Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre

Supporting Innovative Research and Evaluation

DEVELOPMENT OF A NETWORK TO SUPPORT GIPPSLAND'S MIGRATION STRATEGY

FEDERATION UNIVERSITY

COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION & RESEARCH CENTRE

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

DEVELOPMENT OF A NETWORK TO SUPPORT GIPPSLAND'S MIGRATION STRATEGY

September 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre (CERC) Federation University Gippsland is an innovative initiative that aims to build evaluation capacity and expertise locally in Gippsland, and nationally and internationally. As a local provider in Gippsland, Victoria, the CERC understands the value of listening to the community and has the ability to deliver timely and sustainable evaluations that are tailored to the needs of a wide variety of organisations.

Professor Joanne Porter is the Director of the CERC. Joanne has led a number of successful research projects and evaluations in conjunction with local industry partners. She has guided the development of the CERC since its formation in 2018.

The CERC team that implemented the Gippsland Migration Project included:

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Labour shortages in regional Australia are a multifaceted challenge requiring a concerted effort by all relevant actors at all levels. Although the population of regional Australia grew by 11% between 2011 and 2021 (ABC, 2021), in 2022, only 28% of the total population lived in regional Australia (AIWH, 2023).[1] This figure is particularly reflected in the state of Victoria, with approximately 25% of the population living in regional areas (ABC, 2022).

Both humanitarian settlement and migration programs can facilitate the movement of overseas-born people to regional Australia. The separation of the migration program from the humanitarian settlement program occurred in 1993 to provide a better balance between international humanitarian purposes and the "domestic, social and economic goals guiding the annual migration" (Galligan et al., 2014, p. 70).

A regional body or state government also plays a role in regional migration. For example, a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) is a formal arrangement between a regional body/state government and the Australian Government to attract skilled migrants to regional Australia (see Home Affairs, 2020). While these humanitarian settlement and migration policies have partly contributed to attracting overseas-born people to regional Australia, they may not be the only factors. For example, some argue for a regional medical education program to increase the likelihood of graduates working in regional Australia (Tang et al., 2014).

In addition, the retention of overseas-born people in regional Australia requires more than just these overall policies initiated by the Australian and/or state governments. For instance, strategies supporting migrants' and refugees' participation in socio-cultural or religious activities initiated by the local government and the community sector may be necessary (see Boese & Phillips, 2017). Hence, exploring migrants' and refugees lived experiences in regional Australia may provide insight into why they moved to regional Australia and what motivated them to live there.

The Collaborative Evaluation and Research Centre (CERC) at Federation University was commissioned by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) through the Gippsland Regional Partnership (GRP) to implement a project titled "*Development of a Network to Support Gippsland's Migration Strategy*" (also known as Gippsland Migration Project). The CERC team worked in partnership with the GRP to conduct a series of workshops and interviews with key stakeholders, including a variety of organisations across Gippsland, employers of migrants, employees, students, special interest groups, and migrant community members to co-create a network to inform the development of the Gippsland Migration Recruitment and Retention Charter.

The CERC used a mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis, consulting with 87 participants (migrants, stakeholders, and businesses) through survey, interview, and focus group discussions, coordinating six workshops, undertaking three organisational case studies, and performing a desk-top review of migrant-related support services within Gippsland.

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[1] Of the 28%, 26% lived in inner and outer regional Australia, and 2% lived in remote and very remote areas.

The Gippsland Migration Project encompassed two crucial interconnected components: Research and networking. The research component informed the networking component in the sense that the CERC research team identified participants for individual interviews, in-depth discussions, and engagement workshops. The rapport built with the research participants during the data collection phase led to the invitation of these participants to attend networking events where the CERC research team disseminated the research findings and co-created key guiding principles and implementation strategies with the event participants leading to the development of the Charter.

Migrant attraction to Gippsland

The engagement workshop quantitative data indicated nine motivations for migrants to move to Gippsland. Of these reasons, the top three were "permanent residency purposes", "marriage and/or family", and its "physical landscape and/or view". The findings are derived from a multiple-choice, multiple-answer question, so it is understood that there was no single reason for migrants to move to Gippsland but multiple interrelated reasons. These reasons were also found in the engagement workshops' qualitative data. A couple who recently moved to a small town in East Gippsland expressed their satisfaction with the Australian outdoor lifestyle interacting with nature in regional areas as follows:

> "*Coming* [from our home country]*, we also have an outdoor lifestyle, and…this town offers the coast, the sea, good running tracks, good mountain bike areas. So, it is very much a part of our daily lifestyles with regards to mountain biking, running, the ocean, fishing, swimming and things like that. So, if you combine all the factors together, that is what brought us towards this small town. It would have to be the lifestyle.*"

The two most reported attraction factors raised by the participants during focus group discussions were less traffic and crowding and Gippsland's natural beauty and peacefulness. When discussing traffic and crowding, the participants compared Gippsland with Melbourne and complained about the crowding and traffic congestion in Melbourne.

The two most reported attraction factors are in line with the findings in the scoping review paper of 11 empirical studies on regional migration in Australia (see Section 6 for literature review summary). One of the four attraction factors found in this review paper is *"human and non-human relation features of regional areas"*. These factors provided the participants with positive experiences, motivating them to continue their stay in Gippsland.

Decisions to stay in Gippsland or relocate within and/or from Gippsland

The engagement workshop survey data clearly indicate that the subjective feeling of belonging to the community was as crucial as the community's positive attitudes and behaviour toward migrants (63% vs 57%). These positive experiences were also encapsulated in the notion of *"stress-free and healthy lifestyles"* derived from the interview participants.

> "*They're* [community] *just very friendly and… you can connect to them so easily, you feel like you're being attached to them you talk like you just met them one day. Next day you become like, you know, close friends and all that.*"

One stakeholder interview participant suggested that the community's positive attitudes and behaviour toward migrants were crucial to retaining migrants in Gippsland:

> *"I think they need good community support... I think that we need to promote Gippsland not as a secondary settlement but as somewhere you* [migrants] *can come, and the community will embrace you."*

Only one-fifth of the engagement workshop participants regarded the feeling of belonging in the workplace as a reason to continue their stay in Gippsland.

Similarly, a regional meats work business owner whose most of his sponsored employees with migrant backgrounds continued to work for his company and stay in regional Victoria after getting permanent residency observed that employment stability, family and friends, and homeownership were key retention factors:

> *"They have their friends; they have their family; they have their house; they have their job. That's what people want. And if you do that with them, you're working with them, you'll hold them. That's how you take them there."*

The interview data also illuminated that "securing employment" was a key factor in retaining the participants in Gippsland. Employment is more than just an economic matter but self-worth; without employment may lead to the deterioration of migrants' mental health and/or out-migration to metropolitan areas. This aspect aligns with one of the four retention factors, "A positive workplace experience and/or employment satisfaction," found in the scoping review paper.

Examining the findings from different types of data suggested that all retention factors are inextricably linked. It also indicated the retention of migrants in Gippsland is not just about primary visa holders, but all family members. The scoping review paper also demonstrated the importance of considering the competing needs and aspirations of migrants' family members in retaining migrants in regional Australia.

Settlement-related information and services in Gippsland

The stakeholder interview data identified a federally funded settlement-related program called the Settlement Engagement Transition Support Program (SETS) in Gippsland. This program had been managed by the Gippsland Multicultural Services (GMS) and Anglicare Victoria before it was transferred to the Latrobe Community Health Services (LCHS). The SETS program collaborated with other service providers to support eligible migrants by co-case managing and referring them to other service providers. An interview with a professional working with migrants suggested that the program benefited some migrants and/or refugees in a positive way. However, the SETS program was constrained by the eligibility criteria of other service providers.

In addition to the SETS program, there were some formal or informal multicultural friendship groups in Gippsland. They were the Moe Multicultural Friendship Group, Warragul Multicultural Friendship Group, Wonthaggi Multicultural Women's Group, and International Women's Group. Participants found these groups very supportive and made them feel connected to the community.

Regarding settlement-related information, as indicated from the workshop quantitative data, the information mainly came from informal sources, which was doing own research and through friends and/or family. Further, organisations providing multicultural services were a formal source of information for the participants. Some of the interview participants who migrated to Gippsland through employment received settlement support from their employers. This included relocation costs and/or accommodation arrangements, connecting them to local real estate to find

accommodation, finding employment for their spouses, and providing professional support. The meat industry case study illustrates this clearly.

Other support available to new migrants emerged from migrants who settled in Gippsland. As highlighted in the interview data *"Helping new families"*, after settling in Gippsland, the migrants in this research helped and/or were willing to help new families settle there. This willingness to help tended to result from their lived experiences of hardship:

> *"We had a lot of challenges, so we wanted to give other community members the support that, like me myself, didn't get. When we have people move here, we provide settlement services. Everything they need, they come back to us for support because people want that communication, that network. So, we try to help people settle down in the area, give them the platform to celebrate the celebrations, family picnics, get-togethers."*

Challenges faced by migrants in Gippsland

Various data sets in this report revealed some common challenges faced by migrants. The interview data with migrants indicated that many participants faced hardship at the beginning of their migration journey in Gippsland. This *"hard beginning"* included the issue of no or minimal settlement support or being unaware of such support, which was often interrelated to a lack of or no social connection.

> *"We didn't…we never got* [any support]*… because we kind of have an English level, so we can solve that our problems by ourselves and we didn't realise on that time there are different organisations which can help us. I didn't realise that there are some non-profit organisations that can help me."*

According to the interview data, some married participants and their partners faced difficulties in securing appropriate employment. Securing employment was not easy for the participants, with some facing more challenges than others, except for those who moved to Gippsland through employment or employer sponsorship.

The interview data also indicated that other challenges including; *"transport difficulties," "access to school," "sourcing food," "access to healthcare,"* and *"finding appropriate housing".* The *"transport difficulties"* challenge involved the infrequency of bus and/or train services, which was considered a challenge by the participants who did not own a car. The stakeholder interview participants also observed this problem.

The interview data pointed to the existence of the issue of *"cultural practice and safety".* While some interview participants and most workshop participants had opportunities to practise their culture and felt belonging to the community, others raised the issue of cultural safety. Cultural safety implies inclusiveness, meaning that local people embrace people with a multicultural background so that they feel safe, not judged, welcome, and respected. As discussed in interviews with migrants, *Cultural practice and safety",* with findings also confirmed in some recounts from stakeholder interviews, some migrant participants received racial comments:

> *"…if organisations and workplaces* [are] *not conducive but microaggressions happening, how much you can sustain? So, it is difficult, and if people are bad to me or are rude to me, maybe I'm speaking up, and they know that I will not take it, but not everybody can do that."*

Some interview and workshop participants faced problems with English proficiency, ranging from having an accent to comprehension. The stakeholder participants who worked with migrants and/or refugees also raised this issue, adding that it was compounded by English language barriers and low-quality on-the-phone interpretation services. Two of the organisational business case studies indicated this challenge, their commitment, and approaches to address it. The stakeholder participants raised the issue of service coordination for multicultural communities, which required a central coordinating hub.

1.3 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a total of five identified recommendations for the Gippsland Migration Project. The following recommendations are based on the findings of this report:

1. Research the benefits and outcomes from existing **Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)** and consider the development of a Gippsland DAMA.
   a) Through the Gippsland Regional Partnership, raise awareness among regional stakeholders in Gippsland about the need for and benefits of a DAMA.
   b) Leverage state and federal government in reducing barriers to the implementation and flexibility of a Gippsland DAMA.
2. Consider the **development of a single guiding agency** to steer the Gippsland Migration Strategy.
   a) Undertake further research to understand who the most appropriate agency may be to steer the strategy.
3. Periodically review the developed **guiding principles** for the Gippsland Migration Strategy.
   a) Review of the guiding principles by key stakeholders including future migrants to regional Victoria, community organisations including education institutions, business entities, industry peak bodies, Gippsland Regional Partnership, and local, state, and federal government.
4. Develop an implementation strategy for the **Migrant Recruitment and Retention Charter** to disseminate the key findings of the Project.
   a) The Charter was designed as a set of overarching values and principles to inform future implementation strategies.
5. Ensure any strategic work relating to **migrants in Gippsland** includes opportunities for them to be **included in co-design**.
   a) Work in partnership with migrants to create solutions and ensure their voice is represented within decision making and planning.

DEVELOPMENT OF A NETWORK TO SUPPORT GIPPSLAND'S MIGRATION STRATEGY

To co-create a network to inform the development of the migration attraction and retention plan.

Feedback from Migrants

"The reason why we chose a remote area like this small town firstly was because of the incentives that the Government gave for permanent residency visas and the help with relocation costs. Another reason... is that major cities... are very difficult to find currently in the housing crisis... So that was also the consideration that made us choose a remote area."

Feedback from Stakeholders

"...we need lots of training... It's kind of like cultural awareness training, more about the bridge of our understanding and the shared understanding.... We would also like to provide training to multicultural members because there are lots of norms and codes"

Reasons to migrate to Gippsland

Other (retirement, low cost of living, desire to leave off Melbourne) 15%

Refugee purposes 12%

Employment 6%

Marriage and/or family 33%

Permanent residency purposes 39%

Regional physical landscape/view 33%
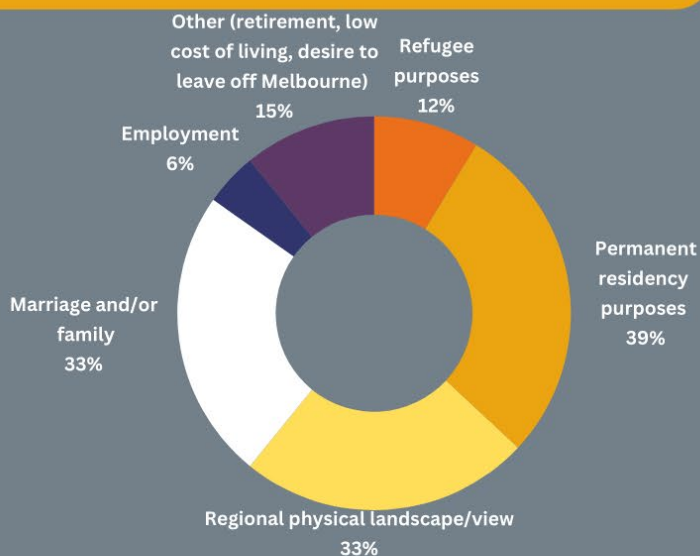
Data Points

123 participants (Migrants, stakeholders, businesses).

6 scoping & engagement workshops across Gippsland.

Interviews/discussions with 68 migrants & stakeholders.

3 Organisational case studies with Gippsland businesses.

1 Desktop review of migration-related services in Gippsland.

Developed Guiding Principles

1. Develop and maintain a positive mindset toward people from CALD backgrounds.
2. Promote inclusivity/social cohesion and awareness of diverse communities.
3. Reduce language barriers for people from CALD backgrounds.
4. Develop opportunities for broader community networking and connection.
5. Elevate and build upon good practices.
6. Incentivise migrants to settle in regional areas.

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REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS GIPPSLAND

2. DEVELOPMENT OF A NETWORK TO SUPPORT GIPPSLAND'S MIGRATION STRATEGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Labour shortages in regional Australia are a multifaceted challenge requiring a concerted effort by all relevant actors at all levels. Although the population of regional Australia grew by 11% between 2011 and 2021 (ABC, 2021), in 2022, only 28% of the total population lived in regional Australia (AIWH, 2023).[2] This figure is particularly reflected in the state of Victoria, with approximately 25% of the population living in regional areas (ABC, 2022).

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[2] Of the 28%, 26% lived in inner and outer regional Australia, and 2% lived in remote and very remote areas.

2.2 PROJECT AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The CERC team worked in partnership with the Gippsland Regional Partnership to conduct a series of workshops and interviews with key stakeholders to co-create a network to inform the development of the migration attraction and retention plan.

The following were the project objectives:

1. To co-create a stakeholder network to support the Gippsland migration attraction and retention plan.
2. Inform the vision and framework for the Gippsland migration attraction and retention plan.
3. Identify any potential opportunities for collaboration to deliver migration attraction and retention outcomes.
4. Deepen relationships across stakeholder networks interested in and/or working on migration attraction and retention in Gippsland.

2.3 PROJECT DELIVERY/ACTIVITIES

The CERC team worked in partnership with the GRP to deliver the project through a Project Advisory Group whose members are from GRP, DJSIR, and CERC (see Appendix 1). The Project Advisory group had a regular monthly meeting to guide the project activities, such as identifying participants for individual interviews, coordinating engagement workshops, and implementing a series of migration direction workshops. The project was implemented in three related phases, summarised in Figure 1 below.
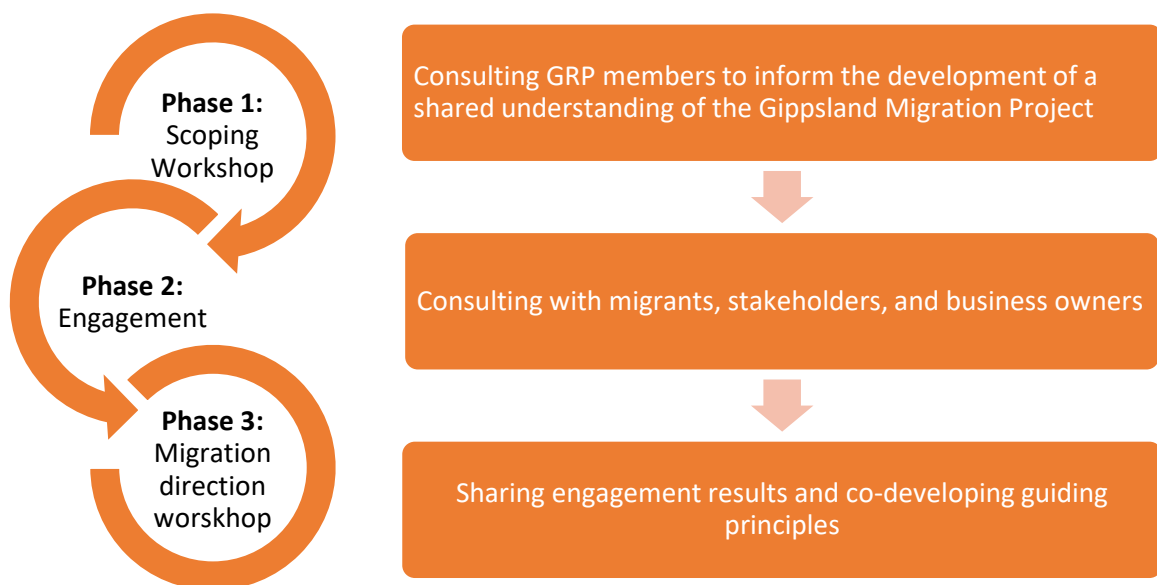
Figure 1: Three Phases of Gippsland Migration Project

The first Phase of the project, from August to September 2023, involved preparing and conducting a scoping workshop with GRP members to develop a shared understanding of the Gippsland Migration Project. This Phase also included analysing the workshop results and consulting these results with the project Advisory Group.

In the second Phase of the project, from October 2023 to January 2024, the CERC research team consulted migrants, stakeholders who worked with and/or provided services to migrants, and some business owners employing migrants as part of their workforce. These consultations occurred in four Shires (Baw Baw, Bass Coast, East Gippsland, and Willington) and one City (Latrobe) in Gippsland. The consultation discussions focused on migrant attraction, retention, challenges, and support needed. Figure 2 illustrates the total number of research participants from each type of participant.
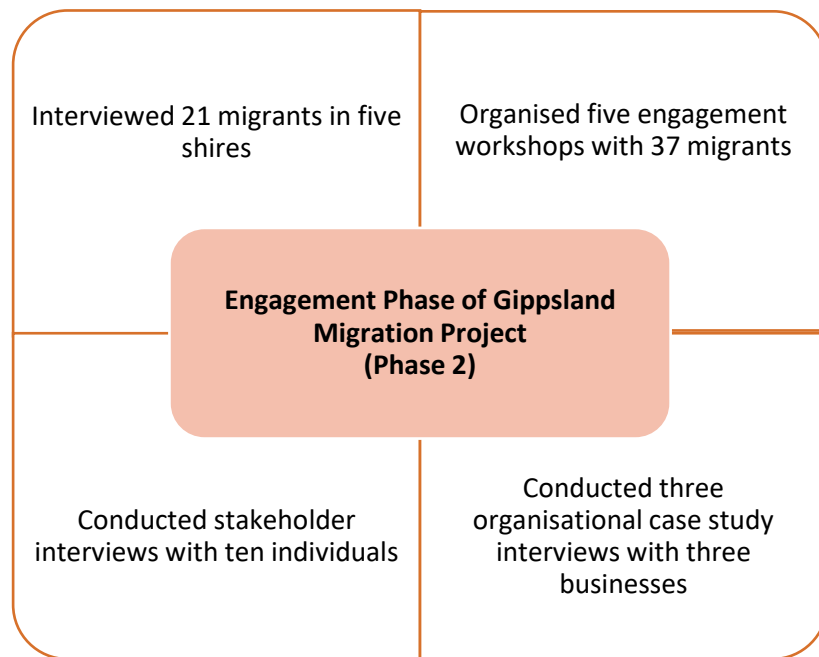
Figure 2: Total number of research participants consulted in project Phase 2

The third Phase of the project, from May to June 2024, was designed to share the research findings via three migration direction workshops and create a network to support Gippsland's Migration Strategy, in which key guiding principles and strategies were discussed and finalised for this research report (see Appendix 2). The workshop participants included:

- **Community stakeholders**: all in-depth interview/discussion participants were invited to attend this community stakeholder workshop.
- **Industry stakeholders**: the participants were (1) the research participants of the organisational case study interviews, (2) business entities from different sectors, (3) professionals who provide support and/or services, including multicultural services, to migrants, and (4) members of the Gippsland Regional Partnership.

2.4 DATA COLLECTION / TOOLS USED

A mixed methods approach was used to execute the Gippsland Migration Project with quantitative and qualitative data collected, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Quantitative

Scoping workshops: Assessment of levels of commitment from GRP members and their priority areas

Engagement workshops: Understanding of migrants' motivations to move to Gippsland and migrant retention factors

Qualitative

Scoping workshops: consultations with key stakeholders relevant to the project

Interviews with migrants on their migration journey in Gippsland

Interviews with stakeholders who worked with and/or provided services to migrants

Organisational case study interviews with business owners employing migrants as part of their workforce

Migration direction workshops: consultations on guiding principles and strategies for Gippsland's Migration Direction

Desktop review and analysis of government websites and action plans to understand the support available to migrants.
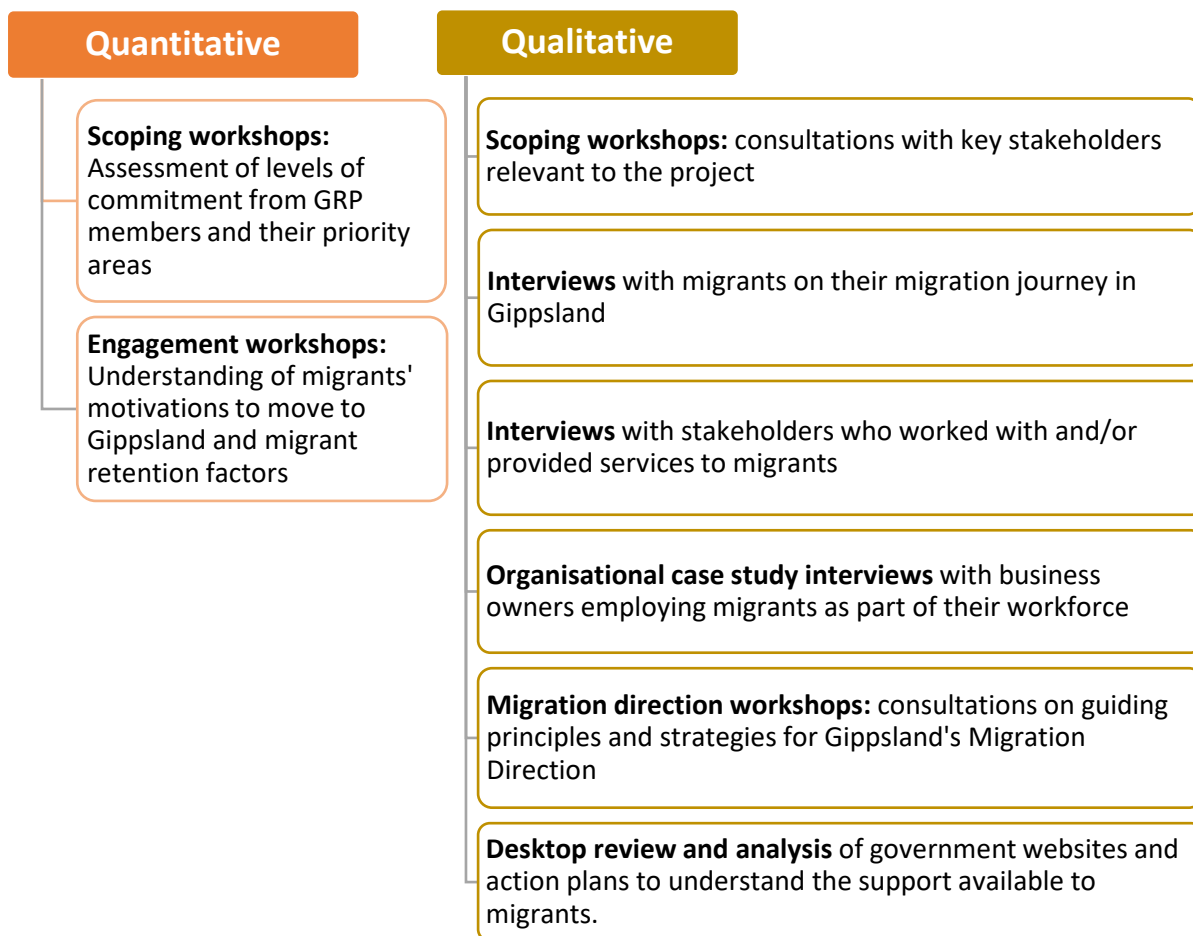
Figure 3: Data collection tools

Image: Project participant workshop

3. PHASE 1 – SCOPING WORKSHOP FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In August 2023, a scoping workshop was conducted in Morwell in Latrobe City with 20 Gippsland Regional Partnership members (GRP) members. Participants included chief executive officers of local governments, appointed community GRP members, and Regional Directors of state government departments. The workshop aimed to inform the development of a shared understanding of Gippsland's Migration Strategy. A survey was distributed to workshop participants during the session to ascertain their level of commitment to a Gippsland Migration Strategy. The key questions discussed during this workshop were the following:

1) Who are the key partners involved with regional migration?
2) What is the level of interest and commitment among partner organisations to contribute to the development of the Migrant Attraction Strategy?
3) What is working well, and what needs to be considered or developed?
4) How can the partnership support the development of a Gippsland Migrant Attraction strategy?

In responding to questions one and three above, the participants were asked to consider four different levels/layers of relevant stakeholders, from **Migrants** at the centre to **Community** at the outer layer, presented in Figure 4 below.
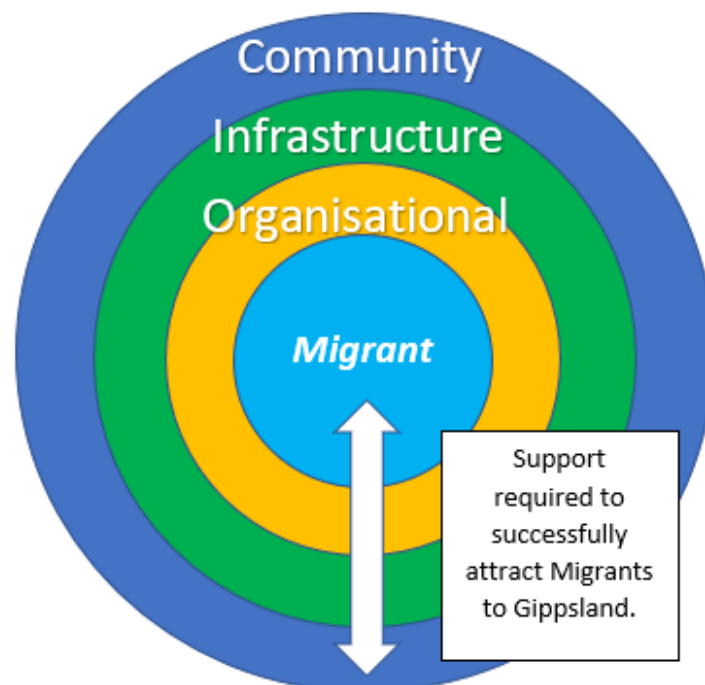

Figure 4: Gippsland migrant attraction stakeholders

QUANTITATIVE DATA

During the scoping workshop, all 20 participants were asked to respond to a set of six statements indicating their level of commitment to a Gippsland Migration Strategy and another set of six statements identifying their priority areas in relation to this migration matter. All participants agreed to respond to each of these statements.
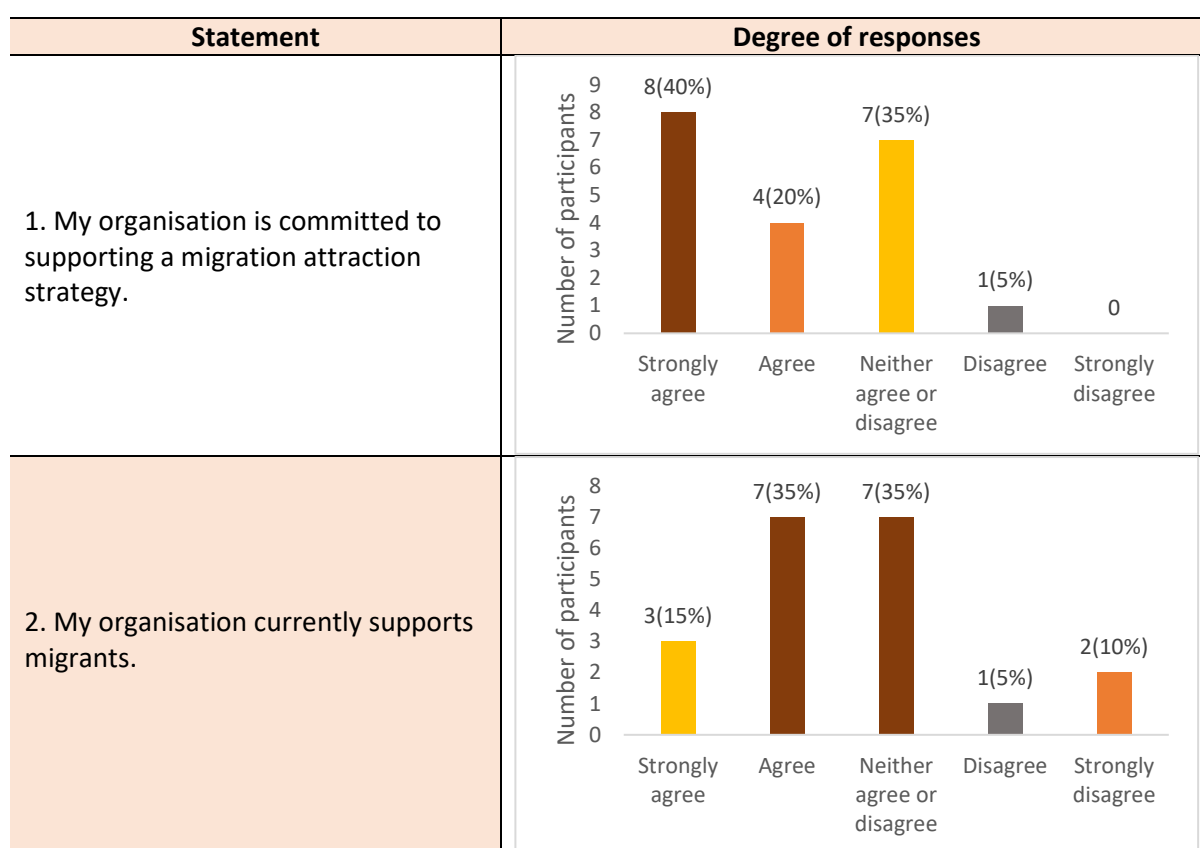
Level of commitment from GPR members to Gippsland Migration Strategy

As shown in Figure 5 below, at the organisational level (statement 1), 60% (a combination of "strongly agree" and "agree" responses) of the participants agreed that their organisation was committed to supporting a migration strategy.

Individually (statement 5), the largest majority (95%) supported the development of a Gippsland migration strategy. Similarly, as shown in statement 4, the same proportion of respondents believed that there should be committing resources to developing this strategy.

However, as shown in statement 6, this proportion dropped to about 60% in relation to their individual commitment of time to the development of this strategy.

