



Report on the availability of a Humanitarian Migrant Workforce for Regional Western Australia

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Report prepared by:

Jackie Jarvis, Chief Executive Officer

Sian Pladdy, Research Assistant

Rural, Regional, Remote Women's Network of WA Inc.



Humanitarian Migrant Workforce Report

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Executive Summary

The RRR Network has been asked to undertake some preliminary investigations and report on the availability of Humanitarian Migrants to fill Western Australian regional employment vacancies with a particular focus on the WA Sheep meat processing sector. Whilst the RRR Network was not funded, at this stage, to consider the full design of any project to support a migrant workforce, this report has made some preliminary recommendations in relation to what type of projects or programs could be implemented.

The report considered four cohorts of Humanitarian Migrants being:

- Refugee and humanitarian program participants
- Bridging Visa (asylums seekers)
- Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders
- Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders

As the only official Australian government channel, the Refugee and Humanitarian program represents one of the few opportunities for an ongoing stream of motivated workers for regional WA, yet currently WA receives a very small number of Humanitarian Migrants under this program.

This report recommends that consideration be given to the value of having more Federally funded settlement services being delivered in WA regional locations where engaged communities have identified a desire for population growth or a need to fill labour supply shortages. Despite the small numbers of migrants arriving in WA through this program a good number of participants have found themselves working in the Katanning sheep meat processing sector, but limited on-the-ground support and access to housing remain challenges and result in high staff turnover. The sector has also found that the changing demographic of the Humanitarian program migrants, coupled with the low numbers coming into WA continues to make recruitment into regional towns a challenge.

To address this challenge this report considered the employment availability of Bridging, TPV and SHEV holders all of whom are in Australia under temporary protection but with limited opportunity to secure permanent residency; as a result of having arrived in Australia by boat after the Australian Government policy changed to ensure that anyone arriving by board was not given a permanent protection visa. Since 2014 onward some TPV holders have been able to apply to transfer to a SHEV.

The SHEV provides protection for 5 years (compared to the 3 years available under a TPV), with the main feature of this visa being that it can provide a pathway to possible residency. The process is however onerous with SHEV applicants having to work and/or study in regional Australia and not access social security benefits for a period of 3 ½ years within the 5-year visa period. After that time SHEV holders are not automatically granted another type of visa in Australia and must instead apply for, and meet the requirements of, an existing Skilled visa or Employer-sponsored visa.

This process would mean that a SHEV holder must, after the 3 ½ year period have a demonstrated and verifiable skill, and be in an occupation and region currently accepting Skilled migration. They are also a required to pass the high-level International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as required of all skilled migrants coming to Australia.

The requirement that SHEV holders work in a 'regional' location is further complicated by the fact that the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT all have their capital cities included under the definition of 'regional' for SHEVs and local refugee advocates are now lobbying to have the whole of Perth classed as 'regional' for SHEV purposes. The lobbying is driven by a genuine desire to support SHEV holders who are well settled in their metropolitan communities and employed, in many instances, in jobs roles that may otherwise be hard to fill. This report found that due to poor regional connections, and the lack of a coordinated approach from a mainly volunteer support system, Perth based SHEV holders may not have fully explored regional employment opportunities within WA.

If the WA State Government has a genuine desire to utilise SHEV holders in regional locations it should explore the idea of a place based, needs based case management mechanism to source employment vacancies from regional employers, matched with skills, experience and qualifications of SHEV holders. Ongoing case management is then required to ensure that SHEV holders and their employers remain on a pathway that leads to permanent residency.

During the preparation of this report the RRR Network spoke to SHEV holders with skills and experience that would be highly valued in some regional towns, yet the feedback provided was that, if compelled to relocate to a "regional" postcode, many Perth based SHEV holders were more likely to move interstate to a large regional town/city or a capital city classed as 'regional' - rather than to regional Western Australia. This was due to the perceived greater support mechanisms in place in large East Coast towns and cities, existing connections to larger ethnic based communities in some areas, and a perceived greater access to training and English lessons.

There is a real opportunity for Western Australia to access a pool of committed, willing employees able to relocate to regional locations (potentially from across Australia) with a structured, but relatively simple case management model.

The primary focus of this report was to consider the use of SHEV holders in the regional WA Sheep meat sector. If there are limited job roles in that sector that are likely to be classed as eligible skilled occupations for a future, then SHEV holders are unlikely to take on a role that cannot support their pathway to permanent residency.

Bridging Visa and TPV holders may be more willing to relocate for lower skilled work opportunities, but on the understanding that this cohort could face deportation and have no access to federally funded support services, making the move to a regional town more difficult.

Katanning based employer WAMMCO has successfully employed humanitarian migrants for many years, most coming through the Australian Government's refugee and humanitarian program but only after the migrants were initially settled in Perth for some time. This 'secondary migration' from Perth to the regions seems to have slowed significantly, most likely due to a changing demographic of the very limited number of refugee and humanitarian program participants being settled in Perth. The opportunity to secure federally funded settlement services to ensure regional Western Australian towns can become first or primary settlement location for new migrants would help regions where there are labour supply shortages.

