female, secondary applicant)

They exhibited considerable awareness of the need to develop these capacities and a reflexive understanding of how their transnational experiences had contributed to their own learning and development, in other words, to their migration career capabilities.

> We don't have the availability of the jobs, and we had to start on the same platform as the others. So that was the difficulty, and the references, that was very hard at the time, and then you come and there's no one to help, even your relatives, that's when it becomes very hard. And then you don't have the network. Our understanding was because as skilled migrants, it will be easier to get a job. But that was not the right thinking. Then as we made more networking, it was easier, but still it is not easy and then you need to shift your ways in order to find a job, or go home. (Archana, female, secondary applicant)

Social inclusion

The view of social inclusion adopted in this report sees it as aiming to provide opportunities to enable all people to participate and succeed in society, with education a key means to achieve these ends. Our participants, however, viewed social inclusion as having a wider remit than this, extending to their sense of acceptance in Shepparton, which contributed to their sense of belonging. They demonstrated resourcefulness by working to achieve their goals with a variety of different institutions and organisations in which current practices are constructed in racialised ways. A number were still struggling to gain jobs at suitable levels, although they may have felt included within Shepparton in other respects, particularly on a cultural and social level.

> The people of Shepparton I think are wonderful and it's so multicultural. I think the children can grow up seeing the people from every part of the world.
> (Roshan, female, secondary applicant)

> For me social inclusion is I'm Australian, you are Australian, so I'm not different than you.
> (Antoinette, female, primary applicant)

> Ultimately you are socially included if you feel home again. It's having a network where you live that supports you. (Valentina, female, partner visa)

And for some, the most important aspect of social inclusion was not the material comparison with their country of origin, but the fact that they felt safe.

> The rent here is expensive, yes ... and we have a different wage here, we have a different salary here. So, those are the comparisons you go on, and you go, like, oh my God, this is a big difference. So, on a daily basis then ... the other thing, they're very simple things ... I am able to walk outside without a fear that I'll be robbed, I mean, I'm with my iPad in my bag, and I know

> that nobody's going to take it away from me, and I know that I'm safe, and … So, that's the daily
> basis that we love. (Luz, female, secondary applicant)

A small minority of participants did not have a strong sense of belonging in Shepparton or indeed, Australia. For them, it could not be home. But, as partners of primary applicants who were employed and happy and parents of children who had settled, they could not see how they could return. Therefore, they held multiple senses of belonging.

> Well the big thing is I want to go back home, that's the biggest thing, yes, I want to go back home
> one of those days, I don't know when. Initially when I was coming, planning to come here, I
> thought I was just coming to Australia for five years then go back, but I'm realising five years it's
> not enough, yes, so I don't know when but eventually I'll need to go back.
>
> (Charles, male, secondary applicant)

Others felt they had suffered discrimination, especially in the private rental housing market, although the intervention of employers on an individual basis assisted some participants who were affected by these practices.

> I couldn't get any accommodation … 'Oh, the landlord has decided not to rent yet. Or I have
> decided to take the property off the market'. And you'll go and talk to the neighbour and they
> say: no, we haven't had anyone visiting. Only you came. And it's always the same offenders, a
> couple of real estate agents. (Antoinette, female, primary applicant)

A number of participants felt that they had been discriminated against in organisations or treated in patronising ways. Their existing knowledge and experience were not always valued or they were positioned as rather ignorant. However, there were different senses amongst participants of what constituted discrimination and different ways of dealing with it if it occurred.

> I go to a store and sometimes they treat you like you can't speak English and then I'd start talking
> and they totally change. Yes, it's there, but it doesn't bother me
>
> (Cecilia, female, secondary applicant)

> I have been told by quite educated people that actually, I should not be here, because they say,
> 'It's unacceptable for Australia to get doctors from other countries. That means we have not
> educated our youth'. So people think us as more of a threat, not a refugee as a threat. But we are
> not a threat. They never see the skilled migrant as an asset.
>
> (Damayanti, female, secondary applicant)

> I'm being told what to do, not that I think I know everything, but I'm in a position where they
> probably think because I need to learn about what my job involves they probably think I don't
> know anything about it, so there's a tiny little corner where I feel a little bit hurt sometimes, the
> way they regard me and the thing is Asians are very humble. I'm telling you all this, but I've never
> told it to, I don't tell them I have a Master's degree, but to them I'm just whatever else they can
> figure out from the way I look. (Sylvia, female, partner visa)

Some participants were working to raise awareness of the impact of discrimination. There was evidence that racially based discrimination existed and that this undermined what could have been described as the 'good life'.