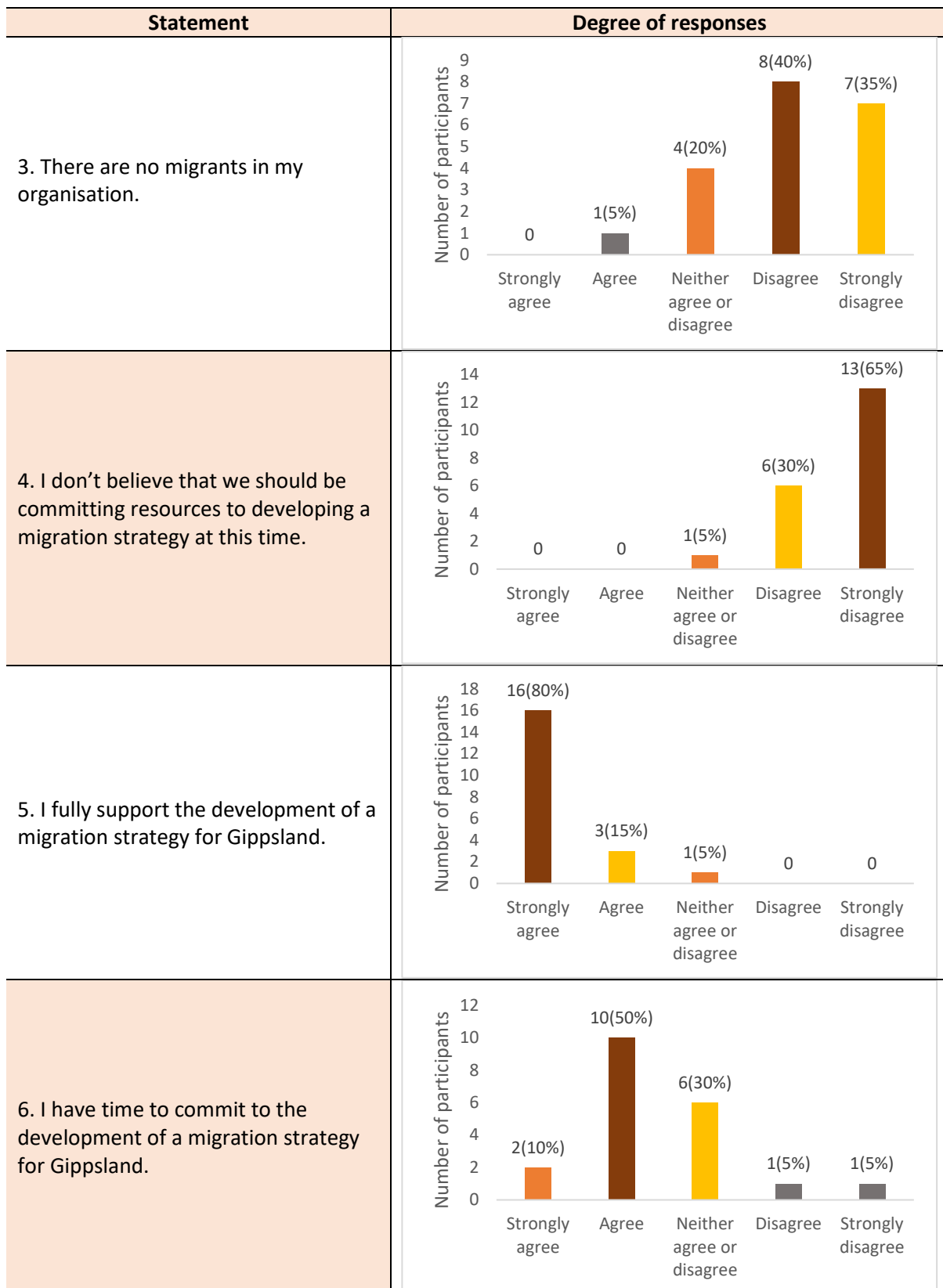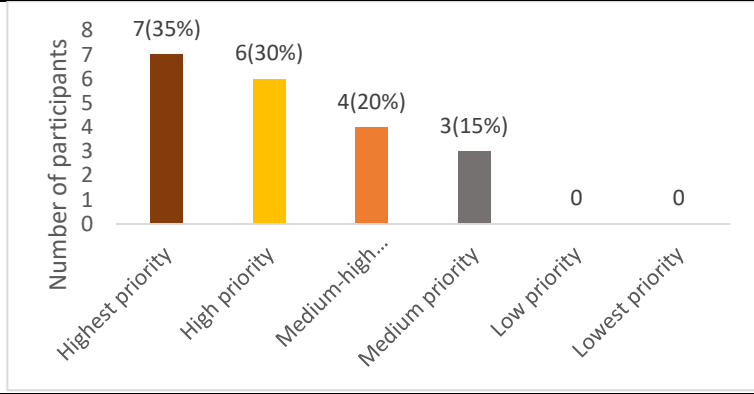Overall, outcomes were positive in relation to the support of the development of the migration strategy.

Statement	Degree of responses
1. My organisation is committed to supporting a migration attraction strategy.	
2. My organisation currently supports migrants.	

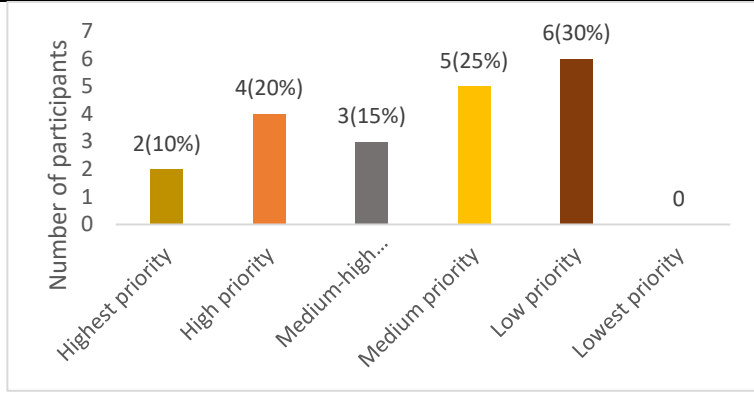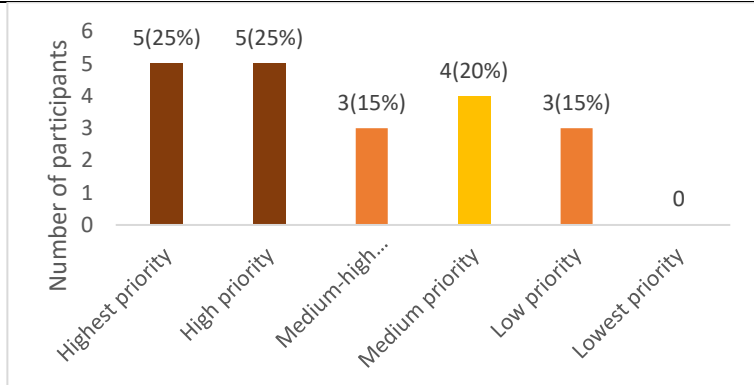| Statement	Degree of responses
3. There are no migrants in my organisation.	**Number of participants** Strongly agree: 0 Agree: 1(5%) Neither agree or disagree: 4(20%) Disagree: 8(40%) Strongly disagree: 7(35%)
4. I don't believe that we should be committing resources to developing a migration strategy at this time.	**Number of participants** Strongly agree: 0 Agree: 0 Neither agree or disagree: 1(5%) Disagree: 6(30%) Strongly disagree: 13(65%)
5. I fully support the development of a migration strategy for Gippsland.	**Number of participants** Strongly agree: 16(80%) Agree: 3(15%) Neither agree or disagree: 1(5%) Disagree: 0 Strongly disagree: 0
6. I have time to commit to the development of a migration strategy for Gippsland.	**Number of participants** Strongly agree: 2(10%) Agree: 10(50%) Neither agree or disagree: 6(30%) Disagree: 1(5%) Strongly disagree: 1(5%)

Figure 5: Level of commitment on Gippsland migration strategy from GRP members

Priority areas of Gippsland Regional Partnership members

The responses to statement 2, as shown in Figure 6 below, suggested that while only 45% of the participants rated the development of a migration strategy as their highest to medium priority, the remaining participants rated it as their lowest priority.

The overall pattern of all responses suggested that while 65% to 85% of the participants prioritised local people, 15% to 35% considered employing migrants, perhaps those already in Australia. For instance, the responses to statement 6 suggested that although recruiting a skilled workforce internationally was not their top priority, it does not mean that the respondents did not consider employing migrants who are already in Australia.

Statement	Degree of responses
1. Employing local people	
2. Development of a migration attraction strategy	
3. Supporting the training of locals	

Statement	Degree of responses
4. Downsizing the existing workforce	
5. Upskilling existing staff	
6. Recruiting skilled workforce internationally	

Figure 6: Priority areas of Gippsland Regional Partnership members

QUALITATIVE DATA

The qualitative data collected in the Phase 1 scoping workshop focused on identifying key stakeholders involved in Gippsland regional migration, what is working well, and what should be considered.

Who are the key stakeholders involved with regional migration?

The workshop participants were divided into three groups to discuss key stakeholders at the community, infrastructure, and organisational levels involved in regional migration. Each group wrote their discussion points on butchers' paper. The CERC research team then analysed the discussion notes of the three groups to determine common and different points. The results of this analysis of key stakeholders for each level are presented in Figure 7 (Community level), Figure 8 (Infrastructure level), and Figure 9 (organisational level) below.

Figure 7 below depicts primary community-level stakeholders involved in Gippsland regional migration.

Figure 7: Community-level stakeholders involved in regional migration

As presented in Figure 8 below, some structural elements to consider in Gippsland's regional migration were the federal stakeholders and other elements at the local level. These structural elements represent the stakeholders at the infrastructure level of regional migration in Gippsland. An asterisk (*) suggests a higher level of interest and commitment to the Gippsland Migration Strategy or the importance of stakeholders and/or services for supporting migrants. A question mark (?) implies the participants' uncertainty about whether these stakeholders were interested in, and committed to, the strategy or whether these services were available for migrants.
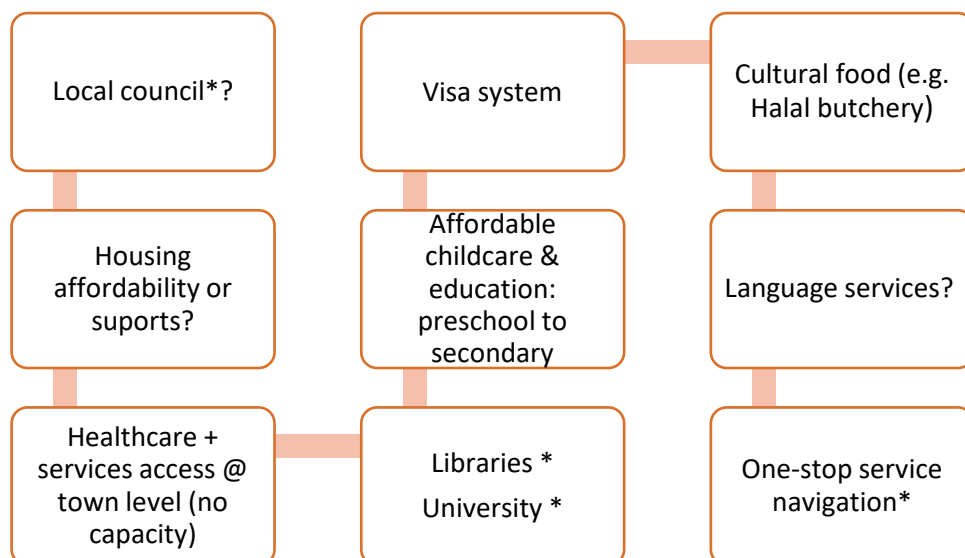
Figure 8: Migration infrastructure for supporting migrants

Figure 9 below presents some important organisational stakeholders identified by the participants. These stakeholders have the potential to support and/or sponsor skilled migrants to Gippsland.
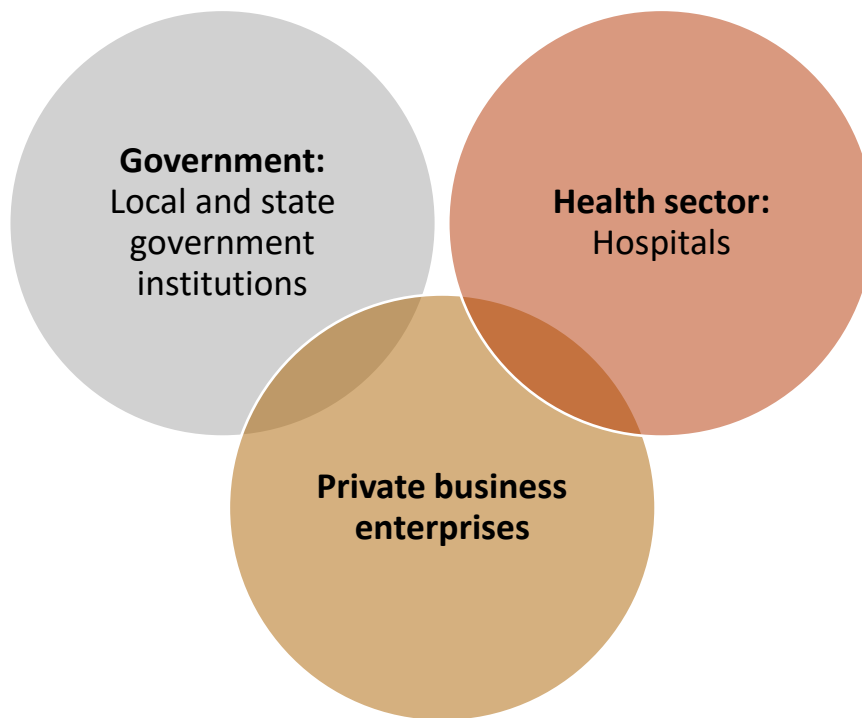
Figure 9: Organisational stakeholders in relation to regional migration

What is working well?

The scoping workshop participants suggested that the six points, illustrated in Figure 10 below, could be considered strengths or perceived strengths that could be used to attract more migrants to Gippsland. For example, although some legislation and/or policies on migration could be considered strengths, they could also be improved.

What is working well?	Some organisations and/or townships are considered to do it well in relation to migration
	Community and/or regional media outlets
	Programs and/or social services
	Realisation about the importance of migrant workforce among employers
	Physical spaces and/or landscapes
	Some legislation and/or policies on migration

Figure 10: Things that are working well

What needs to be considered?

When workshop participants were asked what needs to be considered when attracting more migrants to Gippsland, the ten points presented in Figure 10 below were derived from the participants' responses. These points informed the CERC research team of some directions and/or clues to explore further as part of the development of the migration strategy. Three points in orange were mentioned by a number of groups of participants.

What need to be considered?	
	Govenment funded employment services (provisions and purpose)
	Support for community groups
	Mapping of migrant integration into Gippsland
	Language support
	Migration strategy
	One-stop navigation support services or visitor information centre
	Connection to school
	Housing/accommodation – employer sponsorships
	Improve public transport – safety and accessibility
	Engagement with social services, businesses, and migration agents

Figure 11: Things to be considered for supporting migrants

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The qualitative and quantitative data presented from the Phase 1 scoping workshop suggest the following concluding points: There was a high level of individual commitment to the development of a migration strategy. More than half of the respondents expressed that they would commit their time to contributing to the development of this strategy.

Whilst most respondents focused on recruiting and upskilling local people, some considered recruiting migrants, perhaps those already in Australia. Assurances are suggested for relevant stakeholders that having a migration strategy does not mean that they no longer prioritise local people.

The data provided the CERC research team with a better understanding of the types of stakeholders at different levels who could be consulted in the project's next Phase.

The responses to the question of "what's working well" suggested some strengths and/or perceived strengths that could be leveraged to attract more migrants to Gippsland. The research team would explore these areas further as part of the research process.

The responses to the question of "what needs to be considered" provided some directions and/or clues of potential key components of a migration strategy that needed to be explored.

4. PHASE 2 – ENGAGEMENT PHASE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA – ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

From October to December 2023, the CERC research team conducted five engagement workshops in three shires/cities. Three engagement workshops (one in Morwell, one in Traralgon, and one in Moe). One engagement workshop was held in Warragul in Baw Baw Shire, and another was organised in Wonthaggi in Bass Coast Shire.

The CERC research team created a workshop flyer which was sent to different ethnic and multicultural groups and community stakeholders who worked with and/or provided services to migrants in Gippsland. The research team obtained their contact emails via Google search. No existing multicultural groups assisted in coordinating the two workshops in Latrobe City, these workshops were open to any migrants with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Three multicultural friendship groups assisted the research team in organising three other workshops in Moe, Warragul, and Wonthaggi.

In each workshop, the research team collected quantitative data through a questionnaire, and conducted focus groups to encourage participants to share their insights and/or lived experiences of migration in Gippsland. A total of 37 participants attended the five workshops, one of whom participated in the workshop twice. In addition, four migrant women who assisted the CERC research team organise these workshops were present in the workshops. This section of the report analyses the quantitative survey data of 36 of the 37 workshop participants, with removal of one duplicate participant response.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Of the 36 workshop participants, 83% (n=30) were female, and 17% (n=6) were male. Nobody identified as non-binary. All participants were 18 years old and over. Many of the participants were 61 years old and over, with a high proportion of those aged 61-70 (33%, n=12), followed by the 70+ age group (31%, n=11). The number of participants for each age category is shown in Figure 12 below.
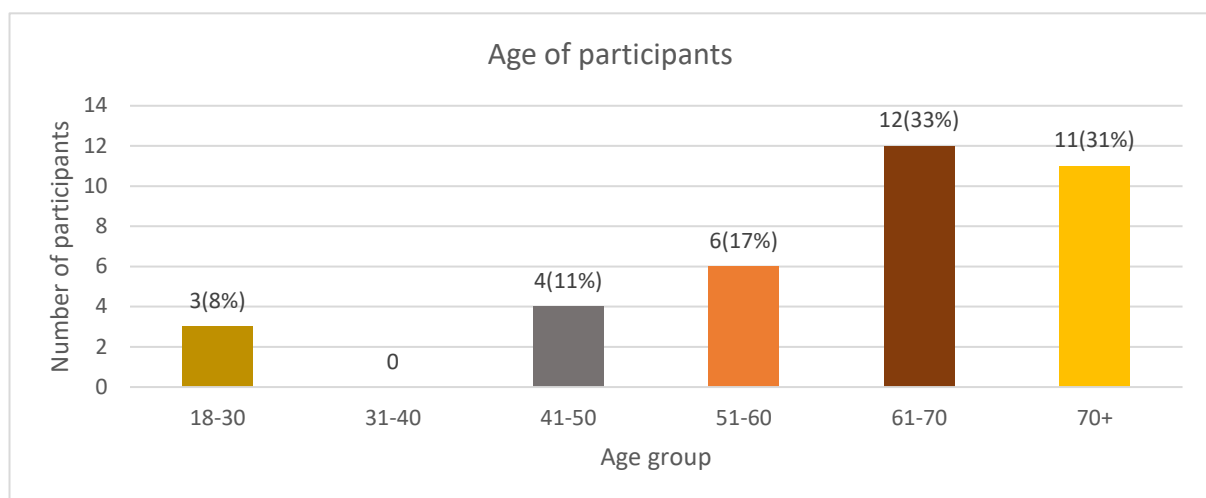
Figure 12: Age of survey participants

Cultural backgrounds of the participants

Almost half (46%) of the participants came from Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia. The second largest ethnic group was people with a European background being 23% (n=8). Only 11% (n=4) came from South Asia, including India. One participant came from the United States of America.
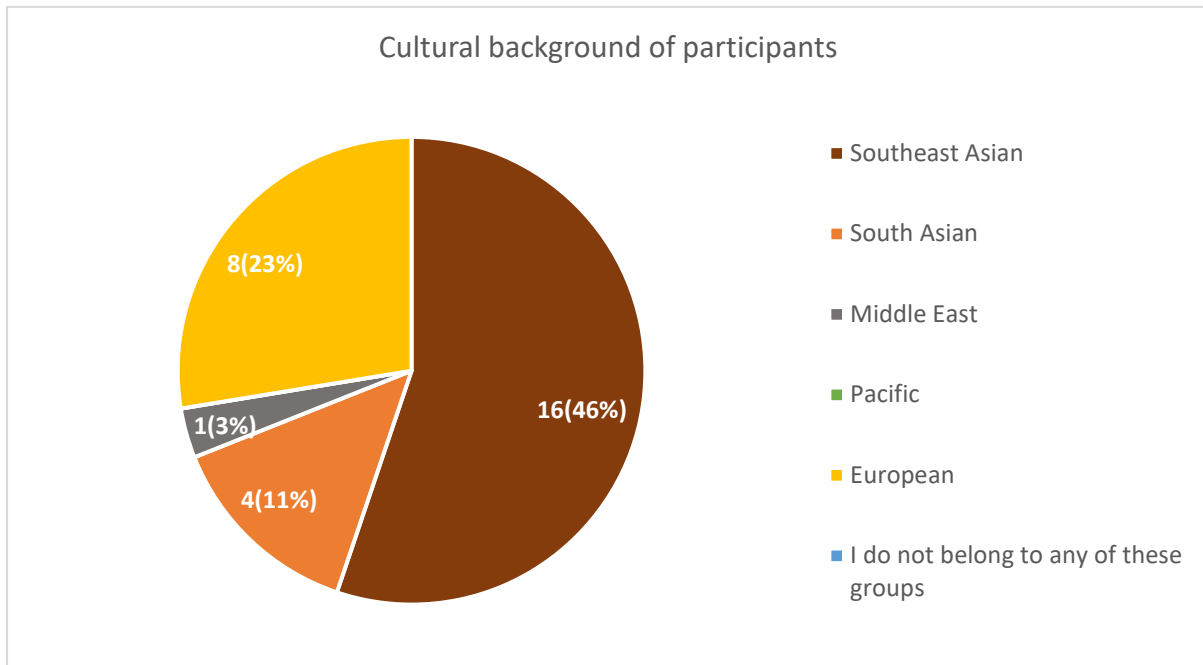
Figure 13: Cultural background of participants

Employment status

Participants were asked about their employment status, with multiple options that could be chosen. As shown in Figure 14, most participants were retired (58%, n=12). The proportion of the participants who selected the *"Other"* and *"Unemployed"* categories was the same at 11% (n=4). When examining the reasons for choosing the *"Other"* category, it was identified that one participant was a person with a disability, one was a carer, and two were volunteers.
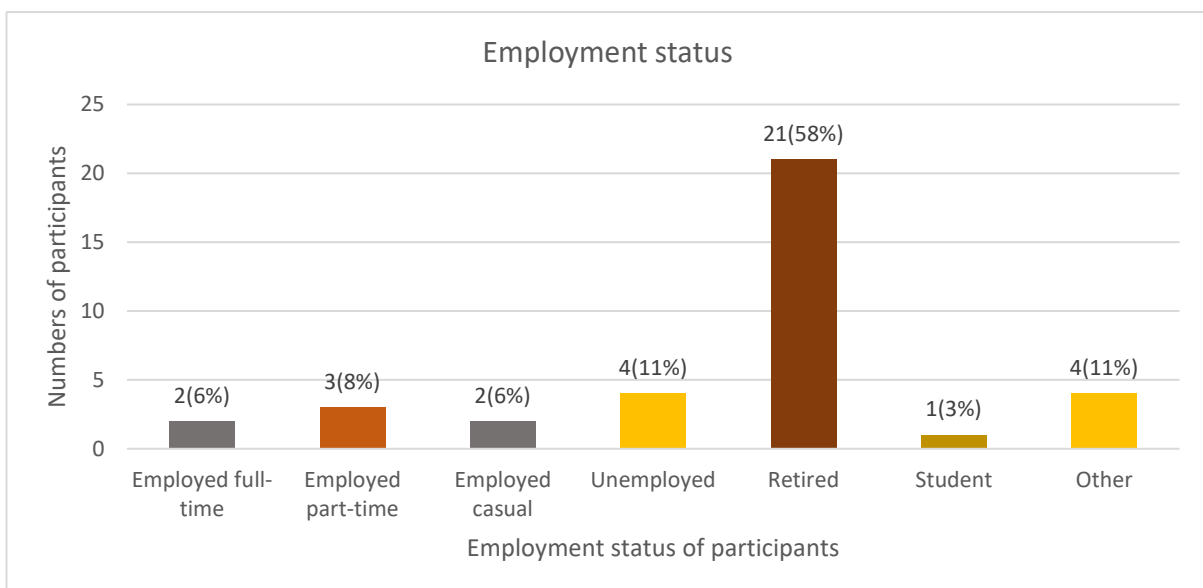
Figure 14: Employment status of participants

All 36 respondents indicated which town/postcode they lived in. The survey respondents came from 10 different postcode areas. The top two postcodes were Moe (3825, n=10) in Latrobe City and Wonthaggi (3995, n=7) in Bass Coast. The number of people from Morwell (3840) in Latrobe City and Warragul (3820) in Baw Baw Shire was the same at four people. One participant came from each of the other six postcodes (3996, 3992, 3921, 3818, 3824, and 3844), as shown in Figure 15.
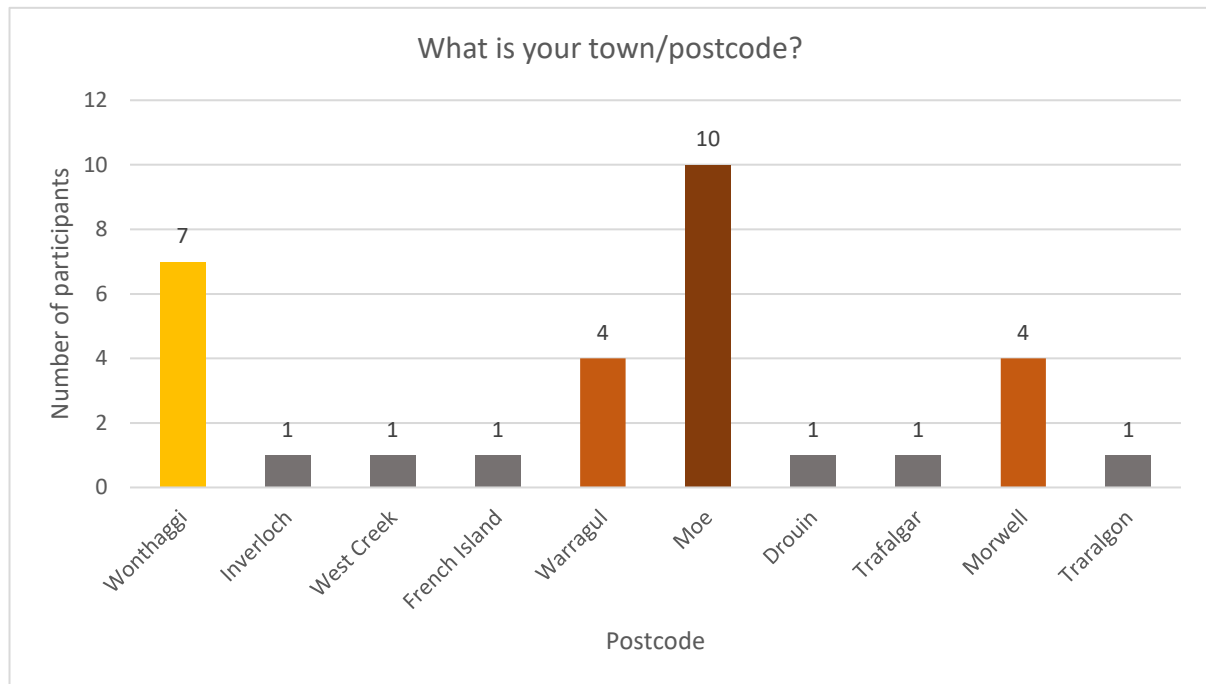
Figure 15: Participant town/postcode

MOTIVATION TO MOVE TO GIPPSLAND

Of 36 participants, 33 agreed to explain the multiple reasons why they migrated to Gippsland. It was a multiple-choice with multiple-answers question, so the participants chose more than one reason. Of the six reason categories, over half of the participants (58%, n=19) chose the *"Other"* category and provided their reasons. These reasons could be grouped into six categories: marriage and family (n=6), nature and peace such as stillness, quietness, silence, and birds (n=5), refugee reasons (n=4), desire to get out of Melbourne (n=2), low-cost of living (n=2), and retirement (n=1).

The second largest (39%, n=13) reason for moving to Gippsland was getting a permanent residency, followed by the region's physical landscape and/or view at 18% (n=6) and close to extended family members (relatives) at 15% (n=5).
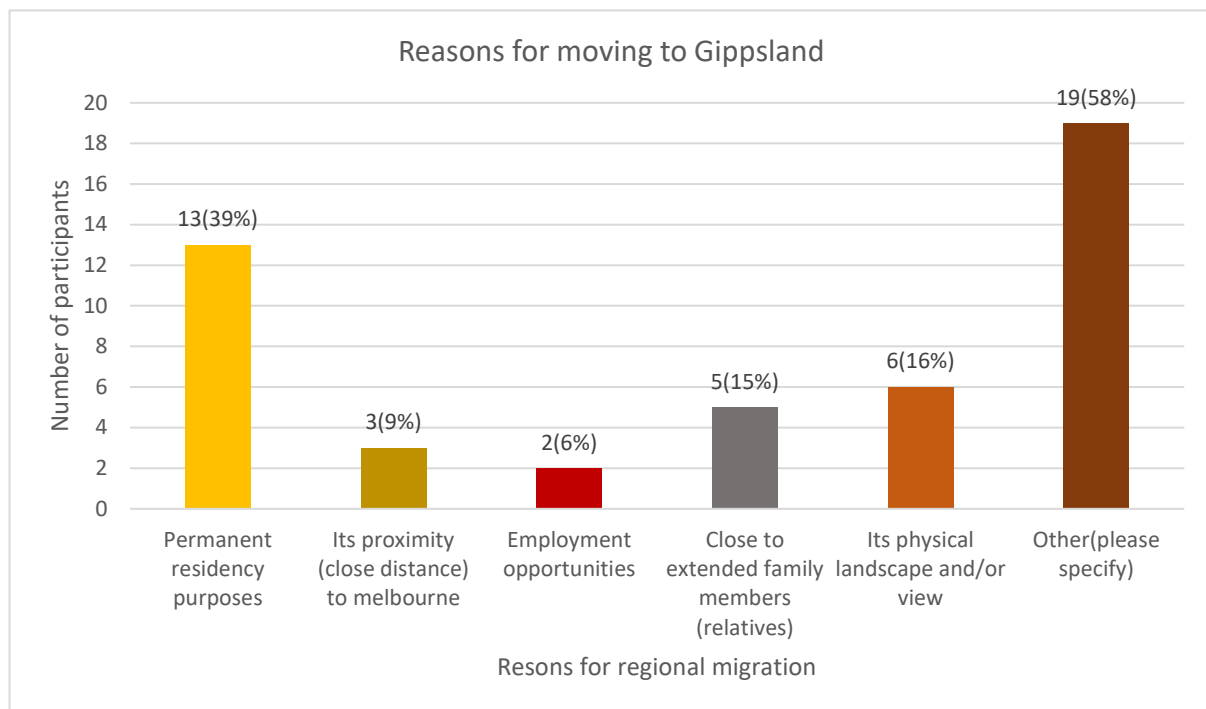
Figure 16: Reasons for moving to Gippsland

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Participants were asked to respond to two questions about settlement-related information and another two questions on settlement support. The settlement-related information questions were about the type of information the participants received and/or needed when first moving to Gippsland and who provided that information to them. The settlement support questions were about settlement support from employers and their satisfaction with this support.

Type of information received and/or needed when first moving to Gippsland

Participants were asked to answer whether they received and/or needed each of the seventeen types of settlement-related information, as shown in Figure 17 below. Except for the *"Employment and workplace issues"* category, the percentage of participants who *received* each information type was significantly higher than that of *needed* that information.

The top three types of information *received* by the participants were *"Education and library services"*, standing at 58%% (n=21), *"Banking services"* at 55.56% (n=20), and *"Public transport"* at 44.44% (n=16). The top three types of information *needed* by the participants were *"Emergency services and or contacts"* at 41.67% (n=15), *"Public transport"* at 38% (n=14) and *"Multicultural services and/or religious contacts"* at 36% (n=13). The proportion of participants who needed *"Entertainment, festivals, and events"* also stood at 36% (n=13).
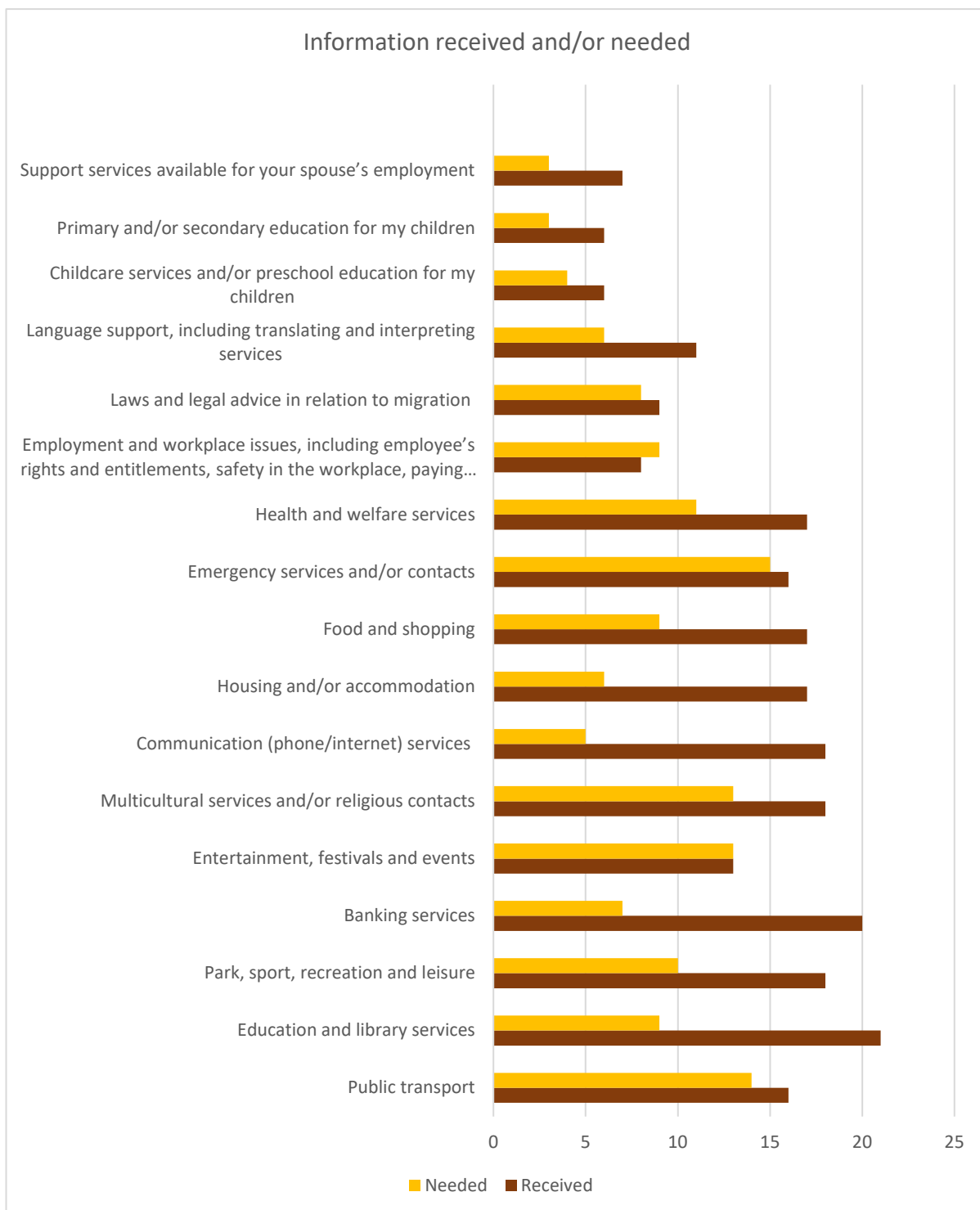
Figure 17: Information received and/or needed by participants when first moving to Gippsland

Sources of settlement-related information

Of the 36 workshop participants, 31 agreed to indicate the sources of information they *received* the above information. As shown in Figure 18, most participants (61%, n=19) received settlement-related information from friends and/or family, followed by organisations working on multicultural services 42% (n=13). The participants (29%, n=9) chose the "Other" category as the third source of information by indicating that they did their own research and reached out to others.