Background

The Rural Regional Remote Women's Network of Western Australia (RRR Network) is an Incorporated Association that received Royalties for Regions funding in 2016 to transition the organisation from a State Government Advisory group to an independent entity, with the autonomy to engage in a broader and deeper range of activities that benefit Western Australian women and their communities. Our primary focus is to support the economic and social wellbeing of Western Australian communities, located outside of the Perth metropolitan area.

In 2013 Jackie Jarvis; the current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the RRR Network; developed and delivered a migrant employment program that placed Humanitarian Migrants (refugees) into regional jobs supporting the agriculture sector. The program was delivered by Jackie's then employer, Victorian based Not for Profit (NfP) entity MADEC Australia, but was fully funded by a \$50k grant from the Western Australian Office of Multicultural Interests.

The 2013 project had a limited scope due to modest funding and ran as a pilot over a 6-month period with 0.4 FTE allocated over that term. Despite the limited resources the project resulted in 9 full time jobs in industries that had previously relied on backpacker labour, with the South West dairy sector and Gascoyne Horticultural sector representing the most successful case studies.

In 2014/15 Jackie commenced work at CCI WA, in a role funded by the then Dept. of Agriculture and Food to guide and support workforce development plans for different agrifood sectors.

Based on the extensive experience of the RRR Network's CEO in this area, and the clear links to economic and community development that comes from good workforce planning, the RRR Network has been engaged to undertake this preliminary research report on the role a Humanitarian Migrant Workforce might play in regional WA with a particular focus on the Sheep meat Processing sector who have reported labour shortages

Scope

The RRR Network was tasked, in the first instance, to provide an understanding of the number, and broad demographic information of Western Australia's current and proposed Humanitarian Migrant intake under the Federal government's Refugee and Humanitarian program.

This project was also asked to consider the utilisation of the cohort of asylums seekers currently living in Western Australia under various temporary visas who may be suitable for employment in regional Western Australia.

Whilst this preliminary report was not, at this first stage, funded to design a program to support the settlement of workers into the Sheep meat Processing sector, comments have been made about the potential design settlement programs for regional Western Australia.

Humanitarian Migrants in Western Australia

This report looks at four cohorts of Humanitarian Migrants.

- Refugee and humanitarian program participants
- Bridging Visa (asylums seekers)
- Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders
- Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders

Refugee and humanitarian Program participants

There are an estimated 1.2 million refugees globally who need resettlement and Refugee and Humanitarian Program is part of Australia’s contribution to the international protection of refugees.

In 2017/18 Australia allocated 16,250 places for refugee settlement into Australia; with 18,750 places allocated in 2018/19 places. There were also 12,000 additional places made available for those displaced by the Syrian/Iraqi conflicts. A very small number of migrants entering into Australia under this program are settled in Western Australia, and those who are placed here by the Federal government are all settled in the Perth metropolitan area.

Between January and March 2018; 2,740 people arrived in Australia on a humanitarian visas and the data would indicate that many arrived in family groups with a broad mix of ages:

Age Band	Humanitarian (a)
00-05	360
06-11	336
12-15	199
16-17	106
18-24	362
25-34	501
35-44	372
45-54	247
55-64	152
65+	105
Grand Total	2,740

Of these 2,740, the Department of Human Services data indicates that 397 identified as Syrian and 339 identified as Iraqi. 1354 were Male, 1386 were Female and the majority were settled in Fairfield and Liverpool (western suburbs of Sydney), Hume (outer suburb of Melbourne) and Brisbane.

Of the 2,740 Humanitarian Migrants who arrived in Australia between January and March 2018 only 150 were placed into Western Australia.

Current State^	Humanitarian (a)
New South Wales	1,071
Victoria	835
Queensland	416
Western Australia	150
South Australia	176
Not Recorded	16
Australian Capital Territory	29
Northern Territory	21
Tasmania	26
Grand Total	2,740

This small number of placements into Western Australia in 2018 reflects the trend established over many years, due mainly to the perceived lack of access to relevant services. Those that arrive under the Humanitarian Settlement Program receive practical support for up to 18 months upon arrival with specialised and intensive services funded by the Federal government including Adult Migrant English Program; Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training; Skills for Education and Employment; Jobactive; Disability Employment Services; Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma; Translating and Interpreting Service.

Whilst the small number settled in Perth are able access these federally funded support programs, there are presumably economies of scale achieved by placing the majority of humanitarian migrants into larger population centres. The ongoing trend also then creates communities in these larger population centre, making incoming humanitarian migrants more likely to want to be settled in locations where there may be relatives and community members already located.

As these migrant communities grow the available resources increase. An example is Community Hubs Australia Incorporated, a not-for-profit organisation that works with federal, state, and local governments; business; philanthropic and not-for-profit organisations; and community organisations to deliver proven grassroots programs that build social cohesion. See: <http://www.communityhubs.org.au>

Community Hubs Australia are located throughout Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland and in the 2016 federal budget funding of \$5.7 million over three years was provided to increase the number of Community Hubs, including the expansion into South Australia. There are no Community Hubs in Western Australia.

