



Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy

MRC Tasmania Submission
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Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania

Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania (MRC Tas) was founded in 1979 and has been delivering services to migrants in Tasmania for over 40 years.

Formerly Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc. MRC Tasmania changed its trading name in 2017 in recognition of an increase to its established services in northern Tasmania and the subsequent opening of a dedicated Launceston office. MRC Tasmania currently manages over 30 concurrent contracts with all levels of Government, as well as other funding bodies. MRC Tasmania also provides fee for service programs.

MRC Tas provides direct services to over 3000 clients each year as well as indirect and group activities to members of the broader Tasmanian community. MRC Tas receives contact from both multicultural and mainstream community members on a daily basis seeking assistance and information regarding living, studying, visiting and moving to Tasmania.

Clients range in age from 0-96 years and represent a diverse range of cultures originating in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and South America. The organisation provides a wide array of services across Tasmania to migrants, temporary visa holders and former refugees of all ages and cultural backgrounds. In addition, MRC Tas delivers a highly regarded suite of training programs, including cultural awareness training for support for business to increase their capacity to effectively work with culturally diverse staff, manages an accommodation and learning centre for new migrants/humanitarian entrants, and runs a social enterprise café and catering business.

For more information about MRC Tas please refer to our website www.mrctas.org.au and our 2021-2022 Annual Report for client statistics and project reports

Response to Consultation Paper questions:

1.1 *In the next five to 30 years, what liveability related issues do you see impacting your sector, or the community you live in?*

- I. Housing – there needs to be a rapid increase in housing, especially social and affordable housing; including community-based designs which can accommodate multi- generational living and communal spaces.
- II. Employment for lower-skilled migrants and dependents of skilled migrants; support for employment programs that facilitate on-the-job language programs.
- III. Social cohesion - migrants continue to face racism and discrimination. There is a need to support events, programs and trainings which positively promote and reinforce the benefits of diversity, as well as building the cultural awareness and competency of individuals, communities and organisations.
- IV. Health and Mental Health – many migrants face significant barriers to accessing appropriate medical services (rising costs; inconsistent approach to use of interpreters; need for more cultural competency and awareness training for providers).
- V. Wellbeing: barriers to accessing sport and leisure activities (due to cost, unwelcoming club cultures, transport issues); lack of access to religious leaders and places of worship for many people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in Tasmania.
- VI. Inability to plan for future - increased housing, employment, and economic stresses arising from the complicated visa system leave many skilled migrants in limbo while awaiting their permanent visas. This prevents many migrants from planning families or long-term futures in Tasmania.

1.2 *What in your view are the top two opportunities which have the potential to increase liveability? Please share potential partnerships and other approaches that could assist in progressing these opportunities.*

Housing projects:

In developing projects to alleviate the housing crisis, there needs to be a clearer recognition and understanding of the populations served by housing strategies, which takes into account not just broad demographics, but social geography, community development, social cohesion, and inter-cultural relations. Consideration needs to be given to the housing models that allow for, and encourage, multi-generational family cohabitation. Such models would not only be more receptive to the needs of the different family relations and living arrangements common to many of the cultures that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds come from, but may also help ameliorate some of the housing crises likely to be faced in dealing with an increasingly aging population and the move away from residential facilities longer term.

A key opportunity in this space is the development of partnerships between government, private and community sectors to support building of social, affordable, and innovative

community and co-housing solutions. For example, State government or LGA owned land could be made available for Public Private Partnership (PPP) models to build social housing leased at peppercorn or reduced rents for long rental periods; such a model has been very successful in W.A. (the 'My Home' Project <https://myhomehousing.org.au/>).

Additionally, providing targeted support to facilitate people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to access mortgages would increase liveability. This could take the form of expanding on first home buyer schemes, the My Home program, reductions in stamp duty, specialised loans that reduce deposit required, or provide guarantors for people from refugee background who do not have sufficient credit ratings.

Multi-purpose Community Spaces:

State and Local government could work with local community groups and community service providers to focus on building and promoting public community spaces. Such spaces could form hubs for social interaction, leisure, and recreation, as a means of fostering social cohesion and making local neighbourhoods safer and more inclusive for CALD community members. These spaces could build on existing public spaces including parks, green space, neighbourhood houses and community gardens.

To make such spaces appealing to CALD communities, both structural and cultural barriers to access need to be addressed. For example: hubs need to be accessible by foot or public transport; main walkways need to be safe and appealing; spaces should be attractive and welcoming to different cultural communities; use of multilingual signs; infographics; holding events highlighting different local communities; having multipurpose areas that can be used by different communities for their preferred sport or recreation activities (soccer, music, etc).

2.1. To increase workforce participation, how might workplaces in Tasmania become more adaptable as the future of work changes?

To increase participation of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the Tasmanian workforce there needs to be a much more concerted effort to ensure that new Tasmanians have a supported entry into a welcoming and culturally safe workforce. This requires two major pieces of work:

- Building the cultural competency of organisations. There need to be levers in place to encourage widespread uptake and provision of Cultural competency training across all organisations and private businesses to ensure workplaces foster diverse workforces. For example, cultural competency audits, and advice and specialised workplace culture training to manage cultural difference in the workforce, and develop effective cross cultural communication skills.
- Orientation support for skilled migrants. on-arrival support, orientation, and training in Australian workplace cultural norms for new migrant workers and their families.

2.2. What is critical for all levels of government to do to a) attract and retain families and b) support those looking to start a family, to create a life in Tasmania?

Better support for Humanitarian entrants to Tasmania

Issues with housing and employment impacts negatively on retention and growth of CALD populations in Tasmania. In the last few years, the rate of client transfer to the mainland is higher than the successful tenancy rate. Given that the majority of humanitarian entrants are young (over 50% under 25), and that former refugees are less mobile than other populations, this represents an important loss of future generations with the capacity to contribute to our economy and build existing community groups.