Settlement-related information mainly came from informal sources, which included the participants doing their own research and through friends and/or family. Further, organisations providing multicultural services were a formal source of information for the participants.
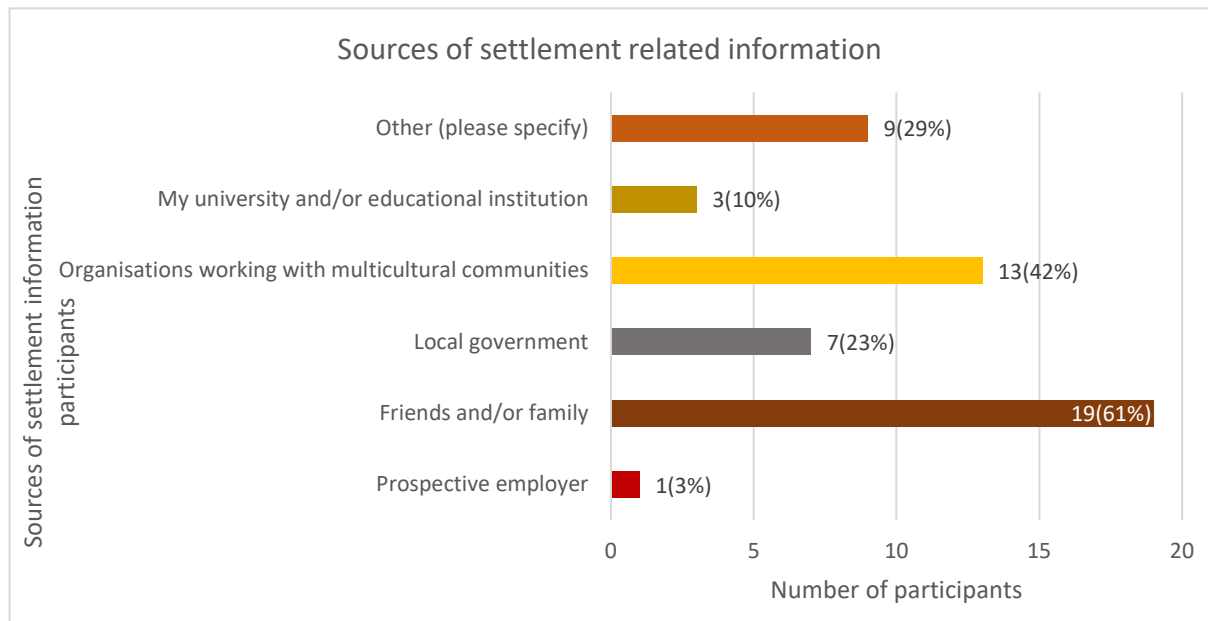
Figure 18: Sources of settlement-related information

Support provided by (prospective) employers

Of the 36 workshop participants, 33 agreed to respond to the question of what kind of support they received from employers. Figure 19 shows that this question was not relevant to most participants (85%, n=28) because they did not come to Gippsland through work. Three people (9%) chose the *"Other"* category, with one explaining that they received support from Latrobe Community Health Services (LCHS). Another indicated that they received a fixed amount of cash, and the other stated that they received support from relatives.
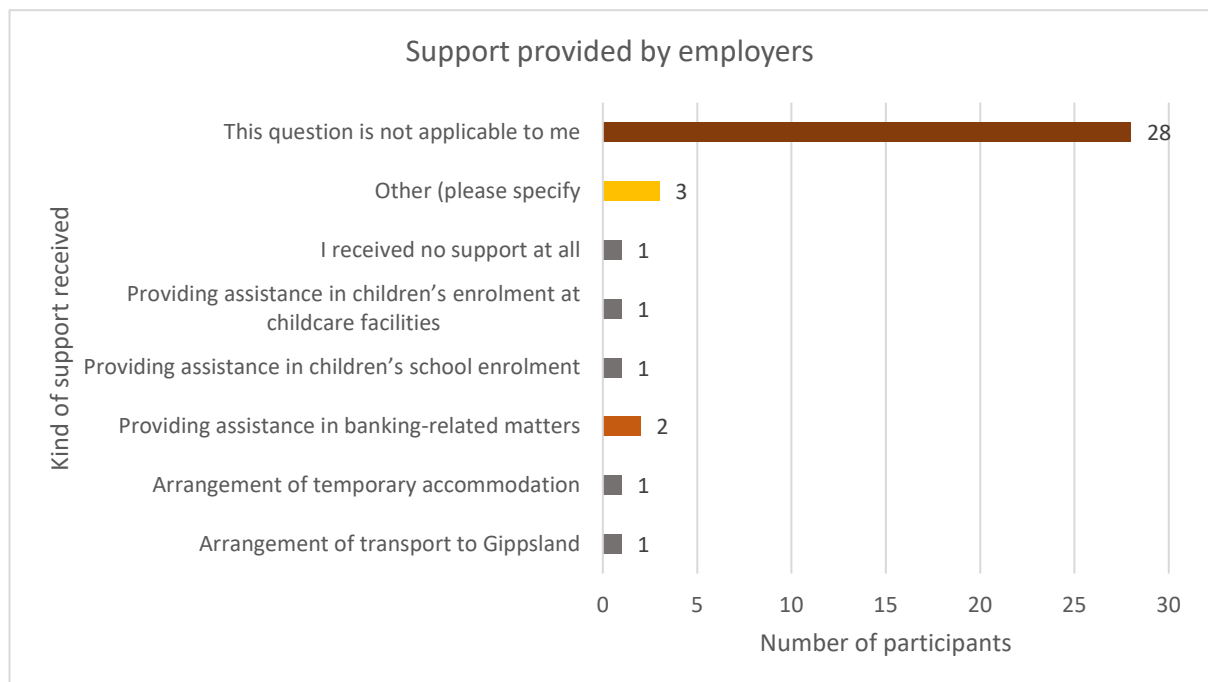
Figure 19: Support provided by (prospective) employers

Levels of satisfaction with employers' support

Of the 36 workshop participants, 33 agreed to answer the question about how satisfied they were with the support they received from their employers. As shown in Figure 20 below, this question was irrelevant to most participants (90%, n=30) as they did not come to Gippsland through work. While one participant indicated they were "very satisfied" with the support, another was unsatisfied.
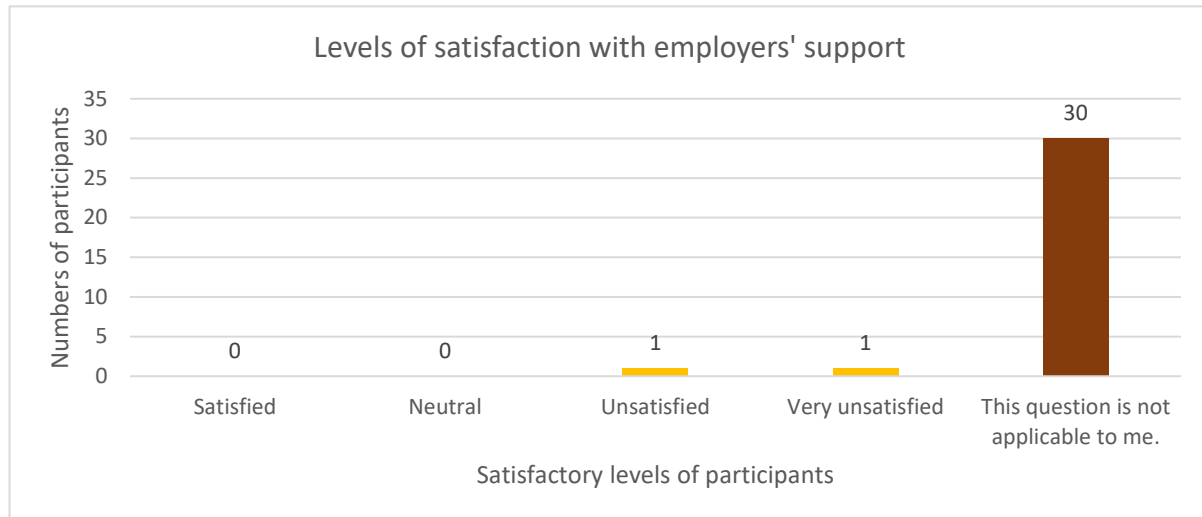
Figure 20: Satisfaction with employers' support

MIGRANT RETENTION

Five domains enabling the research team to better understand migrant retention in Gippsland were the length of stay, living arrangements, current visa status, thoughts about moving to a metropolitan area, and factors making migrants consider Gippsland a second home.

Length of stay in Gippsland

Participants were asked how long they had lived in Gippsland to better understand migrant retention in Gippsland. As shown in Figure 21, over half of the participants (56%, n=20) had resided in Gippsland for more than 10 years, and a quarter had lived here for less than five years. A total of 19% of participants (n=9) had resided in Gippsland between 6 to 10 years.
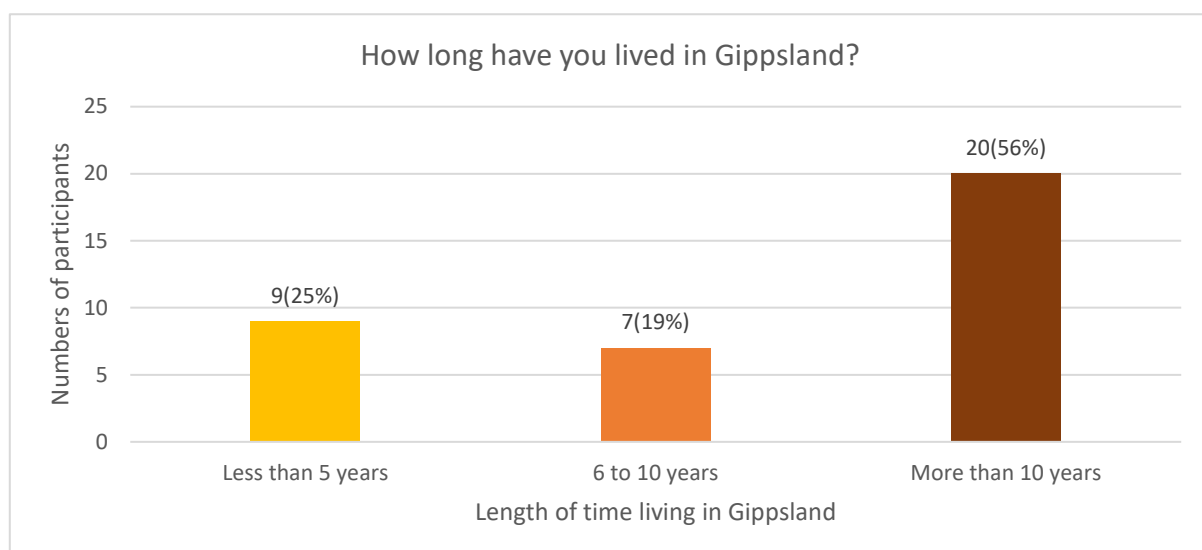
Figure 21: Length of stay in Gippsland

Living arrangements in Gippsland

Participants were asked about their living arrangements. Two living arrangements, *"Live with my spouse and/or children"* (living arrangement 1) and *"Live on my own as I am single"* (living arrangement 2), were presumed to signify a stronger possibility of migrant retention in Gippsland. A total of 33% (n=12) and 25% (n=9) of the participants chose these responses, respectively.

This stronger possibility is followed by a weaker possibility of migrant retention in the other two living arrangements, *"Live with my spouse here and my children live in a metropolitan city and/or overseas"* (living arrangement 3) and *"Live on my own as my family live in a metropolitan city and/or overseas"* (living arrangement 4). A total of 28% (n=10) and 3% (n=1) represented these two living arrangements, respectively. In comparison, living arrangement 4 represents the weakest possibility of migrant retention in Gippsland as they are likely to move to join their family and/or children in a metropolitan city at any time (Figure 22).

A total of 17% (n=6) chose the "Other" category as their response, with a description reflecting their own living arrangement. These arrangements are as follows:

1. With spouse and family (n=1)
2. Live with my family and spouse (n=1)
3. Sometimes with my daughter (n=1)
4. I am single and live with my brother's family, and my children live in the city (n=1)
5. With visitors and permission from real estate management (n=1)
6. Marriage but living alone (n=1)

While the first two dot points can be classified as living arrangement 1, the third can be classified as living arrangement 2. The fifth and sixth points fall under living arrangement 2, and the fourth point can be classified as living arrangement 4.

Overall, the living arrangements of most participants suggest a strong possibility of migrant retention.
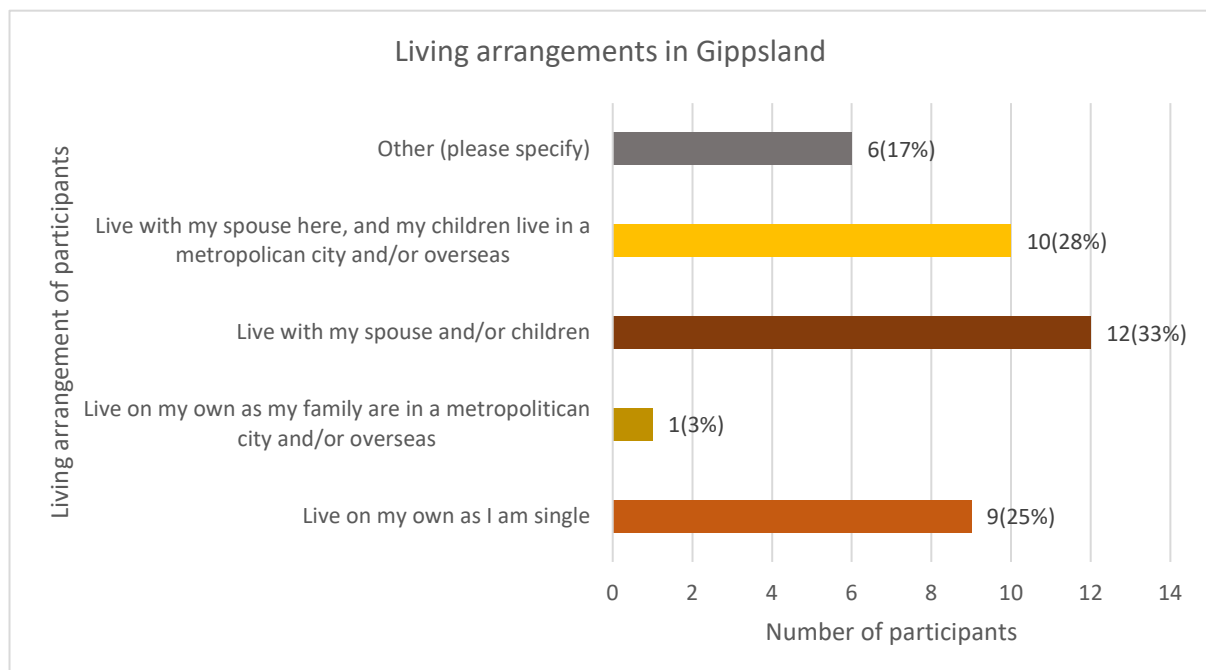
Figure 22: Living arrangement in Gippsland

Current visa status of participants

Of 36 survey participants, 35 agreed to indicate their current visa status. As indicated in Figure 23, almost all participants had either Australian citizenship (83%, n=29) or permanent residency status (11%, n=4). Only two chose the *"Other"* category as their responses, and one indicated that they were on a student visa.
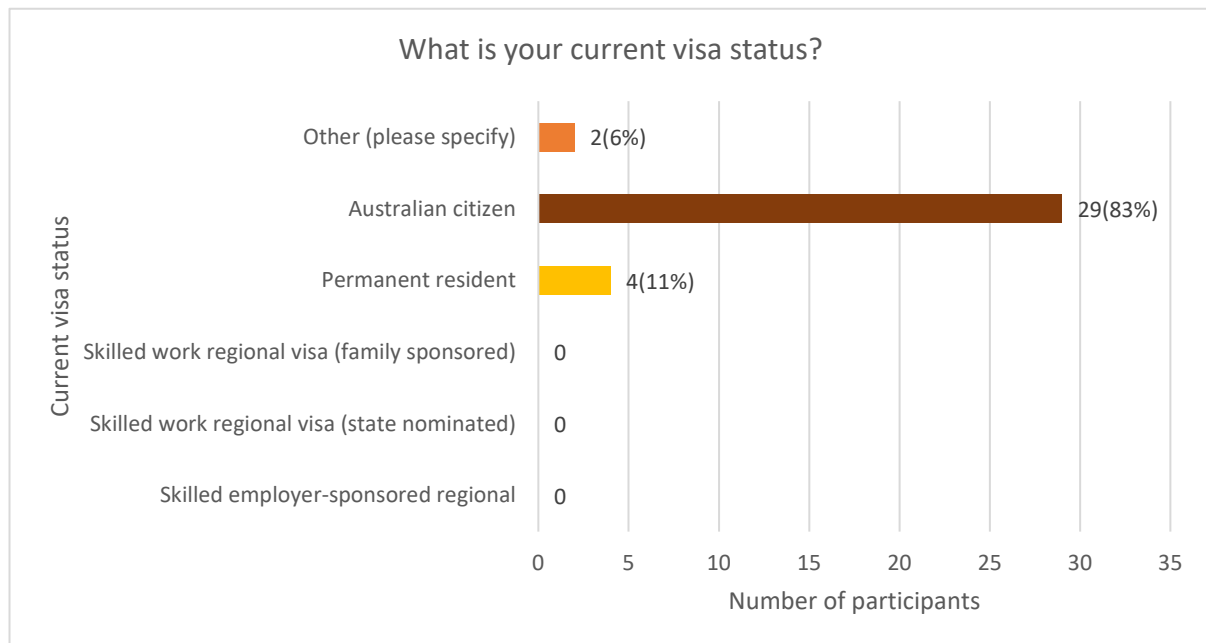
Figure 23: Current visa status of participants

Consideration of moving to live in a metropolitan area

As part of the migrant retention questions, participants were also asked whether they considered moving to a metropolitan city. Figure 24 shows that 81% (n=29) had never thought about moving to a metropolitan city. A total of 17% (n=6) were not sure whether they would leave Gippsland to live in a metropolitan city in the future, and one participant (3%) had decided to move to a metropolitan city.
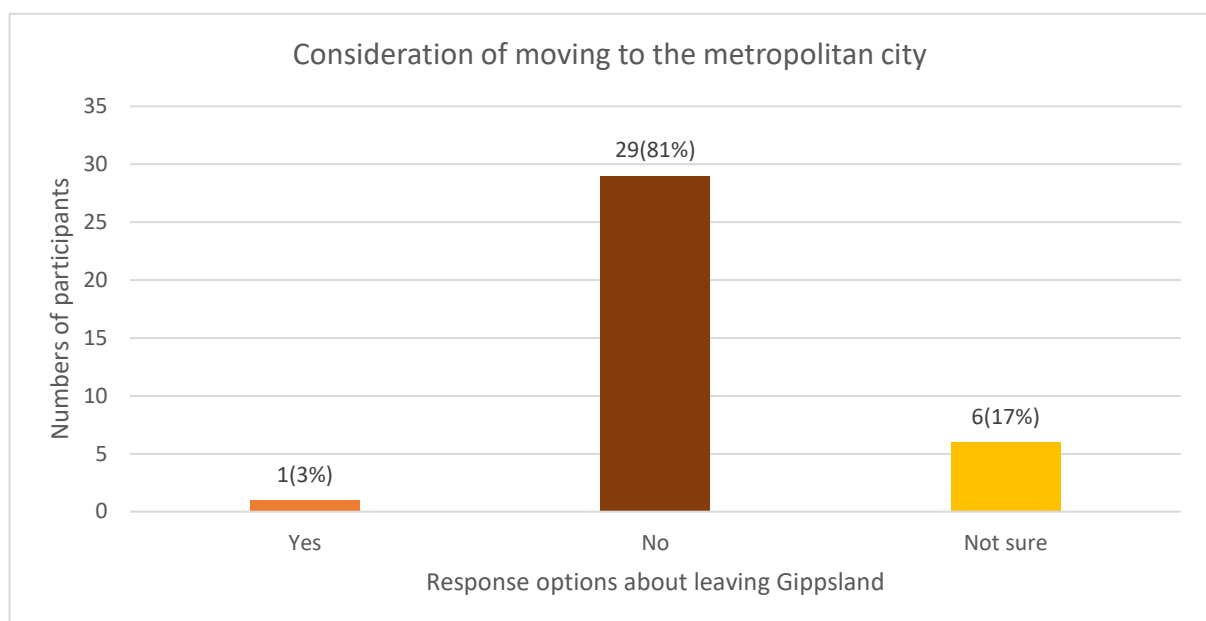
Figure 24: Consideration of moving to the metropolitan city

Factors making participants consider Gippsland as a second home

The final aspect of the migrant retention questions was *"What would make you consider Gippsland a second home?"* and 30 participants responded to this question. The community was considered a crucial factor for migrants to consider Gippsland a second home, as shown in Figure 25. A total of 63% (n=19) rated *"the feeling of belonging to the community"* (factor 1) as an important factor, making them consider Gippsland a second home. Corresponding to this subjective feeling is the *"community's positive attitudes and behaviour toward migrants"* (factor 2), where 57% (n=17) of participants chose it as an essential factor.

A total of 20% (n=6) selected "*the feeling of belonging at my workplace*" (factor 3) and *"Other"* categories as their responses. Their comments on the *"Other"* category were related to safety, less population and traffic congestion, and beautiful and peaceful nature (scenic, mountainous, green views, simple living/peace).

Overall, although the proportion of participants who chose factors 1 and 2 was higher than factor 3, it does not mean that factor 3 was less important than others. One possible reason why a small percentage of the participants chose factor 3 was that many participants were either retired or unemployed (see Figure 14).
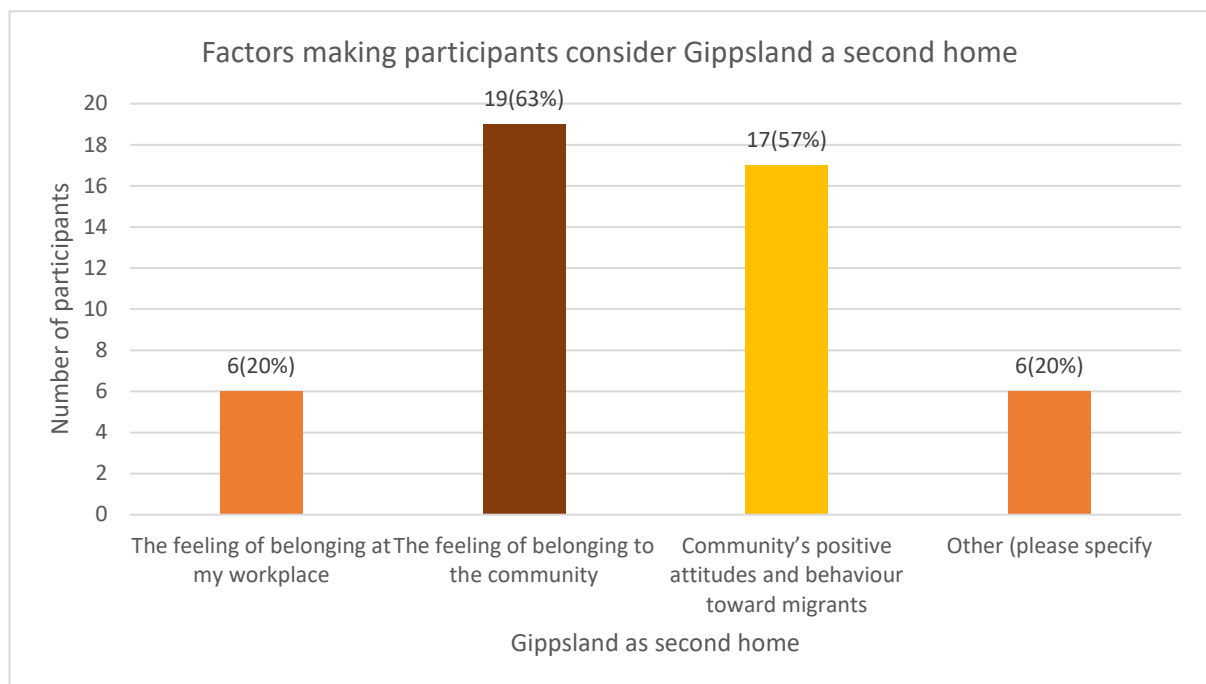
Figure 25: Factors making participants consider Gippsland a second home

4.2 QUALITATIVE DATA – ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION

As described in Section 4.1, between October and December 2023, the CERC research team conducted five engagement workshops in three shires/cities. Included in these engagement workshops were focus group discussion with participants, guided by a series of questions:

Set 1 questions:

1) What motivated you to migrate to Gippsland?
2) What motivated you to live/stay in Gippsland up until now?
3) Have you thought about leaving for a metropolitan city in the future? Why? Why not?

Set 2 questions:

1) What kind of information and/or support did you receive when you first moved to Gippsland? Who provided that information to you?
2) What kind of information and/or support do you think someone planning to move to Gippsland would need?
3) What would make you consider Gippsland your second home? Who would be involved in this? In what way?

4.2.1 WORKSHOP 1 FINDINGS

Two senior women attended Workshop 1. Both were married and had an Indonesian cultural background.

Attraction and retention to Gippsland

The participants came to Gippsland because of either marriage or retired to Gippsland with husband. One participant outlined that the primary reasons for choosing Traralgon as a retirement place were the countryside's natural beauty, its proximity to Melbourne, enabling her to take the train to Melbourne to visit her friends, and easy access to medical services. The proximity to Melbourne reason clearly indicated that social connections with friends (and/or family) were important to her. She responded "*yes*" when asked whether she had ever considered leaving Gippsland to live in Melbourne. An in-depth discussion with her suggested that there were competing priorities between her and her husband. While she wanted to move back to Melbourne, her husband did not want to, so she stayed.

In contrast, the other participant did not want to leave Morwell at all, as she felt that Morwell was her home. A few things made her consider Morwell a second home. One was that her late husband bought a house here in Morwell, and she wanted to be near his grave. She also stressed the importance of her nice neighbourhood. Further, in her view, the traffic was not as busy as in other towns, which was positive for her to live in Morwell. Another important retention factor was her employment. She volunteered at a local radio station in Gippsland, enabling her to interact with her Australian colleagues at the workplace and her Indonesian fellows via her radio programs. Further, her ability to use English at the workplace made her feel connected to the community.

Settlement-related information and support

Two institutions were highlighted by the participants in regard to settlement-related support. One was the Gippsland Multicultural Services (GMS), which was deemed by both participants as the first point of contact for migrants. GMS hosted the International Women's Group (IWG), and one participant was a member of IWG. She found IWG's weekly program very helpful and enjoyable. It allowed her to make new friends and engage in physical exercise activities, such as Tai chi (a form of exercise involving slow movements of the body), dancing and badminton/table tennis. Some of these activities were jointly provided by IWG and another aged care organisation called the University of Third Age. The second institution was TAFE Gippsland, and one participant found an English class at this institution helpful, enabling her to not only improve her English ability but also learn about Australian culture.

The participants also explained to the researchers how the Indonesian community had provided settlement-related information/support to their Indonesian people coming to Gippsland and were willing to continue this support to newcomers. Participants outlined that, newcomers and/or local people who want to get in touch with the Indonesian community could find information through the following:

- Information office/kiosk at the Traralgon train station.
- Information office at a local library. They believed that people could get information about the Indonesian community at a local library.
- Contact details on Latrobe City Council's website.
- Indonesian WhatsApp Group.

Challenges faced by migrants

The focus group participants' life challenges tended to be shaped by their marital status. The widow participant faced several challenges and needed support regarding house maintenance, coping with increasing house insurance prices, and paperwork related to financial matters/taxation.

With the support of her husband, the other participant did not have any challenges, as mentioned above. Although she was retired, she stressed the importance of finding employment, noting that if she were in Melbourne, she would still be working.

They both had different perspectives in relation to social connection. One highly valued the social connections with friends from the same cultural background, but the other was open to making friends with people from other cultural backgrounds.

Suggestions to Government

When asked about some suggestions for policymakers to support future migrants in Gippsland, both participants highly appreciated the support in relation to visa matters provided by the local governments to migrants through the GMS and TAFE Gippsland. However, they provided some suggestions as the following:

- Easing some visa requirements for migrants to get into Australia and Gippsland as more migrants were needed in Australia.
- Providing easier pathways for migrants to get permanent residency when they are in Australia.

4.2.2 WORKSHOP 2 FINDINGS

Three women attended workshop two: two participants were of retirement age, while the third was a young person with a refugee background.

Attraction and retention

Whilst two participants (Filipina and Burmese) were attracted to Gippsland because of marriage and/or family, another (Filipina) women moved from Sydney to Gippsland for retirement purposes. Of the participants moving here due to marriage and/or family reasons, one married an Australian man who had lived in Gippsland, and another initially came to help her sister with caring responsibilities and then stayed.

All three participants did not intend to leave Gippsland to live in a metropolitan city, providing three primary reasons. Friendliness and interconnectedness of the community were the key reasons keeping them here in Gippsland. The friendliness of people in their neighbourhood was highly appreciated, and they felt connected with people from their own ethnic group and with people from other cultural backgrounds. For instance, one participant explained that she got a driver's license because of a multicultural driving instructor and that the instructor helped her with different matters, including paperwork at Centrelink. Another example was clearly illustrated in the narrative of the participant who relocated from Sydney for retirement purposes:

> "I am connected with many organisations here in Gippsland, the Filipino seniors, other Filipino organisations, the International Women's Group (IWG) and also the church, which is one of the most important things to me. I attended the church every Sunday and all those activities [organised by IWG and her Filipino organisation]. And I like the people here… they are very friendly, the neighbours, or even not neighbours [other people]. If they see you in the street, I smile at them, and they give me back their smile. So, it makes me connected to people here."

A second reason to stay in Gippsland emphasised by the participants was relatively easy access to services, including banks, clinics, shopping centres, Centrelink, and schools. As one participant put it, *"It's easy to access facilities like the hospital, Centrelink, and schools."* Another quote also illustrates this reason:

> "We are located in the centre of Morwell, which makes it very convenient for us. Banks, clinics, shopping centres—everything is close by. That's why we prefer to stay here in Morwell, Gippsland."

Peacefulness and less-crowdedness were also mentioned by the participants, especially the participants who moved from Sydney. In her own account:

> "Life in Sydney is very busy – it's a busy place. But [it's] not too crowded here in Gippsland. [It's] very peaceful at the moment. I don't know if it will change."

Other reasons to stay mentioned by the participants included job opportunities, proximity to Melbourne, and house ownership. The younger participant, the retired woman moving from Sydney, and the participant married to an Australian man emphasised these reasons, respectively.

Challenges faced by migrants

Different living conditions shaped the challenges faced by the participants. Two participants mentioned language barriers upon first moving to Australia and/or Gippsland. The participant, who married an Australian man, attended an English class at TAFE Gippsland to improve her English proficiency, while the young participant received language support at school upon moving to Queensland.

The participant who married an Australian husband faced further challenges in securing appropriate employment. She attended certificate courses at TAFE Gippsland and obtained a skilled job for a while before working on a farm. Additionally, she encountered difficulties in receiving full retirement benefits from Centrelink because she had been an Australian permanent resident for less than 10 years. She emphasised that her biggest challenge at the time of the workshop was her inability to pay her house mortgage due to living alone.

Suggestions to Government

The participants provided some suggestions to attract more migrants to Gippsland and retain them here.

- More investment in entertainment for the younger population, for example, cinemas.
- Establish a more coordinated institution/agency to connect employees (including temporary visa holders) with employers. Some kind of paid employment, together with training opportunities, should be integral to this community employment connection program.
- Promote Gippsland's liveability to metropolitan residents to generate their interest in relocating there. This can be done through cultural festivals/events in Metropolitan areas or media platforms and/or targeting Metropolitan-based recruitment agents.

4.2.3 WORKSHOP 3 FINDINGS

Sixteen participants attended workshop three, which included 11 women and five men. Five participants came from English-speaking countries, and five were of working age. For the first set of questions, the participants were divided randomly into two focus groups, each facilitated by a researcher.

Attraction and retention

The intersecting attraction factors that motivated the participants to Gippsland were around: the natural beauty and peacefulness, less traffic and crowdedness, low cost of living and/or affordable housing, marriage and family, and proximity to Melbourne.

Of these factors, the two most reported were less traffic and crowdedness and Gippsland's natural beauty and peacefulness. When it came to traffic and crowdedness, the participants compared Gippsland with Melbourne and complained about the crowdedness and traffic congestion in Melbourne. Several quotes indicated how participants loved Gippsland compared to Melbourne.

> *"I love it here because there's less population. Easy to drive around, less traffic."*

> *"They* [her friends and family members] *love the rural area* [as it provides] *a lot of benefits to everybody, like clean and less population."*

> *"One of the main reasons I moved up here was the road* [less traffic]*."*

The natural beauty and peacefulness of Gippsland were also emphasised by the participants as one of the reasons for relocating to the region. The narratives of the participants suggested that peacefulness includes both a peaceful feeling received from the geographical landscape/view and a simple, less competitive lifestyle. The following quotes indicate this reason:

> *"He* [her husband] *always loved living in the countryside for the peace and serenity. And the views, the mountainous views… are fabulous."*

> *"Moe is a beautiful place to live."*

> *"Simple lifestyle. We don't have to compete with anyone. It's simplicity, like easy-going, simplicity in lifestyle. No competition."*

Several participants outlined that they came to Gippsland because of marriage and/or family reasons. Some got married to Australians and moved here in Gippsland directly or to Melbourne first and then Gippsland. Others moved to Gippsland with caring responsibility for their grandchildren. The following quotes illustrate the relocation to Gippsland because of marriage.

> *"My husband got a job here, and I followed him."*

> *"I came to Melbourne first, and I met my husband in Melbourne at a church and got married. After three kids, we moved to the country, and then the kids grew up here."*

Some participants emphasised that the proximity to Melbourne was one of the reasons they relocated to Moe and Warragul. One participant said, "*It is close to Melbourne, and the train to the city is very good.*" A few participants highlighted the low cost of living and/or affordable housing as one reason for moving to Gippsland. When they moved here, house prices and rent were much lower than those in Melbourne.