Refugee and humanitarian Program participants - in the Media

A story from The Guardian published earlier this year highlights the skills Humanitarian Migrants can bring to Australia and the challenges presented by placing them into already crowded urban areas:

The Guardian Tues 20th March 2018, By Ben Doherty

(<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/20/the-catch-22-refugees-to-australia-struggle-to-find-work>)

'The catch 22': refugees to Australia struggle to find work"

Syrians and Iraqis settled in a one-off program are full of gratitude but despair at being able to obtain jobs because they lack experience here. They might be qualified, committed and keen to work but newly arrived refugees face significant barriers to work – the “catch-22” of needing Australian experience to find employment but requiring employment to gain that experience.

Between November 2015 and July last year, Australia resettled an additional 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq in a one-off program to help people displaced by long-running civil conflicts.

Those refugees – additional to Australia’s annual humanitarian intake – have mostly settled in western Sydney, and, overwhelmingly, have found a positive resettlement experience. They have told researchers of their gratitude to Australia for accepting them, and reported little experience of racism.

Those in the group:

- Were split 50-50 between Iraqi and Syrian nationals

- Were young (one-quarter were children, and most aged between 18 and 44)

- Were well-educated and with good English

- Were mostly Christian (more than 80%)

- Were middle-class and professional (Including dentists, engineers, pharmacists and business people who had held senior positions with multinational companies in their homelands)

- Had a high level of female employment

- Were in large family groups with typically three to five dependent children

But the refugees have difficulty finding jobs in Australia, particularly ones commensurate with their skills and experience. After 18 months in the country, just 17% of humanitarian entrants are in employment, a Centre for Policy Development report found last year. And longer term, less than 50% of skilled and qualified refugees find work in their area of expertise and experience.

Several initiatives, such as Refugee Talent, founded by Syrian refugee Nirary Dacho, and Thrive Refugee Enterprise, have sought to give refugees an entry into the workforce or assistance to begin their own business.

Dacho told the Guardian he had more than 100 unsuccessful job interviews before he decided to start his own firm, connecting refugees with employers looking to hire them.

Prof Jock Collins, from the University of Technology Sydney has begun a three-year study of families resettled under the special Syrian-Iraqi intake, and said employment was the biggest barrier to those families' resettlement.

"Their biggest worry is finding a job," he said. "There are two key employment issues: the recognition of qualifications, and the catch-22: they need Australia employment experience before they can get a job in Australia, but they first need that job to get that experience. "They come here and they want to work, they are impatient to work. Both men and women, have had very successful careers ... Some of the men were almost in tears when we interviewed them about just sitting at home. They want to get off the dole as quickly as possible, they want to work. "From the Australian end, how do we provide Australian experience? We need to think a little bit innovatively about that."

But Collins said the 200 refugee families were overwhelmingly positive about being in Australia and "hugely grateful" for the chance to rebuild their lives in safety. "Rarely did anyone mention any experience of racism, it didn't come up."

The New South Wales coordinator general for resettlement, Peter Shergold, said the state had accepted more than half of the additional 12,000 cohort, in addition to its regular refugee resettlement program. "We almost tripled the number of refugees in 2016-17, from 4,500 to 11,200, and on the whole, it went effectively and it went ahead without a great deal of media controversy, and it does demonstrate we do have the capacity to take larger numbers of humanitarian migrants in response to global humanitarian catastrophes."

Shergold said the concentration of refugees moving to one local government area – a majority moved to Fairfield in western Sydney, largely because their sponsors lived there – had put intense pressure on services in that area, and future settlement cohorts would benefit from moving to rural and regional Australia. "In many of those regional centres, there is goodwill at a community level, there is employer interest, and affordability of housing. There are significant advantages."

Writing in a public health research and practice paper published by the Sax Institute, Shergold said employment – particularly one that recognised qualifications and experience – was a cornerstone of successful resettlement and integration into Australia.

A total of 2,200 refugees have gone through the NSW Refugee Employment Support Program, which offers language and skills training, assistance with having qualifications recognised, work experience and mentoring.

Through another program Shergold implemented, the NSW government has hired 80 refugees in positions in the state's public service. "That was one of my first moves, a program that the NSW government would take on recently arrived refugees, not that they would make their lives as career public servants, but in six or 12 months' time, they could, if they wanted to, seek jobs in the private sector, and they would go with references, with work skills, with that experience in Australia. "But none of them have left," Shergold said. "They don't want to go back to welfare, they want to work, and they'll take on even relatively junior-level positions and see that as a first rung on the ladder."

ENDS

The above media article reflects Refugee Council data showing that intake via the refugee and humanitarian Program throughout 2015 to 2017 was mainly families from Syria and Iraq.

Recommendations - Refugee and Humanitarian Program participants

As the only official Australian government channel, the Refugee and Humanitarian program represents one of the few opportunities for ongoing stream of motivated workers for regional WA, yet currently WA receives a very small number of Humanitarian Migrants under this program.

