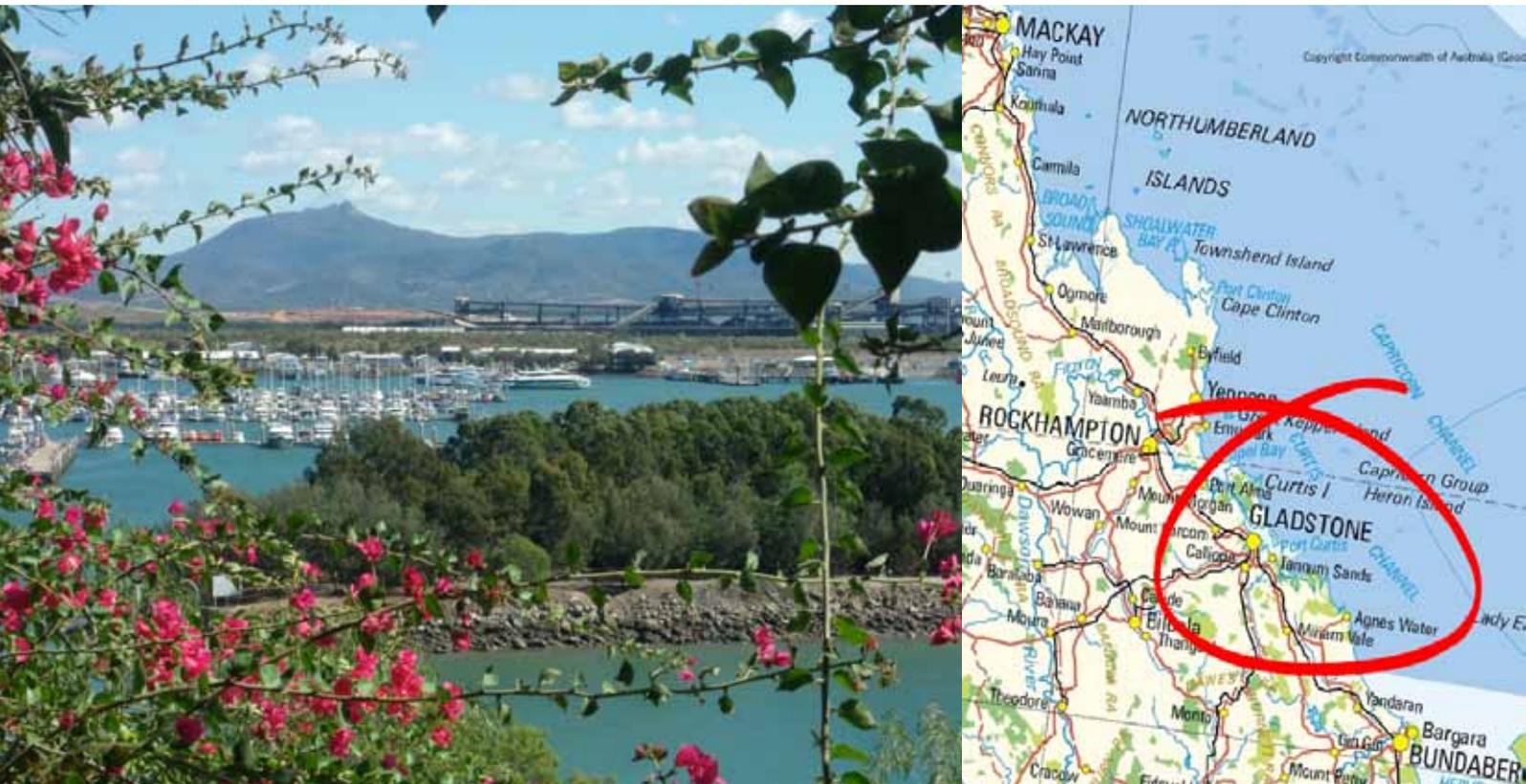


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SKILLED MIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA: A GLADSTONE CASE STUDY

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## Introduction- What the report is about

Labour demand and skill shortages in regional Australia are having a profound effect upon regional sustainability and renewal. The Gladstone Region is currently facing the combined effects of increased business opportunity and increasing competition for the skilled members of its diverse workforce primarily related to the construction of the infrastructure for the four CSG/LNG projects and related developments. There is already evidence of an emerging two-tier economy within the region with a housing crisis and a loss of existing workers to the new projects. Whilst the Gladstone region and its workforce are familiar with the boom-bust cycles of industrial development the impending number of large infrastructure projects, and the timing of their development, will place unprecedented demands on available skilled, and unskilled, labour. The Gladstone region is front and centre of Queensland's evolving economic growth with 35%, or some \$45 billion, of investment being delivered in the region. The coincidence of these significant developments will demand a highly skilled workforce. Skilled migration has become a key element in Australia's strategy to address major human capital issues and imperatives and regional skilled migration initiatives are a "glocalised" response to regional skill shortages and demand.