> I don't know if it's because it's country thinking but it's like, wow, you're African and most
> Africans that we have contact with are all from refugee backgrounds. We see that you're
> different. But that cannot change my perception that I have of Africans. You're just an exception
> to the rule. And that's very hard to break that. (Antoinette, female, primary applicant)

> One of my managers started focusing on me. He's finding fault and making a lot of trouble on me. I faced racial discrimination from here, but my belief is that, that's an exception case only, only that man has turned against me. I got positive support from everywhere.
>
> (Moncey, male, secondary applicant)

Finally, some interesting data emerged when we asked participants whether they felt they were better off in Shepparton compared with a city like Melbourne. In most cases, participants felt that the Greater Shepparton region was more hospitable and inclusive, although they also identified the constraints of the local labour market.

> My wife wants to move. She wants to have more experience. There are limited — let me say — you have more experience when you go to bigger cities ... But left to me I think I would love to stay here. (James, male, secondary applicant)

> We yeah we really liked it, because when we came here 14 years back as well, it was nice to see that everyone recognised you, because if you went to the post office or anywhere, everyone kind of knows you ... Plus the other thing we found was to get a job as well, you get some kind of work here, but in big cities you just seem lost. (Satwinder, female, secondary applicant)

And as this migrant succinctly states, the 'good life' depends in part on your capability to find it.

> It's not uncomfortable here, and we are having a good life yeah, and I can't complain, yeah, but coming from the city where you have so many different opportunities to go to, where you have probably got one or two places to work, I mean from a job perspective it's been different. But it's possible. I think what I have learned, because when I came here I remember I went to the Council because they offer some service for new migrants or new people coming to the area and that person told me you know there's really nothing for you here, like you, you know you are going to have to go to Melbourne if you want a proper job like on your level and I sort of went home quite depressed. But, yeah, I think, yeah well if you just look closely you will, there's a lot of opportunities out here in the country, you just have to find them.
>
> (Karen, female, partner visa)

Summary of findings and discussion

The research questions asked how vocational education and training could contribute towards socially inclusive outcomes for migrant women and their families in regional Australia and how the cultural capital and assets of migrant women could be harnessed in the context of regional industry, community development and social cohesion. The Greater Shepparton region, which has existing long-standing provision for migrants and some history of successful inclusion, presents a good site for the research. In the literature review, we noted that quantitative research in Australia has suggested that skilled migrant women experienced difficulty in gaining suitable employment but that the qualitative research in this field was very limited, particularly in regional areas. Research conducted in other countries similarly highlights the hardships skilled migrants, especially women, can experience, and has offered some explanations of the factors at work. Our findings reinforce this latter work (such as that of Fawcett 1989; Hagan 1998; Portes 1997), which identifies the need to regard migration as a family not an individual endeavour, in which social networks play a significant role in mediating between individuals and families and the structural factors that affect individual decisions and opportunities.

More specifically, our research echoes that which has identified the importance of different forms of capital in the migratory trajectory, finding that those who are most able to maintain their

professional and high-status social capital are more likely to experience an untroubled migratory trajectory, in contrast to the more risky trajectory experienced by those who make a break with their pre-migration professional networks and valued social capital and struggle to re-establish these connections post-migration (Alfred 2010; Smyth & Kum 2010). Our findings also showed that the experience of migration and the different networks in which migrants engaged provided a form of informal learning, just as others have described (Jackson 2010). We argue that this process is an important aspect of building migration career capabilities for all migrants and provides a strategy for managing a risky trajectory. Risk is also diminished when organisations acknowledge their role in discrimination and in the creation of structural barriers, as argued by Bloch (2008). A summary of our findings and a brief discussion are presented below.

Support from organisations

Many employers and organisations identified the benefits of employing skilled migrants and consequently provided support for the settlement of the whole household. Often though, this support relied on the persistence and commitment of individual managers and employers. Yet, organisations have the capacity to offer support to migrants and to afford opportunities that may not be available through some informal networks. The provision of systematic direct settlement assistance is one means. The employment of migrants within local organisations can also demonstrate that diversity is valued, as well as opening doors for others.

The growth of migration services in the region has provided some limited labour market opportunities for skilled migrants to change careers and have their prior skills and migratory experiences recognised as having value in this growing professional field of human development. Recognising the skills and attributes that migrants possess and seeking avenues for these to be utilised contribute to a sense of inclusiveness for migrant households but also increase the stock of knowledge that can be drawn on to strengthen organisations, especially those that service diverse communities or which operate globally, where a transnational workforce would be a major asset. Governance arrangements which seek to represent community diversity represent one such avenue for organisations to develop more socially inclusive practices.