The above-discussed factors motivated the participants to move to Gippsland and their positive experiences of living in Gippsland continued their motivation to stay here in Gippsland. The participants noted that the low cost of living and/or affordable housing factor did not hold true at the time of the workshop because the rent and house prices had been rising recently. However, participants still enjoyed other factors, specifically Gippsland's natural beauty, peacefulness, and less traffic and crowdedness. For instance, when asked whether they had ever thought about leaving Gippsland, one of the participants responded "*No*" to the question by giving her explanation *"I can't handle the crowd. Because I came from a crowded country, I don't want to return to Melbourne and see that crowd again."*

Other positive experiences keeping the participants in Gippsland related to friendliness, a sense of community connectedness, and feeling safe. The social interactions with local people on the street and/or in other settings, such as ethnic and cultural groups, made them experience friendliness and a sense of connectedness to the community. It is evidenced in the following quotations:

> *"What I've worked* [out] *is that it doesn't matter where you come from. Everyone's sort of friendly with each other. Australia is like that….my mother…said that Australia is the only country that everybody's compatible with… all friends and anybody from anywhere."*

> *"We feel like…because we have a lot of multicultural groups around this area that we can join, we can celebrate together with different multicultural groups… We become like the same group."*

Furthermore, feeling safe (general security) kept the participants in Gippsland. One participant said, *"I feel safe both in my house and on the street because nobody stands in front of me and says anything bad."* Feeling safe is also reflected in the following quotation:

> *"We can live happily together. I feel safe living here. Nobody follows you or steals something from your house."*

Settlement-related information and support

Many participants did not receive formal support from institutions when first moving to Gippsland. A key emerging theme was that the participants had to be active in reaching out to people and/or institutions to get some information/support they needed. For instance, many women mentioned that they received information/support from the International Women's Group where members had regular meetings at the Gippsland Multicultural Services' office.

One kind of support participants received from the government was an English class at TAFE Gippsland. Some attended this English class and received other settlement-related information. One student commented, *"I went to the English class. And the teachers are the best in the world. I'm telling you that they're the best people."*

Other than receiving information from this source, the participants identified several platforms that could be useful to get settlement-related information across to newly arrived migrants in Gippsland:

- Local real estate agents
- Print media (local papers) and social media
- Train stations
- General Practitioner (GP) clinics
- Supermarkets
- Local City/Shire Councils
- Local libraries

Based on their migration journey in Gippsland, the participants identified the following types of necessary information/support for newly arrived migrants:

- Housing and accommodation
- School/childcare
- Employment/social services
- Social service information
- Transportation

Challenges faced by migrants and suggestions to Government

The interrelated challenges faced by migrants in workshop three were securing employment, lacking recognition of overseas qualifications, and driver's licenses.

Securing employment was a primary challenge raised by a significant number of the workshop participants. They underscored that it was relatively difficult to secure enjoyment here in Gippsland.

This challenge is interlinked with the issues of lacking recognition of overseas qualifications, English proficiency, and driver's licenses. The interlink between these challenges is reflected in the following quotes:

"We know they [employers] *needed those who are willing to work like us* [migrants]. *They're willing to work…. It's not that easy they will be asking for your education from here, not from overseas….No matter how you are training in your country, they do not accept it. You have to be educated here"*

"And you have to speak English well."

"You get any job. You need you need a driver's license."

The participants also noted that many migrants moving to Australia did not have a driver's license. It was one of the main barriers to work and study and get around Gippsland. Hence, they suggested providing some support to migrants to get a driver's license was important. It was also challenging for senior people to access health-related services without a driver's license. For instance, one participant gave an example of her own case. She had a medical appointment and had called her aged care service provider to arrange a taxi for her medical appointment, but she could not get through them after spending 20 minutes on the phone because it was a very busy line. She was worried that she might not have any transportation to this appointment. With this experience, she added, *"I think the transportation for the elderly and the newcomer is very important."*

In addition to the above challenges, one working-age participant raised the issue of lacking sports/entertainment activities after school for young people and lacking high education options here in Gippsland. She brought her two daughters to Dandenong every weekend to practise table tennis. She was considering sending her daughters to a Melbourne university after completing their high school in Warragul. She outlined how she may also consider moving to Melbourne to care for her daughters. She recommended that there should be more investment in sports/entertainment for younger people.

4.2.4 WORKSHOP 4 FINDINGS

Eight participants attended workshop four, including one male and seven females. Among them, three women were of working age, and three participants (including one man) informed the CERC team that they came from English-speaking countries.

Attraction and retention

The interrelated factors attracting the participants from workshop four to Gippsland were the beautiful nature and peacefulness of Gippsland, employment opportunities, and family. Two participants came to Warragul through their husband's employment; two participants had visited their family in Gippsland and loved the natural beauty and peacefulness and then decided to move here; and others who did not have family members here had visited Gippsland before relocating because of falling in love with the beautiful nature and peacefulness of Gippsland.

Almost all participants highly commended Gippsland's natural beauty and peacefulness and regarded them as one of the primary factors that kept them here. The accounts of one participant relocating from the Mornington Peninsula beautifully capture this reasoning:

> 'Do you fancy moving back?' And I'm like, 'No, not really because I have a choice of going for three months every year, right? And I just love [here]I've just settled in. And when I joined this group [multicultural centre] a few years ago, it just broadened my horizon for Gippsland.

One participant from Pakistan who had visited her brother in Gippsland before moving here loved the natural beauty of Gippsland and considered it one of the reasons keeping here:

> "This [Gippsland] is beautiful. As I have mentioned before, it seems like I am living in a resort. So, when I see through my window, it looks like I'm living in a resort. I'm sitting in a resort, so it's really beautiful."

All participants reportedly raised friendliness and a feeling of connectedness to the community as one of the factors motivating them to continue their stay in Gippsland. An example raised by the participants was the Warragul Friendship Group, coordinated by Warragul Community House. One participant said:

> "I joined Warragul Community House, and they were very welcoming. I have got the experience of being there and that was one thing other than my family that motivated me to be here."

Another participant added, "I was introduced to it [the Warragul Friendship Group] by a Malaysian girl, and I didn't realise that this group existed until she told me. And then I joined this, and I've never looked back. It's lovely."

When asked what kept them here in Gippsland, one participant explained how the community people kept them here as follows:

> I never thought of myself as settling here. And sometimes I still question, 'Why did I come here?' and stay here, you know, it seems really, really strange. But that's it. I've met people, and I'm still meeting people who interest me, and we have a common interest many times."

Another retention factor mentioned by a few participants was accessibility to services and less traffic compared to Melbourne and their home country. This factor is captured in the following quote:

> "It is really easy to move around in [Gippsland] Everywhere is so close by. At the moment, I am happy. My job is just 5 minutes away and my husband's job is just 5 minutes away, and there's no traffic when you travel around the Gippsland."

Settlement-related information and support

The participants did not receive any settlement-related information and/or support from any institution. Those who had the family here received information and/or support in relation to housing and/or accommodation from their family. Through their participation in the Warragul Friendship Group, they shared settlement-related information and others with one another. One participant reported that she got her first job through this group, "I joined the Multicultural Friendship Group, and I found my first job through the group."

Challenges faced by migrants

English as a second language was discussed as one of the challenges faced by migrants with CALD backgrounds when first relocating to Gippsland or Australia. One participant attended an English class at TAFE Gippsland which enabled her to do their courses, namely Certificate IV and Diploma in Community Services. For the case of one participant, she did not have any problem using English because she had been in Australia for many years, but her husband, who had just arrived in Gippsland from Chile about a year and a half ago did have difficulties in communicating in English. Her husband went to English classes offered by TAFE Pakenham rather than TAFE Gippsland in Warragul due to the unavailability of English classes for beginners here:

> *"He needed to learn English to get around. So, slowly, he's getting there, and he's learning English now, three days a week. He goes on the train to Pakenham and comes back* [home].

Another issue was visa restrictions linked to employment and permanent residence. One participant came initially on a visitor visa to visit her brother and then converted her visit to a student visa. One issue she raised was that because she was older than the age limit of 45 years for permanent residency application, she would not be eligible for permanent residency, though their occupation was on the migration priority list. Further, the big challenge facing her was visa restrictions linked to employment. Her current casual employment agreement with one education institution was due to finish in December 2023. She outlined that she just received an email from her employer explaining that her contract would not be renewed due to the government rules and regulations in relation to temporary visas. They explained that temporary visa holders, for example, student visa holders, were not eligible for that type of employment.

Suggestions for supporting current and future migrants

When asked for some suggestions to policymakers, the participants identified some suggestions for the Government as follows:

- Producing a service directory for migrants. The participants raised challenges in finding services and suggested that the local government produce a service directory. In their view, it is important not only for migrants with CALD backgrounds but also for people from English-speaking countries. One participant viewed a service directory as a way of promoting inclusivity in Gippsland:

  > *"People need to feel included. If they want to find out about something you have… and there is a language difference, you have to have someone there who can explain where you go for a driver's license.*

- Some workshop participants suggested relaxing visa restrictions. This suggestion was for the Federal Government to address the challenges of visa restrictions linked to employment and permanent residency faced by some migrants, as discussed earlier.
- Expanding the eligibility criteria of the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETs) program funded by the Federal Government. One participant who had in-depth knowledge of the SETs program because of professional experience called for expanding the eligibility criteria for the SETS program participants to support migrants who came to Australia more than five years ago. According to this participant, the SETs program only provided settlement support to migrants who came to Australia less than five years ago:

> "*They* [SETs program staff] *can work with people who have been here just five years. after five years, they are not allowed to assist people. Unfortunately, it's the central government's decision. This year, they said they were going to review* [the eligibility criteria]. *They would extend these five years, but it didn't happen. So, we are not sure when it's gonna happen.*"

- More publicity for the Warragul Friendship Group, the participants had a sense of belonging to the community when joining this group and it was a platform where people can share information and support one another. They suggested that there should be more advertising of this group to other migrants and more sustainable funding for the group.

4.2.5 WORKSHOP 5 FINDINGS

The fifth community engagement workshop was organised in Wonthaggi in the Bass Coast Shire. Nine migrant women and two female community volunteers attended this engagement workshop. One migrant came from an English-speaking country, and others came from non-English-speaking countries, with a few initially coming on a refugee visa. Two community volunteers who facilitated the multicultural women's group and helped the CERC team organise the workshop were also present and at times contributed to the discussion.

Attraction and retention

Key attraction factors that brought the participants to Wonthaggi were refugee visa sponsorships, farm owner sponsorship, exploring more opportunities outside Melbourne, and retirement. Of the nine participants, one wanted to explore more opportunities outside Melbourne; one came to Wonthaggi from Melbourne for retirement purposes; one came on a farm owner sponsorship visa; and other people relocated to Wonthaggi from a Thai refugee camp on a refugee visa sponsorship program.

While many participants did not have other options to relocate, the two relocating from Melbourne had a choice to go to other regional areas but decided to move to Wonthaggi for two reasons. The retired woman who married an Australian citizen wanted a quiet and peaceful place to retire, so they chose a town in Gippsland.

When asked what kept them in Gippsland, one of the recurring themes was the friendliness of and a feeling of connectedness to the community; *"it is a good community to support each other*." Participants outlined that this sense of belonging to the community was a result of their social interactions with members of the Wonthaggi Multicultural Women Group, coordinated by a volunteer at Mitchel House in Wonthaggi, and with the broader community. A few quotes illustrate different ways that the participants felt that they belonged to the community:

> *"I think it's because I came here at a young age. I feel like I grew up here, almost like a second home—going from primary school to high school. So, I feel like I really belong here..."*

> *"I feel like I belong to this community. When you feel that sense of belonging, you know you're truly part of it."*

Easy access to services and the natural beauty of the place were also mentioned by many participants as a reason to live in Wonthaggi. One participant explained:

"We have a complete community here. So, we decided to stay and love the peacefulness and simple living here in Wonthaggi.

The retired participant added:

"It's a nice place for retirement because of the fresh air and less pollution, especially since we live nearby. Everything is within walking distance—facilities, shops, clinics. We just walk, and it's a very nice place."

Likewise, one participant explained:

"I think Wonthaggi is a good place to live because it has a good environment and excellent community services. You don't need to go too far for shopping or the hospital. It's a quiet place here."

Settlement-related information and support

Many participants who came here on either refugee protection visas or farmer owner sponsorship programs received some settlement support. The refugee participants were initially cared for by a sponsor family (their relatives or local people) in terms of transportation from the airport to Wonthaggi and accommodation. They were entitled to some health and social services and to have a settlement support worker for approximately six months. As indicated in one respondent's narrative, *"This worker helped us settle, like finding a house and go to* [a] *bank and all that."*

One participant who was sponsored by a farm owner was cared for by that owner regarding transport from the airport to Wonthaggi, accommodation, and school enrolment for their children. However, the two participants who relocated from Melbourne to Gippsland for retirement purposes or new opportunities outlined how they did everything by themselves; they had visited Gippsland before relocating.

Two kinds of settlement support that were highly appreciated by many participants were an English class at TAFE and a driving license program called "L2P", meaning from Learner to P Plates. The refugee migrants also benefited from the L2P program run by the Wonthaggi Neighbourhood House (Mitchell House) to get free driving lessons, and were mentored to get a driver's license. One participant explained, *"When you need help, there is a program for newly arrived migrants, a program for driver* [driving], *Learner to P-plate. That's the first program I joined when we first came here."*

Challenges faced by migrants and Suggestions to Government

Key challenges for refugees and/or migrants were linked to the two types of settlement support discussed earlier: English as a second language and getting a driving license. Younger refugees and/or migrants found it relatively easy to improve their English language compared to their adult counterparts.

In response to the English barrier, one community volunteer who had been a TAFE English teacher for a few years suggested that *"...for two days a week* [English class at TAFE], *it's not enough to try to learn English. It* [would] *be better if it was full-time."* She recommended a full-time English program for refugees and/or migrants.

The importance of the L2P driving program pointed to the issue of lacking public transport in Wonthaggi, meaning the infrequency of bus services. As one participant commented, *"We don't have*

any public transport to speak of"; in her view, *"public transport is very important to stay connected"* because getting a driver's license takes time.

The community volunteer participants pointed to the lack of government-funded settlement support because *"the settlement services are Latrobe Valley centric."* The settlement support in Wonthaggi was community-driven.

Image: Project participant workshop

4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – INTERVIEWS WITH MIGRANTS

INTRODUCTION

From October 2023 to January 2024, the CERC research team conducted 16 individual in-depth interviews and two in-depth focus group discussions with five participants with migrants from various cultural backgrounds who lived in four shires (Baw Baw, Bass Coast, East Gippsland, and Willington) and one city (Latrobe) in Gippsland at the time of the interview, equalling a total of 21 participants. Participants' cultural backgrounds included Pakistani, Nigerian, Vietnamese, Indian, Turkish, Nepalese, Filipina, Burmese/Karen, Irish, South Sudanese, Indian Fijian, and South African. Each in-depth interview and focus group discussion with the participants lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A summary of geographic, visa and resident information is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of demographic, visa and resident information

Description	Number
Gender	
Women	12
Men	9
Visa types at the time of the interview	
Number of participants who were on a student visa	2
Number of participants who were on a graduate visa	1
Number of participants who were on an activity visa	1
Number of participants who were on skilled shortage visas with a pathway to permanent residency	1
Number of participants who had Australian permanent residency and/or citizenship	16
Primary and secondary visa holders	
Number of participants who came to Australia and/or Gippsland as a primary visa holder	14
Number of participants who came to Australia and/or Gippsland as a secondary visa holder	7
Length of stay in Gippsland	
Less than five years	10
More than five years	11
Marital status	
Had a partner and/or married	14
Lived separately and/or got divorced	2
Widow/widower	1
Single	4
Participants who had or had no children at the time of the interview	
Number of participants who had children	11
Number of participants who had no children	10
Primary or secondary migration to Gippsland	
Number of participants who came to Gippsland directly	9
Number of participants who came to other metropolitan areas and/or states	12

The interviews and focus group discussions focused on attraction and retention factors, issues faced by migrants, and suggestions for relevant stakeholders. A thematic analysis method was used to analyse the interview and focus group discussion data, which generated five major themes with minor themes anchored by one central title, *Migrant Journey in Gippsland*. Figure 26 shows these five major themes.

Figure 26: Migrant journey in Gippsland – Thematic analysis

Major theme 1 – A path worth travelling

While migrants faced hardship at the beginning of their migration journey, this hardship was offset by beautiful nature, healthy lifestyles, and opportunities in regional areas.

Figure 27: A path worth travelling – Minor themes

Minor theme 1.1 - Hard beginning

Several aspects of the hard beginning were highlighted by the participants. None, or minimal settlement support or being unaware of such support was commonly raised by the participants, which was often interrelated to lack of, or no social connection. For instance, a female migrant whose husband first moved to Warragul for a few months and then the family followed him indicated that the family did not receive any support and was not aware of the existence of any support:

> *"We didn't…we never got* [any support]*… because we kind of have an English level, so we can solve that our problems by ourselves and we didn't realise on that time there are different organisations which can help us. I didn't realise that there are some non-profit organisations that can help me."*

The same participant also highlighted the issue of lack of social connection: "… *when we first moved here, we didn't know everyone, and we didn't have all this connection and we…just wanted to see our friends. I think the main thing was socialising at the beginning…"*

Other participants also echoed the issue of lack of social connection leading to feelings of isolation or stress when first moving to Gippsland as follows:

> *"In terms of finding social connections, that was really tough because… it was really challenging in the sense that I was working full time. There was nothing that was available outside of the office hours or working hours. And it was depressing and dull in the after-hours because people will retire to their homes, and there's nothing."*

The lack of social connection was compounded by the absence of religious practice. As one participant said, "*…when we came, there was no mosque, but there was a spiritual centre at Federation University at that time. That was a Monash Uni, so I think they still have that spiritual centre with children. Young people, students and everyone can go and do prayers, so that was the only place.*

A foreign accent was another aspect of the hard beginning that resulted in migrants being perceived as less competent. One participant's narrative captured this well:

> *"I'm just telling you this because sometimes, not sometimes, all the time, why we… feel like we have to prove ourselves, why people think that when we have an accent, we can't… understand properly. We can't do the job. There are people better than us, and yeah…I was the most successful one in this role."*

Another aspect of the hard beginning was the fact that migrants needed to undertake relatively low-skilled work in Australia in comparison to their previous work in their home country. This aspect is captured well in the narratives of one participant who had worked as a government official in the Philippines and migrated to Wonthaggi to work on a farm:

> *"No workmates, no others, no house help, no others, no someone to help us do all the farm work because we were not, we were not informed that we would be living and working on a farm. That's why it's a big shock for us when we started living there on our own and doing all the farm work by ourselves."*

Time-consuming visa processes and uncertainty about visa grants were another hard beginning experienced by some migrants in Gippsland. One participant highlighted the issue of the time-

consuming and costs associated with the visa process before coming to Wonthaggi, *"…migrating to another country took a lot of process and time, and money."* Another participant working on a farm, whose partner and herself were on a one-year activity visa (subclass 408), expressed her frustration of switching from one visa to another several times. Her partner was planning to apply for an employer sponsorship visa that would provide a pathway to permanent residency after their current activity visa expiry, but she was anxious about this process. In her own words, *"Yeah, it's just a waiting game, isn't it? Like it's when you go on a bridging visa sometimes, and you're like waiting for that next visa to get granted."*

The above discussion illustrated the hard beginnings experienced by the participants when first relocating to Gippsland. However, as discussed in the following two subsections, this hard beginning tended to be balanced out by other benefits of regional areas.

Minor theme 1.2 Stress-free and healthy lifestyle

Overall, the participants expressed their satisfaction with people, natural landscapes and animals, outdoor lifestyles, safety for children, and less pollution in Gippsland. This motivated them to relocate to and/or to continue their stay in Gippsland areas. A couple who recently moved to a small town in East Gippsland, with one partner being a secondary teacher, expressed their satisfaction with the Australian outdoor lifestyle interacting with nature in regional areas as follows:

> *"Coming from* [our home country]*, we also have an outdoor lifestyle, and…this town offers the coast, the sea, good running tracks, good mountain bike areas. So, it is very much a part of our daily lifestyles with regards to mountain biking, running, the ocean, fishing, swimming and things like that. So, if you combine all the factors together, that is what brought us towards this small town. It would have to be the lifestyle."*

Further, the participants considered this countryside outdoor lifestyle simple and peaceful and loved their interaction with Gippsland's regional natural landscape and animals. For example, a Filipina migrated to Wonthaggi in 2007 under an agricultural sponsorship visa and continued to live there viewed that "*Although the lifestyle* [here in regional areas] *is quite different* [from the Philippines], *it's very peaceful and very simple*." Another example is the case of the South African couple. They expressed their enjoyment of nature and animals in a group discussion: "*I've enjoyed seeing a lot of nature, like the Kangaroos and the kookaburras and things, to hear birds chirping in the mornings and the evenings has been wonderful*."

Less pollution was another feature of regional areas making the participant feel peaceful living in Gippsland. It was illustrated in the case of an education professional who just recently moved to Gippsland. In his own words, "*The regional area is…having less pollution… and* [has] *also like…nature and environment,* [which enable] *…me to work comfortably and peacefully, specifically for research. I think this is the right place to work."*

The participants admired the friendliness of people in regional areas. This admiration is reflected in the narrative of a young Burmese woman with a refugee background who came to Wonthaggi in 2011 when she was 11 years as the following:

> "*They're just very friendly and like it just it's like I said you can connect to them so easily like, you feel like you're being attached to them you talk like you just met them one day. Next day you become like, you know, close friends and all that.*"

Affordable housing and safety for children made the participants less stressed. A young Vietnamese woman who followed her husband from Melbourne to Warragul in 2015 explained this aspect by drawing on her own experience and that of her friends as follows:

> *"They said…they live here, they feel like less stressful. The house is cheaper, and the children going to school are safer. This is what I hear* [heard] *from my friends.* [Regarding access to] *… schools here, it is easy to find schools for children. Maybe in the city, some schools… don't get more students, and they need to change to another school, or they said like they go to school but a lot of children…have bullying or something* [were bullied]."

Similarly, a Nigerian student at Federation University who was planning to bring his three children here in Gippsland expressed, *"I love the environment, and it's a place to live and to raise kids."*

Minor theme 1.3 - Opportunities in regional areas

Participants outlined that Gippsland has offered more opportunities to migrants to motivate them to move to regional areas. These opportunities included securing employment or prospects of securing employment, relocation financial assistance, the possibility of obtaining permanent residency, and affordable housing. While some participants may be interested in one opportunity, others were attracted to several interrelated opportunities altogether.

Getting employment, which often intersects with other reasons, was a recurring theme highlighted in our in-depth interviews/discussions with the research participants. A clear example was the case of an education professional who relocated from Melbourne to Gippsland in 2022. She emphasised getting a full-time job that led her to own a house as her primary motivation for relocating to regional areas. She highlighted that this reason was also true for other migrants:

> *"…People don't mind moving like migrants don't mind moving, provided they have a job. So family, friends, everything becomes secondary because the goal they have come here is economic reasons. So, all those things become secondary."*

The intersection of getting employment, relocation financial assistance, and affordable housing was found to be a rationale for relocating to Gippsland. This was reflected in the case of a South African participant moving from South Korea to a small town in East Gippsland. Their narratives provided during an in-depth discussion with them reflect this.

> *"The reason why we chose a remote area like this small town firstly was because of the incentives that the Government gave for permanent residency visas and the help with relocation costs… metropolitan areas are very difficult… currently in the housing crisis, it's very difficult to find housing. So that was also the consideration that made us choose a remote area."*

The importance of employment as a reason for relocating to Gippsland was also well captured in two Pakistani women's narratives. One Pakistani woman moved from New South Wales to Trafalgar with her late husband and two children in the last 11 years. When asked about the reason for this relocation, she responded as follows:

> *"Obviously, we didn't have that job or those things we wouldn't be moving* [here]. *You know, for all of us as migrants, the job is the most important thing. If you don't have a job, you're not going to move anywhere. You need to see where your job is."*

Similarly, another Pakistani woman who was a part-time teacher of English and doing her master's degree at the time of the interview highlighted the job opportunity as one of the three primary reasons for relocating to Warragul in the last few years and continued her stay here.

> *"I'm very happy living here in Warragul. There are so many reasons. The first one is* [that] *I have been given the opportunity to teach and the second thing is that my family is here, and the third most important thing is the area."*

The prospect of getting permanent residency was another recurring theme emphasised by the research participants. This reason sometimes intersects with securing employment. The following quote from an international student at Federation University indicates the interplay between the prospect of getting permanent residency, and securing jobs as his rationale for moving from Nigeria to do an engineering degree in Gippsland.

> *"I said, researching about Gippsland, and I found that there's a good prospect for engineers here. I also understood that Gippsland is considered a regional area that could help pursue permanent residency. I'll be hoping to explore* [these] *permanent residential opportunities."*

The intersection between the prospect of getting permanent residency and employment can occur through a regional employer's sponsorship. In this case, migrants need to work for a particular employer for a certain period before getting permanent residence. The case of a Pakistani woman was an example of this intersection. She initially came to Australia on an Australian government scholarship and then returned home. She came back to Australia for the second time as a privately funded student to do a counselling course in Melbourne. She then secured a regional employer's sponsorship to move to Warragul. She explained her migration journey as follows:

> *"I reapplied for a student visa, which I got, and I came back. This time, I studied counselling, and that's where my pathway has been within the mental health and service delivery job that I did in like my first job in Gippsland."*

In this Path Worth Travelling theme, the researchers initially discussed some hardships that the research participants went through at the beginning of their migration journey. This hard beginning was offset by some advantages of regional areas, particularly the feelings of less stress and a healthy outdoor lifestyle, as well as some opportunities that Gippsland has provided. The key to these opportunities was securing employment (often intersecting with others), which will be discussed in Major theme 2 below.

Major theme 2 – Road to Work

The research participants deemed securing employment of primary visa holders as crucial as the prospect of their spouse getting employment upon moving to the Gippsland areas. Minor theme 2.1 elaborates on how the research participants secured a job, and Minor theme 2.2 discusses the roles of partner employment in their regional migration journey in Gippsland.
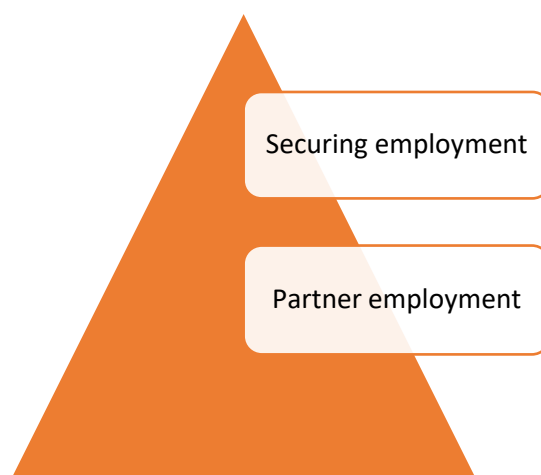
Figure 28: Road to work – Minor themes

Minor theme 2.1 Securing employment

The participants viewed securing employment as essential to their relocation decision to Gippsland. As one participant stated, *"I don't think people can come with the whole family and live* [in the] *countryside…without a job, there's no way"*. However, securing employment was not an easy process for the participants with some facing more challenges than others, except for those who moved to Gippsland through employment or employer's sponsorships.

Lacking local experience (and often linked with lacking social connections) was one of the challenges that newly arrived migrants faced in Australia and/or regional areas. The narratives of a female migrant who had not been able to find an appropriate job relevant to her overseas professional experience and qualifications but later worked in a sector that enabled her to interact with industry stakeholders and migrants in Gippsland reflected on these challenges.

> *"…even* [if] *they may have a skilled visa, unfortunately, the Australian Government doesn't* [provide much] *support* [to] *skilled migrants. You have to find the job by yourself, and lots of people are working as a taxi driver or waitress or another survival job because… it takes time for people to understand what is* [are] *the* [local] *expectation(s) here."*

For some low-skilled jobs, having social connections with people in the industry was important for migrants to access a labour job. An in-depth discussion with a small group of South Sudanese men who had worked at an abattoir in Moe and later worked as disability support workers revealed the importance of social connections for getting a job at this Moe abattoir. As they put it in the in-depth discussion, "[In the past, when the abattoir was with the previous owner] *they told us to bring Sudanese in. Anyone needed a job; they got a job. After that, the job collapsed* [the change of the abattoir ownership]. *No job anymore.*"

Doing volunteer work to gain local experience and some social connections was a recurring theme across the in-depth interviews. As discussed in Minor theme 1.3, "Opportunities of regional areas", a Pakistani woman emphasised a job opportunity as one of the primary reasons to stay in Warragul. She taught English in Pakistan for over 20 years before moving to Gippsland. When asked how she got a teaching position at TAFF Gippsland, she responded, *"I joined TAFE as a* volunteer. [I] *started*

supporting the teachers [who taught English at TAFE] *as a* volunteer *and then I was offered a casual job."*

Participants outlined that another way to get a first job was to get support from a community organisation or recruitment agency. The two community organisations mentioned by the participants were Latrobe Community Health Services (LCHS) and Migration Resource Centre/Gippsland Multicultural Services. One participant got her first job because of a Community Employment Connector (CEC) program at LCHS.[3] She highly appreciated this program as follows:

> *"My experience in the past and what my qualification I have now and how would like connection and like what kind of job like I'm interesting. They guided me to know about myself."*

Another participant who migrated to Gippsland in 2005 and had lived in Morwell for 15 years or so before moving to Melbourne in 2021 received support from Migration Resource Centre/Gippsland Multicultural Services as part of the whole package of settlement support. In his own words, he said:

> *"I asked some lot of people talk to people, mouth to mouth, you know, and then also the I've got some help from Migration Resource Centre. They helped me to find my first unit. They helped me to print it out or to make a resume, you know, and drop off resume everywhere."*

The researchers later found that the support that the above participant received was part of a settlement engagement Transition Support (SETS) program, a federal government-funded program that was then managed by GMS and later managed by LCSH.[4]

As illustrated here, another participant got his first job through a recruitment agency while doing his engineering degree.

> *"It was really amazing to me because they were willing to assist* [me] *at all levels* [by] *drafting my resume that would suit the Australian employer expectations, and they even went further to prep me on the expected Australian working culture and yeah, even going up, you know, I had to go for that to see how to provide me with the initial."*

Another challenge faced by the participants was the restrictions of particular employment to only Australian permanent residents and citizens, not for temporary visa holders. Overall, this type of employment was funded by the Federation Government. One participant experienced this challenge. This is the case of the Pakistani woman who was initially offered a casual teaching position at TAFE Gippsland after her volunteer work, and she held this position for a while. Toward the end of her current contract, her employer informed her that they were unsure whether her contract could be renewed because of the restriction of the teaching position. Holding a student visa was not eligible for this teaching job. In her own words:

> *"I have been working and now the contract is going to be finished on* December *14th*. So, *they want to renew that contract, but they have a condition; they were saying that we have to see*

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[3] Our interviews with two other participants, one used to work in the Community Employment Connector (CEC) program, and another one worked in the SETS program, suggested the CEC program was a part of a COVID recovery program, which was finished at the end of 2023.
[4] A staff member working for the SETS program at LCHS explained to us during an interview with her that the SETS program used to be managed by Gippsland Multicultural Services. It was later managed by Anglicare Victoria before it was moved to LCSH.

whether we can work with you because under a student visa, if you are not a citizen, if you are not a permanent resident, you are not [eligible for this teaching role], [meaning that] *you cannot continue* [working with us] *anymore*."

The participants' accounts suggested that employment is more than just an economic matter but also a matter of self-worth; without employment, migrants may experience deterioration in their mental health and/or out-migration to metropolitan areas. Some migrants who were community leaders expressed their concerns about these potential links when asked about their community members' key challenges:

> *"I think we need to give them that kind of opportunity for good learning spaces and get a job because I think people who don't have a job, I have seen them that they are, they feel worse, they feel undervalued."*

Minor theme 2.2 Partner employment

Of the 21 research participants, 16 had a partner prior to the interview. The participants initially came to Gippsland (sometimes to Australia first and then Gippsland) on one of these visas: student, post-graduate, skilled migration, regional employer's sponsorship, refugee, and working holiday. When moving to Gippsland, some were primary visa holders, enabling them to bring their spouses and/or children here, and others were secondary visa holders brought here by their spouses. Among the secondary visa holders, one participant married an Australian man.

Within this context, two clear patterns were under this *Partner employment* section. The first was the role of their partner employment that brought them here in Gippsland, and the second was the challenges in getting employment faced by their partners as secondary visa holders. The following quotes indicate the role of their partner employment that brought them here to Gippsland when asked why they moved to Gippsland:

> *"He… moved here, I think he said to me because he had a job here and moved here. He moved here, and he also loved the rural area outside Melbourne. So, the reason why he moved here, and I followed him."*

A slightly different story but still in the same category of partner employment bringing them to Gippsland is the case of an Irish woman who initially came to Gippsland on a working holiday visa with her partner. They both wanted to get permanent residency to continue their stay here, so her partner was planning to apply for a regional employer's sponsorship after his current temporary visa expired:

> "[He] has *a job like managing a farm, etcetera. And because that's on the skill shortage list in Australia. And he went to agriculture college for three years, and he's got qualifications that mean we can get sponsored*."

The participants who were the primary visa holders expressed their concerns about their partner's employment, and there were divergent responses to the unavailability of appropriate employment for their partners. The idea of relocating to a bigger regional area dominated the participants' thoughts at the time of the interview. This is the case of a couple who recently relocated to a small town in East Gippsland. Both had an overseas teaching qualification and taught English in South Korea before moving to Gippsland. While the primary visa holder managed to get a secondary school teaching position, her spouse could not find appropriate employment in that area. They, therefore, sought to

leave that small town for a bigger regional area where both could find appropriate employment. The following quote reflects this idea:

> "*It's a beautiful little town; the community of people is just wonderful. Everyone's very friendly and helpful. I think for…*[my spouse], *maybe just the lack of opportunity for the professional job would probably be a decisive factor* [for us to leave]."