Existing small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) need to sustain their existing workforces and cannot compete with the wages on offer in surrounding projects and the resources sector throughout Central Queensland. These businesses also want to leverage off the opportunities that regional economic development offers in terms of expanding and growing their businesses. Existing larger employers are concerned about turnover and retention and the construction cycles of the CSG/LNG projects that may have impacts upon their own workforces. Government agencies can see increasing pressures for services and community groups are trying to work together to support these skilled migrants and their families to settle and integrate into the region. These groups are also working hard at promoting cultural understanding and tolerance along with celebrating the diversity already in the region. The overarching aim being to create a welcoming community that is characterised by cultural tolerance, awareness, sensitivity and mutual appreciation.

This CQUniversity funded study has investigated the economic, social and cultural contributions of skilled

migrants and their families to a region. The attraction, settlement/integration and retention of skilled migrants and their families is a crucial human capital initiative and strategy for a sustainable Gladstone region which is facing significant workforce and labour market challenges. The study has utilised a mixed methods approach that has collected both qualitative and quantitative data from key businesses, community stakeholders and skilled migrants and their families based in the Gladstone region. The following key existing workforces were the focus of the study: industrial/manufacturing; health, nursing and medicine and; retail and services. There is no one data source that can provide an accurate picture as to the number of skilled migrants and their families in a region. A large focus of this study was collecting data from a variety of secondary data sources to enable the research team to piece together some indication of the number of migrants in the region. This was supplemented by collecting data from within the community through interviews, case studies and surveys.

There is strong global competition for highly skilled workers stimulated in part by the demographics of the developed world. Professionals within the key workforces identified for this study (manufacturing/industrial; health nursing and medicine; and retail and services) are some of the most sought after occupational groups globally. Thus regional Australian will need to focus on strategies to attract and retain skilled migrants so as to assist in maintaining a competitive advantage in the "war for talent" and to meet deepening skill shortages. For the Gladstone region this situation is exacerbated by the demand for labour during the construction phase of the CSG/LNG projects and other developments by existing industry. A crucial element of this will involve both geographic branding and image, as well as, a strong focus on supportive employers and communities with particular emphasis on resolving the perennial settlement issues associated with family, housing, schooling, cultural and linguistic challenges faced by skilled migrants and their families locating to regional Australia.



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## Aims/objectives

The overall aim of the study was to investigate the contributions of skilled migrants and their families to regional business and communities and to identify the factors which attract and retain skilled migrants in key workforces to regional areas.

The research questions driving this investigation were:

**RQ1:** What economic, social and cultural contributions do skilled migrants and their families make to regional business and communities?

**RQ2:** What are the issues encountered by business and

communities when employing skilled migrants?

**RQ3:** What support does business and the community need to provide to ensure they attract and retain skilled migrants and their families in regional areas?

**RQ4:** What support do skilled migrants and their families need to better assist them settle, become active members of communities and remain in regions?

**RQ5:** What are the implications of the study findings for policy and practice?

## Research Methodology

This is a mixed methods study which allows for the collection of much wider perspectives from which to draw findings, by utilising a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. The study collected secondary data from a variety of sources: Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) Settlement Database, ABS 2011 Census data, citizenship data supplied by Gladstone Regional Council, data on Regional Skilled Migration Scheme (RSMS) Visas applicants from the Regional Certifying Body (GAPDL) and data collected by public schools on children from non English speaking backgrounds (NESB) supplied by the Department of Education, Training

and Employment (DETE). The study collected primary data through a Health services scan, interviews with HR managers of larger employers both private and public sector (n=7), a workforce survey (n=26) of professionals, case studies of small to medium sized enterprises who have utilised skilled migration (n=5), a Community Migrant survey (n=73) and interviews with migrants from various ethnic groups represented in the region (South African, Indian, Jamaican and Filipino) and community leaders who work closely with migrant groups (n=8). The research was undertaken over three phases as outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Study Phases and Samples**