There appears to be a “Chicken and Egg” scenario at play in Western Australia. Perth only receives very limited federal funding for services due to the small number of Humanitarian Migrants being settled here; but then more Humanitarian Migrants are not settled in Perth due to limited services.

More work needs to be done to consider programs currently available in other States and to undertake analysis of the economic drivers created in regional communities from the placement of Humanitarian Migrants into a region.

It is recommended that the WA State Government closely examine the current and proposed cohorts of Humanitarian Migrants coming to Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, and consider the benefits that may flow to rural and regional Western Australian with the considered placement of migrant families in selected regions. By identifying interested and engaged communities that wish to act as settlement hubs, and mapping their needs, be it for population growth or labour supply, the WA State Government may have a role to play to in working with the Federal government to secure funded settlement services in areas of identified need.

A commitment of both Federal and State funds should also be considered within the context of the community benefit that flows from both the increase population in regional areas, but also from the related economic activity that comes with the provision of local services supporting new migrants.

Given the relatively small number of migrants currently entering Western Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, and that their settlement is currently limited to the Perth, this cohort of migrants has not been considered for immediate work opportunities in WA's sheep meat processing sector.

Bridging Visa holders

Asylum Seekers who have applied for a protection visa but are still awaiting a decision are often left on Bridging Visas for a significant length of time. This cohort generally arrived by boat from around 2013 onwards, but before the policy of the day moved to off-shore processing. Most of these Asylum Seekers were not given work rights of any type, for the first 2 to 3 years of their time in Australia and following a security assessment were released into the community under the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program. The SRSS program is administered by selected Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) who receive funding to provide participants with a basic living allowance, typically 89% of Newstart allowance.

Bridging Visa holders could have their visa cancelled and be deported at any time. For most work rights have now been provided and this cohort have been advised that they will be losing access to SRSS living allowance in coming months if they are deemed able to work.

Refugee support workers in Perth advise that many within this cohort are actively seeking work opportunities and may be suitable for regional work opportunities such as in the Sheep meat processing industry. The main barrier to accessing this cohort is having a coordinated approach to gathering resumés, assessing suitability for employment, and assessing English language skills and aptitude for the job roles and for regional living.

The RRR Network met with two charities; Mercycare and the Asylum Seeker Hub at Riverview Church; who are actively helping this cohort with the preparation of resumes and other employment skills but do this purely on a charitable basis using volunteers. While Mercycare administers SRSS payments, they receive no funding to offer other face to face support and again rely on volunteers.

Recommendations – Bridging Visa Holders

Bridging visa holders are possible candidates for employment in the regional Sheep meat processing, and other sectors, however there is an need to create a coordinated program to source willing workers through the funding or provision of services in Perth to provide pre-employment support and screening.

As this work is currently being undertaken by charities utilising volunteers it would unreasonable for a WA State Government program to continue to rely on charities and volunteers to provide a vetting or referral service for any program. The funding of these organisations, or the provision of a specialist Human Resource services to assess the suitability for employment, English language skills and aptitude for regional employment would be recommended.

There would also be a role for the provision of specialist advice on the likelihood of individual bridging visa holders being granted asylum in Australia, given the tenuous nature of bridging visas

Temporary Protection Visa Holders

A Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) is available to those people who are claiming asylum, but who arrived in Australia by boat after the Australian Government policy changed to ensure that anyone arriving by board was not given a permanent protection visa. Like the Bridging Visa holders this cohort were not initially given any work rights and, following security clearances, were placed into the community under the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program prior to work rights being granted.

Most TPV holders now have work rights and have a 3-year visa. After each 3-year visa term, their visa may be cancelled, at which time the visa holder could be deported, or TPV could be renewed for another 3-year term.

TPV holders can work, have access to Medicare services, and may be eligible for some social support through Centrelink payments.

They cannot sponsor family members to come and live with them in Australia, and they cannot leave and return to Australia without permission. They also cannot get government-funded financial assistance for further education and would therefore be treated as an International Student and charged accordingly if they wished to study.

TPV holders can apply to transfer to a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV), but those who are working and settled in Perth may be reluctant to relocate if the move represents significant uncertainty and limited support mechanisms.

Recommendations – TPV Holders

Those TPV holders who are not currently employed may be candidates for employment in the regional Sheep meat processing, and other sectors, but as with the Bridging Visa holders there is a need to create a coordinated program to source workers.

Given the 3-year term of TPV Holders there is also a risk of deportation and TPV holders may wish to be remain close to specialised legal and immigration support services if they have already made those connections in Perth.

If a workable program is developed that provides real employment outcomes for SHEV holder (as per recommendations in the next section) there may be an opportunity for current TPV holders to apply for the 5 year SHEV, and find a pathway to secure residency.

Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) Holders

The Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) is a second type of temporary protection visa introduced in late 2014. The visa provides protection for 5 years (compared to the 3 years available under the TPV).