Fast Track Family reunion

Many humanitarian entrants to Tasmania have immediate family overseas, often including adult children with families. The success rate of applications for family reunion visas for refugee families in Tasmania is very low. Increasing family reunion not only strengthens the family units already residing in Tasmania, but also means there is support in place for families wanting to have children. Lack of access to parents and grandparents for CALD families could impact families' decisions about when to have children.

Better support to recognise overseas qualifications and skills

All levels of government need to work together to ensure the authorities evaluating migrant's qualifications and skills are fair and balanced. Many skilled migrants have advanced qualifications and experience that are not recognised as being sufficient to meet Australian standards (for example, in engineering) and the pathways to seek advice and training to meet standards can be extremely costly. There may be limited opportunities in Tasmania for such migrants who cannot work in the area of their qualification, which leads to many moving to the mainland.

3.1 What is needed to help support the next generation of 15 to 18 year old Tasmanians to thrive and choose to continue live in their home state?

Transport

The lack of access to affordable transport has an enormous impact on young people. The housing crises is driving families further away from CBDs, and new social housing projects are often in areas with no youth or settlement services, and limited access to regular public transport routes. Lack of access to reliable, widespread public transport has enormous impact on young people's ability to seek employment and training, and travel to work opportunities outside the CBD. This requires investment in public transport that is regular and affordable and connects residential areas where CALD families increasingly are located to the services and employment opportunities they need.

Lack of youth-related services and support

Outside of key CBD areas of Hobart and Launceston there is a serious shortage of services that youth can access, exacerbated by transport issues noted above.

3.2. What more can be done to attract and retain more 18 to 44 year olds from interstate and overseas to address labour and/or skills shortages over the next five to 30 years?

In addition to the housing crisis, cost-of-living pressures, and lower wages compared to the mainland means Tasmania is not as attractive a destination as previously. To attract younger migrants, there

needs to be targeted support to help them secure housing, buy a house and provide security around employment.

Increased services to support dependents of migrants will also help improve the desirability of Tasmania: for example, on arrival orientation services similar to HSP; easier access to healthcare; support to gain a mortgage; reduced fees for schooling and childcare; clear pathways to permanent visas.

A focus on more innovative housing solutions including multigenerational living with communal spaces for recreation and community activities can also help improve the options for young people and young families. Such designs can help strengthen relationships and family safety, minimise segregation, and feelings of social isolation, all while encouraging social connection and wellbeing.

3.3 How do we better support successful settlement for skilled migrants and newly arrived community members in different parts of Tasmania?

On arrival and orientation services need to be available for families and dependents of skilled migrants, as well as migrants from humanitarian backgrounds. The development of settlement service hubs in different areas of the state, including access to language support, childcare and education could help improve settlement of migrants across the state. This would require satellite hubs for key settlement services, including case management, employment and training support, as well as language programs.

3.4 How might emerging workforce needs across a range of sectors and industries be better met through joined up efforts?

Many recent arrivals from humanitarian backgrounds, and some dependents of skilled migrants with low or no English face increased barriers to finding work in Tasmania. Many migrants would prefer to balance learning English with paid work. This enables financial stability and promotes independence and belonging. Many newly arrived migrants learn better in applied settings, where they learn English 'on the job' through vocationally relevant vocabulary and tasks.

Recent MRC Tas pilot programs have shown the success of such models in preparing employees from a CLAD background to work in areas with labour shortages. These programs require connected efforts from service providers, employers and AMEP and TAFE. Additional language support and training is needed to ensure workers can safely learn on the job, as well as cultural competency training for employers, and the development of EAL-designed and plain English versions of training modules.

4.1 What are the most significant innovation opportunities you see which have the potential to improve (one or all of) health, food security, ageing in place, and aged care?

A key opportunity to address all of these issues lies in innovative approaches to housing and community hubs that provide services, learning opportunities, communal spaces and a mix of accommodation types on one site. The MRC Tas Goodwood Multicultural accommodation and learning centre provides a small scale example of how providing settlement and learning supports on site can improve settlement goals and social cohesion.

Custom designed mixed-use accommodation centres that foster multigenerational living enables aging in place, reduces the burden on aged care, and could lead to enhanced health outcomes. The inclusion of communal spaces and services like kitchens, shared dining areas, and communal food gardens could also improve food security, and counter isolation leading to improved social cohesion. Wellbeing, health and social connection could also be improved through communal recreation spaces and communal buses to enable group travel to services and recreation.

Some innovative examples of cohousing models include:

- Chapeltown Cohousing in the UK, which mixes dwelling layouts, rentals, self builds, short term rental/guest houses - <https://www.chapeltowncohousing.org.uk/>
- CURANT model in Belgium –buddy systems for young refugees to co-rent with home owners or renters, with case management support and a mentoring system in place (<https://www.housingevolutions.eu/project/co-housing-and-case-management-for-unaccompanied-young-adult-refugees/>)

Also beneficial would be to support and extend the home hosting program (currently under consideration by DPAC), allowing Tasmanians with free room in their house to host migrants for a reduced rent.

4.3 Do you see potential to redesign current initiatives or use existing facilities in a new way to engage intergenerational participation? Please outline ideas that could be scaled up for broad application.

As noted above, sites such as MRC Tas' Multicultural Accommodation and Learning Centre could help alleviate many of the key issues identified around housing, employment and wellbeing. This site has the potential to be redeveloped as a higher density accommodation site, designed as a multigenerational living community. Such a redevelopment could become a model that could be replicated in other areas where currently there are few if any settlement and support services.