

Concept note

Social and Economic Impact of Settlement

This concept note has been prepared by the SETSCoP Secretariat and is based on feedback from the Social and Economic Impact Steering Group. The note outlines the approach to mapping the social and economic impact of settlement.

Background

SETSCoP is a national collaboration of settlement service providers across Australia, who assist vulnerable migrants and refugees under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program. SETSCoP is facilitated by [Migration Council Australia \(MCA\)](#) to encourage the sharing best practice and expertise for effective settlement, in addition to collectively identifying issues and opportunities.

Since its establishment in January 2020, SETSCoP has developed sub-groups focused on key areas for settlement which include economic participation, operational, thematic, community capacity building and state-based best practice.

The SETSCoP CEO Forum was convened to address high level issues and strategic considerations as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on settlement services and to discuss the future of settlement service delivery. Two steering groups have been established to focus on identified areas of focus including enhancing the settlement sector and workforce sustainability, and mapping the social and economic impact of settlement.

Context

The economic impact of migration has been mapped, demonstrating the value that migration brings to every aspect of our economy.¹ Despite Australia's long history of settlement and settlement services to support newly arrived migrants and refugees, the true extent of the economic and social impact of settlement, is yet to be determined. Since the first federal immigration portfolio was established in 1945, Australia has welcomed over 800,000 refugees and other humanitarian entrants to settle in Australia.² During the 2019-20 financial year, even with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia granted 13,171 refugee resettlement visas.³

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the settlement process and settlement services in Australia. With international borders closed for the foreseeable future, there is significant value in developing an accurate and in-depth understanding of the economic and social impact of settlement system and developing recommendations for the enhancement of the impact of settlement on life outcomes of clients. While data on program-specific outcomes is collected and analysed by Department and service providers (more qualitative, case-study

¹ https://migrationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2015_EIOM.pdf

² https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3599552/upload_binary/3599552.pdf

³ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/report-migration-program-2019-20.pdf>

based), there is a need to bring together existing bodies of evidence to produce a robust, quantitatively and qualitatively rigorous analysis of the aggregated impact of settlement service provision on Australia's economic and social (including social cohesion) outcomes.

A model-based analysis of the collective impact of settlement service provision, will provide evidence of the return on investing in settlement and settlement services and its influence on Australian society, beyond individual case outcomes. Additionally, it will highlight the role of the settlement sector in driving successful settlement outcomes, demonstrating the necessity for forward planning of Australia's settlement program.

The CEO Forum has acknowledged a need to identify the economic and social impact of settlement, and as such a related steering group has been established.

Economic impact of settlement

With the support of the CEO steering group and wider CEO Forum, there is value in mapping and measuring the economic impact of settlement in Australia. Independent economic modelling of the impact of settlement services will provide a comprehensive analysis of how the sector contributes to the Australian economy. Measuring economic impact will also demonstrate the role that the settlement sector can play in COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

With the RBA forecasting unemployment peaking at 10 per cent or over 1.3 million by the end of 2020⁴, it is timely that we highlight the role that settlement services play in enhancing economic participation through job readiness programs and collaborative partnerships with Job Active Providers and employers. Additionally, the economic impact of practical and emotional supports provided by settlement organisations needs to be determined as many play a crucial role in the prevention and intervention of mental health issues, family relationships, community development and cohesion and support participation in economic and social life.

The scope of mapping the economic impact of settlement could be through expert economic analysis of data from government, settlement services or through an ad hoc assumption based approach, or a combination of all approaches. A small working group will help identify data collected by settlement service providers that may feed into the mapping exercise.

Social impact of settlement

Measuring the social impact of settlement, will demonstrate the role that settlement and settlement services play in influencing social cohesion and the social context of Australia more broadly. A literature review, in addition to impact driven storytelling through case studies, will provide a dynamic overview of successful settlement outcomes and settlement's social influence at the local, state and national level.

⁴ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/costs-covid-australia-economic-prospects-wounded-world>

The scope may include collating and evaluating case studies that demonstrate the social impact of settlement and focus on:

- employment
- health and wellbeing
- productivity
- social cohesion
- social participation
- community engagement and development

Better understanding and articulating the social and economic impact of settlement to date, will provide substantive evidence of the value of settlement services in Australia. Demonstrating the value of settlement programs and their impact across social and economic domains, will provide a clearer direction for the future of settlement in Australia and its role in rebuilding social cohesion post COVID-19. Articulating what constitutes effective settlement based on the National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards and National Settlement Framework, will provide a base for this work.

Both a literature review and modelling could support the development of a more comprehensive narrative of settlement. While the role of settlement services and the nature of settlement programs is understood by policy makers within key Government departments, the breath and reach of settlement services is often not well understood by the broader policy making community. Further, enhanced understanding of the impact of the settlement sector would lend weight to an argument for the expansion of the SETS program and the opening up of the eligibility.