Networks of support

Despite all efforts to attract and retain skilled migrants into regional areas, if members of a family are unhappy, the family will not remain, as was acknowledged by a number of participants, particularly women. Feeling part of a community is one element of the settlement process and where informal networks of support can aid the transition into new social and cultural ways of living. But one important factor that contributes to a family's sense of belonging in the region is whether the partner can gain suitable employment. However, while government-provided settlement services exist for humanitarian migrants as they build new lives in Australia, there are no services provided on a systemic level to assist skilled migrants, who enter through other visa streams into employment. Instead, skilled migrants in their settlement transitions draw heavily on informal networks of support, either those developed pre-migration or those they build post-migration.

Skilled migrants are resourceful and work to build new networks. However, the process of rebuilding was often gendered and culturally differentiated, resulting in different opportunities being generated for migrants from different countries and regions of origin, sometimes segmenting migrants into networks and activities dominated by Australians or those dominated by migrants of a similar type. Networks can be valuable to skilled migrants, but they can also limit opportunities for participating in society more broadly and in ways skilled migrants had imagined, if those networks lack the cultural

and social capital to facilitate entry to professional-level employment. The process of enabling new network building can be enhanced when local networks are welcoming and offer opportunities for migrants from different backgrounds to connect to others, as well as to the wider community. Those migrants who were adept at network boundary crossing were more likely to quickly develop an understanding of how the formal and informal processes of job recruitment and education and training opportunities operate within Australia.

Transition into the workforce

Gaining work commensurate with their skills and experience in the region was difficult for many of our participants. Their qualifications were not always recognised, but even if they were, their overseas experience was widely discounted. Gaining work at a high skill level depended on obtaining a local reference, with the exception of those who were in employer-sponsored positions. The path to a local reference was often through volunteer or casual work, but these pathways were both gendered and culturally differentiated and gave access to different labour markets.

These local labour markets were in either traditional high-status professional work or in newer fields, often in personal and human services, where entry is more porous because there are few gatekeepers, the professional knowledge needed is less prescribed and entry qualifications are more fluid. In these latter fields, satisfying work was not always the outcome, despite the best efforts of participants, and career progression was not guaranteed. Selection processes in areas without skills shortages were seen to favour local (non-migrant) candidates, even by members of some organisations that served the growing diverse communities in the region. And lack of cultural knowledge of application processes worked to exclude new migrants who, prior to migration, may have been more used to informal family and social network methods of job seeking and recruitment. These practices work powerfully against inclusion and impacted greatly on female secondary applicants, especially those from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds.

Education and training

The majority of our skilled migrant participants did not regard vocational education as relevant, as they already had high-level qualifications. Instead, they considered further tertiary education at university level a better option. For others, vocational education offered a route to qualify in a different field, which would gain them entry to employment locally. And in a minority of cases, skilled migrants recounted feeling they had been 'mis-sold' lower-level VET courses for which they were over-qualified and which did not meet their needs. In addition, education and training funding policy and student fee levels at state and national levels had an impact, with some participants feeling that education and training opportunities were unavailable to them until they gained permanent residency. The cost of further study was considered prohibitive, particularly if the return was uncertain.

Clearly, the absence of an independent, universally available, education and career development advice and guidance service for adults, staffed by those who understood the full range of tertiary provision, made it difficult for skilled migrants to navigate their way through the range of offerings and providers. Nevertheless, some migrants identified good practices, such as those in universities that provided valuable opportunities for migrants to develop their individual employability skills, localised knowledge about Australian labour markets, local work experience and entry to professional and employment networks. The Economic Development unit of the local council sought to develop some comprehensive information by bringing together publicity material about progression pathways in the tertiary system, based on the provision of Goulburn Ovens TAFE and the Shepparton regional

campus of La Trobe University, and while this did not specifically target skilled migrants, it provided an example of an approach that could be developed further.

The resourcefulness of migrants

Despite the difficulties they faced, our participants, both female and male, demonstrated resilience, and drew on their resources, including their prior learning and experience, to build new capabilities, which assisted them to find a way forward. There was evidence that a number of the migrants had experienced so-called circular migration, travelling, studying and working in a number of different countries, building their migration career capabilities by gaining wider experience of different contexts, learning a number of different languages, obtaining enhanced entitlements to live in different countries and sometimes earning premium pay rates. As a consequence, while they may have experienced many personal and structural barriers to social inclusion in the Greater Shepparton region, they often had strategies for dealing with these.

