



Multicultural Community Dialogue: Migration and Employment Strategies Snapshot Summary

3 September 2022, 9:30am-12:30pm, Ballarat Welcome Centre

Purpose

The Multicultural Community Dialogue: Migration and Employment Strategies was hosted by Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, organised in partnership with the City of Ballarat. The aim was to bring together multicultural leaders with local government and industry representatives to discuss the potential for increasing Ballarat's skilled migration intake. Over 50 key stakeholders attended including representatives from 20 local multicultural associations and a range of industry stakeholders including Commerce Ballarat, Ballarat Regional Tourism, Central Highlands Regional Partnership, Jobs Victoria, Federation University, Regional Opportunities Australia, Runway HQ and major employers in the region. The dialogue was timely given the National Jobs Summit held from 1-2 September 2022, where the Federal Government committed an additional 34,000 regional places to the skilled migration program. The dialogue examined Ballarat's readiness, barriers and opportunities for culturally diverse and migrant jobseekers, employers and entrepreneurs, considering local, secondary and overseas situations. Stakeholders discussed challenges, innovative solutions and best practice models through keynote presentations followed by interactive roundtables.

Presentations

There were six presentations from government, researchers and consultants, settlement organisations and entrepreneurs, local tourism bodies, and international health organisations.

Kelli Moran, Team Leader Economic Growth, City of Ballarat

Kelli presented an overview of Ballarat's economy, current employment needs and future projections, with an eye to addressing labour shortages.

- The last few years have been challenging for Ballarat's economy, especially for tourism, hospitality, higher education, specialty retail, arts, beauty services and sport and recreation sectors. Workforce shortages are a national issue.
- However, Ballarat's economy is diverse, which builds resilience to weather shocks. There are 9,000 active businesses and strong construction, manufacturing and food processing sectors. Manufacturing has been strong since the Gold Rush.
- Ballarat's economic output is nearly \$16 billion per annum. Manufacturing and construction are the two largest sectors, contributing 23.6% and 13.1% of that total respectively. Ballarat's gross regional product is \$7.4 billion.
- Estimated job numbers in Ballarat are 48,443. The top three sectors for employment are Health Care and Social Assistance (19%), Retail Trade (12.1%) and Education and Training (11.2%). The 10 largest employers are Grampians Health, Federation University and TAFE, City of Ballarat, St John of God Hospital, McCain Foods, UFS

Pharmacies, Ballarat and Queen's Anglican Grammar School, McCallum Disability Services, MaxiTRANS Ballarat and Sovereign Hill.

- Ballarat has performed better than any other regional city over the period 1997-2020, with a higher GDP per capita growth (3.7%) than Victoria (2.5%) and regional cities (1%). The average value added per employee (\$252,000) is on par with the State average, and 36% of the workforce is qualified to Bachelor level or higher.
- Between 2014 and 2021, employment grew at an average rate of 3.6% (Victorian average = 1.6%). Future growth opportunities arise from continued population growth, Ballarat's strategic location, the skilled workforce, excellent training opportunities, and collective business advocacy for continued investment in transformational projects.
- According to the 2021 Census there has been a population increase of 11.9% since 2016, with the total population now 113,763 people. There has also been 11.3% increase in private dwellings to 50,233. There is an anticipated need for approximately 14,000 additional jobs by 2036, and there are also many unfilled apprenticeships.
- The focus moving forward needs to be on increasing innovation levels, advanced manufacturing, trade and export, and knowledge-intensive business services.
- In terms of current workforce shortages, the City of Ballarat is keen to develop a systemic view of how to best position Ballarat to focus on migration as a solution. A survey of 64 businesses was conducted by the City of Ballarat in July 2022. The majority of respondents were from accommodation and food services, followed by construction. 77% reported that they were having trouble filling vacancies. 40% of reported vacancies were in accommodation and food services. Some businesses (e.g. construction) reported losing tender opportunities due to staff shortages. Sectors with the biggest vacancies were Hospitality (32%), Equine Industry (18%), and Apprentices (9%). The top three growth occupations reported by the Victorian Skills Authority were Aged Care, Nurses and General Clerks.
- 51% of respondents having difficulty recruiting said they would consider employing a migrant. Some barriers to employing migrants were employers lacking understanding of visa processes/pathways, concerns about ability to meet language and cultural requirements, need for training resources, and uncertainty about qualifications.