Research Phase (April- October 2012)	Sample (purposive)
Phase 1: Key workforces (health, industrial and manufacturing)	<p>Scan of health services in the region (not including public sector provision) - number of overseas trained health professionals</p> <p>Interviews with HR Managers (n=7) large employers both private and public sector</p> <p>Workplace survey of professionals (n=26)</p>
Phase 2: Secondary data and small to medium enterprise (SMEs) case studies	<p>Secondary data sets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DIAC Settlement Database</li> <li>• ABS Census 2011</li> <li>• Citizenship data (GRC)</li> <li>• RSMS data (GAPDL)</li> <li>• NESB children in public schools (DETE)</li> </ul> <p>Case studies SMEs (n=5)</p>
Phase 3: Migrant groups	<p>Interviews with representatives from various ethnic groups in Gladstone (n=5)</p> <p>Interviews with community leaders (n=3)</p> <p>Migrant Community Survey (n=73)</p>

# Piecing together the puzzle

As noted earlier there is no one data source that can provide accurate data on the number and composition of skilled migrants and their families in a region. As a result a series of secondary data from a variety of sources was collected in an attempt to paint a picture of skilled migrants and their families in the Gladstone region. To this end the study can be viewed as an attempt to put together a jigsaw puzzle without all the pieces of the puzzle being available.

Most national data sets can provide data on demographics such as country of birth, whether the parent of residents were born overseas and if English is a second language. DIAC settlement data provides data on those who entered Australia as permanent residents which covers some of the skilled migrant visas but does not cover visas like the Temporary 457 visa. Citizenship data can provide the demographics of those granted citizenship in Gladstone however this does not guarantee these new citizens are still Gladstone residents. The data provided by the Regional Certifying Body (GAPDL) for Regional Skilled Migration Scheme (RSMS) visas can provide data on applicants that have come through that office, however the reality is that many employers may not have gone through that body. Many employers independently recruit skilled migrants through the 457 and 417 visas options and only they have this data as part of their established human resource management information systems. The data from DETE on NESB school students joining public schools in Gladstone gives a strong indication of the number of NESB students in the community but does not include data from private and independent schools. It also does not cover students/children of skilled migrants from English speaking nations such as South Africa, Canada, USA, New Zealand, UK and Ireland. In addition to these secondary data sets, the research team also collected primary data through interviews, case studies and surveys.

Despite all these limitations the study has made a concerted attempt at piecing together the depth of diversity in the region and the key issues from the perspectives of employers, governments, NGOs, community groups and skilled migrants and their families who have come to live and work in the Gladstone region.

We believe this to be the first study of its kind in Australia which has focused on skilled migrants and their families in a particular region. The study has explored key issues in terms of attracting and retaining skilled migrants to the Gladstone region to ensure sustainable workforces, businesses, services and regions.



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## Summary Of Key Findings

### Secondary Data Sets

#### ABS Census 2011 and DIAC Settlement Database

As outlined in Table 2, the majority of Gladstone residents were born in Australia (80%). The most common countries of birth were New Zealand 3.4%, England 2.6%, South Africa 1%, Philippines 0.8% and Scotland 0.4%. These five add up to 8.2% (n=4719).

Table 2: Country of birth Gladstone LGA

Country of birth	Gladstone	% of total persons in the region	Australia	% of total persons in Australia
Australia	46,314	80.0%	15,017,847	69.8%
New Zealand	1,950	3.4%	483,398	2.2%
England	1,499	2.6%	911,593	4.2%
South Africa	582	1.0%	145,683	0.7%
Philippines	444	0.8%	171,234	0.8%
Scotland	244	0.4%	133,432	0.6%

Source: ABS Census 2011



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The DIAC Settlement Database captures data on those migrants who entered Australia as permanent residents. There are several visa options which allow for this, however, the Temporary 457 visa is not one of these. Table 4 below provides a regional comparison of permanent resident arrivals to regions in Central Queensland since 2009. Mackay has almost double the rate of arrivals when compared to Rockhampton, both of which have the higher rates of arrivals than Gladstone. Gladstone has had 865 arrivals since 2009.

Table 3 lists languages spoken at home in the Gladstone LGA. Common languages spoken at home in the region were: Afrikaans, Tagalog, German, Filipino and Spanish.