Social inclusion

Social inclusion for participants meant more than just having a job, although a job was a very important aspect of feeling included. Work that was seen as utilising a participant's skills and experience was highly valued, but other aspects were also significant and demonstrate that inclusive practices in a range of domains are vital for building connections. Non-discriminatory practices in terms of access to housing and work are crucial to enable social inclusion, but the process also needs to extend to practices that welcome rather than exclude people in all areas of social life and value the contribution that skilled migrants can make to organisations and civic life.

Clearly, our participants held a broader view of social inclusion than one that focused on standard material and economic measures. Their conception encompassed ideas about how they wished to live their lives, although a number held ambivalent and multiple views about whether they were living a good life and to whom or where they belonged. Despite the research that suggests that in regional areas, attitudes towards migrants can be more negative than in the capital cities (Markus 2010), this was not the case for most of our participants. For many, living in Shepparton was considered a 'good life' and a safe life that gave them a sense of belonging. Their quality of life was perceived to be better than it would be in a capital city, with greater access to housing and good-quality infrastructure. They identified local people as friendly and welcoming. Skilled migrants, especially female secondary applicants, appreciated the opportunities their children had in relation to education and training in Shepparton and beyond, even though they might perhaps still regard elsewhere as 'home'.

In sum, this regional area was valued by our participants, both women and men, in terms of the ease with which they could make connections with others, not just from similar communities, but also beyond these and gain a sense of belonging to the area.

Conclusion

The research had two aims. The first was to determine how vocational education and training can contribute towards socially inclusive outcomes for migrant women and their families in regional Australia. The second was to investigate how the cultural capital and assets of migrant women could be harnessed in the context of regional industry, community development and social cohesion. In relation to these questions, we set out below our key findings and their implications.

Key findings and implications for vocational education and training

The numbers of skilled migrants in Shepparton, as identified in the 2006 census, were relatively small, but the 2011 census reveals a significant rise. Skilled migrants by definition have a range of different qualifications and experience, which are not necessarily recognised by local institutions. There is evidence that the increasing number of skilled migrants in the Greater Shepparton region have education and training needs which are not yet recognised.

- There is a gap in provision, with no education and training aimed specifically at skilled migrants. VET providers are focused on school leavers and humanitarian migrants. The local higher education institution targets students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous groups in the school leaver population and mature-age students more broadly.

- Skilled migrants do not consider the VET sector as offering them suitable opportunities for education and training, as the focus of local institutions is directed elsewhere.

- Education and training provision in the region lacks coordination. Weak links among institutions mean that there are few partnerships amongst local institutions that are able to articulate clear pathways between different sectors. The partnerships that have been developed are often with geographically distant organisations and these can reduce rather than enhance opportunities for progression through the sector for those adults with limited time and other resources to travel to study outside the region. The development of a tertiary education strategy by the Greater Shepparton City Council is a positive step and is currently under development. The production of a booklet by the Economic Development unit of the council presents the range of tertiary providers in the region in a more comprehensive and coherent way.

- Systemic measures are not in place to consider the ways by which local educational and training institutions can meet the needs of skilled migrants. While individual networking and problem-solving are advantageous in some smaller regional institutions, ad hoc measures depend on individuals and can also disadvantage some skilled migrants.

- VET institutions could work more effectively to provide learning opportunities and other forms of support, not only to skilled migrants, but also to organisations seeking to work in more culturally diverse ways and to become learning organisations that learn from their employees.

Within education and training organisations, our findings identified some good practices that enhance individual migrants' employability skills. These involved support in relation to job seeking, local work experience and understanding of specific professional networks and labour markets, sometimes through participation in organised volunteer programs aimed at humanitarian migrants. Our findings noted that the participation of migrants in the tertiary sector was varied and to some extent serendipitous in this region. It was also highly gendered, concentrated in childcare and aged care at relatively low qualification levels and culturally and language-specific.

Key findings and implications for social cohesion

The findings in relation to this question suggest that, as well as focusing on the personal development of migrants, institutions and organisations should analyse how systematic their practices are for including migrants as employers, as clients and as members of the wider civil society in which the institutions and organisations operate. The potential for social inclusion is increased for skilled migrants when they maintain professional networks and social capital and acquire Australian work experience, and move into employment. The research has also highlighted the fact that it is not always straightforward for migrants to move into employment or housing because of the discriminatory practices of some organisations. The conclusions also highlight that the migration experience needs to be considered in a holistic way, as there are other aspects that contribute positively to the experience for families, including greater safety and security, and better opportunities, particularly for children and these are highly valued.