Martin Szakal, Managing Co-Director, Global City Connect

Martin gave an overview of the research Global City Connect is undertaking for the City of Ballarat's Economic Growth Team to match jobseeker skills and needs with available jobs.

- The 2020 "For Want of a Worker: Grampians Region Literature Review and Analysis" project commissioned by Regional Development Australia identified growth, decline, resurgence and expansion industries based on Department of Education data for the period 2011-2019. Findings were that agriculture, forestry and fishing were in decline; mining and administrative/support services were slowing; wholesale trade, manufacturing, retail trade and financial/insurance services were experiencing a resurgence; and professional/scientific/technical services, education and training, accommodation and food services, healthcare and social assistance, construction and transport, postal and warehousing were expanding. The highest growth positions are medical practitioners and nurses, then health diagnostic and therapy professionals. Jobs experiencing decline are labourers, drivers, store-persons, and sales workers.
- Global City Connect is conducting a skills gap analysis to determine what employers need in Ballarat. This is in order to identify target markets, migrant work opportunities and to plan for sustainable and targeted solutions to workforce shortages.
- A survey will be sent out to businesses asking what kinds of positions they need, how many positions there are, and when they are available.

- Gathering deep data on positions available by occupation code creates the opportunity to then tactically target people to move to Ballarat. Different nationalities have different skillsets, educational models and industry models, and having this data makes it easier to target groups that fit employer needs.
- The survey will also gather data on projected needs, asking about anticipated employment vacancies and needs in three months, six months, one year, two years and five years.
- This will allow for future planning and coordinated advocacy efforts, such as tracking housing needs against employment needs over a five-year period and advocating for making land available for housing stock and/or community housing options.
- The research findings will be available in November 2022.

Dr Tess Altman, Research/Policy Coordinator, Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council

Tess provided an update on the Destination Ballarat research, which is being conducted by BRMC in partnership with Myriad Consultants and overseen by the EVOLVE Partnership of City of Ballarat, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Ballarat Community Health and Wimmera Development Association.

- This research refreshes the 2016 Destination Ballarat report, which highlighted Ballarat's excellent settlement service capacity and made commitments to support skilled and humanitarian entrants as well as students from diverse backgrounds.
- The new report will be launched in November 2022, and will provide current data and information on migration patterns, government policy trends and settlement best practice. It will include a literature review, mapping framework based on the National Settlement Outcomes Standards, case studies, and key recommendations.
- The aim is to provide an evidence base of strengths and needs to ensure sustainable settlement in Ballarat, and highlight that Ballarat is a thriving settlement location.
- Some early findings are:
 1. There is a favourable federal and state policy environment to increase migration (although the state settlement budget has been reduced, some of this is channelled to settlement through health and employment funding).
 2. There is advocacy at the national level to: a) address current labour shortages through awarding permanent pathways and work rights to existing onshore migrants who are on temporary or bridging visas, b) provide more tailored employment support services to migrants, and c) provide more support in re-training (e.g. earn and learn programs).
 3. There is increasing cultural diversity in Ballarat (9% in 2016 to 11% in 2021), with a high level of skilled migration (65% of migrants to Ballarat are from the skilled migration stream).
 4. Local settlement strengths are in coordination, education and employment, while gaps are in the areas of housing, transport, legal services, and cultural competency.
 5. Employment barriers are the lack of recognition of qualifications, lack of understanding of cultural needs from employers and of the Australian workforce by migrant job seekers, barriers to volunteering due to rigid insurance categories, and need for affordable childcare for migrants wanting to get into the workforce.

Joseph Youhana, Director, Victoria Host International

Joseph shared about global not-for-profit organisation Host International's current employment and mentoring initiatives to place skilled migrants with businesses in Australia.

- Host International is launching the Ballarat Professional Mentoring Pilot (BPMP) in partnership with Welcoming Cities, BRMC and the City of Ballarat.

- The BPMP is an action research piece designed to create a welcoming environment for migrant jobseekers, helping to bridge the gap between skill shortages and skilled migrants looking to move to regional communities.
- Over three months (September to December 2022), the aim will be to connect around 25 migrants with individual professional mentors who will support them to build networks and access job opportunities in their profession in Ballarat.
- The mentoring program will match professionals in Ballarat with migrant individuals looking for employment in their field of expertise. Mentors will be selected based on their experience working in their field for at least two years. Some mentors might be employers, and others will be well connected in their field.
- Mentors will be provided with information to assist people with employment. They will offer free support and advice to help migrants with their transition through six one-hour sessions provided for six weeks. If mentees secure a job in the region, they will be supported through community mentors to settle in to their new community.
- There are currently 17 people registered, and all migrants have met English language requirements. It is a diverse group including people from Indian, Nigerian, Syrian, Yemeni, Indonesian, Pakistani, Malaysian, Afghan, Mexican, Brazilian, New Guinean, and Bangladeshi backgrounds.
- At the conclusion of the pilot an evaluation will be conducted that asks both mentors and mentees about the value of the program.
- Expressions of Interest for the Ballarat Professional Mentoring Program are currently open until 28 September: <https://www.roa.org.au/mentors/#becomeMentor>.

