

Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees

Navitas Skilled Futures Pty Ltd

27 May 2022

For over 70 years Australia has invested in the settlement of migrants and refugees, beginning with English language classes for people in transit on ships post World War II that we now know as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Australia's first planned humanitarian programs, designed to deal with refugee and humanitarian issues, was established 1977. It is important we continually review the range of settlement services and their delivery to improve on the settlement outcomes of humanitarian and refugee arrivals.

Since 1990, Navitas Skilled Futures (formerly Navitas English) has been contracted by the Australian Government to deliver programs to improve the language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills (LLND) of over 200,000 people from diverse backgrounds. Navitas Skilled Futures delivers training that meets the settlement, education and employment needs and goals of migrants and refugees. Programs offer nationally accredited courses and qualifications, including: The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) for migrants and former refugees since 1998; Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) for jobseekers since 2010; Career Transition Assistance (CTA) for mature-age jobseekers since 2019; and Foundation Skills for Your Future (FSfYF) since 2020. We recently secured Australian Government contracts to deliver Employability Skills Training in four regions, commencing July 2022.

Navitas Skilled Futures welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Next Steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees Discussion Paper, released by the Commonwealth Coordinator General for Migrant Services.

Navitas Skilled Futures has previously made submissions to Government on:

- Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia ((2019)
- Reform of the AMEP 2021); and
- Delivery of the SEE (2022).

Executive Summary

Based on our extensive experience working with refugees, we understand that refugee and humanitarian settlement is not linear and, while programs and their respective resources need to support the achievement of the many settlement milestones, they need to be timely, layered and able to be customised to participants and locations.

The separation of "... settlement services and English learning ..." seems to reflect a settlement sector definition rather than a focus on the needs of refugee arrivals. English is pivotal to settlement and integration. NSF believes that on arrival English language learning in the AMEP is a core settlement

service and provides refugees with a key set of skills to support them to further education training or employment opportunities and greater social integration.

How do we ensure there is good coordination between our settlement services and English learning, employment and health services to ensure an end-to-end approach to service delivery?

Navitas Skilled Futures (NSF) supports greater policy and program alignment and coordination across the Commonwealth programs linked to refugee settlement, such as the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), AMEP, Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program, as well as Workforce Australia and Foundation Skills and Vocational training programs, to build a seamless pathway for refugees to connect with services. This also includes an ongoing review of services to ensure they meet the changing local, regional and national ecosystems and changes in the refugee client profiles. Our responses to the questions below are drawn from our experience delivering the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy and Humanitarian Settlement Services (I/HSS) from 2005 to 2017, the AMEP since 1998, SEE program since 2010, and Foundation Skills for Your Future since 2019.

From our extensive experience working with refugees, we understand that refugee and humanitarian settlement is not linear and, while programs and their respective resources need to support the achievement of the many settlement milestones, they need to be timely, layered and able to be customised to participants and locations – people and place-based solutions.

NSF acknowledges that it is unlikely that all the Commonwealth-funded programs which support refugee settlement and integration will ever become completely aligned and co-designed, as they are contracted through different departments over different contract periods and, different geographic contract regions. For example, the procurement process for Workforce Australia and related programs has been completed and programs are due to commence on 1 July 2022. The AMEP Request for Tender is not yet released and expected before 30 June 2022 to commence July 2023 and the SEE program Request for Tender is expected in the second half of 2022 to commence July 2023. And currently, the Department of Home Affairs is sensibly reviewing the AUSCO, HSP and SETS programs, with the intention of building improvements into the next Request for Tender or grants round. The program design phases are rarely undertaken concurrently, which means that a whole-of-government co-design process for all settlement-related programs is extremely unlikely. The reality of an imperfect alignment of policies and programs underpins the importance of the work of service providers to bridge the gaps that may exist across programs to ensure efficient and effective service delivery to refugees.

NSF welcomed the creation of the role of Coordinator-General for Migrant Services in late 2019. We also want to recognise other Commonwealth initiatives which support successful settlement, such as the Refugee and Migrant Services Advisory Council, which is a ministerially appointed body providing practical advice to the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs on improving settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants and other migrants. There is also the Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group (SOSOG), which brings state, territory and Commonwealth stakeholders to work together. In addition, there is a recently formed SOSOG Settlement Planning Working Group, currently chaired by the CEO of Multicultural NSW.