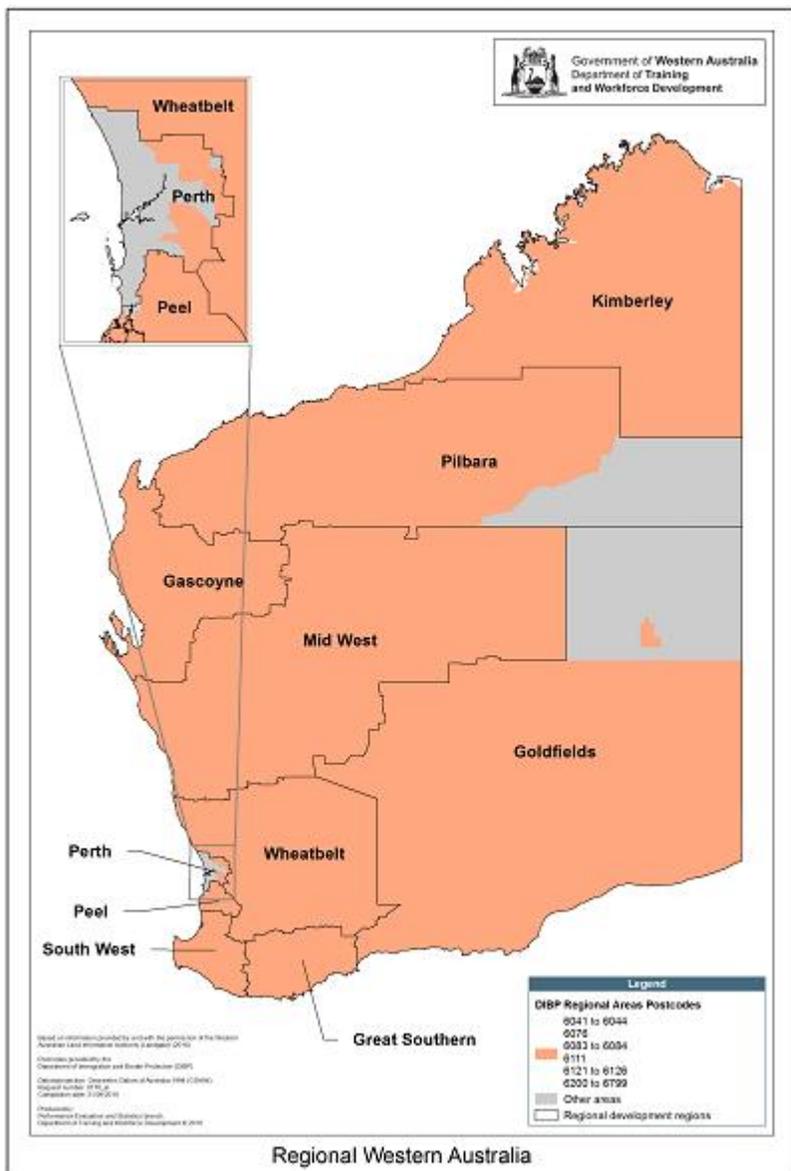
The main feature of the SHEV is that people who hold it must intend to work or study in a part of Regional Australia as the potential pathway to permanent residency; however refugee advocates view the pathway as onerous and not achievable for many SHEV holders.

For the purpose of the SHEV the term “Regional Australia” is somewhat of a misnomer as different States have different defined areas, many of which included urban areas and, in some instances include State capital cities.

The areas considered part of regional Australia for the SHEV arrangements in each state and territory are:

- ACT- All postcodes; including Canberra
- NSW - All areas except Sydney, Newcastle, the Central Coast and Wollongong
- NT - All postcodes; including Darwin
- QLD - All areas except Brisbane city and Gold Coast city areas.
- SA - All postcodes; including Adelaide
- TAS – All postcodes; including Hobart
- VIC - Excludes Melbourne and some regional areas (Alpine, Ararat, Buloke, Campaspe, Cardinia, Central Goldfields, Hepburn, Macedon Ranges, Mansfield, Mitchell, Moira, Moorabool, Mount Alexander, South Gippsland, Southern Grampians, Surf Coast, Towong and Yarra Ranges).

In Western Australia the area defined as regional Australia for the SHEV arrangements includes most of the State except for much of metropolitan Perth and some very remotes parts of the Pilbara and Goldfields regions.



The following postcodes are included areas in “regional” Western Australia:

6041 to 6044; 6076; 6083 to 6084; 6111; 6121 to 6126; and 6200 to 6799.

These postcodes include some peri-urban areas such the Perth Hills and the Kelmscott/Karragullen.

Source:

<https://migration.wa.gov.au/services/settlement-services/safe-haven-enterprise-visa>

It appears that the inclusion of the peri-urban areas of Perth is as a result of the SHEV postcodes being matched to the same postcodes WA uses for Working Holiday Makers (backpackers) wishing to gain 2nd year visas for agricultural work. The horticultural sector successfully lobbied for some fruit growing areas of Perth to be included in “regional” list for Working Holiday Makers, and this seems to have been carried over to the SHEV arrangements, seemingly without consideration that SHEV holders can work across a range of industries and sectors.