- There is a lack of acknowledgment system-wide that skilled migration is a family undertaking. This means that migrants who are secondary applicants, both men and women, will struggle to contribute fully to the new communities in which they settle. For skilled migrant women who are secondary applicants and who have caring responsibilities, our findings suggest that their struggle is likely to be the greatest, because their labour market opportunities were found to be more limited, often gendered, culturally and linguistically distinct and with lower rewards. Consequently, many find themselves either less economically active than they would wish or confined to areas of the labour market where they are overqualified, their skills and qualifications unrecognised and with few opportunities for progression. As suitable employment is acknowledged in policy to be an important element of social inclusion, these migrants face a riskier path to inclusion.

- Migrants possess capabilities such as perseverance and resilience, which they use to build new networks, undertake voluntary work and remain open to different career opportunities. Yet as the findings indicate, gaining employment in Australia, particularly in jobs with higher skill levels, depends on the maintenance of professional networks and social capital, rather than on the existence of particular human capital. Modes of entry can disrupt professional networks and lead to a loss of social capital and a reduction in the currency of human capital. Secondary applicants, who for the most part are women, experience this disruption more acutely than primary applicants. For the migrant without Australian work experience, the lack of a local reference is a hurdle to gaining employment.

- Migrants are able to rebuild networks most easily when education institutions (for example, VET providers and higher education institutes), professional accrediting bodies and associations and employers intervene actively to support paths to employment, particularly for the partners of skilled migrants.

- Employers can be important in assisting with settlement, as can a range of community groups and networks, although often these practices are dependent on highly motivated individuals rather than being the result of formal policies within organisations. In addition, there is clear evidence of discrimination in employment and also to some extent in the private rental housing market, and organisations should attend to this at the personal and structural level.

- Our participants are very positive about the advantages of living in a regional centre. In spite of the difficulties identified by many in relation to their access to rewarding high-level employment, social inclusion meant more than standard economic benefits. For many, living in the Greater

Shepparton region was considered a 'good life', and a safe life, which gave them a sense of belonging.

- As resourceful, creative and extremely reflexive individuals, skilled migrants were mindful of the contribution they were making, not only to filling certain skills shortages, but also to the civic life of the region: in supporting other new migrants; in stimulating new activities within the regional centre; and in some cases taking on leadership roles in non-governmental organisations and engaging in local politics.

- The migrants we spoke to were hopeful that this research would enable policy-makers to hear their voices and to recognise that a family household approach to migration policy and practice would allow them to better appreciate that migrants have capabilities to contribute to their new communities in diverse and differentiated ways.

Suggestions for policy and practice

The report also identified some policy implications for a range of stakeholders to encourage the development of more socially inclusive practices in regional communities. The following are suggestions for each of the stakeholder groups who participated in the research:

Skilled migrants could:

- recognise the need to become familiar with the Australian labour market

- investigate the opportunities available, which may be in unfamiliar industries or sectors

- consider which skills are generic in terms of the labour market

- adopt an open approach to building Australian experience.

Educational institutions could:

- identify skilled migrants as a target group in regional areas

- develop progression opportunities between vocational education and training and universities in ways that articulate to local labour market needs

- develop particular programs for skilled migrants, for example, high-level job-search courses and employability skills, and consider the development of higher-level language courses related to professional job seeking in the regional Australian context

- provide independent career advice and the best courses to achieve the desired outcome

- provide for the recognition of prior learning and experience.

Employers could:

- give greater recognition to overseas experience

- ensure selection processes are open and accessible

- provide more systematic settlement assistance

- value diversity by employing migrants locally, particularly secondary applicants

- recognise the skills and attributes that migrants possess and utilise these to increase the stock of knowledge, thereby strengthening organisations.

Supporting organisations could:

- publicise their ability to provide local information to skilled migrants

- ensure that local networks offer welcoming opportunities to enable migrants from different backgrounds to connect to others, as well as to the wider community

- put in place governance arrangements that reflect community diversity.

Government:

- Local government could:

  - enhance the accessibility of selection criteria and application processes for employment within the sector.

- State government could:

  - reconsider the role of skilled migration coordinators in regional areas on the basis that they provide independent advice for employers and prospective migrants

  - consider the provision of advice on overseas qualifications and the ways these can be utilised in the labour market.

- Federal government could:

  - develop skilled migration policies with an awareness that resources may need to be provided to assist families.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: Promoting social inclusion through VET: support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2653.html>. The support document includes more detail on the methodology, ethics, participants and descriptive statistics.

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