To add to the complexity of this at the Commonwealth level, there are myriad state and territory and local government programs and supports which assist refugee settlement and integration. It is clear to NSF that success requires the combined efforts of government across all levels and service providers to ensure that the services are effective in meeting the settlement policy and program objectives.

NSF proposes possible enhancements to strengthen opportunities for successful settlement outcomes and improve cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders working with a shared client cohort:

Recommendations:

1. The Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) should undertake development and management of a “Settlement Hub”, an online resource available to all migrants and refugees and service providers providing relevant information from Commonwealth and State level departments and including AUSCO training materials. Such a resource also promotes self-agency, as migrants and refugees can access information independently and as needed in a timely manner.
2. Home Affairs to include requirements related to collaboration and cooperation in settlement contracts/grant agreements. This is especially essential whenever refugees are engaging with different programs concurrently. For example, Home Affairs could create a communication protocol between an HSP Case Manager and an AMEP Pathway Guidance Advisor to ensure a more holistic and timely response to refugee client needs.
3. Home Affairs to consider having a Settlement Innovation Fund available only for collaborative projects across programs to improve settlement in local areas. Home Affairs would take responsibility for disseminating information on these and for promoting the need to regularly review local needs to ensure flexible and nimble responses to settlement issues as they arise.
4. Home Affairs to convene quarterly state/territory meetings of key cross-sectoral stakeholders and providers. Stakeholders would be expected to report on issues arising and collaborative initiatives implemented to address these.

NSF does not have direct engagement with the AUSCO pre-arrival training program; however, the program rarely features in the understanding and knowledge that refugee clients bring with them to the AMEP. Our suggestions on availability and content are:

- Plan for as many people as possible to access training face-to-face and online.
- Ensure materials are available in language.
- Ensure materials are regularly reviewed by language providers so they are accurate, appropriate, relevant and reflect settlement locations that are in current use. New locations need to be added as they are made available for referrals.
- Create up-to-date location snapshots to provide an overview of location features.
- Include the AUSCO materials online as part of the on-line Settlement Hub in recognition that the intensive pre-departure training may result in travellers remembering a smattering of information as their focus is on the impending flight to safety.

Finally, NSF disagrees with the separation of “... settlement services and English learning ...” in the question. Learning English is a settlement service for refugee arrivals. The separation of the two seems to reflect a sector self-definition rather than a focus on the needs of refugee arrivals. It is pivotal to settlement and integration. The AMEP commenced more than 70 years ago to provide settlement English for new migrants. NSF believes that on arrival English language learning in the AMEP is a core settlement service and provides refugees with a key set of skills to support them to further education training or employment opportunities and greater social integration.

Given the pressures in finding affordable housing in Australia, are there any changes we need to make to settlement services' approach to housing refugees?

NSF agrees that affordable housing is not a refugee issue but rather a widespread issue across the Australian community which affects families with limited income, including refugees on Centrelink benefits.

As an AMEP provider, NSF is witness to the adverse effects on refugees and other clients of housing instability. These include:

- Clients choosing to defer commencement of study until housing is stabilized.
- Clients perceive commencing study and then transferring between locations/providers when they move to long-term accommodation to be yet another disruption to their already disrupted lives and education to date.
- Housing instability prolongs the refugee experience of de-stabilization.
- Clients experience increased stress levels which affects their capacity to focus on learning and their physical and mental health.
- Clients feel increased pressure to get employment to optimise their opportunities to secure housing.

While NSF does not wish to comment on the approach to housing refugees, we offer the following suggestions which might improve successful housing outcomes:

- Home Affairs to establish an AMEP and HSP project to jointly design and deliver a course on navigating the housing market – developed by contract region or locality (in regional areas) to ensure relevant information and that course content be reviewed regularly.
- Home Affairs to ensure HSP and SETS contracts and grant agreements are adequately funded to have staff capacity to advocate in the market for refugee clients.
- Home Affairs to provide support for real estate agents to use interpreters, as needed, when working with refugee clients to improve stable housing outcomes.

How could we create greater opportunities for all refugees to build deeper relationships and friendships with the wider Australian community?

and

What opportunities are there for the wider community to help refugees and humanitarian entrants settle?