Refugee advocacy groups have been lobbying the WA State Government to include the whole of the Perth metropolitan area under SHEV arrangements, arguing that it works successfully in the Northern Territory, South Australian and Tasmania and that many Perth based SHEV holders are valuable, employed members of the Perth community. Advocates also note the lack of support services in Regional Western Australia and the extreme difficulty in transitioning from a SHEV to one of the approved pathway visas.

To begin the SHEV pathway to possible residency SHEV applicants, must make a declaration that they will work and/or study in regional Australia and NOT access minimal social security benefits requirements for a period of 3 ½ years (42 months) while on the 5-year SHEV.

After that time SHEV holders NOT automatically granted another type of visa in Australia even if they meet the SHEV pathway requirements. They are instead required to apply for and meet the requirements of an existing migration visa class. These visa classes are predominantly skilled visas and include:

Skilled visas

Subclass 189 (Skilled—Independent)

Subclass 190 (Skilled—Nominated)

Subclass 476 (Skilled—Recognised Graduate)

Subclass 489 (Skilled—Regional (Provisional)).

Employer-sponsored visas

Subclass 186 (Employer Nomination Scheme)

Subclass 187 (Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme)

Subclass 482 (Temporary Skill Shortage visa)

SHEV holders, who complete the pathway requirements could be considered for a Skilled visa or Employer-sponsored visas BUT must have the demonstrated skill and be in an occupation and region currently accepting Skilled migration under the above visa types. They are also a required to meet a high-level International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as evidence of English language skills, as required of all skilled migrants coming to Australia.

Safe Haven Enterprise Visa – Case Study

As told to Jackie Jarvis of the RRR Network

RZ* is an Iranian man in his late thirties. He states he is a qualified accountant and owned a successful accounting practise in Iran, but felt compelled to leave Iran due to his political activism.

He arrived in Australia in 2013 by boat and under the Government Policy of the day was detained on Christmas Island before being settled in Perth. He had no work rights initially and spoke very limited English. He had planned to build a new life in Australia and hoped to find work and commence study to enable him to return to his professional occupation. He was however prohibited from working until 2015 and still cannot undertake study without paying the same full fees as an international student.

With the support of Red Cross volunteers, he found accommodation and was encouraged to undertake volunteer work with a Perth based community services agency. Whilst he arrived as part of a family group he and his wife have now divorced and he spends time with his 9-year-old daughter on weekends and during school holidays.

Once his visa conditions changed in 2015 to permit work, he was offered full time employment in the aged care sector, and now has a permanent position as a personal carer – visiting the homes of elderly clients to assist with bathing and other personal care matters. He has 50 regular clients that he provides various levels of in-home care to. As a full- time employee, he pays income tax in Australia.

Whilst he is aware that the SHEV requires him to relocate to a defined Regional area but he is reluctant to leave his home, his daughter, his community and his paid employment for an uncertain future.

RZ is clearly an intelligent man and understand that the SHEV “pathway” to skilled migration is unlikely to include unskilled or semi-skilled job roles such as Personal Carers or Abattoir workers and would not be willing to take up a job in the Sheepmeat processing sector with such a high-level uncertainty about his future and the high likelihood of failure to meet any future Skilled Migration criteria.

His current employer has provided him with some training and he sees that a pathway that involves upskilling in the aged care sector may be his best chance to eventual qualify as a skilled migrant. He also wishes to remain close to specialist English classes to meet any future English language requirements and is concerned about access to such training in a regional location.

(* name changed to protect privacy)

Due to poor regional connections, and the lack of a coordinated approach from a mainly volunteer support system, many SHEV holders have not explored regional employment opportunities. As a result, many have commenced working in Perth, which is allowed under their visa. They are however aware that they will need to spend at least 3 ½ years of their 5-year visa working or enrolled in full time study in ‘regional Australia.’

Whilst the SHEV does allow for the 3 ½ years to include a period of study, the study option is almost impossible as SHEV holders must pay the same fees as an international student and NOT access any social security to live on while they undertake that study.

There is significant advocacy work being undertaken to make the Perth metropolitan area a “regional” SHEV location as occurs in other States. This is driven by a genuine desire to support SHEV holders who are well settled in their communities and employed, in many instances, in jobs roles that may otherwise be hard to fill. There is also a sense that the volunteer support system that has evolved in Perth has little connection to or understanding of regional Western Australia or the opportunities that may exist outside of the Perth metropolitan area.

The feedback provided was that, if compelled to relocate to a “regional” postcode, many Perth based SHEV holders were more likely to move interstate to a large regional town/city rather than to regional Western Australia. This is due to the perceived greater support mechanisms in place in large East

Coast country town and cities, existing connections to larger ethnic based communities in some areas, and a perceived greater access to training and English lessons.

Recommendations - SHEV holders

It is clear that the SHEV pathway to permanency residency is onerous and it is our view that it could only be achieved through individual case management, with a supportive employer and with access to required training and upskilling.