Table 3: Language spoken at home Gladstone LGA

Language spoken at home	Gladstone	% of total persons in the region	Australia	% of total persons in Australia
English only	51,578	89.1%	16,509,291	76.8%
Afrikaans	282	0.5%	35,031	0.2%
Tagalog	213	0.4%	81,457	0.4%
German	143	0.2%	80,371	0.4%
Filipino	130	0.2%	55,400	0.3%
Spanish	79	0.1%	117,498	0.5%
Households where 2 or more languages are spoken	1,169	6.0%	1,579,946	20.4%

Source: ABS Census 2011

Table 4: Migrant arrivals to LGAs in Central QLD 2009-2012

	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total	%
Mackay	823	511	576	259	2,169	42.1%
Rockhampton	342	335	343	194	1,214	23.6%
Gladstone	287	207	250	121	865	16.8%
Bundaberg	194	128	159	83	564	10.9%
Emerald	150	87	65	36	338	6.6%
Total	1796	1268	1393	693	5,150	100%

Source: DIAC Settlement Database

# Summary Of Key Findings Cont.

## Regional Skilled Migration Scheme (RSMS) Data

The number of RSMS applications to the region has rapidly increased since 2010 (n=85). The RSMS applicants are predominantly male (87.1%) and in the 20-39 years of age (78.8%). The top six nationalities for these applicants are depicted in Table 5 and Table 6 lists the top six occupations of RSMS applicants.

**Table 5: The top 6 nationalities of RSMS applicants (July 2010 to June 2012)**

Nationality	Number	Percentage
Philippines	27	31.8
India	11	12.9
China	8	9.4
South Africa	8	9.4
Hungary	6	7.1
UK	5	5.9

Data collected from July 2010 to June 2012 | Source: GAPDL

## Citizenship data

There has been a steady increase in citizenship applications since 2009 (n=337). The gender balance is relatively even with male applicants at 51.9 per cent and females at 48.1 per cent. South Africa (21.3%) and U.K (16.9%) had the highest number of citizenship approvals during this period followed by the Philippines and India.

**Table 7: Top 6 citizenship countries (2009 - 2012)**

Country	Number
South Africa	72
U.K	57
Philippines	48
India	31
New Zealand	17
Zimbabwe	17

Data collected from May 2009 to April 2012 | Source: GRC

**Table 6: The top 6 occupations of RSMS applicants (July 2010 to June 2012)**

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Chef/Cook	15	17.6
Welder	10	11.8
Metal Fabricator	6	7.1
Metal Machinist	5	5.9
Motor Mechanic	3	3.5
Diesel Mechanic	3	3.5

Data collected from July 2010 to June 2012 | Source: GAPDL

## DETE Data

As outlined in Table 8, 165 Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) children enrolled in Gladstone public schools from 2009 to 2012.

**Table 8: NESB arrivals at Gladstone public schools 2009-2012**

	Primary	Secondary	Total
New arrivals in 2012	23	7	30
New arrivals in 2011	26	19	45
New arrivals in 2010	18	21	39
New arrivals in 2009	22	29	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>89 (53.9%)</b>	<b>76 (46.1%)</b>	<b>165 (100%)</b>

Source: DETE



# Key Workforces

## Health Services Scan

Table 9 presents the data from a health services scan undertaken on health and medical practices within the region.

**Table 9: Health Services Scan**

Health Practitioner	Total Number	Overseas trained #	Percentage
Drs/ GPs	47	24	51
Dentists	24	12	50
Pharmacists	22	7	32
Physios	21	8	38
Nurses	21	0	0
Optometrists	8	0	0
Chiropractors	5	2	40
Podiatrists	4	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>34</b>

A major finding from this has been the fact that 50% of the general practitioners and dentists working in medical centres and dental services in the Gladstone region were overseas trained. Just under one third (32%)

of pharmacists and over one third (38%) of physiotherapists were also overseas trained. Overall just over one third of the Health Services workforce as represented by medical centres and health services located in the community, were overseas trained.



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## Workforce Survey (n=26) – Professionals

The respondents of the workplace survey (n=26) were predominantly male (73%), married (65.4%), between the ages of 30-44years (73.1%), from a diverse range of countries and professions. The majority had arrived

**Attraction:** The main attractor for migrating to Australia was predominantly for:

- lifestyle reasons (30.8%)
- to improve career (30.8%)
- prospect of safe and stable political environment (19.2%).