AMEP engagement is normally the longest and most intensive of all settlement support services to refugee arrivals, based on their time in the AMEP and hours of learning and therefore has a pivotal role in fostering relationships with and in the wider community. Our experience with newly and recently arrived refugees suggests that there is a pattern in how people navigate social integration. In general terms people follow this path:

- On arrival, refugees seek out their community from their country or origin, if there are members already established in Australia
- Joining the AMEP connects refugees with local migrant and refugee communities in their location
- AMEP can connect clients with external communities and agencies by inviting them into an AMEP environment. Exposure in a safe environment like the AMEP facilitates subsequent engagement outside the AMEP

- AMEP can facilitate client engagements with local community activities through structured activities in community not classrooms or colleges
- AMEP can support engagement with the wider community through support to volunteer, connection to sporting opportunities for self or children, connection with programs like community dinners which bring together refugee and local community members in an informal and local environment.

Engagement opportunities need to be:

- Scaffolded and relevant
- Local
- Linkages based on interests such as sports or hobbies.

Home Affairs could use this opportunity of program review to put in place across the AMEP, HSP and SETS programs a volunteering program which would enhance opportunities for refugee engagement with the wider Australian community.

NSF notes that the Home Affairs has reviewed and revised the Community Support Program, which does provide for engagement between refugees and the wider Australian community. Home Affairs has acknowledged, however, that this program has essentially provided for family reunion which suggests that there are limited opportunities to engage with the community at large.

NSF also notes the new Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) expects that CRISP will provide the wider community many opportunities to work directly to assist refugee settlement and integration.

How could we improve refugee health outcomes?

NSF, as a long-standing AMEP provider, understands the impact on refugee settlement of trauma, poor physical health and undiagnosed or untreated mental health matters. Time and attention to health-related issues leads to disrupted engagement in language learning and, in some cases, creates a barrier to employment until health matters are dealt with and stabilised.

NSF works closely with NSW Refugee Health Service to ensure that refugee clients in the AMEP are provided with information and are supported to effectively navigate the health system.

How do we design programs to take into account the large differences between settlement locations?

NSF considers that program implementation and approach, rather than program design itself are the key factors which determines an appropriate program response which recognises differences between settlement locations and refugee cohorts. As per the response to the first question in this paper, it is the coordination and collaboration across services, agencies, local, state and federal governments which contributes to successful settlement in a location.

How do we design programs to respond well to people's individual needs and aspirations, and to help strengthen their capacity and self-agency?

Programs need to be designed with refugee clients and their projected settlement journey at the centre of thinking and planning rather than the priority for the individual service provider.

Governments and civil society need to see settlement programs as empowering and providing a safe future for people and families.

Program design should ensure:

- A strengths-based approach which builds on knowledge, life experience and skills which refugees bring to Australia;
- Effective needs assessment process on arrival and repeated as skills and knowledge evolve over time;
- Case management plans that are co-designed with participants and, where appropriate, are shared between agencies supporting families;
- Built-in opportunities for AUSCO, AMEP, HSP and SETS providers to collaborate to ensure relevant, accurate and timely information about services and how to access them;
- Service delivery is based on scaffolded learning so that independence is the result rather than dependence on others to manage their settlement; and
- Self-access to settlement information, perhaps available in something like a virtual/online Settlement Hub.

What are the biggest barriers to the delivery of good outcomes in our current services?

NSF suggests the following areas for improvements to deliver more positive settlement outcomes for refugees.

- A clear definition and shared understanding of what constitutes “good” outcomes.
- Contract and grant agreement requirements which focus on outcomes rather than outputs.
- Well designed and user-friendly tools to accurately measure outcomes.
- Accurate capturing of qualitative outcomes.
- Increased focus on formative and summative program evaluation – at a local, state and national level – to inform program improvements.
- Improved and increased end-user feedback collected by a third party, as clients are often reluctant to give negative feedback to the service provider with which they have engaged over a significant period of time.
- Increased use of government, providers, stakeholders and clients co-design for program components.
- Clear and accountable risk management and quality assurance frameworks and protocols.
- Increased coordination between AUSCO, AMEP, HSP, Workforce Australia programs and SETS.

Examples of Navitas Skilled Futures innovative programs

Ask the Expert

NSF’s Ask the Expert series of webinars is now in its 5th series of sessions. The sessions provided targeted practical information to anyone in the community, particularly those of low-level English, because they met identified needs and provided a genuine community service, while keeping people connected and informed about current topics of interest such as vaccinations, testing and financial

support. The sessions were inclusive, easy to access and understand, and well promoted by all the relevant services.