There is however a strong case for Western Australian communities to be actively engaged in this process. The case study of RZ* highlights the potential. RZ has no connection to regional Western Australia and neither he or his volunteer support network seems to have considered the possibility that an experienced accountant with practical, hands on experience in the aged care sector would be highly valued in some non-metropolitan communities.

Placement of a person like RZ could only be achieved through personal case management, firstly in finding a job role that has the potential to transition to a Skilled Migration visa, including consideration of the Western Australian skilled migration occupation list. Personal case management would also be required to identify any upskilling, training or study required by the person to achieve the required skill level for qualification as a skilled migrant, and consideration given to how to access any upskilling, including English language classes, from a regional location. If the WA State Government has a genuine desire to utilise SHEV holders in regional locations it should explore the idea of a place based, needs based case management mechanism.

As with the recommendation for Bridging Visa holders, there needs to be Perth based specialist Human Resource services made available to SHEV holders to assess their suitability for employment, considering their skills, qualifications and work experience gained whilst in Australia, and those skills and experiences from their country of origin.

At the same time there needs to be mapping of regional work opportunities, perhaps tying into some of the work already being done by the Migration Services section of the Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD) as part of the work done to create the Western Australian skilled migration occupation list. Whilst DTWD may take the lead in mapping of skills shortages and making policy recommendations accordingly, that agency may not be best placed to either source individual employment opportunities in the regions or in providing the on-the-ground support.

With the Regional Development Commissions (RDCs) now taking a role in linking State Government regional contracts with local suppliers to create job opportunities in the regions; there may be an argument to broaden the role of the RDCs to source individual employment vacancies from regional employers with the aim of "job matching" from the pool of SHEV holders. Alternatively, an NGO could take on this role, perhaps with a staff member being co-located with each of the RDCs.

Individual case management would need to be ongoing to ensure that SHEV holders and their employers remain on a pathway that leads to permanency, and again an NGO may be best placed to provide these services, perhaps in partnership with selected Community Resource Centres.

The Sheep meat Sector – Industry specific findings

WAMMCO

The RRR Network travelled to Katanning to meet with Tony Bessell (plant manager) and Alex Hamun (OH & S Officer) at the Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative Limited (WAMMCO) sheep meat processing facility. They confirmed that they currently have 30 permanent positions available, with immediate start and are keen to work with, and have experience employing Humanitarian Migrants.

Jobs roles at WAMMCO are varied and include skilled process workers for the slaughter floor and meat boning room, knife hands, packing staff, cleaners, stock hands and general labourers. They state that they work closely with applicants to match them to suitable job roles.

Unskilled workers begin on minimum wage of \$719.20 per week and WAMMCO have introduced a \$20 bonus paid for every week for attendance, introduced to help combat high staff turnover rates. The jobs are fulltime with shifts running from 6:30am- 3:40pm Monday- Thursday, 6:30-12:30 on Friday, and 12 Saturdays to be completed annually. All new employees are employed with a 45-day probation period.

All work wear is provided by WAMMCO and they provide a bus service to and from Katanning for workers at a charge of \$20 per week. Extensive training is provided and paid for by WAMMCO for those who are interested in progressing. They are also very keen to employ more female staff. They prefer workers who move to Katanning as part of a family group as they find they are more likely to stay.

WAMMCO report that, as an employer, they feel there is limited support being offered from either the Shire of Katanning or the federally funded migration support services.

WAMMCO recently connected with Communicare, an NGO funded to provide Settlement Services to refugees and humanitarian visa entrants (not Bridging, TPV or SHEV holders). WAMMCO staff presented to around 30 Communicare clients following 18 were brought to Katanning for tour of the town and facilities. From that recruitment drive 5 people commenced employment at WAMMCO in late August 2018. They are currently being housed in accommodation sourced by Communicare.

WAMMCO are keen to try the same recruitment model with anyone holding a valid working visa and this could include Bridging, TPV and SHEV holders, however it should be noted that, unlike the Communicare clients, there is no agency being funded to provide on-the-ground support for these categories of visa holders.

Services in Katanning

Great Southern Migrant Services (GSMS) receives federal funding to provide assistance in Katanning to people who have arrived from another country within the last 5 years, under refugee and humanitarian visas. The funding only allows them to operate 3 days a week, and the funding does NOT include support services to Bridging Visa, TPV or SHEV holders.

Services provided include translation, opening bank accounts and helping with accommodation matters. Most of their client base has limited or no English language skills. Staff at GSMS advised us that WAMMCO have a great reputation as an employer, but their engagement with those working at WAMMCO was limited due to GSMS only operating during business hours.

GSMS listed the main issues impacting the lives of humanitarian migrants in Katanning as:

- No Centrelink services in Katanning
- Minimal public transport to other centres such as Albany
- Lack of general services who cater for the non-English speaking community
- Lack of translation services
- Lack of accommodation with GSMS often asked to provide references

WAMMCO also identified that their workforce receives limited or no support from GSMS, most likely due to workers not be able to access service outside of usual working hours. WAMMCO also confirmed the lack of accommodation and difficulty in finding private rental accommodation in Katanning was impacting their ability to recruit staff.