On a whole, participants believed that the move to Australia was a good career move (76.9%) because of improved:

- health care, pay, opportunities, lifestyle and career advancement.
- being placed below or not recognised for professional ability were the main reasons cited for

the moving to Australia being a negative career move.

None of the participants expressed any experiences of difficulties 'fitting into' the Australian work place and highly ranked their sense of belonging to the Gladstone community with the majority intending to stay in Gladstone once their current visa expired.

**Retention:** The top reasons for considering leaving Gladstone were:

- poor facilities
- the area not being what was expected
- friends/family living in other areas.

under 457 visas (61.5%) followed by permanent residency (PR) (23%). The occupational groupings were Engineers (12), Doctors and Nurses (4) and remainder from an array of professions.

Another regional town in Queensland (14.3%) or Brisbane (38.1%) were the relocation places of choice.

Lifestyle factors impacting respondents' decision to stay were employment opportunities for both the participant and their spouse with religious tolerance being the least contributing factor influencing participant's decisions to stay.

The skilled migrants in this study generally reported that they did not feel valued by their employer and that the employer was in breach of their employment contract by failing to keep promises made during

recruitment. Further, a strong sense of belonging to the employing organisation and job satisfaction were not evident in this study. Participants reported intentions to search for a new position with another organisation or leave the organisation in the new year.

**Community involvement:** Participants joined in community social groups or organisations (42.3%) and undertook volunteer work (23.1%).

## Interviews with HR Managers (n=7) - Larger employers (both public and private sector)

**Skill shortages:** Every HR manager reported they had a first preference for recruiting domestically and used skilled migration as an option when they were unable to recruit the right skills domestically. Many referred to global and national skill shortages in certain skill sets namely engineering and medical and health occupations.

A variety of recruitment strategies were employed.

**Communication and language** were seen as the biggest issues employers had when recruiting skilled migrants. Employers felt that it was easier for

English speaking skilled migrants to integrate into the workforce than those from non English speaking backgrounds.

**Positive effects** of recruiting skilled migrants were seen in terms of creating a more cross cultural organisation and encouraging diversity.

**Settlement:** All the employers provided relocation services and expenses to the skilled migrants. In general, employer attempts to settle the skilled migrant and their family into the community were

well intentioned and informal but ad hoc at best. Some employers tapped into the activities of the local migrant community groups and the activities developed by GRC but a lot more could be done in this respect, especially for the spouses and families of the skilled worker.

**Turnover rates** for skilled migrants varied with each employer from little if any turn over to rapid turnover.



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## Small and Medium sized Enterprises: Case Studies

Five small to medium sized enterprises were used as Case Studies. Three of these were happy to be named however two preferred not to be identified. Refer to the full report for details.

**Skill shortages:** Each of the Case Studies has embraced skilled migration options in the face of resounding skill shortages and the lack of ability to attract and recruit domestic skilled workers in and to the region. All the businesses who participated only employed skilled migrants after several failed attempts to recruit local, regional or national skilled employees.

**Variety of visa options:** These businesses have used a variety of skilled migration options. The skilled migrant pathways utilised by these local businesses included: international students, onshore skilled migrants, temporary 457 visas, Labour Agreement and the Regional Skilled Migration Scheme (RSMS).

**Settlement & Integration:** Each of the Case Studies have all placed a strong emphasis on the settlement of their respective skilled migrants and their families (where applicable). Post arrival support (housing, transportation and other supports) to the skilled migrants and their families help them to settle in Gladstone, integrate into the local community and the workforce.

**Retention:** Each Case Study demonstrated successful strategies for retention with little if any turnover.

**Entrepreneurship:** Some of these businesses were owned and run by skilled migrants themselves and were examples of the entrepreneurial activities skilled migrants can bring to regions.

# Skilled Migrants and their Families

## Community Migrant Survey (n=73)

The majority of respondents were between 25 to 44 years of age, were married (79.5%) and had 1 to 2 children (81.4%). The top 5 countries of birth were: India, UK, Philippines, South Africa and Sri Lanka. Just under one third

- **Attractors:** The main reason many migrated to Australia was lifestyle reasons (42.2%) with a much smaller number stating it was for career purposes (18.8%).
- **Researching Australia before arrival:** Interestingly, when considering moving your family to another country, almost half the respondents (49.3%) did not research jobs and employment opportunities before they came to Australia. Of those that did research job opportunities, 35.1% stated that they had a poor or very poor impression about their chances of gaining employment in their field.
- **Residential Status:** Since their arrival in Australia, almost all of the migrants (92.5%) surveyed claim that they have already received permanent residency, or they will or are thinking about becoming permanent residents of Australia.
- **Negative Experiences:** 41.1% commented that they had encountered negative experiences as a migrant in Australia.
- **Living in Gladstone:** When considering how happy respondents were to be living in Gladstone, almost one-third (30.6%) stated they rate their sense of belonging to the

(31.5%) had entered Australia as Permanent Residents and 68% entered on 457 visas.