Webinar topics range from Protecting your family from COVID by the NSW Refugee Health Service (Arabic, Chinese and Vietnamese language), Job Search Strategies by Dress for Success, Updates for the Afghan community with Dari interpreter by Legal Aid, How to get help in an emergency, safety in the home and more with Fire and Rescue NSW, Updates from the Police by NSW Police Force, Session on strategies to improve social-mental wellbeing by STARTTS, and Updates for job seekers by Centrelink.

Participants can join the sessions to get the latest information and services, and have questions answered. Anywhere between 50 to 160 people have attended at least one of the 5-6 sessions run every term since mid-2020, with consistent positive feedback from all participants and presenters.

This project shows the value of collaborating with others to achieve safety, wellbeing and connectedness within the migrant/refugee community by identifying their distinct needs and working together to positively address those needs.

The series has been publicly acknowledged in Navitas Skilled Futures' recent [NSW Premier's Multicultural Community Medal](#) award (for the second year in a row), as well as the [NSW Humanitarian Award](#), awarded to Stakeholder Engagement Manager Basim Shamaon, who initiated and continues to manage the sessions.

English for Swimming – interactive teaching resource shared throughout Australia

An award-winning Sydney program for migrants and refugees, developed by a NSF Learning Designer, combines learning English with swimming lessons. It has been transformed into a teaching resource with links to instructional and virtual reality videos and flash cards, that will be shared widely across Australia to help reduce drownings.

After successfully running the English for Swimming program in South West Sydney for the past two years, Navitas Skilled Futures has produced the interactive book to be distributed free to other adult education providers in the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community in time for summer 2021. The book was launched on Thursday 9 December at Auburn Swim Centre, Lidcombe, and attended by Auburn MP Lynda Voltz and representatives from organisations including STARTTS, CORE CS, South West Local Health District and Royal Life Saving.

NSF hopes the English for Swimming comprehensive resource will empower more adults from CALD backgrounds with new skills and water confidence, and ultimately help reduce the number of drowning deaths among this statistically over-represented group.

Digital Literacy for Health resources

As more government services are delivered online, NSF recognised that there is a growing digital divide which could disadvantage migrants and refugees and make access to services more difficult for them.

NSF has developed two sets of learning resources to support learners to develop digital skills necessary to access health sites and apps. The first set of resources was prepared to assist higher level learners, while the second set was developed specifically for those with lower English Language proficiency. The second set is currently being piloted and may be revised before widespread use with learners. This follows the journey of a character as she navigates her way through the online processes.

Topics covered include making appointments online using an app like HotDoc, Telehealth, e-scripts, My Health Record, the Medicare app, Dr Google and trustworthy websites for medical information and health and fitness apps.

Foundation Skills for your Future: Community Construction

NSF partnered with Thrive and Community Construction to design and deliver a language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy training program customised for Community Construction. The program supported employees to refine their skills, improve their work performance and reduce Workplace Health and Safety incidents. A short video was produced to highlight the outcomes for participants. There are interviews with employees about the benefits of the program, the employer and the program staff. It can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzSG3LX7rIE&t=5s>

Examples of innovative programs operating at a state, local or community level that we can learn from?

Multicultural NSW and Service NSW: The Youth Linker Pilot Project

Multicultural NSW (MNSW) undertook a project to engage refugee youth to research ways to improve supports and services to young people. The results indicated that young people from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds frequently found navigating NSW Government services and other allied programs for young people confusing and complicated. Service NSW agreed to host a new role called a Youth Linker to assess if such support would improve outcomes for young people. The pilot was conducted in Fairfield in south-west Sydney. Young people were recruited and trained to provide these supports. Service NSW describes it as follows:

“You can ask your Multicultural Youth Linker for advice and help on a range of topics, including:

- Studying and finding courses
- Staying healthy
- Finding hobbies and friends
- Supporting your family
- Learning more about opportunities in Australia.”

The program was a success and has subsequently been expanded.

Multicultural NSW: NSW Growing Regions of Welcome (GROW)

This project was initiated in 2019 and was significantly delayed due to COVID. It is a pilot program now in its early stages. The program has been designed to connect interested migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Western Sydney with lifestyle and employment opportunities in regional NSW.

It launched in June 2021. Over 3 years, NSW GROW aims to strengthen capacity in regional areas to attract and retain newcomers, assist people in western Sydney to relocate to regional NSW and to coordinate a collaborative, cross-sector approach to regional settlement in NSW. For the purposes of the pilot program, regional locations are Murray RDA and Riverina RDA.