Another response to the unavailability of employment relevant to their partners' overseas qualifications was to get reskilled. This is the case of a Nigerian man who migrated to Traralgon on a regional employer's sponsorship visa in the last 23 years or so. When arriving in Gippsland, his wife "*couldn't get a job because she did administration back in Nigeria*", and she was looking for "*a secretariat administrator*", but she couldn't get it. So, "*she had to change her profession*" and "*went back into the Uni to do nursing.*"

The partners' challenge in getting appropriate employment was not unique to the above cases. As one of our research participants, who was also a community leader, put it, "*If the husband gets a job, the wife will be struggling to get a job, and a lot of them will, you know, do training and after doing the training, they will still not be able to get a job.*"
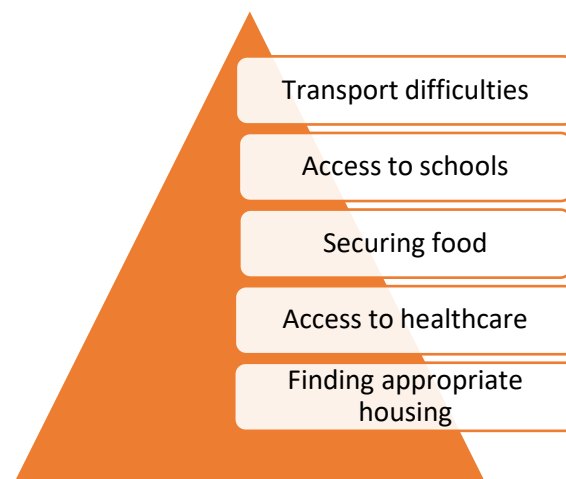
Major theme 3 – Accessing the side road

Figure 29: Accessing the side road – Minor themes

Minor theme 3.1 Transport difficulties

The infrequency of bus and/or train services was considered a challenge by the participants who did not own a car. They were required to plan their trips carefully; otherwise, their travel time would be extended. A clear example is the case of an education professional who just moved to Gippsland and went to Melbourne on the weekend on a regular basis for some time. The following quote illustrates this challenge:

> "*If I miss one bus, then I have to wait for the next bus for an hour. Similarly, reaching the city* [Melbourne], *it takes two and a half or three hours. Yeah, the whole day is spoiled.*"

A practical solution to the lack of public transport in Gippsland adopted by the participants was to drive one car. Drawing on their experience, the participants would advise newcomers to Gippsland to consider owning a car. Participants noted when responding to the question of possible advice to newcomers indicate this solution.

> "*You need to have a car. That's very important. Public transport is not great, and you have to wait a lot for a bus or a train, even to go to the train station,* you need to have a car, *or you'll spend a lot of money on taxis and other services. So, it's important to have a car, that's what I would say.*"

Some participants found that regularly travelling long distances from Gippsland to a metropolitan area, even with a car, was burdensome. This is the case of an education professional who travelled frequently to purchase her cultural foods or catch up with friends either in Pakenham, Clyde or Dandenong. In her own words:

> "*It is a burden to travel. It is a burden to travel… like every time you want to invite people over, they'll also think about it. OK, we need to drive for one hour and need to drive back home for more than one hour. You can't meet them regularly. If you need some support or help, they are very far.*"

For some small towns, train services to Melbourne are not available. This burdened residents who had to drive long distances to Melbourne to access some services unavailable in regional areas. A couple who had just relocated to a small town in East Gippsland from South Korea experienced this travel difficulty. They had to drive approximately 7 hours to Melbourne to access the South Korean consulate services linked to an unexpected issue of the police check for registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT):

> "*…that's a 7-hour drive one way to Melbourne, which is* [the] *cost of fuel plus accommodation because you can't do that trip and get to the VIT in one day and back. And so, we had to drive, stay over, submit all our documents, drive back…that was a little bit frustrating and unforeseen events and expense.*"

Another issue relevant to transport difficulties was the unavailability of transport to pick migrants up from Morwell to Maffra for farm work. In an in-depth discussion with a few South Sudan men, they revealed that "*There used to be a bus or maybe a small van full of people. They picked them up* [from Morwell to Maffra]."

Minor theme 3.2 Access to schools

The participants with children going through primary and secondary school education generally did not raise any challenges in accessing education here. They instead appreciated general education here. An example of one participant enrolling her daughter at a primary school was quick and smooth, as illustrated in the following quote:

> "*We went to primary school just to inquire about a new enrolment…possibility of accepting our kid to their school. We were surprised that when we enquired, she was already accepted, and they said that tomorrow, bring your daughter, and she will start school.*"

Additionally, she highly appreciated the school arrangement for free public transport for her daughter travelling from home to school and back:

"We were so glad because it never happened in the Philippines like that. I thought to myself. The school looked for a sponsor for her [daughter] *to have a free ride because she took the bus to primary school."*

Similarly, one participant who came to Gippsland on a refugee protection visa with her parents and two siblings in 2011 when she was 11 years old appreciated the support provided at her primary school.

"It was really hard for me to communicate at first [when] *moving here because we did not understand any of* English. *We have like a special teacher at school where she'll pull us at a class of like 2 hours to teach us English, like a slowly learning."*

Another positive aspect of regional schooling, particularly, kindergartens, reported by the participants regarding relatively more hours compared to metropolitan areas. This enabled parents with small children to have more time at work. The following quotation illustrates this advantage:

"I'm not sure about the exact number…more hours for free for children go to kindergarten. they can go to work, and they need to put [can put] them at school [kindergarten]."

However, an issue related to children living in Gippsland reported by the participants was its lack of outside school-hour sports and entertainment activities for children. There was *"not enough activity in the rural area"*. The same participant, with one daughter going to secondary school and another to primary school, brought her daughters to Dandenong every weekend to play table tennis due to the limited sports/entertainment activities in Gippsland.

Perhaps, it was linked to the limited availability of sports and/or entertainment activities in Gippsland that another participant observed that many of her friends moved to Melbourne. During an interview, she let us know that:

"Many of my friends who live in regional areas they had kids because there is a schooling community. All those things are very important for their development. So, they have moved t even though properties are expensive, houses are expensive."

Regarding access to higher education, it was viewed as a disadvantage of living in Gippsland because only very few course options were available. For the cases of two participants, each having three children, whose children decided to go to university in Melbourne and work there, one participant remained in Gippsland, but another moved to live in Melbourne in 2021. The participant moved to live in Melbourne explained that *"She moved to Melbourne in 2012* [first child] *and the other one in 2019 and another one in 2021."* When asked why his children decided to move to Melbourne instead of going to university in Gippsland, he responded "*Because of more options here in Melbourne*."

The decision to attend university in Melbourne was not unique to the above two cases. Other participants who had children attending secondary school in Gippsland also considered sending them to a university in Melbourne. They were unsure whether they would relocate to Melbourne to follow their children or continue their stay in Gippsland.

Minor theme 3.3 Sourcing food

Lacking a variety of food ingredients, especially cultural foods in Gippsland, frustrated many research participants residing in smaller towns in East Gippsland and bigger towns in Latrobe City and Baw Baw Shire because they had to travel long distances to bigger towns or Melbourne:

> *"It was quiet when you moved to a new place. You don't know anything, so you thought things would be different, but then you can't find food. Our culturally specific food was another big shock.*

Some participants who relocated from Melbourne integrated travelling to buy cultural foods into a leisure trip. This integrated aspect is reflected in this respondent's words as the following:

> *"I know lots of people are travelling to Melbourne to buy foods, maybe sometimes in bulk and socialising. It's just kind of like going out sometimes. Traveling and doing some shopping."*

> *"People are still travelling to Melbourne. I think it's not just buying foods; they're going there* [to make] *connections with their own communities as well."*

Lacking cultural food in Gippsland also created a food business opportunity for some migrants. A clear example is the case of a Nigerian man who moved to Gippsland travels to Melbourne to buy his cultural foods, and his wife later ran a food business sourcing food from overseas. He explained that *"*She does *a business that she's selling Nigeria and African food and does a bit of cooking for events and things like that.*"

The issue of lacking cultural foods appeared to be recognised by some stakeholders in Gippsland, and some specific actions were taken. Perhaps it was due to advocacy from some local community leaders.

> *"We've been advocating a lot about that* [Halal food]. *And if you want people to come and settle down, if you're not giving them proper food, they're going to go back and go to the places which can give them that food."*

Minor theme 3.4 Access to healthcare

Gippsland as a region has diverse geographical areas, from smaller towns with limited basic healthcare services to bigger towns with relatively advanced healthcare services. In-depth interview data suggested that the problem of access to healthcare was not so much about basic healthcare, such as seeing a GP. Rather, it was about the unavailability of relatively more advanced healthcare services in some smaller towns.

Some of the participants had a positive experience with basic healthcare services. One participant described her experience with a GP as *"very convenient…because whenever when we need medical advice from the doctor, they are very helpful, very kind, very approachable."* Likewise, another participant was amazed by Australian healthcare, expressing this satisfaction in an interview that *"…I am very much awed by the amazing health systems I found here."* In his view, this amazing healthcare systems *"would just be ideal for any family man,* [because] *you don't necessarily have to live in Melbourne to be able to assess, you know, proper healthcare".*

The availability of a wide range of healthcare services in bigger towns, was a positive aspect. Still, participants outlined that more advanced healthcare services were expensive, especially for those without a Medicare card.

A primary challenge faced by participants residing in smaller towns in East Gippsland was the unavailability of relatively more advanced healthcare services. Some evidence of this lies in an interview with one participant residing in a small town in East Gippsland. Overall, he rated the healthcare of the small town where he lived as *"poor medical services"*. He supported this claim by explaining that there was no problem with basic healthcare services, such as seeing a GP, but the primary problem was the lack of more advanced healthcare services.

Another primary challenge that the participants shared during in-depth interviews/discussions was the complexity of Australian health systems. One participant shared his views on the invisibility of migrants from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in accessing mental health services as follows:

> *"Many of my colleagues working in the mental health space did not see them* [people with CALD backgrounds] *coming out to really access the services."*

> *"Anybody can be anxious so, but a lot of the people will stay at home because they don't really understand the* [health mental] *system."*

Our in-depth interview data suggested that not only participants with a limited English level but also participants from English-speaking countries l faced difficulty in navigating Australian health systems at first. Of course, the level of difficulty would be different between these two groups. One participant expressed that:

> *"I think, like with everything, the first time you go to apply for something here, it's hard because it's the first time, and then after that, it gets easier. Like even getting Medicare, things like that the first time you do it, it's a bigger process, and then when you're renewing these things and you know more information, it becomes easier."*

The above quotation indicates that migrants from English-speaking countries initially had some challenges navigating the health care system in Australia.

Minor theme 3.5 Finding appropriate housing

Participants outlined how finding appropriate housing was part of the migration journey and was essential but not always easy. Our in-depth interview data suggested that colleagues and/or friends, and employers/business owners were key players in this process. One participant stated:

> *"He asked his colleagues about the house [housing options]. He lived in a motel. So, he lived in a motel for two weeks. So, after that, he was looking around as well. He found a room...It's a shared house, so he stayed in that house…with three other people for six months. And after that, we moved to Warragul, and he rented a house."*

Similarly, some participants decided to commute from metropolitan areas for a while, giving them the time to look for appropriate housing. The following quote from a Pakistani woman who migrated to Warragul in 2015 is an example of this option:

> *"So, first six months, I commuted from Clayton, and I kept looking for a house here because I had a daughter who was up just about to start kindergarten, and I wanted her to be close to where I worked, but I didn't find any accommodation or housing. Then I guess you know, I was just, like, really desperate."*

She finally found a temporary house through her connection with the person who looked after the real estate of her office/organisation. After living in this temporary house for a year or so, she found a long-term house where she had lived for the last eight years until the time of the interview.

One couple found a fully furnished unit, which reduced the burden for them to buy new furniture while waiting for their furniture from overseas to arrive:

> "The unit that we are renting has been fully furnished. So, there might be other areas in Australia that maybe don't offer furnished units. This can be a problem because although the Government is sponsoring a container for you to ship your goods, that can be anywhere between three to six months, maybe even longer, where people are essentially going to have to live off of the floor."

Similarly, one participant on his post-study work visa moving from Melbourne to a small town in East Gippsland had been connected to a local real estate to find appropriate housing before moving to that area. In his case, the former business owner, connected him to a local real estate agent. He said, *"The past* [former] *business owner has already spoken to the real estate people, and then they came to us and helped us out."*

Some participants received settlement support from the Migration Resource Centre/Gippsland Multicultural Services. According to some interview participants, this settlement program package provided additional support (a relocation cost for moving houses from Melbourne plus $500 cash) to those with a refugee background than skilled regional migrants. An interview with a skilled regional visa migrant indicated that the Migration Resource Centre helped him find his first unit (and others looking for a job). *"I've got some help from Migration Resource Centre; they helped me find my first unit."* An in-depth discussion with a small group of South Sudanese men who initially came to Melbourne under a refugee protection visa illustrated additional support that the settlement support program provided:

> "We were working; we partnered with the Migrant Resource Centre. They supported moving houses here. So, anyone who wanted to move here, [if] we knew who was coming here and then we talked to the Migrant Resource Centre, and they would pay for the truck to bring all things here".

The question of whether the rentals in regional areas were affordable was dependent on the duration that the participants had resided in Gippsland. Those who newly arrived considered rentals reasonable and within reach. This is reflected in a Nigerian student's narratives. *"I found out that it was within my means and my budget, you know, and I was happy, you know, firstly on the living conditions that found…that better space…"*. On the other hand, the participants who had resided in Gippsland long enough understood that the rentals were more expensive. The case of a Filipina who moved to Wonthaggi in 2007 recounted "*I think* the p*roperty, the rentals are very expensive."* She suggested that *"there could be…price ceiling for new ones or migrants."*

Major theme 4 – One step forward, one step back

Figure 30: One step forward, one step back – Minor themes

Minor theme 4.1 Helping new families

After settling in Gippsland, the migrants in this research project outlined how they helped and/or were willing to help new families settle there. This willingness to help tended to result from their lived experiences of hardship. As one participant put it, interacting with and helping other migrants resulted from inside compassion built through lived experiences:

> *"You love to see the people, to talk to them, to discuss your things, your experiences, share their experiences and you get the opportunity to help the people more and more. And that raises the compassion inside you when you connect* [with] *the people, listen to them, you resonate your story to* [with] *them. So, then you feel more compassionate, more empathetic with them."*

Their ability to help others was dependent on each participant's circumstances and/or knowledge about the Gippsland. The participants who were community leaders and/or worked in the community development sector could provide more support to migrants from their communities and/or other ethnic communities. For example, different types of support concerning housing, information on social services and connection to multicultural groups were reflected in the narratives of one participant who had held several positions in the community sector and was a member of the Warragul Multicultural Community Group:

> *"I'm aware of other organisations at the moment, so probably I will help them to find their house and after finding a house and if they are coming with a job, it's much easier. Probably I will introduce them to this friendship group* [the Warragul Multicultural Friendship Group] *so they can start to make some connections and... if they have kids, I will assist them to enrol their kids on some clubs, and I can give some brief information about the schools and so they can make their decision."*

Similar types of support were evidenced in the narratives of one respondent who worked in the community development sector:

> *"If we know someone* [migrating to Gippsland], *we need to connect them with different organisations. We support them to find the right service for what they need…a lot of people don't know how to get it* [and] *where they can get the right service they need, so we kind of like people who listen to their concerns and ask them like if they want to get this* [service] *from this organisation or another organisation. So, we will make a referral to that specific organisation."*

Another participant (a community leader) volunteered some of her time to run a community organisation and specifically mentioned the settlement support she provided and/or was willing to provide. The community members she supported were bound by her religion rather than nationality. As shown in this quote, her willingness to help resulted from her experience of hardship as part of her migration journey:

> *"We had a lot of challenges, so we wanted to give other community members the support that, like me myself, didn't get. When we have people move here, we provide settlement services. Everything they need, they come back to us for support because people want that communication, that network. So, we try to help people settle down in the area, give them the platform to celebrate the celebrations, family picnics, get-togethers."*

One community leader participant helped his community members get jobs, among other things. As discussed in Minor theme 3.4, "Access to healthcare," this participant helped educate people from CALD backgrounds on mental health. In addition, the following quote is about being a job referee to his community members:

> *"I happen to be the support form for all people that come here for the first time, so most of the time, they refer people to me; I remember in the past before they needed to do or employ anybody from Africa."*

The discussion, supported by various quotes, indicates how established migrants have supported new families in Gippsland.

Minor theme 4.2 Cultural practice and safety

Cultural safety was considered by the participants as important as cultural practice. Although an opportunity to practise one's culture was desirable, it was not always possible for some ethnic communities to do so in Gippsland because the communities were very small. Whether having an opportunity to practise one's own culture or not, cultural safety is essential.

The cultural practices took different forms, ranging from an opportunity to learn one own language to organising cultural festivals in which cultural foods were involved. In the case of the Nigerian community in Latrobe City, small children learning their own mother tongue was important. The importance of learning their own language was extended to spouses who are not Nigerians. The following quote reflects this importance:

> *"We bring together all our children and the wife, our spouse, our partners that are not from Nigeria, who wants to learn our native language."*

Besides language learning, they also gathered to *"share memories and good times together."*

With some funding, some ethnic communities worked together to organise cultural events involving cultural foods. An in-depth discussion with South Sudanese community members indicated this kind of cooperation between cultural groups in organising cultural events:

> "During that time, we had festivals where we brought a lot of people together. The Nigerian, Sudanese, and Zimbabwean communities cooperated, and the multicultural [Gippsland Multicultural Services] provided funding. With that money, we cooked various foods, everyone participated."

Such cultural festivals were considered essential to them, and in their view, "*you have to follow your culture, even though you are in Australia, you got to live your culture.*"

Another similar story is the case of a Muslim community in Latrobe City. We regularly organised cultural events/gatherings where multicultural community members could join if they respected certain rules posed by the organiser:

> "We never said no to anyone, and we welcome everyone to come and attend our gatherings. But obviously our religious, our religious faith has certain rules and regulations that we as Muslims follow, which we respectfully follow... our religion tells us to respect everyone and everybody's equal, so treat them properly. That's why we do so."

Alongside these cultural practices, cultural safety was considered important for them and their children. Cultural safety implies inclusiveness, meaning that local people embrace people with a multicultural background so that they feel safe, not judged, welcome and respected. In the case of an education professional, although she did not have children, she thought about cultural safety at school for children:

> "In the schooling system, if you have diverse cultures. I don't have kids yet, but I'm already thinking about it. I really want my children not to feel like outsiders. And we're really proud of their [our] culture. Those things are there. Like more diverse education about different cultures."

Cultural safety was as important for those who had an opportunity to practice their own culture as it was for those who did not because of the small size of the community:

> "In communities where you don't have too many people from a certain background. You need to come up with solutions that are inclusive rather than exclusive. I do think that I really struggle to find people from a similar culture."

Another example is reflected in the narratives of an Indian man residing in a small town in Gippsland. To his knowledge, there were only five people with an Indian background in that town, living far from each other. So, he outlined that it was not always possible for them to practice their culture. What he considered important was the inclusiveness of the local community:

> "It is important to maintain the community…like all the people in my in the town which I live in…became a mate. So, it is not necessary to get friends only from my community, as long as I say everyone is like being nice to me. I don't prefer to go to only the Indian community or like Indian culture like that. And the most important thing is I have been hanging out with the Australian people."

The participant went on to highlight the importance of an inclusive community after receiving some racial comments on the phone and in person. He was a service station manager with some shares in this company. These racial comments are embedded in the following quotes:

"If you wanna live in…here, be good… and do what I say; otherwise, I'll make you go back to India, and then he used to do all some stuff like that on the phone."

Another quote from an interview with another community leader indicated that other participants received racial comments:

"…if organisations and workplaces [are] *not conducive but microaggressions happening, how much you can sustain? So, it is difficult, and if people are bad to me or are rude to me, maybe I'm speaking up, and they know that I will not take it, but not everybody can do that."*

Some other participants, particularly those who were part of Multicultural Friendship Groups[5] shared their positive experiences with the local community, however. For instance, the Wonthaggi Multicultural Women's Group participants felt connected and supported by the group and the community. The group also helped them in relation to getting a driver's license and citizenship, as well as linked to paperwork required by Australian social services.

Minor theme 4.3 English as a second language

Many of the research participants came from non-English speaking countries but not all had difficulties in English proficiency when first moving to Gippsland. So, only some participants had difficulties in English proficiency, ranging from having an accent to comprehension. As discussed in Minor theme 1.1, *Hard beginning*, just having a foreign accent resulted in migrants being perceived as less competent. The participants, therefore, had to prove themselves all the time at their workplace.

Others who had difficulties in English proficiency attended a free English course at TAFE Gippsland that was funded by the Australian Government through its Adult Migrant English Learning (AMEP) Program. The participants found this English program useful because it enabled them to pursue certificates or diplomas. One participant, who came to Wonthaggi in 2014 on a refugee protection visa, attended a free English class first before doing her Certificate III in Individual Support. The following was her own account:

"At that time in 2014, I studied English like a general English because my English was not very good enough like it was called an Adult Learning Centre. After that, I went to TAFE [Certificate III]."

Likewise, another participant, who married an Australian man, did her free English course at TAFE Gippsland after staying at home to look after her second daughter for about three years. She then completed her Certificate IV in Community Services in 2021, and she was pursuing her diploma at the time of the interview, *"I go* [went] *back to school to join in an English class"* and "[the course that I finished], *it's called community services. And now I study a diploma."*

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[5] The research team identified four Multicultural Friendship Groups (one in Moe, one in Warragul, one in Morwell, and another in Wonthaggi) in Gippsland and conducted in-depth interviews with one or more members of reach group. The group in Wonthaggi was called Women Multicultural Group and the one in Morwell was called International Women's Group.

Those who migrated to Gippsland when they were young got English support as part of their primary education. This is the case of one participant who came here on a refugee protection visa when she was 11 years old:

> *"It was really hard for me to communicate at first when moving here because we did not understand any of English, but we have like a special teacher at school where she'll pull us at a class of like 2 hours to teach us English, like a slowly learning."*

It was identified that not all migrants were eligible for an English course at TAFE Gippsland. An interview with a community leader suggested that some of her community members, who were not eligible for a free English course, decided not to go pay for an English class because they had to earn an income for the family:

> "*Because the visa does not permit them to get those things* [free English class], *and when you are new in a country, you're already struggling financially, so you don't know what's more important. Is it important to put a foot in front of the family or get in an English class, so you prioritise?"*

The account of one participant who came to Gippsland in 2005 on a regional skilled visa and was not eligible for a Free English class did not bother to attend any English class because he had to work to support the whole family: his wife and three children. He said, "*I didn't have time to do other courses, but I was doing here related work…hospitality course, like food safety. And…I had to pay for it because we didn't get any support."*

The above discussion suggests making a free English course for migrants and/or skilled migrants was important in encouraging them to attend this course to improve their English proficiency. This would benefit both migrants and the regional labour force.

Major theme 5 – A path forward

Suggestions for future migrants

Business support for migrants

Suggestions for employers

Suggestions to Government

Figure 31: A path forward – Minor themes

Minor theme 5.1 Suggestions for future migrants

Drawing on their lived experiences of migrating to Gippsland, the participants gave some advice to future migrants planning on moving to Gippsland. One piece of advice was that future migrants do some research about regional areas and set their reasonable expectations of life in regional areas:

> "If I have to give them advice, I think they have to set their expectations. They're not gonna get as much as they have in the city because living in the high country is a little bit of adjustment. But as you adjust for a month or two, you should be all right because you've got all the people in here."

As part of their research and setting up expectations, the interview participants asked new migrants to research religious activity and cultural food before moving to Gippsland if this was important to them:

> "I guess as part of some of the scoping, I would say, you know, just check and reflect how important it is for you to have access to religious spaces, or culturally or religiously appropriate food."

Central to their expectations, participants outlined that future migrants should also be open-minded, flexible, and willing to embrace a new way of life. This advice is reflected in the following quote:

> "I would say that the whole process of immigration requires one to really [be] open-minded, allowing some level of flexibility within your budget, your personality, your value system and everything just allows flexibility and be very open to change and then embrace the new culture. And yeah, just be optimistic."

Other advice was linked to employment. Securing employment was challenging, so the participants advised that future migrants find employment before moving to Gippsland because it would enable them to get appropriate housing:

> "I would probably recommend for them to try and search for a job before they arrive. Because once they need accommodation and everything, they're going to need to show that they have work lined up. So probably to search for our jobs and try a few different jobs out to see what they like."

When looking for employment, one participant advised that any future migrants should be willing to start from the beginning. This advice was based on her and her husband's experience. She explained that she had been a lawyer for 15 years in her country and started from the beginning in Australia and Gippsland. So did her husband in the engineering profession:

> "My husband worked in a really good position in Turkey. But he started from the beginning in his profession [here in Gippsland]. He's doing the same job from the beginning [with a junior position] …I think migrants need to understand they have to start from the beginning."

Another piece of advice was about regional transport. Public transport was described as very limited in Gippsland, so driving was outlined as the most practical solution for new migrants to move from one place to another. One participant asserted that "as long as you have the car to drive down to somewhere that's near the city or somewhere that you can get some groceries, that should be fine. And we easily cope up with all of that."

The participants also suggested future migrants consider obtaining a vehicle and driver's license. This advice is reflected in the following quotation:

> "If it's a family with dependence, just make sure that you know how to drive a car. Because without a car, you can't really survive in a regional area, especially if you have to move around a little bit if your house is further away from the school. You have to drop off; you have to drive there or ride a bike."

Another piece of advice the participants gave newcomers was to give themselves sufficient time to set up everything if they even come to Gippsland through work. Here is the quotation from a South African couple moving to a small town in Gippsland:

> "What helped us set up initially is do not come to the country or fly into the country on Friday and think you're going to start working the Monday. No, you have to give yourself lead time in order to set up all your admin things, like bank accounts, cell phones, Medicare, and driver's license change; all those things take some time. It's a day each for one of those. So, you have to give yourself at least ten days."

The above quote indicates that potential migrants planning to move to regional areas should consider giving themselves sufficient time before an expected working day.

Minor theme 5.2 Business support for migrants

Some participants moved to Gippsland through employment. Some essential support provided by their employers was related to relocation costs and/or arrangement of accommodation, connecting them to local real estate in finding accommodation, finding employment for their spouses, and providing professional support.

The participants securing employment in the secondary education and health sectors before relocating to Gippsland highly appreciated the relocation costs and/or accommodation arrangements provided by their employers:

> "They would provide funds towards aeroplane tickets to get there and visa costs that we already had to pay, medicals and things like that, because it can get quite expensive through that whole process. And then you still have your container to be shipped over for your personal goods and stuff. Then they'll say we give you $10,000, or we give you 15 [thousands], or we'll give you 20 [thousands] towards all of that. Then you submit your invoices and then they refund you."

The second case involved a Filipina and her partner relocating from Sydney to a small town in Gippsland to become physiotherapists:

> "Well, actually, there's our relocation assistance from my employer, which is good because we didn't get to manage well; we did, but just a little bit of… savings back then. And also, we managed to get some refund from our previous insurance [provider] and so that's a plus for us as well."

In addition to the relocation assistance, they both also received some accommodation support. While the employer of the South African woman connected her to a local real estate agent to find a suitable unit for her and her partner, the employer of the Filipina arranged long-term accommodation for her

and her partner. When asked whether she received accommodation support from her employer, she responded as follows:

> "It is actually quite good. The management here is quite good because before we came here…, it is [was] all settled by the management. They all settled into our house. I think they buy [bought] house down here somewhere in… so that we're just going to pay our rent through the hospital."

In a similar case, the employer of an education professional arranged temporary accommodation for him. When asked about accommodation support, he responded:

> "My supervisor supported me a lot, and she guided me. She understood that I was moving here with difficulties in terms of accommodation and everything…. she sent me the information related to the living arrangements here…and she also sent an email to the campus accommodation manager."

Through support from the Harvest Trail program; a federally funded program, some farm owners worked with their hostel partners to arrange accommodation for working holiday visa holders wanting to work for them at the employees' own expense. One participant came to Gippsland under this visa type and received this kind of accommodation arrangement for her first farm job:

> "When we first moved [to Gippsland], we stayed with the family…And then when we moved to the farm to do our farm work, accommodation was included with the job, and I think that helped us massively."

Besides the relocation assistance and accommodation arrangement support, some participants appreciated professional support from their employers. For instance, the above participant highly appreciated work-related training support provided by her current employer as follows:

> "So, we get a lot of training here, like we're provided with a lot of training, especially if you're interested in what you're doing. There's also maintenance daily with the supervisors. So, anything we think we can improve on or anything that we have a think can help make jobs easier or any training, we think all those areas must, and something is brought up and addressed like it's really, really good."

The CERC research team found one case in which the employer of the Filipina participant had helped her spouse secure appropriate employment in the same hospital prior to their relocating from Sydney to a small town in Gippsland. In her own words, "Before we actually go [moved] here, it is [was] all settled up. My employer, the CEO of the hospital, aimed to find a job for him [her spouse] as well, which is [was] really good. That's a plus for us."

Minor theme 5.3 Suggestions for employers

Employers can be private business owners and government agencies as employers. Even though the participants shared some similar migration experiences, they went through a slightly different journey. These lived experiences shaped their suggestions for employers, as discussed below.

One suggestion was to advise employers to offer more employment opportunities to migrants because they are hardworking people.

"I think employers need to understand if they give a chance to newcomers [migrants]. *They will do the job anyway because they need to survive here."*

One way to give job opportunities to migrants was to embed a lived experience requirement in a job advertisement.

"I think giving an opportunity to migrants, especially…their lived experience is really important. Creating job opportunities with this kind of lived experience. When they advertise the role, I think the most important thing [is to state] *that lived experience is an advantage."*

One participant provided compelling evidence to support her suggestion that a bicultural worker role required a lived experience person to provide culturally appropriate services to migrants.

Another participant stressed the importance of a paid role with reasonable hourly rates rather than an unpaid volunteer role for migrants. In her view, requiring migrants to do volunteer work was an exploitation. The following are her narratives:

"…There's a lot of expectations from migrants…that they need to volunteer. Which is unfair. They need to be paid work. You put them, the migrants, every time in a volunteer position, which is unfair."

Arranging long-term accommodation for migrants was also suggested by some participants. This was reflected in an interview with an education professional.

"If people are new, like me, they have difficulties finding accommodation…Maybe they have to arrange for long-term housing with affordable rent, which is fine."

Some participants who were temporary visa holders wished to see employers sponsoring more migrants to attract more skilled people to Gippsland. For instance, a participant on a temporary visa suggested the following:

"If they choose to sponsor [migrants], *it* [will] *mean that they're getting a lot more skilled people over, and they would be able to have them people for two to four years. I think it would be special."*

One participant who was a community leader and witnessed her community members dealing with unfair treatment at the workplace called for "*fair treatment for recruitment processes*".

Minor theme 5.4 Suggestions to Government

The participants provided some suggestions, which were shaped by their lived experience of moving to and residing in Gippsland and can be applicable to different levels of Government. A general suggestion stressed the importance of the lived experience of Gippsland migrants; it should be the basis for any migration strategy or policy development. This suggestion is reflected in the following quotation:

"People sitting in Melbourne cannot understand the pain of people sitting in Gippsland. So, they need to see [consider] *the lived experiences of Gippsland people for the migration strategy for Gippsland."*

Financial assistance was suggested to attract migrants to Gippsland. An example of this assistance is an internet allowance for migrants relocating to remote areas. It was raised by one couple who migrated to a small town in East Gippsland, where a home internet connection was not available.

> *"I would maybe like to see the Government, if possible, as a suggestion, offer the migrant family an Internet allowance through a mobile network or company and say part of your package for the first 12 months or part of your package is 50 gigs (gigabites) of data a month or something and that's what you sign up with. Especially if there's no NBN (National Broadband Network) or whatever."*

Migrants who had resided in Gippsland for some years observed a significant increase in house rentals. They suggested implementing "*a price ceiling*" for new arrivals or migrants. It is encapsulated in an overall suggestion for rental assistance and medical support by one migrant as follows:

> *"If the Government wants to send me to a regional area, I reckon if they provide a little bit of help, like rental assistance.. or medical support… I would appreciate it, but that time…. there was no support at all."*

Some temporary visa-holder migrants preparing for a permanent visa application faced challenges in navigating migration legislation. For instance, one participant working on a farm expressed her frustration in navigating Australian migration legislation. She and her partner experienced that different lawyers interpreted the legislation differently, which confused them. Websites also provided confusing immigration legal information. They would, therefore, appreciate it if the Government provided some kind of legal support on this matter.

> *"When you go on like the immigration website to read about* [immigration information], *there's so much. That's quite overwhelming for someone who's trying to figure it out, and the immigration lawyers are quite expensive. So, if you need to ring them and ask them questions, it does cost quite a lot of money."*

A final suggestion was a migrant starter pack tailored to each migrant nationality. It may include information about banking services, mobile operators, driver's license conversation processes, and Medicare account processes. This suggestion was based on some of their challenges migrating to a small town in East Gippsland. When asked about any advice for policymakers, one couple responded:

> *"Something from the Government could be a migrant starter pack. So, when are migrant comes here, you say he's from South Africa, China, America, England, wherever the migrant comes from, you have something slightly more specifically designed to their background."*

The suggestion on the migrant starter pack may be applicable to the Federal or State Government. The same participant also specifically suggested a welcome pack containing numbers of local essential service providers for new migrants, which can be provided by a local government:

> *"I think they can include in that welcome pack the local numbers of the town essential needs and things. This is the town's fire brigade number, the police, snake catcher or anti-venom place."*

The above two quotations support a suggestion that the different levels of government provide a migrant starter pack to new migrants to regional Australia.

4.4 DESKTOP REVIEW AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

4.4.1. DESKTOP REVIEW ON MIGRATION-RELATED SERVICES AND/OR INITIATIVE IN GIPPSLAND

The CERC research team conducted a desktop review to understand the availability and/or visibility of information or services related to regional migration in Gippsland on the websites of 55 organisations, including six LGAs in Gippsland. This review examined these websites and their uploaded documents to see whether there were specific services/information helping migrants and/or refugees to settle in Gippsland and/or initiatives/programs supporting migrants to secure employment in the region. This section of the report examines these services/programs/initiatives at the shire/city, organisational, and regional levels.

Services/Information/initiatives available at the shire/city level

The CERC research team specifically examined the websites and uploaded documents of all six LGAs in Gippsland. The team reviewed the website descriptions, disability access and inclusion plans, and gender equality action plans of these shires/cities to understand whether these plans considered migrants or people with culturally diverse backgrounds as their priority participants. Table 2 below summarises these services, programs, or initiatives.