Gladstone community as poor or very poor. 33.3% said it was OK and 36.1% said it was good or very good.

- **Leaving Gladstone:** This is further compounded with the finding that 80.8% of respondents are currently thinking about leaving the Gladstone region. Of these 86.7% state they may leave Gladstone in the next year (36.7%) to two years (50%) with the greatest number (31.3%) stating they will move to Brisbane. Finally, when assessing the most important lifestyle factors that were affecting their decision to leave, the five most

important lifestyle factors that the respondents report they were looking for in a place of residence were:

- Employment opportunities for myself
- Shops
- Cultural Activities
- Cultural tolerance
- Employment opportunities for my spouse.



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## Interviews with Migrant Groups (n=5)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five representatives from four different ethnic groups in Gladstone: South African (n=2), Indian (n=1), Jamaican (n=1) and Filipino (n=1).

There were generally, positive outcomes for interviewees in relation to their respective careers.

**Negatives experiences:** these tended to be related to employment and employment opportunities, a perceived lack of tolerance of the community to diverse peoples, and subtle forms of discrimination.

**Positive experiences:** these related to the reception of people to them, work opportunities and experiences, the perception of Australia as a safe society and opportunities to connect with people through social and religious groups.

**Integration:** Ideas and suggestions for improving integration related to employers and community leaders providing cultural awareness programs, organising events within their own cultural groupings and liaising with council and other community groups and providing English language classes.

Factors which assisted in integration were related to the activities organised by various community groups and local government: Gladstone Regional Council, WIN, CAS and Women Connecting Women, Women's Health Centre, joining clubs and social groups as well as volunteering.

### Big issues:

- Employment opportunities in Gladstone (positive)
- Rental prices and lack of public transport (negative)
- A consistent issue was not having overseas work experience and qualifications recognised which limits skilled migrant's ability to enter the labour market at their respective professional levels and creates skills wastage and atrophy (negative).
- Lack of services and in particular health related services and child and vacation care were seen as an issue (negative).

### Attraction factors:

- Opportunity to live in a safe and secure society
- Employment opportunities
- Support and training
- Social friendships developed between the people they work with providing a strong retention mechanism.

### Retention factors:

- Need for cultural awareness training by employers was seen as important
- Rent prices need to be affordable

## Interviews with Community Leaders (n=3)

Three community leaders were interviewed from three key community groups. The community leaders represent groups with large and diverse memberships which includes individuals and organisations.

Generally these were large organisations with sizable memberships representing a diversity of ethnic groups including; Filipinos, Indians, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, English and Irish, Thais, Indonesians, South Africans, Eastern Europeans, Africans, Jamaicans, South Americans, Persians and Iraqis.

**Interagency:** Each of the community groups work with many other community groups, agencies, government, education and training providers and sponsors/employers. This interagency seems to be crucial for effective and collaborative efforts which rely heavily on volunteers and small government grants for subsistence.

**Settlement:** The role of the employer in assisting skilled migrants and their families to settle into the region was seen as very important.

### Big issues:

- Lack of public transport
- Language/communication
- Lack of services especially health and childcare
- Social isolation of skilled migrant spouses
- Working with children is seen as crucial in the settlement of skilled migrants and their families, especially in terms of fostering and creating cultural awareness and sensitivity within schools and the community.

The migrants are also in a diversity of occupations ranging from highly skilled professionals to trade and service occupations.

Each of these community groups offers different services and information. These range from social and cultural activities, to multicultural festivals and significant events, sporting events, conferences, a variety of training (driver awareness, First Aid, English conversational classes, vocational certificates), information services or products.

**Attraction and retention:** of skilled migrants can depend on the type of visa and residency status of the migrant. For those on temporary 457 visas the issues and circumstances maybe different from those on permanent visas.

**Key benefits:** of skilled migrants include the economic benefits (growing the population and skilled workers) and the cultural diversity migrants bring to regions and the follow on effects this brings to the social fabric of a community.