Sarah Myers, CEO, Ballarat Regional Tourism

Sarah spoke about the Diversify project, a collaboration between BRMC and Ballarat Regional Tourism, arising out of the need for innovative approaches to regional tourism.

- Ballarat Regional Tourism (BRT) is a not-for-profit organisation representing tourism in the Central Highlands region. BRT works collaboratively with its members, government and industry partners to support the region's visitor economy. Priorities are to drive tourism efforts through advocacy, strategic partnerships, community building, industry development, product development and destination planning.
- The Victorian Government's Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan is seeking to create a robust regional economy responsive to shocks and crises (such as COVID and the 2020 bushfires). It is underpinned by an investment of \$633 million and provides a whole-of-state strategy and roadmap, with a goal of achieving \$35 billion in annual visitor expenditure supporting 300,000 jobs by June 2024.
- BRT received funding from the Reform Plan for a Workforce Development Project to create and keep the workforce the tourism sector needs, to become more resilient to future shocks, and to create an environment that attracts the best workforce.
- As part of this funding, BRT has partnered with BRMC to create the Diversify project. The project will run for four months between August and December 2022.
- Diversify is a pilot project designed to bridge the gap between multicultural jobseekers wanting to work, and the hospitality and visitor industry needing employees. It is an innovative move to help industry think about how they attract and recruit staff.
- The problem identified is the skills and employee shortage in the Tourism and Hospitality sector. Staffing issues are impacting the ability of businesses to trade, and negatively impacting Ballarat's reputation as a destination. Traditional recruitment techniques are not working.

- Whilst many businesses within the region are unable to find employees, there are multicultural job seekers finding it difficult to gain employment. Workforces may not reflect the diverse customer base of businesses.
- Project Diversify seeks to bridge the gap between multicultural jobseekers and industry through identifying and addressing barriers that multicultural jobseekers may face to working within the Tourism and Hospitality sector, especially young jobseekers; barriers that employers may face in attracting, recruiting and retaining staff from diverse backgrounds; providing a dedicated “concierge” style resource to connect the two; and developing initiatives and resources to overcome any identified barriers.

Anuranj Sankaran, General Manager, Institute of Health and Nursing Australia (IHNA)

Anuranj highlighted the successful and long-established role of Malayalee and Keralite migrants in filling health sector professional roles through Health Care International.

- Health Workforce Australia (HWA) has estimated that there will be a shortage of over 100,000 nurses by 2025. The demand for nurses will substantially exceed supply in 2030, by approximately 94,000 nurses.
- 22,000 overseas healthcare workers joined Victoria’s public health system since 2014. Around 8,500 overseas healthcare workers joined during the pandemic.
- There are 640,000 Indian nurses and health care professionals working abroad, according to the World Health Organization.
- Australia has the third largest population of Indians in the world. Since commencing operations in 2007, Health Care International (HCI) has contributed to moving trained professionals overseas from India, including to Australia. HCI provide a range of services to support migrant placements, including housing, support, and training. With five campuses across three states (VIC, NSW, WA), HCI offers postgraduate, vocational education and online programs to provide students with a variety of work-relevant pathways in health industries.
- So far, HCI have successfully trained over 15,000 healthcare professionals including enrolled and registered nurses in Australia, and have added 7,000 overseas registered nurses to Australia’s healthcare system.
- In Ballarat, partnerships with Federation University and Ballarat Health Services have seen many nurses graduate and register. There is now a strong alumni practising in Ballarat healthcare.

Roundtables

Three roundtables were run concurrently on the topics of migrant jobseekers, migrant entrepreneurs and local employers. Attendees picked the roundtable of most relevance to them and discussed key issues and potential solutions in groups of 10-20 people.

Migrant Jobseekers

Current and former migrant jobseekers and job service providers shared their experiences of barriers to employment in Ballarat, and discussed potential solutions.