Table 2: (Un)availability of services/initiatives for migrants at the Shire/Council level

Description	Latrobe	Bass Coast	East Gippsland	Baw Baw	South Gippsland	Wellington
Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP)	Yes – up to date	Yes – up to date	Yes – not up to date	Yes – not up to date	Yes – not up to date	Yes – not up to date
Committee/group linked to DAIP	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP)	Yes – up to date	Yes – up to date	Yes – up to date	Yes – up to date	Yes – up to date	Yes – up to date
Directory for multicultural services and/or groups	Yes – online	Yes – uploaded	No	Yes – online (in progress)	No	No
Terms associated with migrants and/or refugees	Yes – in GEAP	Yes – in GEAP	Yes – in GEAP and DAIP	Yes – in GEAP	Yes – in GEAP	Yes – in GEAP
Social Inclusion Action Group	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Latrobe City Council

The Latrobe City Council had relatively more programs and/or services for migrants than other shires in Gippsland. The City Council had a special initiative called the "Social Inclusion Action Group" (SIAG). According to the Terms of Reference (TOR) 2023 of the SIAG, this group was introduced based on recommendation 15 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in Victoria to "support good mental health and wellbeing in local communities."

The phrase "people from culturally diverse communities" was among the priority groups mentioned in the TOR of the SIAG, who were encouraged to apply for SIAG membership. These members were paid for their time spent providing any feedback and/or attending meetings linked to this group's activities. The City Council's website stated that the SIAG initiative had funding for up to $5,000 for community-initiated projects corresponding to SIAG priorities. The TOR of the SIAG indicated that Latrobe City was the only LGA in Gippsland that implemented this SIAG initiative with it being operating in four other cities in other regions. The City Council also had an online directory for multicultural services embedded on its website.

The Latrobe City Council also had an up-to-date Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2022-2025 and an up-to-date Gender Quality Action Plan 2021-2025:

- The Gender Quality Action Plan 2021-2025 emphasised an intersectionality approach. It used the terms "cultural backgrounds" and "cultural safety," suggesting that it paid attention to migrants among its priority populations.
- The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2022-2025 did not contain the terms/phrases "migrants" or "people from culturally diverse communities." As part of this action plan, a Disability Access and Inclusion Community Engagement Group (DAICEG) was established.

Bass Coast Shire Council

The Bass Coast Shire Council had a pdf document titled, "A *community guide to local health services and supports 2023-2024*" on their website. It laid out services and supports for LGBTQIA+ and multicultural communities. They also had a small amount of funding for community organisations, up to $2,000. However, the Shire Council did not have a specific plan or policy on migration.

The Shire Council had a Disability Action Plan 2021-2025. However, the terms "migrants", "migration populations", and "people from culturally diverse communities" were not used in this plan.

It also had a Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025, in which an intersectional approach was emphasised as a guiding principle, and cultural diversity/identity was one of the people categories addressed in this plan.

East Gippsland Shire Council

It was not obvious on the East Gippsland Shire Council's website whether they had specific programs or initiatives for migrants or people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Council had a Diversity Access and Social Inclusion Plan 2014-2017 (DASIP). In this action plan, the words "migrants" and "migration populations" were mentioned. The term "migrant populations" was mentioned in the "Rationale" of "Community engagement, information and education" section on page 22:

"Council acknowledges the real and positive influence, past and present, which our Aboriginal communities and migrant populations have made to our region."

The term "migrants" was mentioned in the "Key opportunities" subsection underneath the "Outcomes of the consultation" section on page 19:

"Examining the range of opportunities to encourage newly arrived migrants to work locally, particularly in the agricultural and food industries."

It also had an up-to-date Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025. Interestingly, an intersectional approach was not mentioned, but the term "cultural identity/background" was used in this action plan.

This suggested that the Council had recognised the importance of migrants in its action plan, though it did not have specific programs or plans for them.

Baw Baw Shire Council

The Baw Baw Shire Council's website did not clearly indicate that it had programs/initiatives or services for migrants and/or refugees. It did have a Disability Action Plan 2018-2022, but the terms "migrants" or "migration populations" were not used in this plan.

The Shire Council, however, had an online local directory of community groups, but it was still collecting more contact details from each community group. It also had an up-to-date Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025, emphasising an intersectional approach. Thus, cultural diversity/identity was one of the people categories addressed in this plan.

The Shire Council had a Disability Action Plan 2018-2022 and a Disability Advisory Committee. However, the terms "migrants", "migration populations", and "people from culturally diverse communities" were not found in this plan.

South Gippsland Shire Council

Similar to Baw Baw Shire Council, it was not obvious on the South Gippsland Shire Council website whether they had specific programs or initiatives for migrants or people from culturally diverse backgrounds. They had a Disability Action Plan Framework 2019-2022, but this framework did not mention anything related to multiculturalism, cultural identity/background or people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Shire had an up-to-date Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025. Although an intersectional approach was mentioned, the action plan did not mention the term "cultural identity/background". However, the term "cultural safety" was used in the results section of a survey completed by their staff.

Wellington Shire Council

Similarly to the above three Shire Councils, the Wellington Shire Council website did not clearly indicate that it had specific programs or initiatives for migrants or people from culturally diverse backgrounds. No directory of services was uploaded or embedded on the website.

The Shire Council had a Wellington Access and Inclusive Advisory Group (WAIAG) and a Wellington Access and Inclusion Plan 2017-2022. However, it focused on people with disabilities rather than diverse migrants. Thus, the terms "migrants", "migration populations", and "people from culturally diverse communities" were not found in this plan. The Shire Council had a Gender Equality Action Plan 2021-2025, in which an intersectional approach was emphasised, and the term "culturally diverse communities" was found in this plan.

Services/initiatives available at the organisational level

In addition to the six LGAs, the CERC research team reviewed the websites of 49 other organisations. Two of these websites specifically mentioned their intention to recruit and sponsor international

migrants to their workforce. They were Bairnsdale Regional Health (BRH) in East Gippsland and West Gippsland Healthcare Group in Warragul in Baw Baw Shire.

For BRH, the website specifically mentioned its intention to sponsor and support international migrants to work at BRS. They had visa support, accommodation assistance, salary packaging of relocation costs, and social and community support.

Similarly, under the "Employment" tab on the West Gippsland Healthcare Group's website, there was an "International recruitment" section. This section said they offered some assistance and benefits, including support with Australian visa options and costs, a financial relocation package, and initial accommodation.

Five other websites indicated the existence of services and/or support related to multicultural communities; four organisations provided training courses related to multicultural communities as described below:

- The Gippsland Multicultural Services (GMS) website mentioned that it provided its clients with diversity awareness and cultural competency training.
- The Gippsland Employment Skills Training (GEST) website indicated that it provided a free conversational English class for people with CALD backgrounds.
- The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC) website mentioned that it offered a free hospitality training course for people from multicultural communities.
- On the "Enrol in Course" tab on the Warragul Community House's website, a "Social groups" subtab enabled viewers to register for a social group for free. Although this social group had no name, it could be referred to as a Warragul Multicultural Friendship Group, as the CERC research team had an engagement workshop with this group as part of the Gippsland Migration Project.

The fifth organisation, the Wongthaggi Neighbourhood Centre at Mitchell House's website, had a "Supporting community group" tap that mentioned a Bass Coast Refugee Sponsorship Group and an L2P program assisting younger people in getting a Victorian driver's license.

- The L2P program "matches learners from 16 to 23 years old with a fully licensed volunteer driver and a practice vehicle to help them gain driving experience."
- "Before being matched with a volunteer mentor, learners participating in the program have access to up to seven free driving lessons throughout the program with a professional instructor. This helps learners build their skills before getting on the road with a volunteer mentor and continue progressing through the four stages of the Graduated Licensing System."

Although the term "migrants" or "people from multicultural backgrounds" was not mentioned as one of the target groups of the L2P program, some female migrants interviewed by the CERC research team got their driver's licenses via this program.

Migration programs/initiatives at the regional level

Three websites provided information related to regional visa programs and finding regional employment. The Department of Employment and Workforce Relations (DEWR) website had three main tabs: "Skills and training", "Employment", and "Workplace relations". The "Workplace relations" tab had a subtab on "Working in Australia on a visa", where the rights of migrants and information

related to post-study work visa holders were provided. The "Employment" tab had a specific subtab on finding regional jobs. It also outlined the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme and Harvest Trail program, which were managed by MADEC Australia.

MADEC Australia had one office in Sale, Wellington Shire. Its website outlined detailed information about the *PALM scheme* and Harvest Trail program. The PALM scheme was an initiative of the Australian Government to "provide employers with reliable returning workers from Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste to meet unmet labour demands". The scheme assisted "employers from horticulture, accommodation, aquaculture, cotton, cane and broader agriculture industries with reliable workers for up to 9 months". Under the PALM scheme, "workers may be recruited from the following countries, Timor Leste, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Fiji".

The *Harvest Trail program* "connects workers and growers to fill seasonal farm jobs." Its staff members "liaise with other labour services including the Harvest Trail Information Service. This extends to other potential labour sources including universities, hostels, and community groups".

In the Goulburn Valley (GV), there was a *Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)*, which is an "agreement between the Australian Government and a designated area". The Goulburn Valley's website stated that it "has negotiated a DAMA to include occupations and conditions that assist our region in addressing acute labour shortages". Under this framework, "employers in the GV area who are experiencing skills and labour shortages can apply for endorsement to enter into a DAMA labour agreement." Compared to the standard skilled visa program, "this agreement enables employers to sponsor skilled and semi-skilled overseas workers with more flexible requirements".

Image: Project participant workshop

4.4.2. QUALITATIVE DATA FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The findings presented in this subsection are based on individual interviews and focus group discussions with ten stakeholder participants from eight different institutions. Six people were individual interview participants, and four attended two focus group discussions, with two participants in each group. These participants interacted/worked with and/or provided services to migrants in Gippsland. They came from the tourism industry, the migration industry, migrant settlement services, the community sector, and state and federal government institutions.

Whilst some themes were shaped by the nature of the work/industry the participant worked in, some cross-cutting themes ran through the interviews and discussions with the stakeholder participants.

Issue of labour shortages and programs contributing to addressing this issue

Of the ten participants, one participant emphasised the labour shortage was a key issue in Gippsland that required more migrants to fill in this labour shortage:

> *"There are a lot of jobs in the tourism industry, and the sign is the harvest industry. It all comes once at the same time a year, like in Gippsland, where the harvest is only probably six weeks a year of work. It's a need that many people have.* [For instance]*, the lettuce is only growing in the hot weather or peak time, the same as the tourism industry. Everyone needs the labour, the one time."*

The labour shortage extended beyond agriculture to the education sector. The participant gave an example of a primary school in a small town:

> *"A teacher got sick…she is having three months of treatment. They have to have someone to take her place while she's not there because it's the only school. There are about 16 kids."*

One participant identified one job connector program called Harvest Trail as important in contributing to addressing the labour shortage issues in Gippsland. It is a federally funded program to connect job seekers with farm jobs and was managed by a non-profit organisation named MADEC. MADEC had an office in Sale running this program:

> *"One program with farming is called the National Harvest Trial. They can start in Queensland and work all their way down the coast, Tasmania, and around the country. It's just not enough people, like this year is one of the record grain harvests and they would not get the harvest done without the backpackers."*

The participant explained that the Harvest Trail program connected job seekers, especially backpackers, with farm owners free of charge. One farm owner, who was interviewed by the CERC research team for an organisational case study, confirmed this free service.

Issue of regional migration: No real incentives for living regionally

One focus group identified, "*There are no real incentives for living regionally."* She continued, *"Right now, there's a real lack of regional incentives built into our visa framework, and that's very evident since 2019 when they got rid of the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (subclass 187) visa"* Under this visa scheme, that participant explained:

> *"Students could come directly from university and get sponsored without any experience, and if they had the base qualification in Australia and get sponsored immediately for permanent*

residency as long as they stayed in the region for two years and didn't need skills assessments; it was much easier".

The same participant continued that after the removal of the subclass 187 visa, it was more difficult for skilled migrants to apply for a permanent resident visa:

"Now they've made the requirement on the applicant so much higher. They have to have a minimum sort of three years of experience to go straight to that permanent visa. They've got to have a skills assessment, and for a lot of them, they just can't meet those requirements."

The focus group participants also suggested reducing *"the level of experience or the English requirements for regional visas."* Further, interview participants outlined that it was very expensive for small business owners to sponsor migrant workers for a Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa when they could not find a local workforce in the region. One of the focus group participants explained, *"…Businesses struggle with the Skilling Australians Fund (SAF) levy, and it's a real barrier to them being able to sponsor".*

One of the focus group participants explained that employers also have to *"pay professional fees to have a migration agent lodge the nomination application"* and suggested *"reducing the SAF levy or getting rid of it altogether for regional businesses."*

Furthermore, the participants identified the problem of a recent announcement of an increase of the minimum salary level required for sponsorship from A$53,900 before June 2023 to A$73,150 from July 2024 to June 2025. They explained that regional businesses were not able to pay that amount, so migrants cannot meet this requirement for applying for a sponsored/TSS visa.

The participants further identified that employers need to *"pay all their labour market testing to be done or they're advertising for a month and prove that they can't get somebody"* locally before they can nominate migrant workers for a TSS visa The same participant suggested, *"…they got rid of labour market testing; it's ridiculous. It's a tick-the-box exercise, and it really doesn't mean anything, in my opinion".* She added, "*It just adds additional time in some cases, especially if you've got to do two rounds of labour market testing".*

The participants added that sponsoring migrant workers under the 494 visa required *"another layer of bureaucracy"* because it needed to be certified by a Regional Certifying Body (RCB), which could delay the time from recruitment to work commencement. The same participant said, "*I can't see what value that adds when exactly the same documents go to the Department* [Department of Home Affairs], *and you know that's just adding another layer and complexity".*

The problem of expensive, complex visa processes discussed earlier was compounded by the fact that regional businesses lacked awareness of visa-sponsoring processes. One participant stated, "*A lot of businesses don't understand what options are available when they can't find an Australian worker".*

One of the focus group participants appreciated that other states had a *"roadshow"* program in which a roadshow team travelled around regional areas to educate regional businesses about visa options available to sponsor migrant workers. She continued, *"I know the Victorian one has been extremely limited in the past."* In her view, *"Victoria never had to really work to get migrants to come to the region."* Unlike other states, the Victorian government had a *"blanket approach",* and *"they didn't really try to get people to the regions at that time".*

One participant with knowledge of the Victorian migration program suggested that the Victorian government organised webinars with business owners about regional visa options for migrants, such as the 491 visa. The Victorian government also had a roadshow program for regional Victoria, including Gippsland.

The focus group participants agreed that there should be a DAMA program in Gippsland. With Gippsland's DAMA program, local businesses would have relatively easy access to skilled or semi-skilled workers whose occupations were not in the general skill migration list of the Federal Government. Vegetable pickers or Personal Care Assistants (PCAs) were two examples. The participants continued that the DAMA program provides a number of concessions for skilled migrants to apply for a temporary skill shortage visa. These concessions included expanded age limits and few experience and English proficiency requirements.

The focus group participants elaborated that without a DAMA program in Gippsland, business owners who wanted to nominate skilled migrants whose occupations were not on the general skill migration list would need to sign a Labour Agreement with the Federal Government before they could nominate any migrant workers. This process took time and was costly.

Settlement-related support

One participant identified a Strategic Partnership Program funded by the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. This program adopted collaborative and partnership approaches between settlement services providers, community and organisational leaders, and local governments to provide more effective support for migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker communities.

A few participants identified a federally funded settlement program called the Settlement Engagement Transition Support Program (SETS) in Gippsland. One participant explained that this program had been managed by Gippsland Multicultural Services (GMS), later by Anglicare Victoria and then by Latrobe Community Health Services (LCHS). At the time of the interview, the SETS program provided settlement support to migrants who have arrived in Australia in the last five years. These groups were considered to be "*highly vulnerable*". The participant who was working with migrants mentioned that the eligibility criteria of the program might be expanded to include migrants who have come to Australia/Gippsland for more than five years. The program's potentially expanded eligibility criteria aimed to support secondary migration to Gippsland; those who went to a regional town or metropolitan city other than Gippsland first and later moved to Gippsland.

The SETS program collaborated with other service providers to support eligible migrants by co-case managing and referring them to other service providers, such as recruitment agencies and TAFE, for English programs and/or other vocational training courses. One participant explained, "*We don't just refer off; we actually work in conjunction with agencies and see where we can still fit in, and not just because we can case manage. So, we case manage alongside other agencies as well*."

The SETS program was constrained by the eligibility criteria of other service providers. In some instances, the migrants met the eligibility criteria of the SETS program, but when referred to other service providers, they did not fall into the eligibility criteria of other service providers. For instance, some migrants had work and study rights in Australia but did not meet the eligibility criteria of some recruitment agencies as they were funded to support only Australian permanent residents, "*That's where it gets really confusing*."

In addition, the CERC research team identified some formal or informal multicultural friendship groups in Gippsland through interactions with different stakeholders. These groups were functioning well at the time of the research data collection. Two groups were specifically for women, and two others were mixed-gender groups. These groups had their own weekly meetings on different dates depending on the availability of most of their members. The majority of the group members had CALD backgrounds. They used their weekly meetings to share their stories, support each other, and learn from guest speakers. Here are the four groups:

- Moe Multicultural Friendship Group (MFG), supported by LCHS and facilitated by a support worker from LCHS.
- Warragul MFG, supported by Warragul Neighbourhood House and facilitated by its staff member.
- Wonthaggi Multicultural Women's group, coordinated by a community volunteer at Wonthaggi Neighbourhood House at Michell House.
- International Women's Group (IWG) was an independent group led by a president and was hosted by GMS.

Notably, through support from Mitchell House, the Wonthaggi Multicultural Women's group provided unique support to its members in addition to social networking programs. One was a driver's license, which helped some female migrants get their driver's licenses. The other program was a citizenship program where refugees and/or migrants could come to prepare for their citizenship test.

In addition to the multicultural friendship groups, one participant working with multicultural young people noted a multicultural youth group called the *"Youth Advisory Group"* coordinated by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY). It was a Gippsland-based group with eight members, most of whom lived in Latrobe City. Their regular meeting was monthly. One participant said, *"This group is very important…they are the voices of the multicultural young people in Gippsland."* The same participant explained that the youth advisory group members interacted with other institutions, including local governments and secondary schools, to make their voices heard and raise awareness about multicultural inclusion. This group also provided a platform where multicultural young people could come together and share their stories and concerns.

Furthermore, according to one participant, there was previously the Community Employment Connectors (CEC) program run by LCSH and funded by the state government. It was implemented as a COVID-19 response, so it was one of the programs funded through COVID-19; they were assisting people to get back to work. It was *"fabulous"*, *"hugely successful and, to our surprise, was not refunded."* As noted in 4.3, *"Thematic analysis – interviews with migrants"*, one of the individual interview participants outlined how she got her employment through this CEC program. This support no longer existed at the time of this research data collection period.

Stakeholder participants' perspectives on settlement-related challenges and suggestions to policymakers

Stakeholder participants discussed several challenges in the individual interviews and focus group discussions. The issue of cultural safety was repeatedly raised throughout one of the focus group discussions and in an interview with a professional working with multicultural youth. The issue raised by participants drew on one of the group members' lived experiences. They outlined how key to the cultural safety issue was the Gippsland community's reluctant attitude toward people with CALD

backgrounds, resulting in people with CALD backgrounds feeling unsafe in their social interactions with local people. One example was, "*We don't feel welcome at libraries and other places.*" The same participant acknowledged that not all locals showed unwelcoming attitudes toward migrants.

Similarly, one participant working with multicultural youth also echoed the issue of cultural safety: "*Young people··· experienced issues with feeling that they do not fit in…they told us that they are experiencing discrimination and racism within schools and community as well*".

The respondent with a CALD background also gave an example: having a foreign accent in English was perceived by local people as less competent. "*When we have language barriers, they will perceive us as so less competent…*"

In the view of the focus group participants discussed earlier, feeling culturally unsafe in Gippsland led some migrants to move back to Melbourne, where more multicultural services were available. They suggested cultural safety training be provided for Gippsland businesses and employers to address this challenge. The design of this training should consult multicultural members to include their lived experiences in this training material. This suggestion was reflected in the following quotation:

> "*…we need lots of training… It's kind of like cultural awareness training, more about the bridge of our understanding and the shared understanding…. We would also like to provide training to multicultural members because there are lots of norms and codes. We want these experts to really connect with multicultural members and receive the feedback from lived experience.*"

In addition to cultural safety training for businesses and employers, one participant suggested that the community's positive attitudes and behaviour toward migrants were crucial to retaining migrants in Gippsland. The following quotation reflected her comments and suggestions:

> "*I think they need good community support... I think that we need to promote Gippsland not as a secondary settlement but as somewhere you* [migrants] *can come, and the community will embrace you*".

Transportation difficulties were raised as a key challenge by participants. They agreed that a lack of public transport needed to be addressed as it was associated with an onward migration to metropolitan areas. They pointed to the "*need for more frequent public bus and train services*" and more lanes for bicycling. Further, "*there might be some free transportation services for multicultural community members.*" Similarly, one participant mentioned that in some towns, "*it's just really hard to get there on public transport*" Hence, they suggested increased public transport services to help "*migrants, refugees who are isolated in those smaller country towns to be able to come in and access the services, including an English program*" in bigger towns.

One participant identified that navigation of Australian social and health systems was also a key challenge for newcomers. She gave examples such as getting a job, a Medicare card, and access to health services. In her own accounts:

> "*Migrants and refugees have limited understanding of systems, so it's actually trying to explain the different way things work in Australia, and sometimes it's just beyond comprehension because they've come from areas of the world that just have nothing that they can relate to.*"

Challenges are compounded by English language barriers and low-quality on-the-phone interpretation services, "*There is a communication barrier with language quite often;* sometimes *the interpreter*

services aren't always great. That might not have the right dialect, even though we've asked for it." Although some migrants and/or refugees may not understand what the interpreter says to them on the phone, they may pretend that they understand, *"It's embarrassing, and also they might just wanna say yes, because it's easier to say yes, even if the interpreter has interpreted incorrectly*".

A long-term solution to address the English language barriers was to provide more English classes at TAFE. Based on her previous experience as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher, one participant recommended that the *"two-day a week"* English program with *"five hours per day"* was insufficient. She added, *"If you're trying to learn the language so that you can integrate into the community, two days of English classes just isn't enough"* Hence, she suggested, *"It would be good if there were full-time English classes that people in this area could attend"*.

Lacking the availability of cultural foods was also emphasised by participants. This issue is well captured in one participant's accounts, *"… there are really limited places where you can buy traditional food ingredients like halal products for people who practice halal nutrition and so forth"* This forced migrants to source food from Metropolitan areas. *"I know a lot of a lot of migrant people travel down to Dandenong to buy ingredients that they like to have in their cooking"*.

One participant understood that it was a supply-and-demand issue, one participant suggested an education program for grocers to have proper labels for halal ingredients:

> *"I think we really need to educate the grocers, the people of the shops or whatever, and have like a sticker in the window. We sell halal products. Just so that people who do need to buy special ingredients are not constantly searching shelves and going into a shop and looking for an hour or whatever."*

Securing employment is an important factor that attracted migrants to Gippsland and a current challenge for people from multicultural backgrounds. The issue is linked back to the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications. *"If your qualifications aren't recognised here, that means you can't go back to the work that you were doing that you found fulfilling"* The problem of the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications led to underemployment, meaning that people undertake work not relevant to, and lower than, overseas qualifications. Her assessment was based on her own experiences and that of other migrants she interacted with:

> *"…we have an example from Latrobe Community Health Service. Previously, she was a lawyer* [overseas]*, and she's doing something* [different]*; even though she has a job there, it's still not - we still think that it's a little bit underemployed.* [For me]*, I worked at the university before. I'm not saying underemployed or anything, but it's still not the work I previously did - Yeah, it doesn't really match what I was doing previously."*

The focus group discussion participants stressed the issue of service coordination for multicultural communities, requiring a central coordinating hub. Specifically, while organisations known to migrants had no funding to implement multicultural community-related activities, organisations not known to migrants had funding but no connection with multicultural activities. Hence, the organisations known to migrants needed to connect the organisations with funding to the multicultural communities without any funding support. In the participants' view, this issue had created *"lots of unmet needs… lots of the barriers they're facing. And then there are huge gaps between services and community members there. And then there are needs for services coordination."*

One participant suggested that a welcome pack would benefit newcomers to Gippsland. They outlined how the SETS program should be a primary form of contact in this pack. Contact details of community leaders should also be included. A QR code linking to the SETS Program and the community leader's contact details was recommended to be embedded.

The participants proposed that there is a Gippsland migration plan/strategy/blueprint for attracting migrants to the region and supporting/retaining them in Gippsland. They outlined how this blueprint provides a shared vision and key pillars, including settlement/socio-cultural services and employment. In his view, an intergovernmental institution like One Gippsland should take the lead in this matter. In supporting Gippsland's migrants, participants suggested that we shift our thinking about migrant workers and acknowledge that *"mobility"* is a natural and necessary flow of people into regional areas.

Image: Project participant workshop

4.5 ORGANISATIONAL BUSINESS CASE STUDIES

The CERC research team conducted three organisational business studies, in the meat industry and horticulture and health sectors to explore the ways in which they supported migrants to settlement in Gippsland and their challenges in doing so. Two organisational case study interviews were conducted in October and November of 2023, and the third in February 2024. The organisational case study interview participants reviewed and endorsed the three case studies below.

BUSINESS CASE STUDY: MEAT INDUSTRY - VICTORIA VALLEY MEAT EXPORTS PTY LTD

Victoria Valley Meat Exports Pty Ltd is an export abattoir that exports meat worldwide other than China. The current owner bought the company in 2014. The company has its primary plant in Trafalgar in Baw Baw shire in Gippsland. They have a boning room in Campbellfield, north of Melbourne, and a seasonal plant in Darwin. They employed approximately 300 people directly and indirectly, with about 120 people being employed directly. Of the directly employed staff, around 50% were people with CALD backgrounds, including Indian, Indonesian, Pakistani, and Vietnamese.

Recruitment and retention

The unreliable local labour supply pushed the company to recruit migrants already in Australia and from overseas, particularly Vietnam and Indonesia. Their Human Resources people flew overseas, especially to Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi in Vietnam and Indonesia, to recruit these migrants. The company had a very positive experience employing migrant workers regarding their quality of work and work ethics, which motivated them to keep recruiting migrants. As the owner put it:

> *"I've never had any problems with any of our migrant workers. We don't have a problem getting Vietnamese or Indonesian or anything like that. I've never sacked a migrant worker, but I had to sack many Aussie workers. Their work ethics is much better than many Aussie workers. They just do their job and go home. That's why we went for migrant workers, and I'll continue to go for the migrant workers. Otherwise, without those workers, we can't process because a lot of its manual work, a lot of we get machines to do, but a lot of it in the beefing that through manual work."*

The company has been committed to a long-term solution to labour shortages by sponsoring them to Gippsland so that they could apply for permanent residency after three years. The company is willing to continue this long-term solution. After getting their permanent residency, some migrant workers bought houses in Trafalgar, which is very close to their workplace. Many of the sponsored migrant workers continued to work for this company. As the company has its seasonal plant in Darwin, they sometimes brought migrants to the Darwin plant first and to Melbourne and Trafalgar. For instance, at the time of the interview, the company had got 9 or 10 Indonesians in Darwin who would be brought to Victoria in December when the Darwin plant was closed. They believed sponsoring migrants to regional areas was *"good for the country; it's a win for everybody."*

Strategies to support migrants

The initial support provided by the company to newly arrived migrants included support in relation to accommodation, training, public transport, food, and religious practice. The company initially rented houses for their migrant workers and then transferred the lease to them. Some migrants, such as

Vietnamese, had previous experience in the meat industry, so they were ready for work. However, others were required training before starting their jobs, and the company trained them up for the job. The company also oriented their newly arrived migrant workers on public transport so that they could take the train to work. Migrants were also shown where to buy food and groceries. The company was also aware of the importance of religious practice for newly arrived migrants, so they were shown where they could practise their religious activities. For example, Muslims and Christians were shown where the mosque and church are, respectively.

Support was also provided to employees' dependents. While some migrants were single, others came with their spouses and/or children. Spouses of sponsored migrants were provided lower-skilled jobs, for example, working in packing lines. Generally, sponsored migrants had good English, but their spouses had some language barriers. Putting migrant workers next to other workers of the same nationality was a way to address the language barrier. During the interview, the owner explained, *"We've put one of those migrant workers with someone that came from the same country so they can help, and they can interpret for them, for example, the Vietnamese with Vietnamese workers."* If migrant workers had smaller children, they were oriented to the primary school system and where they could send children.

Most of the sponsored employees stayed with the company after getting permanent residence. In the company owner's view, key retention factors included employment stability, family and friends, and homeownership in regional Victoria. During the interview, he explained, *"They have their friends; they have their family; they have their house; they have their job. That's what people want. And if you do that with them, you're working with them, you'll hold them. That's how you take them there."* At the same time, he also acknowledged that some moved to Melbourne because of having friends and relatives over there.

Drawing on his previous experience in the chicken industry, the owner shared one lesson learnt in relation to the relationship between overseas conflicts and ethnic frictions within the labour force in Australia. For instance, a war in North Africa in which Somalians and Sudanese were involved had created ethnic conflicts between migrant workers with Somalian and Sudanese backgrounds in the chicken company in Australia. This was the lesson-learnt that he will not repeat this mistake in this current business.

Challenges and Suggestions to Government

Through his experiences in recruiting and/or sponsoring migrants from overseas since the start of the current meats business in early 2014, the company had experienced long delays as part of the sponsoring process created by Australian migration policies. He thus suggested *"cutting red tape"* in this process. The following quotes explain his frustration with this red tape:

> *"Now, the biggest problem is getting migrant workers here. Our biggest problem is the Australian government. Our Australian government is causing us problems and making it very, very difficult to bring in this model [sponsoring migrants to regional areas] and a lot of companies, not just my own; I've had enough. It's time they need to get rid of that red tape, right? Remove the red tape."*

> *"It takes months* [to get migrants into Australia]. *It's not overseas* [governments]. *It's our Australian government's causing this problem. That's the Australian government really… pissed me off."*

Linked with the red tape, the company owner raised the problem of a limited period of stay for some migrant workers, specifically Timor-Leste people. His company planned to recruit Timor-Leste people to Australia, but the maximum stay for East Timor people was 18 months. In this view, the 18-month stay was insufficient as training them may take time. The following quotes illustrate his frustration:

> *"We're gonna bring Timor East in up here, and the Timor East [consulate in Darwin] said, please bring them over…I said. I want to pick you up and bring them into the Northern, and the next thing the Australian government… just made it so difficult. I should only have them for so long [only 18 months] and things like this. I'm training these people, and it might take months to train them up, and I am looking for another 12 months. I gotta send them back. Or so that ******** just making it too hard for me."*

> *"It takes months [to bring them in], but when you bring them in, it takes you months to [train them up], and then they want to me only to have some of these East Timor [Timor-Leste] here for 18 months and then send them home."*

To summarise the suggestions, the government should cut the red tape to smooth the visa process, reducing the time it takes to take migrants into Australia. At the same time, this meat company prefers a long-term commitment to sponsoring migrant workers here.

Image: Meat industry employees

BUSINESS CASE STUDY: HORTICULTURE – DICKY BILL AUSTRALIA

Dicky Bill Australia is an Australian family-owned business with two locations, one in Maffra, Victoria and one in Drinan, Queensland. Between the two sites, they have over 1200 acres of farming country where they grow, process and pack salad and herb products 12 months of the year. While leafy vegetables are grown all year round, each location has its peak season, with the Maffra farm from September to May and the Drinan farm from May to October. Employing over 120 people in both Queensland and Victorian locations, Dicky Bills supported a number of migrant workers from across the globe, including workers looking to migrate permanently and those working whilst backpacking across Australia. Of this total workforce, approximately 60% are itinerant or migrant workers.

Recruitment and retention

Due to seasonal employment nature, not all positions in this business are permanent, which shapes how the company recruits its workforce. The company uses at least three ways to recruit its workers. Recruiting itinerant workers on a working holiday visa through "Harvest Trail" program[6] managed by MADEC[7] was one of the practical ways. During an interview with two farm owners, one owner said, *"As far as a migrant workforce is concerned, the main workforce we have at the moment is our itinerant. So, backpackers, we have a lot of backpacker workers that work for us."* This recruitment strategy was fit for seasonal jobs as backpackers were required to work only 88 days in the first year to be eligible for an extension of their second-year visa.

The second was to recruit migrants under the PALM (Pacific Australia Labour Mobility) scheme that supports workers from the Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste. This strategy provided the farm with a relatively stable workforce as migrants under this PALM Scheme could work up to nine months. One of the owners explained during the interview as follows:

> *"There's the MADEC or Pacific PALM (Pacific Australia Labour Mobility) programme, which is done through MADEC to basically facilitate Vanuatuan workers coming here and providing us with a workforce that is stable. You know, they spend nine months here, have to go home for three months, then they can come back for another nine months."*

Besides the above strategies, the company conducted direct recruitment via Facebook, though the company required some support from MADEC. When asked about this direct recruitment, one of the owners explained, *"When we need positions, I'll generate a Facebook post and try to keep it relatively simple. I'll put it on all the local community and employment pages, for example, we've been looking for tractor operators that have got a relative amount of experience driving tractors."* This third strategy was used for recruiting skilled migrants for ongoing positions and the owners were willing to provide a sponsorship.

The farm owners highlighted a strategy to grow in recruiting and retaining skilled migrant workers via sponsorship to fill a "*permanent position*". The farm owners had experienced the opportunity of sponsorship in the past, seeing great value in skilled migrant workers' ability and commitment to the role, "*He's quite good at his job, where we can see him being part of the business permanently".* They

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[6] Harvest Trail program connects workers and growers to fill seasonal farm jobs. It is a no-cost service funded by the Australian government and is managed by MADEC. For further information, visit their website at madec.edu.au/harvest-services.

[7] MADEC is a not-for-profit, professional and independent business that provides employment services to quickly and effectively find workers for farm jobs.

were hoping to have sponsorship opportunities to support migrant workers for "*three years*", which they felt was enough time for the employee to settle into the role, gain confidence and competence in the work and ultimately know whether it is something they would like to continue longer term. That way, the farm owners believed "*Everyone's had some positives out of the engagement*".

With the stated migrant workforce within the company being approximately "*60%*", ensuring a steady flow of skilled workers was essential for the business to maintain consistent operation. Some key "*short-list*" considerations the farm upholds for its workers was "*they've got their own vehicle and can source their own accommodation*" as the farms are not close to major cities or towns. The organisation could not organise transport or accommodation for the employee. However, they stated that supporting organisations such as MADEC and the PALM scheme managed this as part of their employee's experience within Australia.

