

Better Settlement Services

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN
BETTER SETTLEMENT SERVICES
IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Democrats believe that there are currently worrying gaps in the provision of settlement services which we believe need to be addressed. Some solutions to these problems would include:

Better Coordination of Services

If service provision was better coordinated between state and commonwealth agencies, it would be more efficient, more easily accessible for migrants and there would be less duplication of services.

More Specialised Health Services Geared Towards Migrants

There is a need for better health services and more cross-cultural training for health providers. Medical practitioners must be made aware of both health conditions which may be more prevalent in countries of origin, and the potential cultural sensitivities of people. When discussing health problems, well-qualified translators are vital.

Refugees need more intensive health assistance, such as trauma counselling, which our feedback suggests is often inadequate. There are those who have experienced degrees of torture and/or trauma while in their home country and may also have experienced significant trauma during their journey to Australia.

An element within this group who are suffering a lack of specialised response or services are women arriving in the Woman At Risk category.

Many of these women have fled from oppressive situations where they have been systematically abused and raped. The current services for women arriving under the Women at Risk program should be reviewed immediately to ensure they are adequately delivered.

Better Information for Migrants Before They Arrive

There is significant level of inconsistency in understanding amongst people coming from different countries about the situation and services they will be offered in Australia, and information seems to vary greatly from country to country. It is evident that blanket processes do not work. Rather, information should be tailored to the situation and the people involved, and it must be consistent with post-arrival information. It also needs to be provided in culturally appropriate ways to ensure that it is as meaningful as possible.



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Last updated 24/08/2007

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Extending Initial Support Services

Better targeting of support services under the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) is vital, and the initial settlement under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) should be expanded beyond the first 6 months. While recent improvements are welcome, more needs to be done, as many migrants need more time to acclimatise to a foreign system of education, health and life in Australia.

We believe that the initial settlement services provided under IHSS should be extended to 12 months.

The changing demographics and countries of origin of our migrants also mean there is often a significant lag before the service-providers can adapt to the new cultures they are dealing with – new languages, sensibilities and cultures. DIAC should put more resources into anticipating changes to our migrant intake, so that services-providers have time to research and recruit in order to be ready to assist future arrivals.

Remove Employment Barriers.

Many migrants and refugees find their previous qualifications and skills aren't fully recognised in Australia. This not only causes significant hardship and dissatisfaction for the migrants or refugees themselves, it also robs the country of many of the benefits that migration brings.

We believe that more courses need to be provided to validate previous overseas qualifications or bridge the gap to Australian standards where necessary.

The current skills shortage makes the economic arguments for properly utilising the skills of all migrants even more compelling. The issues of discrimination and ongoing racism faced by some refugees and migrants as they look for work are particularly problematic, and we support the current government programs aimed at eliminating racism.

Targeted Education for Migrants and Refugees

We must ensure that education for young refugee and migrant children is appropriately targeted and adequate for their different circumstances. For example, children who have spent much of their lives in refugee camps, or disrupted by civil wars or other conflicts often have lower literacy and numeracy skills than others their age.

There must be more effort put into making sure that these children are not left behind.

Public Awareness

There needs to be more public awareness programs to address the changing face of our country and the emerging communities amongst us, to head off any unfounded fears or tensions. We support government programs that fulfil this function, and pave the way for new communities to engage with the rest of the nation

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Other Barriers faced by Migrants

Settlement services are also needed to address the barriers faced by many migrants and refugees like language, economic difficulties, housing, unemployment and cultural barriers.

These issues can become major impediments to full integration into the community and can pose major problems for some new migrants.