WAMMCO report that some staff struggle with the isolation of living in a regional community and this results in high staff turnover. Their current work force consists mainly of 3 ethnic groups: Malay Chinese/ Cocos Malays originally from Cocos (Keeling) Island; Karen people who are refugees from Myanmar and Afghani refugees. Support is provided though by volunteers mainly through the Baptist Church, who provide English lessons. English lessons are also available at the local TAFE two days a week.

Whilst the Shire of Katanning declared itself “Refugee Welcome Zone” in 2014, refugee advocates report that the Shire is not offering much on-the-ground support. Despite reaching out the RRR Network was unable to engage with anyone from the Shire to discuss this report. 3rd party sources report a sense that the Shire is stepping back from playing any role migrant integration, preferring to concentrate their limited resources on other community development matters including working more closely with the local Aboriginal population. One refugee advocate told the RRR Network they believed that Katanning was “sick of being the poster child for migration, and that other regional communities need to step up”.

Fletcher’s

Whilst we are aware that the Fletcher’s group works closely with humanitarian migrants at their meat processing facilities across Australia it has been reported to the RRR Network there is no current labour shortages at the Albany based facility. It is our understanding that the Fletchers facility in Albany has a secure workforce currently in place, made up of Albany locals, and skilled migrants, prominently from the Philippines who have come to Australia over a number of years.

Recommendations - the Sheep meat Sector

Whilst WAMMCO are essentially “ready to go” with job offers it is important to remember that Bridging, TPV and SHEV holders receive almost no funded support and, unlike the cohort of refugee and humanitarian visa holders, are unable to access local support service providers or a Social Security safety net.

An introduction could certainly be made to the charities and NGOs operating in this space but as per the earlier recommendations it would be unreasonable for a WA State Government program or agency to rely on charities and volunteers to provide an employment vetting or referral service for any program.

The funding of these organisations, or the provision of a specialist Human Resource services to assess the suitability for employment, English language skills and aptitude for regional employment would be recommended, along with provision of on-the-ground support.

In the absence of any State government supported project WAMMCO can continue to reach out to these charities and NGO’s on an ad hoc basis but the lack of local support may make it difficult for potential employees to source accommodation and successfully settle in the town.

Number of Humanitarian Migrants

During the preparation of this report the WA Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD) advised the RRR Network that they had the data available on the number of TPV and SHEV holders currently living in Western Australia; but that they had been advised by the Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs that they were unable to release the data to the RRR Network for the purposes of preparing this report.

Refugee advocates working with SHEV holders state that they are lobbying on behalf of 500 SHEV holders seeking to remain living in Perth but it is unclear where this number came from. In addition, the Katanning based support service states that they are approached by SHEV holders seeking support so there are SHEV holders already living and working in regional locations.

A Perth based NGO also states there are 2,000 TPV holders in WA and on a national level NGOs talk of there being over 13,000 people on Bridging, TPV and SHEVs across the whole of Australia.

Key report recommendations

- That the WA State Government closely examine the current and proposed cohorts of Humanitarian Migrants coming to Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, and consider the benefits that may flow to rural and regional Western Australian with the placement of migrant families in selected regions.
- That the WA State Government work with the Federal government to secure funded settlement services in WA regional locations where engaged communities have identified a desire for population growth or labour supply needs; and where community have expressed a willingness to become a migrant settlement hub.
- That consideration be given to committing State funding to provide on-the-ground job matching and support services for currently unfunded Bridging, TPV and SHEV holders in recognition of the community benefit that flows from both the increased population in regional areas, and the related economic activity that comes with the provision of local services supporting new migrants.
- That funding or specialised human resources support is provided to work with Bridging, TPV and SHEV holders to find those suitable for employment in the WA sheep meat sector in the first instance, or other regional employment opportunities.
- That WA State Government consider implementing a needs-based case management mechanism for SHEV holders, and TPV holders seeking to transition to SHEV. Firstly, to assist in finding a job role that has the potential to transition to a Skilled Migration visa, including consideration of the Western Australian skilled migration occupation list, and then to identify any upskilling, training or study required by the person to achieve the required skill level for qualification as a skilled migrant.
- That there be coordinated approach to mapping of regional work opportunities, building on the work already being undertaken to create the Western Australian skilled migration occupation list but with view to consider opportunities for humanitarian migrants, either those coming to Australia under the ongoing refugee and humanitarian program, or for the identified work ready cohort of Bridging, TPV and SHEV holders
- That the Regional Development Commissions (RDCs) or a funded NGO placed within the RDCs source individual employment vacancies from regional employers with the aim of “job matching” from the pool of SHEV holders.
- That funding is provided for individual case management of any SHEV holders placed into a regional job role, delivered via the RDCs or an NGO to ensure that SHEV holders and their employers remain on a pathway that leads to permanency.

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Jackie Jarvis
Chief Executive Officer
Ph: 0417 998 755
Email: ceo@rrrnetwork.com.au
The Rural, Regional, Remote Women's Network of WA Inc.



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