Strategies to support migrants

Harvest Trail vs PALM scheme. While recruiting itinerant workers via the Harvest Trail program was free of charge, the farm was required to contribute to the PALM scheme. When discussing the supporting partnership between the farm and organisations such as MADEC, the farm owners said they were "*an approved employer, we've had the workplace health and safety practises, everything audited*". As part of the programme, there was an "*employer contribution we must make towards their flights*", then the programme coordinating the employee would organise accommodation, transport and cultural support. The cultural support that was provided by the farm and partnering organisations MADEC and Food and Fibre Gippsland was described as providing "*a video in their native tongue of how to do the job*", providing "*cultural programmes*" specific to food education and "*Employee Assistance Programs*" to support migrant workers in many areas of their personal and professional lives in Australia.

The cost of skilled migrants through the PALM scheme were higher hourly to "*fund*" the additional support provided by the partner organisation. The farm owners outlined the payment for migrant workers, including managing the "*piece rate*" that exists in horticultural work, being paid by picked or packed items rather than by hour. Migrant workers were paid "*the piece rate or the award wage, whichever is higher*". Although the farm owners outlined that this process can be "*inefficient*" on commencement of employment and can be "*expensive*", it demonstrated that skilled migrants in the organisation were renumerated appropriately, with the addition of "*super*" contributions also added on top of their regular wage.

In addition to appropriate wage entitlements, the business highlighted that their support may work as a "*stepping-stone*" for the migrant to explore their opportunities within business in Australia. The farm owners outlined that although it was disappointing to lose skilled migrant staff, they appeared to understand the desire to seek career advancement:

> *"There were two mechanics; one of them went to Melbourne, and the other one started his own business. So, they sort of did use us as a stepping-stone, which is one of those things, you can't have it all. But they took two or three years to get to that milestone, and then they wanted to go and do their own thing. It's a great Australian dream, isn't it?"*

The business was keen to support the skills development of their employees, understanding that not everyone could start to work proficiently despite holding the appropriate qualifications. The farm

owners discussed how in-house "*training*" had built confidence and competence in their migrant workforce and that the staff could take those skills "*somewhere else*" if they so desired. The employees provided positive feedback about this process and the relationship they had built with their supervisors:

> "He said where he's come from, he's never had that relationship at all. So, he wants to stay as part of this family. He wants to stay as part of this business because he has opportunities here that he does not have at home. So, that was really nice to hear".

The farm wanted to support skilled migrant workers as much as possible to ensure their work and settlement in Australia were as safe and informed as possible.

Challenges faced

Some challenges faced by the farm in managing a migrant workforce was the stated "*language barrier*" where, at times, the employer may "*not know they* [the migrant] *(has) got the skills because you can't communicate properly*" and therefore migrant workers may be given "*very menial tasks*" until skills and capacity can be established:

> "Language barriers' are an issue, like when we previously employed guys that English is not a first language, it can be problematic just trying to convey what needed to be done. And then food safety. Just general instructions can be quite difficult as well. We will often still employ those guys, but it is difficult, and we need to consider where we put them".

Differences in food safety standards were recognised by the farm owners, who had to convey to migrant workers the extremely high food standards within Australia as the "*food safety requirements of each of the countries where everyone's coming from are extremely different*". The farm owners recognised this opportunity as an "*education piece*" and an opportunity for "*translation*". Similar challenges were faced during recruitment in discussions with potential employees overseas; the farm owners outlined how different farming practices worldwide often meant that skilled migrants had not used Australian standard products such as fertilisers on their crops.

Suggestions to Government

When discussing the backpacker workforce, the farm owners discussed the required working days of employees for them to gain a second-year visa in Australia and how this could be extended to support the farms and improve skills in a specific role:

> "They can work 88 days regional so they can then (get) their second-year visa. From our aspect, if that was like 120 days, it would be significantly better. Because we then would get to keep them longer and go from there… By the time you teach someone how to do the skills required to do their role, they're already giving you their notice because they're moving on".

Concerns were voiced surrounding the backpacker workforce since the COVID-19 pandemic and the reduction of backpackers allowed into the country. Discussion of local jobs being filled by migrant or transient workforces was outlined as a contentious issue in the area, "*we're not supplying Australians with work. Well, the work is there, the Australians are choosing not to do it*". Furthermore, the farm owners also outlined the challenges they have faced since the government changes to 88-day visa rules surrounding included industries of work:

"The biggest change we saw with COVID was when they introduced the fact that the 88 days could be done with hospitality. Everyone went, 'Well, Why the hell would I go work on a farm and I can go serve coffees or beers on the beaches?'. So, removing the hospitality components of lots of the regions and actually focusing on where the primary need is would actually be better".

The farm owners also outlined the complexities of self-recruiting through advertisement platforms, with a great deal of work surrounding the review of appropriate paperwork, visas and working requirements. They suggested that "*if there is someone that could vet any candidates overseas that are interested and have a pool of sort of pre-authorised staff that are ready to go*", that would make the recruitment process much simpler.

When exploring the process of sponsorship and the potential costs and risks associated with it, farm owners suggested a potential "*bridging agricultural visa*" that would allow the organisation to get to know the employee, understand their skills and allow the employee time to decide whether the industry was something they wanted to continue working in:

"It's almost like a bridging agriculture visa where you get them in, it could go for six months, and you got milestones along the way. After three months, you make a decision that they are the right fit for the business or they're not, and they go home at the end of six months. That would make it a lot easier as well".

The organisation's feedback and suggestions strongly focused on supporting the 60% migrant workforce. The farm owners were invested in their employees and wanted to ensure that both parties could benefit from the work experience, whether short-term or multiple years.

Image: Food packaging at Dicky Bills Australia

BUSINESS CASE STUDY: HEALTH – LATROBE COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

The Latrobe Community Health Service (LCHS) is a not-for-profit health service with 1,400 employees across nine sites in Gippsland, including Bairnsdale, Sale, Morwell, Traralgon, Moe, Warragul, Leongatha, Churchill, and Wonthaggi. The LCHS 2023 Annual report identified recruiting, retaining, and building capacity in the workforce as a priority area. LCHS provides community-based health promotion programs, daily living and rehabilitation assistance, health checks and healthcare plans, and medical and nursing care. This case study explored the recruitment strategies of a nursing and allied health department at LCHS.

Recruitment and retention

Recruitment of skilled health professionals has, at times, been difficult for LCHS, who have explored multiple strategies to attract clinicians to Gippsland. In an attempt to attract experienced health professionals to Gippsland, LCHS sent delegates to recruitment fairs in New Zealand (NZ) and the United Kingdom (UK). The recruitment team offered positions to two health professionals following the NZ recruitment fair, from which one was successfully employed at LCHS; however, the recruitment process took over five months. The visa requirements, together with the registration process for health professionals, required LCHS to employ the professional in an alternative role initially while the visa and registrations were being processed:

> *"It was an organised recruitment fair where there were multiple organisations there, and people could just turn up and talk to any organisation about potential work."*

Figure 32: New Zealand Jobs Exhibition

Strategies to support migrants

After meeting a new staff member at the recruitment fair, the LCHS staff member felt an extra level of responsibility going above and beyond to ensure that the new employee felt safe and welcome to the area by offering them a variety of different accommodation options. It was also important to take into consideration the family situation of the new employee, which could add additional elements to the type and location of the accommodation required. In this instance, the LCHS staff member offered to accommodate the new staff member and their young son in her home, which gave them an added

layer of security and time to then find an appropriate family home. The first few days of arriving in the country and to Gippsland required someone to assist with the transition:

> "…one of the things I've raised is that someone should have the day off that first business day to get them a SIM card for their phone, their bank because they need all that to get a tax file number… they really need someone to take them to all those places on the first day."

It was also suggested that LCHS could put out a call to see if there was any staff who had a spare room that would be willing to have someone stay for a couple of weeks. However, this strategy has yet to be implemented. LCHS arranged for the new migrant to have access to a car, which helped them to be able to move around in a regional area:

> "We booked out one of our fleet cars so that they take it home at night, bring it back in the morning, it goes back into the pool and then they have it over the weekends. So outside business hours, they've got access to a car."

In addition to helping with accommodation and access to a work car, LCHS also paid for visas. As the new staff member was coming into a team leader position, the organisation organised a dinner with other team leaders outside of the work environment so that they could meet their colleagues and start to create social and professional networks. The organisation approached a local community cultural group and was able to pass on their contact details to the new staff member upon arrival:

> "We involve people in the community …from the same place they are from… I think that's important….she's now got those people, those contacts that she can ring or message."

The link with people in the community also ensured that the new migrant felt connected to the community with the hope that this would ensure they stay for an extended period of time in the area:

> "It's about finding how you can link people in to keep them because you want them to feel part of the community. I just wanted her to feel welcome and supported."

Due to the success of the accommodation and car support provided to new migrants, future migrants employed with LCHS will also be offered the same support. In addition, LCHS has encouraged flexible working arrangements as part of the settling-in period:

> "It's about trying to be flexible until they settle in properly. She leaves at three… picks up [her child], goes home, and just finishes her day until they're both settled in enough that they feel happy for the [child] to go into after-school care."

LCHS used an international recruitment agency to assist them with all the recruitment and visa processes, which took the administrative burden away from LCHS. Helping migrants to link with the community and regular communication were important strategies to assist with the transition into a regional area:

> "It's not just about them coming to work. It's about making them feel like this could be home."

Challenges faced

Once a migrant has commenced work at LCHS, they are required to do supernumerary clinical practice until their registrations can be fully endorsed by the Australian Health Professional Registration

Authority (AHPRA). This adds to the workload of existing health professionals who are required to act as mentors and to submit documentation to APHRA as proof of practice and clinical competency:

> *"We are having to provide a lot of supervision to get them registered, so they've got provisional registration with our AHPRA, and then they've got a work plan, and we have to supervise and support."*

Supervising provisionally approved professionals could reduce workload capacity by 25%, which could affect the workload of the whole team. Although there was a significant financial and time commitment to supporting a migrant employee, LCHS was grateful to have someone fill the position after it has been advertised for over three years with no interest. During the visa process, which could last for months, it was important to stay in regular communication with the new staff member and update them on how their application was progressing:

> *"I would have probably emailed once per month throughout the time and then, as it got closer, emailed more regularly just to keep them engaged and tell them little bits about what's going on in our program."*

Regular communication was important especially when recruiting professional health care workers is highly competitive. LCHS continues to compete with other healthcare organisations internationally in the skilled migrant workforce arena:

> *"There are 20 to 30 other organisations after the same people. So we need to be able to offer them something to make them want to come here."*

The recruitment fairs could be very cost-effective; at one fair, the LCHS staff came away with 100 contacts, and after following up with each one, they secured five positions. During the fair, LCHS provided interested people the opportunity to have an interview and even offered positions on the day, taking advantage of being in person. A staff member from the human resources office of the organisation helped with questions about working conditions and wages and understanding the processes required to migrate to Australia. Although there was an initial investment of staff time and travel costs for LCHS to attend the recruitment fairs in New Zealand and the UK, they have been very successful in recruiting skilled health professionals and will continue to be a recruitment strategy for the organisation.

SUMMARY OF BUSINESS CASE STUDIES

The above three case studies shed light on the decision to recruit migrants as part of an organisations' workforce, settlement support and retention of migrants in Gippsland, and organisations' challenges in recruiting and/or supporting migrants with their suggestions to the Government. The following is a summary of these aspects.

Decisions in recruiting migrant workforce

- The unreliable local labour supply pushed employers to recruit migrants already in Australia and/or from overseas.
- Using an international recruitment agency was one of the options.

- The nature of employment within each company shaped how each employer recruited their workforce.
  - With permanent positions, employers were committed to a long-term solution to labour shortages by sponsoring migrants to Gippsland so that they could apply for permanent residency after three years.
  - For seasonal work, employers preferred recruiting temporary visa holders, for example, backpackers.

Settlement support provided by employers and retention of migrants

- Settlement support was provided to migrants depending on the nature of recruitment.
  - Employers provided direct support to sponsored migrants in relation to support in relation to accommodation, training, public transport, food, and religious practice.
  - Spouses of sponsored migrants were provided support in finding employment.
  - Horticulture employers worked with the Harvest Trail program and the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, both of which were managed by MADEC, on settlement support for temporary visa holders.
  - Connected new migrants to local cultural groups.
  - Key retention factors identified by employers included employment stability, family and friends, and homeownership in regional Victoria.

Business challenges and/or suggestions to policymakers

- Complex migrant sponsorship processes required by Australian migration policies and regulations caused long delays. Cutting red tape in migration processes was suggested.
- The issue of a limited period of stay for migrant workers on some visas and/or from specific countries.
- Relatively high turnover and the cost of recruitment of temporary visa holders via the PALM scheme in the horticulture sector were emphasised as a critical challenge.
- Language barriers in the workforce and different food standards overseas were raised as a challenge.
- Requirements to do "supernumerary clinical practice" by the Australian Registration Authority (AHPRA) added to the workload of existing health professionals who are required to act as mentors.

The Gippsland Migration Project's networking component, embedded in Objectives 1, 3, and 4, aimed to identify potential opportunities for collaboration, establish a stakeholder network, and deepen the relationships across these stakeholders to support the implementation of Gippsland's migration attraction and retention strategy. While Phases 1 and 2 of this project helped the CERC research team identify potential opportunities for collaboration and establish a stakeholder network, Phase 3 contributed to deepening the relationships across the stakeholders to co-create guiding principles and implementation strategies. Phase 3 involved conducting three Gippsland migration direction workshops with community and industry stakeholders organised in May 2024. A total of 31 participants attended the stakeholder workshops.

Community stakeholder workshops

Two community workshops were organised to present the research findings and gather participant feedback on project findings to shape Gippsland's migration direction. All participants of engagement workshops and interview participants were invited to attend these community stakeholder workshops, with one being a hybrid workshop. In this hybrid workshop, the invited participants had an opportunity to participate either online or face-to-face.

Participants outlined that the research findings presented to them resonated with their own lived experiences. The participants provided some specific feedback on a Gippsland migration direction. Furthermore, the primary feedback was on how the findings of the Gippsland migration direction would be translated into practice and who would be responsible for what actions. This key feedback enabled the CERC research team to restructure an upcoming industry stakeholder workshop to focus discussion on key guiding principles, implementation strategies and responsible stakeholders for these strategies.

Industry stakeholder workshops

A hybrid industry stakeholder workshop was conducted with participants from state and federal department officials interested in and/or working on regional migration, business industry peak bodies, educational institutions, community organisations and/or service providers, and professionals with expertise in regional migration.

The primary focus of the discussion was to co-create a set of guiding principles to inform migration attraction and retention strategic plans. Implementation strategies and responsible institutions accompany these principles.

Guiding Principles and Implementation Strategies

The CERC research team consolidated feedback collected during the industry stakeholder workshop and drafted guiding principles, which were accompanied by their implementation strategies and suggested responsible institutions. The CERC team consulted the consolidated document detailing these guiding principles and strategies with the Advisory Group before sending it back to the workshop

participants for further feedback. A detailed table of the agreed-upon guiding principles with their implementation strategies and suggested responsible institutions is available in Appendix 5.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

Attraction and Retention of Regional Migration in Australia: A Scoping Review

Although some policy provisions and/or strategies to address labour shortages in regional Australia have been part of the Australian Government's efforts in the last decade or so, regional labour shortages remain an issue. It is, therefore, important for this scoping review to identify the primary contributing factors to the attraction and retention of migrants in regional Australia.

The data presented in this scoping review draws on 11 empirical studies in regional Australia, four of which employed a qualitative methodology, four used a quantitative methodology, and three studies used a mixed-methods approach.

The attraction factors, derived from the examined studies and reported in this paper, are at the intersection of employment and regional migration policies, low cost of living and/or affordable housing, being near family and friends, and both human and non-human relation features of regional areas. The retention factors highlighted by the examined studies are a positive experience at the workplace and/or employment satisfaction, participation in socio-cultural or religious activities, house ownership, and regionally focused education programs. Further, the reviewed papers pointed to the importance of the competing needs and aspirations of migrants' family members in retaining migrants in regional Australia.

The identified attraction and retention factors, as well as a consideration for the competing needs and aspirations of migrants' family members, are essential for regional migration policy. These two policy dimensions require a multipronged approach strategy in which state and non-state actors can play their part at all levels.

The literature review is under review by World Development:

My, S., Porter, J.E., Soldatenko, D., Miller, E.M & Abdelkader, A. (2024). Attraction and retention of regional migration in Australia: A scoping Review. Figshare. Preprint. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.27043957.v2

7. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 DISCUSSION ON MIGRATION ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

The Gippsland Migration Project encompassed two crucial interconnected components: Research and networking. The research component informed the networking component in the sense that the CERC research team identified participants for individual interviews, in-depth discussions, and engagement workshops. The rapport built with the research participants during the data collection phase led to the invitation of these participants to attend networking events where the CERC research team disseminated the research findings and co-created key guiding principles and implementation strategies with the event participants.

The research component is embedded in Objective 2, stated in Section 2.2, "*Project aim and objectives*". Objective 2 was to *"inform the vision and framework for the Gippsland migration attraction and retention plan."* The five data sets that were elaborated in Section 4, "*Research findings – Engagement phase"*, are crucial for Objective 2. These data sets were engagement workshop survey data, workshop qualitative data, in-depth interview data with migrants, stakeholder interview data, and organisational case studies. There were some similarities and differences between these data sets. The following subsections demonstrate these similarities and/or differences where relevant and provide possible explanations.

The research findings from different data sets will be discussed within the broader empirical data of regional migration attraction and retention in Australia, summarised in the *"Literature review summary"* in Section 6.

Migrant attraction to Gippsland

The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data of the five engagement workshops (Subsection 4.1, *"Quantitative data – Engagement workshop survey"* and Subsection 4.2, *"Qualitative data – Workshop qualitative data"*), plus those from the in-depth interviews/discussions with migrants (Subsection 4.3, *"Thematic analysis – Interviews with migrants"*), provide insight into the reasons why migrants moved to Gippsland.

In total, as shown in Figure 33[8] below, the engagement workshop quantitative data indicated nine motivations for migrants to move to Gippsland. Of these reasons, the top three were *"permanent residency purposes"*, *"marriage and/or family"*, and its *"physical landscape and/or view"*. These reasons are derived from a multiple-choice, multiple-answer question, so it is understood that there was no single reason for migrants to move to Gippsland but multiple interrelated reasons. These reasons were also found in the engagement workshops' qualitative data.

An example of the multiple interrelated reasons for coming to Gippsland is the case of relocating to Gippsland for retirement purposes. Some participants chose one town of Gippsland over the others as a retirement place because of its natural beauty and peacefulness, proximity to Melbourne, and

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[8] In the original questionnaire, there were only six multiple-choice choices, one of which was the *"Other"* category. A significant number of participants (58%) chose this category, so the researchers recoded these text responses to expand the number of choices to nine. The recoded categories are *"retirement"*, *"refugee purposes"*, *"desire to leave off Melbourne"*, and *"low cost of living and/or affordable housing"*. The *"marriage and/or family"* category is modified from the *"Close to extended family member (relatives)"* category.

easy access to medical services in that town. This implied that not every town of Gippsland has the same level of attractiveness in location, services, and surroundings.
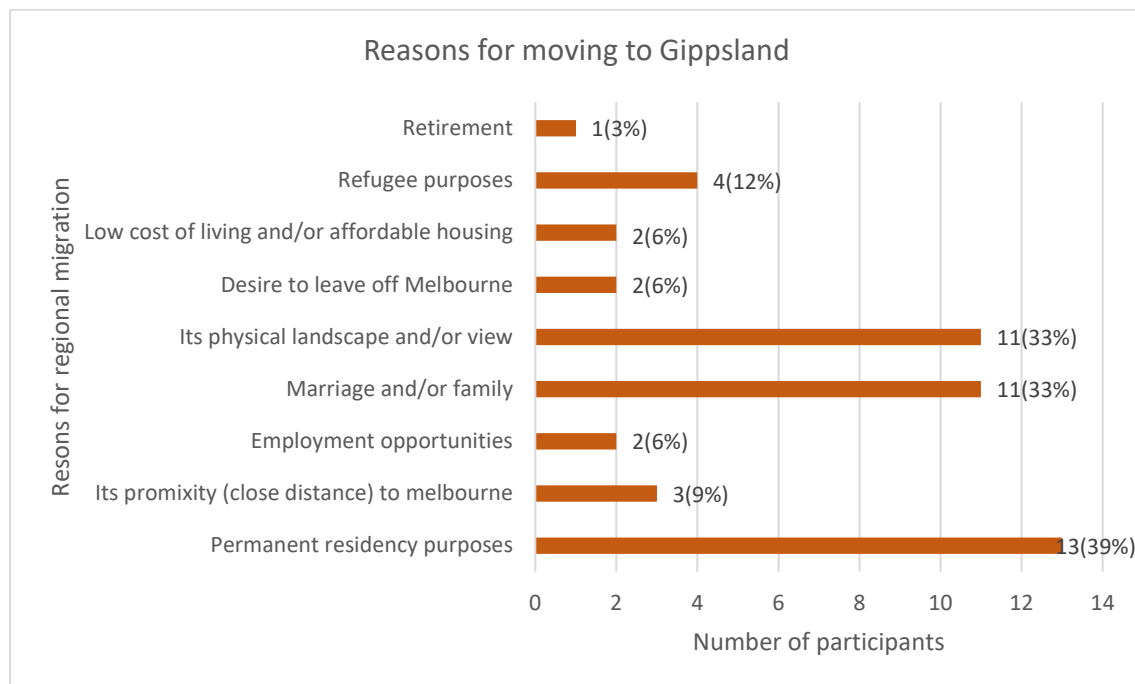
Figure 33: Reasons for moving to Gippsland

The two most reported attraction factors raised by the participants during focus group discussions were less traffic and crowdedness and Gippsland's natural beauty and peacefulness. When discussing traffic and crowdedness, the participants compared Gippsland with Melbourne and complained about the crowdedness and traffic congestion in Melbourne.

These two factors were also found in the individual interviews with migrants, which are discussed in Subsection 1.2, *"Stress-free and healthy lifestyles*." For example, one couple who recently moved to a small town in East Gippsland expressed their satisfaction with the Australian outdoor lifestyle interacting with nature in regional areas as follows:

> *"Coming from South Africa, we also have an outdoor lifestyle, and…this town offers the coast, the sea, good running tracks, good mountain bike areas. So, it is very much a part of our daily lifestyles with regards to mountain biking, running, the ocean, fishing, swimming and things like that. So, if you combine all the factors together, that is, what brought us towards this small town. It would have to be the lifestyle."*

The two most reported attraction factors are in line with the findings in the scoping review paper of 11 empirical studies on regional migration in Australia (see Section 6 for literature review summary). One of the four attraction factors found in this review paper is *"human and non-human relation features of regional areas"*. As will be discussed in the next subsection, these factors provided the participants with positive experiences, motivating them to continue their stay in Gippsland.

The participants interviewed in this research project also saw *"opportunities in regional areas"* (including securing employment or prospects of securing employment, relocation financial assistance,

the possibility of obtaining permanent residency, and affordable housing) as reasons to relocate to Gippsland (Minor theme 1.3, *"Opportunities in regional areas"*).

Decisions to stay in Gippsland or relocate within and/or from Gippsland

The discussion of the decisions to stay in Gippsland or relocate within and/or from Gippsland also draws on the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data of the five engagement workshops (Subsection 4.1, *"Quantitative data – Engagement workshop survey"* and Subsection 4.2, *"Qualitative data – Workshop qualitative data"*), plus those from the in-depth interviews/discussions with migrants (Subsection 4.3, *"Thematic analysis – Interviews with migrants"*), and findings in a scoping review paper, summarised in Section 6.

In Subsection 4.1 (Page 21), the four domains that provided a strong indication of migrant retention were the length of stay, living arrangements, current visa status, and thoughts about moving to metropolitan areas. The quantitative data of these four domains indicated a strong possibility of migrant retention.

Subsection 4.1 also discusses the factors that would make the participants consider Gippsland a second home. These factors are considered stronger retention factors that encouraged migrants to stay in Gippsland. The participants' responses clearly indicate that the subjective feeling of belonging to the community was as crucial as the community's positive attitudes and behaviour toward migrants (63% vs 57%, shown in Figure 25).

Only one-fifth of the engagement workshop participants regarded the feeling of belonging in the workplace as a reason to continue their stay in Gippsland (Figure 25). This figure reflects the fact that only 20% of the participants were employed, either full-time, part-time, or casual (Figure 14), meaning that the retention factors tend to depend on the participants' life courses.

The workshop's qualitative data explained the two primary retention factors. The subjective feeling of belonging to the community was derived from the participants' positive experiences with the community people (e.g., friendliness and interconnectedness) and Gippsland's natural beauty and peacefulness. Safety and less traffic and crowdedness also contributed to these positive experiences. One-fifth of the participants in the survey represented this non-human aspect that contributed to the participants' positive experiences (see Figure 25). These positive experiences are encapsulated in the notion of *"stress-free and healthy lifestyles".*

The interview data also illuminated that *"securing employment"* was a key factor in retaining the participants in Gippsland (Minor theme 2.1). Employment is more than just an economic matter but self-worth; without employment may lead to the deterioration of migrants' mental health and/or out-migration to metropolitan areas. This aspect aligns with one of the four retention factors, *"A positive workplace experience and/or employment satisfaction",* found in the scoping review paper (Appendix 6).

The notion of *"cultural practice and safety"* was key to retaining migrants or a potential factor for them to leave Gippsland (Minor theme 4.2). Cultural practice takes different forms, crucial to whole family members. Although an opportunity to practice one's culture was desirable, it was not always possible for some ethnic communities in Gippsland because the communities were very small. Cultural safety is essential, whether having an opportunity to practice one's culture or not. Without an opportunity to practice one's culture, the absence of cultural safety may force migrants to leave

Gippsland. The importance of cultural practice and safety accords with the *"participation in socio-cultural or religious activities"* found as one of the four retention factors in the scoping review paper.

The scoping review emphasised *"house ownership"* and *"regionally focused education programs"* as two other retention factors. Some participants in the engagement workshop and individual interviews also highlighted home ownership, among other important retention factors.

In a similar vein, a regional meats work business owner whose most of his sponsored employees with migrant backgrounds continued to work for his company and stay in regional Victoria after getting permanent residency observed that employment stability, family and friends, and homeownership were key retention factors.

Examining the findings from different types of data suggested that all retention factors are inextricably linked. It also indicated that the retention of migrants in Gippsland is not just about primary visa holders but all family members. The scoping review paper also demonstrated the importance of considering the competing needs and aspirations of migrants' family members in retaining migrants in regional Australia.

Settlement-related information and services in Gippsland

The stakeholder interview data identified a federally funded settlement-related program called the Settlement Engagement Transition Support Program (SETS) in Gippsland. This program had been managed by the Gippsland Multicultural Services (GMS) and Anglicare Victoria before it was transferred to the Latrobe Community Health Services (LCHS).

The SETS program collaborated with other service providers to support eligible migrants by co-case managing and referring them to other service providers. An interview with a professional working with migrants suggested that the program benefited some migrants and/or refugees in a positive way. However, the SETS program was constrained by the eligibility criteria of other service providers.

In addition to the SETS program, there were some formal or informal multicultural friendship groups in Gippsland. They were the Moe Multicultural Friendship Group, Warragul Multicultural Friendship Group, Wonthaggi Multicultural Women's Group, and International Women's Group. Participants found these groups very supportive and made them feel connected to the community.

Besides the above support, there used to be the Community Employment Connectors (CEC) program run by LCSH and funded by the state government. Unfortunately, it was not continued by the state government.

Regarding settlement-related information, as indicated in Figure 18 from the workshop quantitative data, the information mainly came from informal sources, which was doing own research and through friends and/or family. Further, organisations providing multicultural services were a formal source of information for the participants.

Some of the interview participants who migrated to Gippsland through employment received settlement support from their employers. This included relocation costs and/or accommodation arrangements, connecting them to local real estate to find accommodation, finding employment for their spouses, and providing professional support (Minor theme 5.2). The meat industry case study illustrates this clearly.

Challenges faced by migrants in Gippsland

Various data sets in this report revealed some common challenges faced by migrants. The interview data with migrants indicated that many participants faced hardship at the beginning of their migration journey in Gippsland. This *"hard beginning"* included the issue of no or minimal settlement support or being unaware of such support, which was often interrelated to a lack of or no social connection (Minor theme 1.1).

According to the interview data, some married participants and their partners faced difficulties in securing appropriate employment (Major Theme 2, *"Road to work"*). Securing employment was not easy for the participants, with some facing more challenges than others, except for those who moved to Gippsland through employment or employer sponsorship.

The interview data also indicated that other challenges clustered under Major Theme 3 (Assessing the side road) included *"transport difficulties," "access to school," "sourcing food," "access to healthcare,"* and *"finding appropriate housing".* The *"transport difficulties"* challenge involved the infrequency of bus and/or train services, which was considered a challenge by the participants who did not own a car. The stakeholder interview participants also observed this problem.

The interview data pointed to the existence of the issue of *"cultural practice and safety".* While some interview participants and most workshop participants had opportunities to practise their culture and felt belonging to the community, others raised the issue of cultural safety. Cultural safety implies inclusiveness, meaning that local people embrace people with a multicultural background so that they feel safe, not judged, welcome, and respected. As discussed in interviews with migrants, Minor theme 4.2, *"Cultural practice and safety,"* with findings also confirmed in some recounts from stakeholder interviews, some migrant participants received racial comments.

Some interview and workshop participants faced problems with English proficiency, ranging from having an accent to comprehension. The stakeholder participants who worked with migrants and/or refugees also raised this issue, adding that it was compounded by English language barriers and low-quality on-the-phone interpretation services. Two of the organisational business case studies indicated this challenge, their commitment, and approaches to address it. The stakeholder participants raised the issue of service coordination for multicultural communities, which required a central coordinating hub.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a total of five identified recommendations for the Gippsland Migration Project. The following recommendations are based on the findings of this report:

1. Research the benefits and outcomes from existing **Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)** and consider the development of a Gippsland DAMA.
   a) Through the Gippsland Regional Partnership, raise awareness among regional stakeholders in Gippsland about the need for and benefits of a DAMA.
   b) Leverage state and federal government in reducing barriers to the implementation and flexibility of a Gippsland DAMA.

2. Consider the **development of a single guiding agency** to steer the Gippsland Migration Strategy.
   a) Undertake further research to understand who the most appropriate agency may be to steer the strategy.
3. Periodically review the developed **guiding principles** for the Gippsland Migration Strategy.
   a) Review of the guiding principles by key stakeholders including future migrants to regional Victoria, community organisations including education institutions, business entities, industry peak bodies, Gippsland Regional Partnership, and local, state, and federal government.
   b) Develop an implementation strategy for the **Migrant Recruitment and Retention Charter** to disseminate the key findings of the Project.
   c) The Charter was designed as a set of overarching values and principles to inform future implementation strategies.

A) Ensure any strategic work relating to **migrants in Gippsland** includes opportunities for them to be **included in co-design**.
   a) Work in partnership with migrants to create solutions and ensure their voice is represented within decision-making and planning.

8. LIMITATIONS

There were limitations related to this evaluation that must be considered. These included:

1. It was essential to ensure that the findings were representative of the diversity of the Gippsland region by speaking with migrants and key stakeholders from all six of the Gippsland local government areas. All efforts were undertaken to ensure this diversity of participants could be met across the wide geographic region; however, the generalisability of results may not have been entirely achieved.

2. Engagement with community groups, agencies and migrant organisations was fundamental to this research project. All efforts were undertaken to engage with a cross-section of people with experience with employing migrants, supporting migrants moving to Gippsland, and migrants' lived experience of moving to a regional area. This process may have been hindered by a lack of response from some stakeholders. However, the research team believe an appropriate cross-section was achieved.

3. Representing a diverse range of industries and employers was essential to understanding the benefits and barriers faced by this population. Due to the vastness of industries currently operating within Gippsland, the research team decided upon three case studies of organisations within three different sectors. Whilst findings may not be generalised, the research team believe the findings may be representable of various other industries within Gippsland.

4. All efforts were maintained to represent a diverse range of migrants of various ages, circumstances, employment, cultural, and family backgrounds. Participants were recruited broadly from various multicultural groups, institutions, education providers, and community centres; however, the findings are only representative of those who responded to the invitation.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation is considered to present a credible assessment of the project.

9. METHODOLOGY

9.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The approach of the CERC to this research was informed by a Participatory Evaluation and Co-Design Framework.

Participatory evaluation

A participatory evaluation framework puts people from the community and those delivering the programs, projects and services at the centre of the evaluation. Participatory evaluation is a distinctive approach based on the following principles:

- That evaluation should be a co-designed, collaborative partnership through 360° stakeholder input, including project participants and project funders;
- That integral to evaluation is an evaluation capacity-building focus within and across projects;
- That evaluation is a cyclical and iterative process embedded in projects from project design to program assessment;
- That evaluation adopts a learning, improvement and strengths-based approach;
- That evaluation supports innovation, accepting that projects will learn and evolve;
- That evaluation contributes to the creation of a culture of evaluation and evaluative thinking;
- That there is no one or preferred data collection method rather the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods will be tailored to the information needs of each project.

Co-design

Co-design is a process and approach that is about working with people to create 'interventions, services and programs which will work in the context of their lives and will reflect their own values and goals'[9]. Co-design can be done in many ways but is about collaborative engagement that is bottom-up, creative, and enables a wide range of people to participate and importantly steer decisions and outcomes. Co-design is not a consultation process but a partnership approach where 'end-users' actively define and shape strategies and outcomes. The role of the 'expert' is to facilitate this process.

9.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This Gippsland Migration Project utilised a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed as described below.

Quantitative data

Scoping workshops were undertaken in August 2023 to identify levels of commitment from stakeholders in developing and implementing migration recruitment and retention in Gippsland. Furthermore, five engagement workshops were also conducted between October to December 2023 to understand migrants' motivations to move to and remain in Gippsland. Workshop sessions included a project survey which utilised a combination of multiple choice, Likert scale and open-ended

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[9] VCOSS (2015). Walk alongside: *Co-designing social initiatives with people experiencing vulnerabilities*. V. C. o. S. Service. Melbourne.

questions. The survey was administered during the workshop events and later collated by the CERC evaluation team, who encoded responses in Qualtrics.

The survey design:

- Allowed for the collection of information from a defined group of stakeholders and participants.
- Enabled a large amount of data to be collected quickly.

Qualitative data

Throughout scoping and engagement workshops, qualitative data were gathered, including brainstorming activities, discussion and participant notes, which were analysed using a content analysis approach, aiming to ascertain a deeper understanding of the migration attraction and retention strategies and barriers outlined by participants. The desktop review of government websites and action plans provided further detail on the commitment and implementation of strategies within Gippsland.

Individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were also undertaken from October 2023 to February 2024 with migrants who migrated to Gippsland, stakeholders who worked with/provided support services to migrants, and business owners who employed migrants to explore the lived experience of these individuals surrounding their experience with migration support, attraction, and retention.

Semi-structured interview questions were culturally sensitive and designed to guide the researcher to capture all desired information while providing flexibility for the participant to elaborate on their experience (see Appendix 5).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)[10] for analysis and reporting. A content and thematic analysis technique was used for the qualitative data with findings presented under theme headings together with participant quotes. The thematic analysis utilised Braun and Clarke's six-step process, which included familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and producing the report (Figure 35)[11].

As qualitative analysis is an inductive process, some interpretation of the data was required to create the thematic map. It was actively acknowledged that the researcher's interpretations would inform the results of this study, hence, any prior conceptions of the topic were reflexively bracketed to the best of the researcher's abilities[12].

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[10] Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (2023). (Version 29) [Computer Software]. https://www.ibm.com/spss
[11] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd
[12] Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 15(2), 219-234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

Step 1 • Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down identical ideas

Step 2 • Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashon across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code

Step 3 • Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all relevant data to each potential theme

Step 4 • Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis

Step 5 • Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme

Step 6 • The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Figure 34: Six-step thematic analysis

10. ETHICAL APPROVAL AND PRACTICE

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Federation University aims to promote and support responsible research practices by providing resources and guidance to our researchers. We aim to maintain a strong research culture which incorporates:

- Honesty and integrity;

- Respect for human research participants, animals and the environment;

- Respect for the resources used to conduct research;

- Appropriate acknowledgement of contributors to research; and

- Responsible communication of research findings.

Human Research and Ethics applications: *Development of a network to support Gippsland's migration strategy (Approval number: 2023-152)* was approved by the Federation University Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 3) prior to data collection and analysis. Participant anonymity was maintained by removing any identifiable information from the evaluation.

11. ABBREVIATIONS

AHPRA   Australian Health Professional Registration Authority

BRH   Bairnsdale Regional Health

CALD   Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

CEC   Community Employment Connector

CERC   Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre

CMY   Centre for Multicultural Youth

DAICEG   Disability Access and Inclusion Community Engagement

DAIP   Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

DAMA   Designated Area Migration Agreement

DAIP   Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

DASIP   Diversity Access and Social Inclusion

DEWR   Department of Employment and Workforce Relations

DJSIR   Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

ESL   English as a Second Language

GEAP   Gender Equality Action Plan

GEST   Gippsland Employment Skills Training

GMS	Gippsland Multicultural Services
GRP	Gippsland Regional Partnership
GTLC	Gippsland Trade and Labour Council
GV	Goulbourn Valley
IWG	International Women's Group
L2P	Learners to P-Plates Program
LCHS	Latrobe Community Health Services
LLEN	Learn Local Education Network
LMT	Labour Marketing Testing
MFG	Multicultural Friendship Group
MRC	Migration Resource Centre
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility
PCA	Personal Care Assistant
RCB	Regional Certifying Body
RDA	Regional Development Australia
RSMS	Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme
SAF	Skilling Australians Fund
SAIG	Social Inclusion Action Group
SETS	Settlement Engagement and Transition Support
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
TOR	Terms of Reference
TSS	Temporary Skill Shortage
TSMIT	Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold
VIT	Victorian Institute of Teaching
WAIAG	Wellington Access and Inclusive Advisory Group

12. LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES

TABLES

13. APPENDICES
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COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION
& RESEARCH CENTRE (CERC)

GIPPSLAND MIGRANT RECRUITMENT & RETENTION CHARTER

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Federation University | Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre (CERC)

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS GIPPSLAND

Acknowledgements

The Charter

This Charter is a commitment to shared values and principles for the recruitment and retention of Migrants in Gippsland. The Charter provides its supporters with a clear outline of strategies and approaches suggested by all those that participated in the development of the Charter through the voices of Migrants.

The Regional Partnership Gippsland

The Gippsland Regional Partnership is one of nine established by the Victorian government in 2016 in recognition that the way to understand the challenges and opportunities of a region is through local communities. Gippsland Regional Partnership is made up of community and business leaders, and senior local and state government officers. The role of the Partnership is to engage with communities and local stakeholders to identify priorities and develop collaborative solutions to local problems. The Charter is the result of identifying the need to address regional workforce challenges and look for opportunities to enhance recruitment and retention across Gippsland, while also enhancing welcoming and culturally safe community activities.

Before we start

The Charter acknowledges the members of the Regional Partnership who are committed to working with the community to find sustainable solutions to address regional workforce challenges. It recognises the Migrants who live and work in Gippsland who generously shared their lived experiences and lessons learnt about transitioning to a regional community. Their commitment to the process and the goal of finding solution-focused approaches is to be commended. The Charter also acknowledges the businesses and organisations who shared their learnings of employing a migrant workforce highlighting the benefits to their companies and to the local communities.

The Charter builds upon the insights provided by the people who live, work and study in Gippsland and who took part in the many workshops, interviews, and data collection to inform the development and co-design of the Charter.

How was the Charter created?

The Charter was co-designed through a series of workshops, individual interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussions and workshop activities. There were three phases in the development of the Charter. Phase 1 incorporated a scoping workshop to explore the issues and inform the development of a shared vision and understanding of the complexities of Migrants in regional Victoria. A comprehensive review of the current literature was conducted to inform project activities and add to the body of knowledge on the topic. Phase 2 involved engagement with key stakeholders, local businesses, agencies, support service providers, local and state government staff, and regionally based migrants to inform the direction of the project. Phase 3 incorporated a series of co-design workshops to build upon the findings of the other two phases and to develop a set of guiding principles from each core stakeholder group, which later informed the drafting of the 6 guiding principles of the Charter.

Figure 1. Project phases.
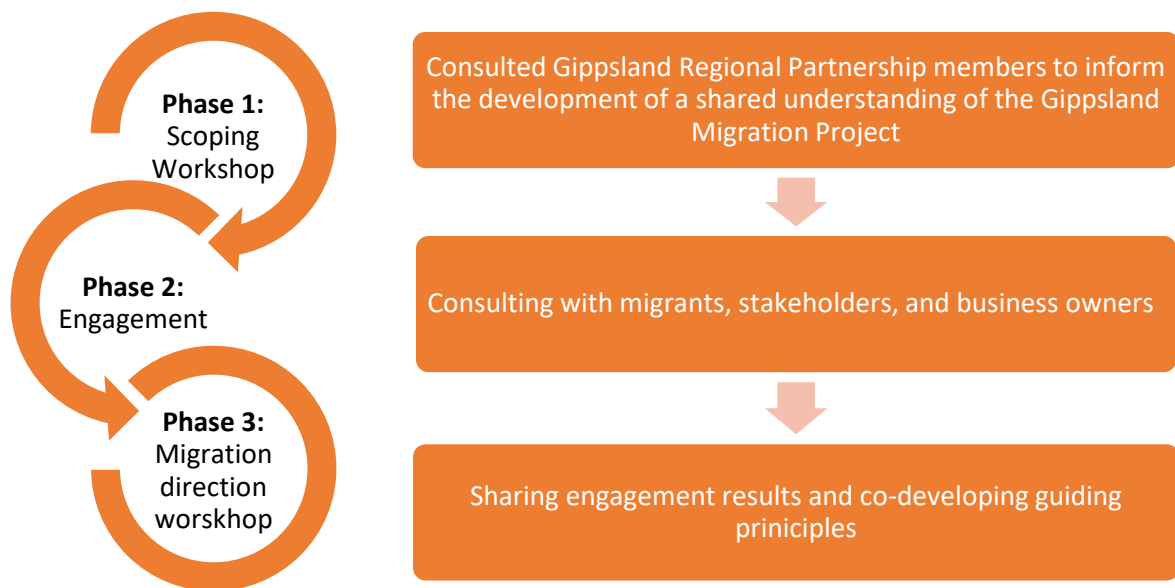
Charter Values

The core values of Migrant recruitment and retention in Gippsland were developed as part of the co-design workshops and are representative of the voices of the participants. The values should be a way in which organisations engage with Migrants and develop their recruitment and retention implementation strategies. The Charter values include:

Inclusion

- Create inclusive workplaces, communities, and regional towns.

Awareness

- Create awareness of the benefits of Migrants to businesses and communities.

Support

- Provide support for Migrants and the Migrant service sector.

Welcoming

- Be welcoming to Migrants and their families.

Orientation

- Create resources to ensure Migrants are orientated to work, town and community.

Opportunity

- Provide opportunities for Migrants to network, live and succeed in regional areas.
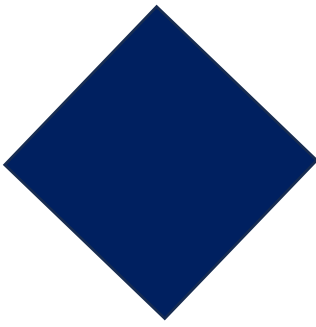
Working in partnership.

There were six key stakeholder groups identified that work together to support Migrants to transition to regional areas. It is through understanding the roles and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders that we begin to develop effective and sustainable support services and mechanisms to improve the lives of Migrants and regional communities. The Migrant recruitment and retention model outlines how each of the six stakeholders reduces barriers and enhances opportunities for Migrants.

Figure 2 Stakeholder Model
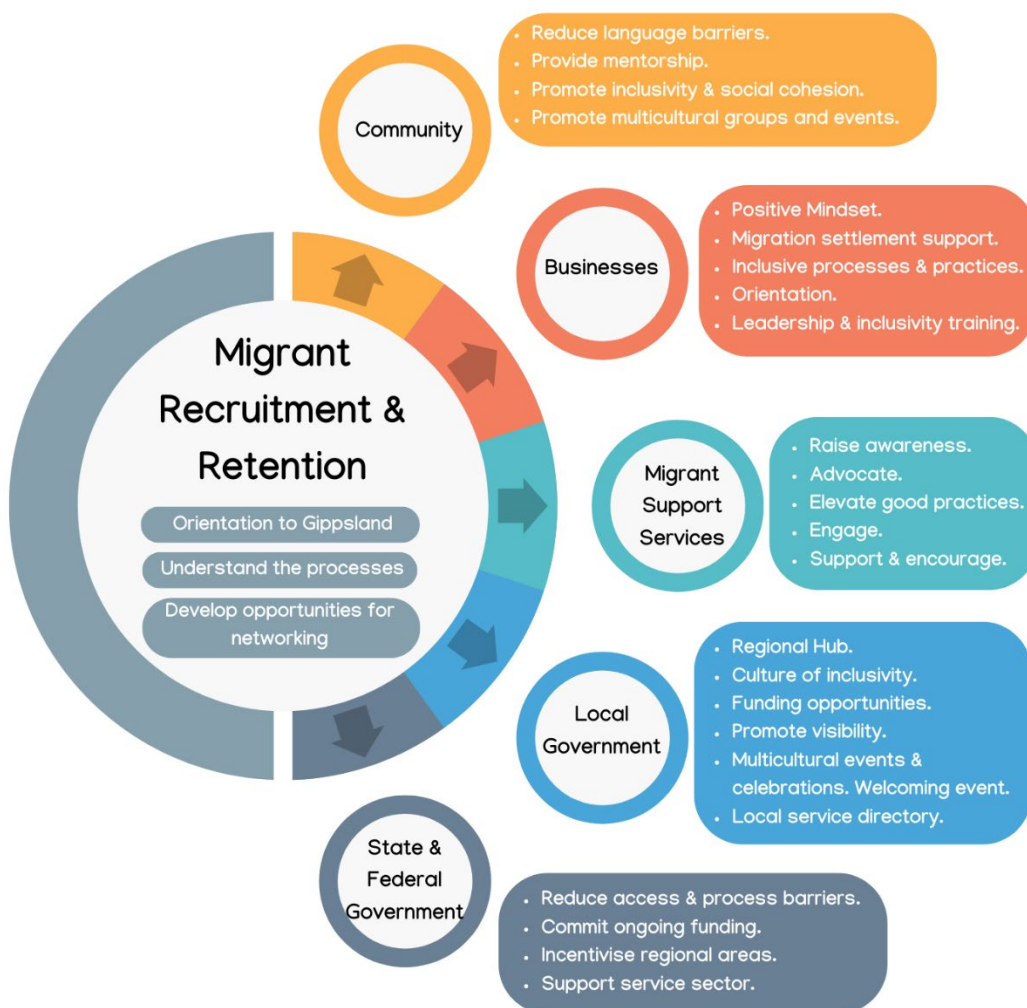
The framing of the Charter.

The Charter was informed by the findings of a scope of work that included individual interview, workshops, case studies and stakeholder engagement. Figure 3 outlines the data sets that informed the Charter.

Figure 3. Data sets

Interviewed 21 Migrants across five Shires	Organised five engagement workshops with 37 Migrants
Conducted stakeholder interviews with ten individuals	Conducted three organisational case study interviews with businesses

Phase 2 Engagement
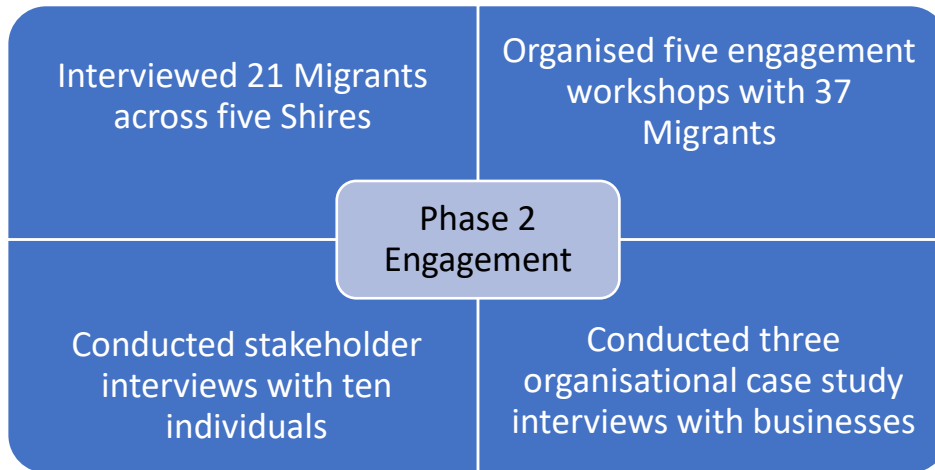
Workshop data produced a set of guiding principles for each of the stakeholder groups using co-design and co-creation techniques and workshop activities. The set of principles were then crafted into the higher level six main guiding principles that are presented in the following table. It was deemed important to not only develop a set of guiding principles but to outline implementation strategies and allocate responsibility for delivery. The following key provides a visual representation of the key stakeholder group responsible for the implementation of each Migrant recruitment and retention principle.

Figure 4 Stakeholder responsibility key

Icon	Key	Icon	Key
	Migrants		Migrant Support Services
	Businesses		Local Government
	Community		State & Federal Government

Migrant Recruitment and Retention Guiding Principles		
Guiding Principles	**Implementation strategies**	**Responsibility**
1. Develop and maintain a positive mindset toward people from migrant backgrounds.	1.1 Employers remain open to hiring entry-level staff from migrant backgrounds.	
	1.2 Education for employers on the benefits of hiring people from migrant backgrounds for their businesses.	
	1.3 Awareness campaign to showcase positive benefits of a diverse and multicultural regional community.	
2. Promote inclusivity/social cohesion and awareness of diverse communities.	2.1 Provide funding opportunities to regional migrant communities to implement initiatives for their members to promote social inclusion.	
	2.2 Local governments extend the scope of their existing "Disability Access and Inclusion Plan" to include social inclusion, ensuring migrants benefit from local government programs and services.	
	2.3 Organise multicultural regional events and celebrations, promote visibility of multicultural communities.	
	2.4 Employers enhance inclusive organisational processes and practices and inclusivity training.	
	2. 5 Run information sessions, including information linked to Centrelink, health systems and local health services.	
	2.6 Create a local service directory for regional migrants and new arrivals.	
3. Reduce language barriers for people from migrant backgrounds.	3. 1 Develop an orientation program about regional areas to be given to migrants before and or upon arrival including "Welcome to Australia", "Workplace Migrant Orientation".	
	3.2 Provide regional mentorship to people from migrant backgrounds.	
	3.3 Education providers provide English training locally, opportunities for regional migrants to attend formal language courses.	
	3.4 Run a multicultural community ambassador program to support regional migrants.	
	3.5 Support regional migrants and employers understand the visa information, and processes.	

4. Develop opportunities for broader community networking and connection.	4.1 Local governments introduce initiatives to foster connections between relevant stakeholders in their local areas.	
	4.2 Appoint a community connection support worker to work on migration matters.	
	4.3 Provide funding opportunities to regional migrant communities and migrant support services.	
	4.4 Establish a multicultural regional hub for migration settlement support.	
5. Elevate and build upon good practices.	5. 1 Local government has a shared vision and objectives to attract and retain migrants for Gippsland.	
	5.2 Advocate for regional migration reforms to simplify sponsorship processes and reduce red tape and costs to encourage and incentivise Small to Medium Employers to recruit and/or sponsor migrant workers.	
	5.3 Review and/or pilot regional migration good practices.	
6. Incentivise migrants to settle in regional areas.	6.1 Provide incentives to businesses to sponsor regional migrants and offer migration settlement support.	
	6.2 Businesses develop a strategic plan with particular attention to recruitment and retention of regional migrants.	
	6.3 Incentivise migrants to settle in regional areas via relaxing visa requirements and policy changes at all levels of government.	
	6.4 Commit ongoing funding to the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program to incentivise the support service sector.	

What is the Charter and who is it for?

The Charter was developed for all stakeholders who are engaging in exploring Migrants as a solution to meet current and future workforce needs in regional Gippsland. The Charter provides a practical guide to inform organisational Migrant policies and procedures.

It gives voice to community aspirations and guides stakeholders in planning and delivering Migrant recruitment and retention strategies. It uses a process of co-design that informs and actively engages with individuals, organisations, communities, and Migrants.

Committing to the Migrant Recruitment and Retention Charter.

The Charter requires the commitment of communities, organisations, and government to work collaboratively towards a sustainable and supportive Migrant strategic implementation plan.

Why the Charter matters to Gippsland.

The Charter is the first step towards finding sustainable workforce solutions for regional Gippsland incorporating a Migrant workforce. The Charter highlights the need for a collaborative approach to supporting Migrants to transition to a regional area and acknowledges the importance of the development of the guiding principles the role they play in informing change. The Charter is designed to be a living document and should be reviewed and updated to reflect the changes in the governmental policy and Migration rule and regulations. Gippsland will benefit from the inclusion of Migrants enhancing the diversity and richness of the community.
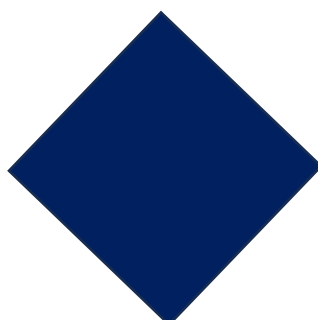
Terms of Reference

Advisory Group – Migrant project

Purpose of Advisory Group

To provide support and advise to the project team to facilitate data that will inform community engagement around the need for and objectives of a migration strategic plan development.

Functions of Advisory Group

1. Meet regularly to discuss the project plan and outputs.
2. Assist with the development of project objectives and deliverables.
3. Provide advice and support at each stage of the project.
4. Assist with participant recruitment.
5. Link to the Regional Partnership.

Role and responsibilities of Lead

1. Preside as Chairperson.
2. Organise advisory group meeting schedule.
3. Certify that the meeting occurred and log attendance.
4. Record and distribution of meeting minutes.
5. Present reports and recommendations on project progress as required.
6. Reflect and review of project deliverables and approaches.

Roles and responsibilities of members

Committee members are expected to:

1. Work together to deliver on the purpose.
2. Commit to attending Advisory Group meetings.
3. Work together, share learnings, collaborate.
4. Provide strategic advice, feedback and approval of activities.
5. Assist in delivery of collaborative activities.
6. Ensure that all research activities are undertaken in accordance with the approved ethics application.
7. Support project delivery between meetings by working to agreed deadlines on relevant tasks.
8. Provide expert advice in relation to project.

Membership

The core membership will comprise CERC project team (Joanne Porter and Sambath My), Regional Development Victoria (Elspeth Kiddell, Nicala Oakley), Gippsland Regional Partnership (Stephen Angus, Farhat Firdous, Therese Tierney, and Sara Lawless).

Migration Direction Worksop Series
Development of a network to support Gippsland's migration strategy

Aim: The workshop series will bring relevant stakeholders together to shape Gippsland's migration ambitions and direction.

Expected outcomes: At the end of each workshop, the workshop participants will agree on common strategies and next steps for Gippsland's future migration in the next five years. These strategies and next steps will serve two objectives. First, these will be included in the research report of the Gippsland Migration project. Second, the participants will be aware of their roles in supporting existing and future migrants in Gippsland.

Participants: In collaboration with the Gippsland Regional Partnership, CERC will organise three migration strategic direction workshops as follows:

- **Community stakeholders**: all in-depth interview/discussion participants will be invited to attend this community stakeholder workshop.
- **Industry stakeholders**: the participants will be (1) the research participants of the organisational case study interviews, (2) business entities from different sectors, and (3) professionals who provide support and/or services, including multicultural services, to migrants.
- **Gippsland Regional Partnership**: the participants are the members of the Partnership.
Note: The participant list for each workshop will be drafted and sent to the Advisory Group for feedback.

Workshop process: *Findings from the first phase of the project will be presented and will inform the workshop discussion and activities. The participants will also have an opportunity to provide future comments after each workshop if necessary.*

Our reasoning: Effective and actionable recommendations need to draw on best practices in industry migration and aim to address key challenges faced by migrants in regional areas.

Process: We propose that each workshop has two steps as follows:

Sharing insights from empirical and secondary data → Actional recommendations for different types of stakeholders:

-Businesses

-Community organisations

-Local governments

-State and Federal Governments

Figure 1: Workshop process

Workshop detailed process:

- **STEP 1: Sharing key insights learned from empirical and secondary data.**
  - o Sharing of Gippsland migration research findings by focusing on key challenges faced by migrants, migrants' positive experiences with their employers and/or other services, and their suggestions for relevant stakeholders.
  - o Sharing of empirical data on regional migration in Australia found in our literature review paper by paying attention to attraction and retention factors and key issues faced by migrants.
- **STEP 2: Community stakeholders**. Ask them to answer four questions:
  - o Have these findings captured your experiences as migrants?
  - o Is there anything else you want to add?[13]
  - o What should be in place to support migrants? This question will focus on:
    - ▪ Roles of a business entity
    - ▪ Roles of community organisations
    - ▪ Roles of local governments
    - ▪ Roles of state and federal governments
  - o What are you personally willing to commit to?
- **STEP 2: Industry stakeholders and Gippsland Regional Partnership**. Ask them to answer four questions:
    - ▪ How can these findings inform/support a migrant workforce?
    - ▪ How can you leverage these findings to provide culturally appropriate services to migrants?
    - ▪ What should be in place to support the recruitment and retention of migrants? This question will focus on:
      - • Roles and responsibilities as a business entity
      - • Roles of Gippsland Regional Partnership
      - • Roles of community organisations
      - • Roles of local governments
      - • Roles of state and federal governments
    - ▪ What are you personally willing to commit to?

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[13] For this question, the research team will provide some level of anonymity to encourage people to talk freely without fear.

Principal Researcher:	Professor Joanne Porter
Co-Researcher/s[14]:	Dr Daria Soldatenko Megan Simic Nicole Coombs Elizabeth Miller Dr Sambath My
School/Section:	**Collaborative Evaluation and Research Centre (CERC)**
Project Number:	2023-152
Project Title:	**Development of a network to support Gippsland's migration strategy.**
For the period:	20/09/2023 to 20/09/2028

Quote the Project No: 2023-152 in all correspondence regarding this application.

Approval has been granted to undertake this project in accordance with the proposal submitted for the period listed above.

Please note: It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure the Ethics Office is contacted immediately regarding any proposed change or any serious or unexpected adverse effect on participants during the life of this project.

In Addition: Maintaining Ethics Approval is contingent upon adherence to all Standard Conditions of Approval as listed on the final page of this notification.

COMPLIANCE REPORTING DATES TO HREC:
Annual project report:
20 September 2024
20 September 2025
20 September 2026
20 September 2027

Final project report: 20 October 2028

The combined annual/final report template is available at:
HREC Forms

Fiona Koop
Coordinator, Research Ethics

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[14] Project staff were added to the original ethics application, approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Staff additions included Luis Antonio T. Hualda, Cath Wilson, Dr Samuel Zhang and Dr Amany Abdelkader. Modification of the consent form was also undertaken and subsequently approved by the HREC.

20 September 2023

<u>STANDARD CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL</u>

1. Conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal required by the HREC.

2. Advise (email: research.ethics@federation.edu.au) immediately of any complaints or other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project.

3. Where approval has been given subject to the submission of copies of documents such as letters of support or approvals from third parties, these are to be provided to the Ethics Office prior to research commencing at each relevant location.

Submission for approval of amendments to the approved project before implementing such changes. A combined amendment template covering the following is available on the HRE website:https://federation.edu.au/research/support-for-students-and-staff/ethics/human-ethics/human-ethics3

- Request for Amendments
- Request for Extension. Note: Extensions cannot be granted retrospectively.
- Changes to Personnel

4. Annual Progress reports on the anniversary of the approval date and a Final report within a month of completion of the project are to be submitted by the due date each year for the project to have continuing approval.

5. If, for any reason, the project does not proceed or is discontinued, advise the Committee by completing the Final report form.

6. Notify the Ethics Office of any changes in contact details including address, phone number and email address for any member of the research team.

7. The HREC may conduct random audits and / or require additional reports concerning the research project as part of the requirements for monitoring, as set out in the National statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Failure to comply with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* 2007 (Updated 2018) and with the conditions of approval will result in suspension or withdrawal of approval.

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions for migrants:

1. Tell me about your experience of migrating to Gippsland.

2. What were your hopes or expectations for your new life here? Were those expectations met? Why or why not?

3. What kind of support did you receive when you first came to Gippsland? What kind of continuing support do you receive? What other support do you need now and/or in the future?

4. If someone you knew was planning on moving to Gippsland, what advice would you give them?

5. Have you ever thought about leaving to live in a metropolitan city? Why? Why not?

6. What would make you consider Gippsland your second home?

7. What advice would you give to policymakers to assist future migrants?

Interview questions for stakeholder participants:

1. Tell me about your experience of working with migrants and/or refugees in Gippsland.

2. What were their hopes or expectations for their new life here? Were those expectations met? Why or why not?

3. What kind of support did you provide to them when you first came to Gippsland? What kind of continuing support do you provide to them now? What other support do you think they would need in the future?

4. If someone you knew was planning on moving to Gippsland, what advice would you give them?

5. What do you think would make them consider Gippsland their second home?

6. What advice would you give to policymakers to assist future migrants?

Interview questions for organisational case study participants:

1. Tell me about your experience of recruiting and/or sponsoring migrants.
   – What motivated you to recruit migrants into your workforce?
   – How big is the migrant workforce in your organisation? Women and men?
   – Recruitment and/or sponsoring process? Strategies?
   – How long are they tied to your organisation?

2. What settlement support has your organisation provided to new staff members with migrant backgrounds, their spouses, and their children?

3. What are some of the challenges in recruiting and/or sponsoring migrants?

4. Does your organisation consider sponsoring migrants into your workforce? Why or why not?

5. What should be in place for facilitating the recruitment of and/or sponsoring migrants into your workforce? What advice would you give to policymakers to assist future migrants?

6. What are some of the key contributing factors for the retention of migrant workforce in regional areas?

APPENDIX 6: GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES WORKSHOP DATA

Table 3: Guiding Principles and Implementation Strategies

Guiding principle	Implementation strategies	Suggested Responsibility
1. Future migrants to regional Victoria.		
Create a happy and healthy life in regional Victoria.	- Develop an understanding what it is to live and work "regionally". 13 - Be aware of the availability and/or limitations of cultural foods, religious activities, health services, and other opportunities. - Talk with local community members, family members/friends who may already reside in regional areas so that they become more familiar with the area and community. - Develop an orientation program about regional areas to be given to migrants before and or upon arrival.	- Migrants - Business owners/local governments/councils /education providers - Settlement, Engagement and Transition (SETS) program
Understand the steps of the migration processes, from temporary to permanent resident visas, and any conditions on a specific visa.	- Consult with migration agents/lawyers/specialists. - Reach out to other migrants about the migration process.	- Migrants - Relevant federal government agencies, for example, the Department of Home Affairs: clear communication around visa requirements. - Local agencies dealing with migrants.
Develop opportunities for broader community networking and connection.	- Local governments introduce initiatives to foster connections between relevant stakeholders in their local areas. - Appoint a community connection support worker to work on migration matters.	- Local governments. - Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'.

2. Community organisations, including educational institutions		
Reduce language barriers for people from CALD backgrounds.	• Provide mentorship to people from CALD backgrounds. • Use of interpreting services. • Help migrants understand their visa information/conditions in their own languages. • Attendance at formal language courses. • Education providers provide English training and/or tests (IELTS and PTE) locally. • Run a multicultural community ambassador program to support migrants.	• All community organisations/service providers/family. • Community ambassadors • TAFE/Educational providers. • Learn Local Education Network (LLEN).
Promote inclusivity/social cohesion and awareness of diverse communities.	• Organise multicultural events and celebrations. • Promote visibility of multicultural communities, for example, through flyers, displaying languages and symbols. • Run multicultural friendship groups, formal or informal. • Provide welcome to Australia information to migrants. • Run specific projects for multicultural communities, for example, the Melting Pot Café project by the GTHC.	• Community organisations like LLEN or Neighbourhood Houses. • Local governments. • Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'.

3. Business Entities, including industry peak bodies		
Employers develop and maintain a positive mindset toward people from CALD backgrounds.	• Employers are open to hiring entry-level staff from CALD backgrounds. • Change employers' mindsets toward people from CALD backgrounds. • Education for employers on the benefits of hiring people from CALD backgrounds for their businesses.	• Business owners.
Employers enhance inclusive organisational processes and practices with particular attention paid to people from CALD backgrounds.	• Run an orientation program for new staff from CALD backgrounds and provide them with a welcome back to the community. • Provide leadership and inclusivity training to all staff. • Offer professional development, study leave, placement payment, and clear professional development pathways.	• Business owners. • Regional industry bodies/peak bodies, for example, 'Food and Fibre Gippsland'.
Migration settlement support is provided to regional businesses.	• Stakeholders embrace a collaborative approach to settlement. • Migrants are provided with a regional welcome pack. • Increase the availability of a culturally diverse range of foods and products.	• Local governments. • SETS program. • Business owners • Regional industry peak bodies.
Migration settlement is embedded in business strategic plans.	• Businesses develop a strategic plan with particular attention to recruitment and retention of migrants.	• Regional industry bodies/peak bodies. • Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'. • Business owners.

4. Gippsland Regional Partnership		
Engage with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to understand how to access migrant workers and retain them in Gippsland.	• Raise awareness among regional stakeholders in Gippsland about the need for and benefits of a DAMA. • Advocate for regional migration reforms to simplify sponsorship processes and reduce red tape and costs to encourage and incentivise SMEs to recruit and/or sponsor migrant workers.	• Gippsland Regional Partnership. • Businesses with expertise in regional migration programs. • Small and medium enterprises. • Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'.
Elevate good practices (what's working well) in relation to recruitment and retention of migrant workers and build upon these practices.	• Support and encourage community support (i.e., migrants supporting the migrants in the region). • Review and/or pilot regional migration good practices, e.g. Latrobe Regional Hospital recruited 50 employees from overseas and provided support for partners and families.	• Gippsland Regional Partnership. • Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'.

5. Local Government		
Local governments extend the scope of their existing "Disability Access and Inclusion Plan" to include social inclusion, ensuring migrants benefit from local government programs and services.	• Run a SIAG initiative currently being piloted by Latrobe City Council. • Promote the visibility of people from CALD backgrounds and their active roles in the community. • Organise multicultural events and celebrations.	• Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'. • Local governments • Community organisations and/or service providers
Develop a culture of inclusivity for people from CALD backgrounds to ensure they feel welcome.	• Organise a welcoming event to the area for migrants. • Run an ambassador program so that residents from CALD backgrounds can support newly arriving migrants. • Run information sessions, including information linked to Centrelink, health systems and local health services. • Create a local service directory for migrants and new arrivals.	• Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'. • Local governments • Community organisations and/or service providers
Provide funding opportunities to CALD communities to implement initiatives for their members to promote social inclusion.	• Council to continue to advertise and provide local grants. • CALD communities need to be able to access these grants – share information on how to apply and provide assistance with the application process.	• Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'. • Local governments • Community organisations and/or service providers.
Local governments have a shared vision and objectives to attract and retain migrants for Gippsland.	• Build upon the Gippsland Regional Partnership's work to develop a Gippsland-based migration settlement strategy to attract and retain migrants in Gippsland. • Establish a multicultural regional hub for migration settlement support. • Commit to an ongoing migration settlement fund to implement this strategy.	• Regional Development Australian (RDA). • Committee for Gippsland. • Peak regional bodies, including 'One Gippsland'. • Active involvement from various CALD communities and community organisations, for example, GMS.

6. State and Federal Governments		

Support local businesses, particularly SMEs, to access migrant workforces.	• Make DAMAs more accessible and reduce red tape.
	• Provide more incentives to businesses to sponsor migrants by:
	   o Removing SAF levies.
	   o Removing Labour Marketing Testing (LMT) as we already know there are regional skill shortages.
		• RDA.
		• Relevant state and federal government agencies, for example, the Department of Home Affairs.

Incentivise migrants to settle in regional areas via relaxing visa requirements and policy changes.	• Relax visa requirements by:
	   o Increasing age limits over 45 years.
	   o Reducing English language requirements.
	   o Reducing work experience requirements (i.e. old Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) visa.
	   o Reducing Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT) in the region.
	• Enable primary and secondary temporary visa holders to access:
	   o A free (or at least discounted) education to improve their skills and English proficiency.
	   o Employment services.
		• Relevant federal government agencies, for example, the Department of Home Affairs

Resource the SETS program to better incentivise the support service sector.	• Commit ongoing funding to the SETS program to incentivise the support service sector. • Case manages and supports migrants through the transition journey.	• Relevant federal government agencies, for example, the Department of Home Affairs.