Barriers

Qualifications

- A main issue is the lack of recognition of international qualifications. A majority of migrant job seekers are asked to either upgrade their qualifications, or need to go back to study to attain other qualifications.

- Many migrants are overqualified with Masters level degrees, and then face the challenge of being overqualified while applying for jobs.
- There is a mismatch between qualifications and experience. Many migrant jobseekers are told they are overqualified but lack local work experience, and this is a barrier to employment. Often they cannot get work experience due to visa restrictions. Many international students are leaving Australia after finishing their studies due to inability to get work.

Visas

- Job seekers who move to Australia without Permanent Residency face visa application processes that are expensive and unpredictable with changing rules and criteria.
- Many migrants end up caught in limbo within the system as they are not eligible to apply for most skilled jobs due to PR or citizenship requirements.
- This can force people into applying for unskilled positions, or retraining.

Cultural Competency

- There is a need for more understanding of how to navigate the workplace from migrants, and more cultural competency and understanding of visa requirements from employers.
- Migrants are ready to be employed, but nearly 50% of employers surveyed in Ballarat were not open to employing migrants.
- It is not widely known that migrants have to meet English language requirements as a condition of being granted their visas and have language proficiency.

Suggested Solutions

- **Policy change to visas.** Advocate for policy change to simplify the visa application process, making it easier and more direct.
- **Mentoring and internships for students.** Introduce mentoring and internships for international students to help gain local experience and connect with potential employers.
- **Connection.** Create opportunities for jobseekers and employers to connect through “meet and greets”, “professional speed dating” and “concierge services”.
- **Diversity advantage.** Promote the “diversity advantage” to employers and emphasise that migrants are good workers.
- **Cultural competency training for employers.** Educate employers through cultural competency training.
- **Professional membership support.** Subsidise or advocate for reduced membership fees for migrant jobseekers to access professional organisations (e.g. Engineers Australia).
- **Financial incentives for businesses.** Incentivise businesses to employ migrants through financial reward.
- **Customer service skills.** Promote learning customer service skills in university courses as a key resource for gaining employment.
- **Employ existing migrants.** Consider employing migrants that are already in Australia (such as temporary visa holders and bridging visa holders), not necessarily just attracting more migrants from overseas.

Migrant Entrepreneurs

Migrant entrepreneurs, service providers, and business networks shared their experiences of barriers to successful migrant businesses, and discussed potential solutions.

Barriers

Mentoring Needs

- Many migrants decide to start a business without knowing basic information such as legal requirements, how to set up an ABN and register, file taxes, etc.
- However, there are many challenges and financial stresses in the first few years of starting a business and many businesses do not survive.
- Mentoring programs that are available to migrant entrepreneurs setting up a business are crucial to help them navigate the system and provide information about challenges.
- However, many available mentoring programs are only running during working hours, which means that migrant entrepreneurs cannot attend.

Integration

- There are language and cultural differences that create barriers to understanding and working with businesses and employees.
- Many entrepreneurs also do not have strong local business networks.
- It can take two to three months to employ workers from diverse backgrounds due to receiving work clearances.

Communication Gaps

- Runway HQ and Commerce Ballarat both have free mentoring programs available for migrant entrepreneurs, but migrant entrepreneurs are not aware of this information.
- There is a need for better communication between migrant entrepreneurs and business networks such as Commerce Ballarat about opportunities available.
- Potential avenues for better communication are through BRMC and cultural associations.

Suggested Solutions

- **Flexible mentoring programs.** Mentoring programs made available at regular and flexible times that suit entrepreneurs, preferably outside working hours.
- **Migrant business peer mentoring network.** Develop a peer mentoring network for established migrant entrepreneurs to mentor emerging entrepreneurs.
- **Cultural tourism.** There is enormous potential to involve migrant businesses in regional cultural tourism and promote Ballarat's diversity advantage. Tourism courses at educational institutions could focus on and promote this as an emerging area.
- **Use existing business networks.** Promote migrant businesses within existing networks such as Commerce Ballarat.
- **Migrant business directory.** Promote migrant businesses on BRMC website and through other channels such as cultural associations.
- **Business Resource List.** Give a list of local business resources/networks to newly arrived people in welcome packs along with other essential information.
- **Migrant business awards.** Celebrate and recognise migrant businesses through awards. The existing business awards do not receive applications from migrant businesses, so there may be support/information needed for the application process.
- **Niche marketing.** Encourage small migrant businesses to promote their uniqueness in order to compete with bigger players that price them out of the market (e.g. Halal meats cannot compete with Coles/Woolworths prices).