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# Summary and Conclusion

One of the major barriers encountered by this research was the lack of a central data collection mechanism, which would allow regional stakeholders to calculate in a more accurate manner the total influx of skilled migrants and their dependants who are residing in a region. In addition, it is important to acknowledge the high fluidity and mobility of the workforce coming from overseas and staying in the region, which also exacerbates the complexity of information collection, compilation and analysis. There are however, disparate sets of data that can be compiled to assist “paint a picture” of what might be reflective of the true nature of the skilled migrant community within a local government area. The sources of secondary data collected for this study have been complimented by primary data collected in the form of interviews, case studies and surveys. The research questions driving this investigation will now be used to frame the study’s conclusions:

**RQ1: What economic, social and cultural contributions do skilled migrants and their families make to regional business and communities?**

In economic terms skilled migrants are providing crucial skill sets (professionals and tradespersons) to large, middle and small size local employers and businesses. For instance, it has been clearly identified that the Health and Medical services in the region not only benefit greatly from overseas migrant skills but depend on them. Skilled migrants and their families also contribute economically through enhanced population growth and entrepreneurship. Both factors generate increased social and physical infrastructure.

From the social perspective, while English, New Zealanders and Filipinos have consistently been the most dominant communities across the region in terms of numbers, there is a wide spread of nationalities (72 different ethnic groupings). This is an indication of the richness and vibrancy of the Gladstone cultural heritage. There has been observed positive community relations among different groups through community self-help structures, large participation in mainstream social and sporting groups, increased engagement of volunteers in community activities and programs and interfaith celebrations.

The cultural activities organised by the migrant community groups in Gladstone are testament to the cultural diversity in the region and how this is celebrated through activities such as Welcoming Morning Teas, multicultural festivals and events throughout the year. These are all indicators of social and civic

engagement which helps build social connectedness and creates a more tolerant and culturally aware community. It also plays a key role in retaining skilled migrants within the region. It may also inadvertently assist in attracting future skilled migrants and their families to Gladstone.

**RQ2: What are the issues encountered by business and communities when employing skilled migrants?**

Businesses in Gladstone are faced with skill shortages and difficulties attracting skilled labour regionally and domestically in a time of substantial economic development and growth. Some of this is related to global shortages in certain highly skilled professions (e.g. engineers and health and medical professionals) however this is complicated by current regional labour supply and demand and difficulties attracting skilled workers to regions in general. Importing skilled labour from overseas is certainly expensive and risky and the last option from an employers point of view. Some businesses, for instance, have reported some issues for skilled migrant workers whose first language is not English as having more difficulties settling into work than those who have English as a first language. Those that have been successful at attracting and retaining skilled migrants in their businesses are those that have invested time and resources into the settlement and integration of the skilled workers and their families (where applicable).

A strong focus on supportive employers and communities with particular emphasis on resolving the perennial settlement issues associated with family, housing, schooling, cultural and linguistic challenges faced by skilled migrants and their families locating to regional Australia is crucial. The research has found that businesses need to become more socially and culturally inclusive as far as their human resource policies are concerned in order to attract and retain their overseas employees. Some employers have encountered considerable success when assisting their newly arrived employees and their family dependants from overseas during their settlement and integration. On the other hand, some employers have found it challenging to retain those skills when there is very little evidence of social and integration support.

**RQ3: What support does business and the community need to provide to ensure they attract and retain skilled migrants and their families in regional areas?**

The key message from the study has been the importance of settlement assistance and integration strategies in retaining skilled migrants and their families. Businesses need to tap into existing migrant community organisations and activities and work with these organisations to improve the settlement and integration of skilled workers and their families. Strategies to combat racism through cross cultural training, public celebrations of diversity, building inclusive schools and inclusive workplaces would go a long way towards assisting in the retention of skilled migrants and their families to the Gladstone region. A lot of work and activity has been undertaken in this space especially by the Gladstone migrant community groups and the Gladstone Regional Council however a lot more could be done with greater involvement from Gladstone industry and businesses.

**RQ4: What support do skilled migrants and their families need to better assist them settle, become active members of communities and remain in regions?**

Most skilled migrants were attracted to Australia for lifestyle and safety reasons and the employment opportunities the Gladstone region has to offer. Skilled migrants need assistance with settlement which is related to housing, transport, access to health and medical services, childcare and general information about life in regional Australia.