Local Employers

Local Ballarat employers shared barriers to and opportunities for employing migrants, and discussed potential solutions.

Barriers

Accommodation

- The lack of affordable short-term housing options in Ballarat is a barrier to people who are looking to “try out” working in Ballarat.
- There is also an issue with long-term housing options to retain workers.

Skills Gaps

- Employment of skilled migrants is limited, as the list of skilled migration occupations does not include many industries that have vacancies and need workers right now.
- For example, there is a need for disability workers, but this occupation is not on the skilled migration visa list, meaning that employers cannot pursue this option.

Cultural Adjustment

- If workers are coming directly from overseas, there is a period of cultural and language adjustment where they will need targeted support.

Best Practice

MaxiTRANS: Sponsoring Skilled Migrants

- MaxiTRANS is one of the biggest employers in Ballarat, manufacturing and supplying road transportation equipment.
- 20 years ago they made a sustained investment in skilled migrant workers, sponsoring 50 workers from China on four-year visas of which 40 remain in Ballarat.
- They are experiencing skilled worker shortages, with a staff of 350 workers and a need for around 120 more, primarily welders.
- After trying a range of local options including apprenticeships and training, they are making a big investment of \$25,000 per worker to sponsor 65 migrant workers from the Philippines, including offering initial accommodation support, integration and training support.
- They are bringing workers in batches of 10, primarily due to accommodation shortages. Many are single people but for those with families they will join them long-term.
- The aim is to retain workers long-term through incentives such as a four-day work week, and moving people onto permanent contracts after three months.

Humanitarian and Student Visas: Flow-on Effects 15 Years On

- From 2007-2009, the federal government supported the resettlement of 45 Sudanese families and 13 Togolese families in Ballarat.
- Around the same time, 40 Indian nurses completed their fourth year of studies with Federation University.
- Though these two initiatives are small-scale, they have had significant positive long-term impacts for Ballarat’s diversity.
- The Sudanese and Togolese communities in Ballarat are vibrant and active.
- Federation University now has strong international partnerships with campuses in China and Malaysia directly recruiting for Australia’s employment needs.

Suggested Solutions

- **University accommodation partnerships.** Look into student accommodation as an option for short-term accommodation options, especially during break period October to March.
- **Alternative visa pathways.** As skilled migration pathways are limited, consider bringing people on student visas who can then also work (earn and learn).
- **Retraining and repurposing workers.** Retrain and repurpose skilled people to fill similar roles, e.g. nurses in disability work.
- **Support micro-businesses.** Not all businesses can afford to sponsor skilled migrants or to provide support to migrant workers. Support is needed for smaller businesses to support migrants.
- **Revitalised local employment program.** Advocate/apply for funding for a new local migrant employment program to support migrant and employer connections (e.g. concierge matchmaking service, information on visa requirements).
- **Coordinated pilot programs and funding bids.** Work together to develop pilot programs and funding bids to sponsor skilled and other migrant workers to the region.

Take Home Messages

Favourable Political Climate

This is an opportune political moment to consider skilled migration as a channel to fill workforce shortages. There is federal support with an allocation of an additional 34,000 regional skilled migration places, state support through Jobs Victoria and Regional Development Victoria, and local support through the City of Ballarat.

Evidence for Planning and Advocacy

Research into sustainable settlement options and skills gap analyses of the region provide an important evidence base for making informed decisions about economic opportunities, for future planning for Ballarat's economy, and to advocate to make sure the support needed is there.

Collaborative Power

This generative conversation between employers, jobseekers, entrepreneurs, government representatives and business networks has shown the power of connecting to identify barriers and solutions. Potential solutions have been identified as well as opportunities to collaborate on partnerships, communication strategies, pilot programs and funding bids.

Innovative Solutions

Pilot programs and best practice examples showcase that innovative solutions to workforce shortages are at our fingertips. The examples of the Ballarat Professional Mentoring Pilot and the Diversify project show that there are innovative ways to approach workforce shortages through supporting migrants and employers, while the examples of Health Care International, MaxiTRANS, and humanitarian and student visa pathways illustrate that investment in migrant workers has long-term benefits for Ballarat's economy and society.

Dialogue Outcome

An immediate outcome following the dialogue has been an offer from CEO Jodie Gillett for BRMC members to access free membership to Commerce Ballarat.