They also need opportunities to connect with members of the community through community self – help structures and to the wider community through social and sporting groups, opportunities to volunteer and opportunities to connect to others who may be feeling isolated, especially the spouses of skilled workers.

Key factors identified that would influence the retention of skilled migrants in Gladstone included:

**Services**

- Lack of public transport
- High cost of rent/accommodation
- Lack of services especially healthcare and childcare
- Need for service providers to adopt more socially and linguistically inclusive policies

**Employment**

- Employment opportunities for self and spouse
- Not having overseas work experience and qualifications recognised which limits skilled migrant’s ability to enter the labour market at their respective professional levels and creates skills wastage and atrophy
- Need for cultural awareness training by employers for all their employees

- Need for Aussie induction training by newcomers
- Need for individually tailored employment coaching or mentoring programs

**Social and cultural**

- Need for English language training
- Cultural activities
- Cultural tolerance within the broader community
- Social isolation of skilled migrant spouses
- Working with children is seen as crucial in the settlement of skilled migrants and their families, especially in terms of fostering and creating cultural awareness and sensitivity within schools and the community.

Regional communities could develop strategies and activities around the three phases of settlement outlined by Wayland (2006):

**Early settlement:** requirements for housing, food, clothing, information and orientation, and other ‘reception’ or settlement services

**Intermediate settlement:** advanced or employment specific language instruction, training and education to upgrade skills

**Long-term settlement:** work to overcome systematic barriers to participate in society as equals to the domestically born population.

**RQ5: What are the implications of the study findings for policy and practice?**

**For regional communities:** regional areas have traditionally found it hard to attract and retain skilled workers. Skilled migrants and their families are crucial for creating sustainable workforces and services in regional areas. The research and its findings have identified key attractors, retention issues and key settlement and integration strategies that need to be deployed to ensure skilled migrants and their families are retained in regional Australia.

**For employers and industry:** employers in Gladstone have the opportunity to ensure the retention of their skilled migrant workers by developing a more systematic and comprehensive settlement and integration process which includes catering to the spouse and families of their newly recruited skilled migrant workers, as well as, ensuring the on-boarding in the workplace is smooth and culturally sensitive. Employers would benefit greatly from instigating cross cultural training within their respective workforces to ensure their organisations manage diversity well and to increase the likelihood of retaining skilled migrant workers into the future.

## Recommendations:

1. There is a need for a national data collection mechanism on skilled migrants and their families which could be used to evaluate current migration policy and inform future migration policy. This collection mechanism could also assist States and Territories and local government by providing an evidence base for service provision, social planning and the development of a coordinated approach to assist regions attract and retain skilled migrants and their families.

2. The study recommends the development of a model to determine the economic, social and cultural contributions of skilled migrants and their families to regional Australia. It is proposed that this model be based on the "Welcoming Community" framework developed in Canada.

A welcoming community is '... conceptualized as a collective effort to create a place where individuals feel valued and included. Ultimately, a welcoming community attracts and retains newcomers by:

- Identifying and removing barriers

- Promoting a sense of belonging
- Meeting diverse individual needs
- Offering services that promote successful integration, with successful integration defined as the "ability to contribute, free of barriers, to every dimension of Canadian life – economic, social, cultural and political."

Thus, we define a welcoming community as a location that has the capacity to meet the needs and promote inclusion of newcomers, and the machinery in place to produce and support these capacities (Esses et al 2010, p.9).

For example, it is recommended that a central hub be established where newly arrived skilled migrants seeking information (employment, schools, childcare centres etc) could register and this could be administered by a community liaison officer within existing support structures (e.g. WIN or GMAI).

3. The study recommends ongoing monitoring of how skilled migration is impacting upon other sectors in the community including CALD children and youth

populating local schools and the required assistance for them to academically and socially integrate into the community.

4. The study recommends a local body (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, GAPDL, GEA, etc) to provide support to small and middle size businesses who are either employing or planning to employ skilled workers from overseas. This would support best practices, learning initiatives and enhance attraction and retention outcomes.

5. This study recommends future research be undertaken to explore the role of regions in branding and attracting skilled migrants to regions and the utility of developing Regional Migration Plans.

6. It is recommended that a future research agenda be developed that explores the experiences of skilled migrants and their families in regional Australia which involves regional comparative studies, longitudinal studies, profession and industry based research and research focused upon the use of skilled migration by small to medium sized enterprises.



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### Research Team

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Full Report

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