Building a Strategically Resilient Migration System for Australia

Submission to:

The 2022 Review of Australia's Migration System

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Introduction

While it is important to acknowledge from the outset that indigenous sovereignty over this continent was never ceded, there is no escaping the fact that modern Australia is a society premised on immigration. Australia has one of the highest levels of net migration in the world as a share of its population – far higher than the UK or the USA, higher even than its more comparable allies Canada and New Zealand, and only exceeded by a few countries with large guestworker programs such as Singapore and the Gulf States (United Nations, 2022. See Figure 1). It has been this way at least since the mid-19th Century (Gamlen & Sherrell, 2022). As a percentage of Australia's fast-growing population, net migration has reached far higher than current levels for many sustained periods over the past 16 decades (Figure 2).
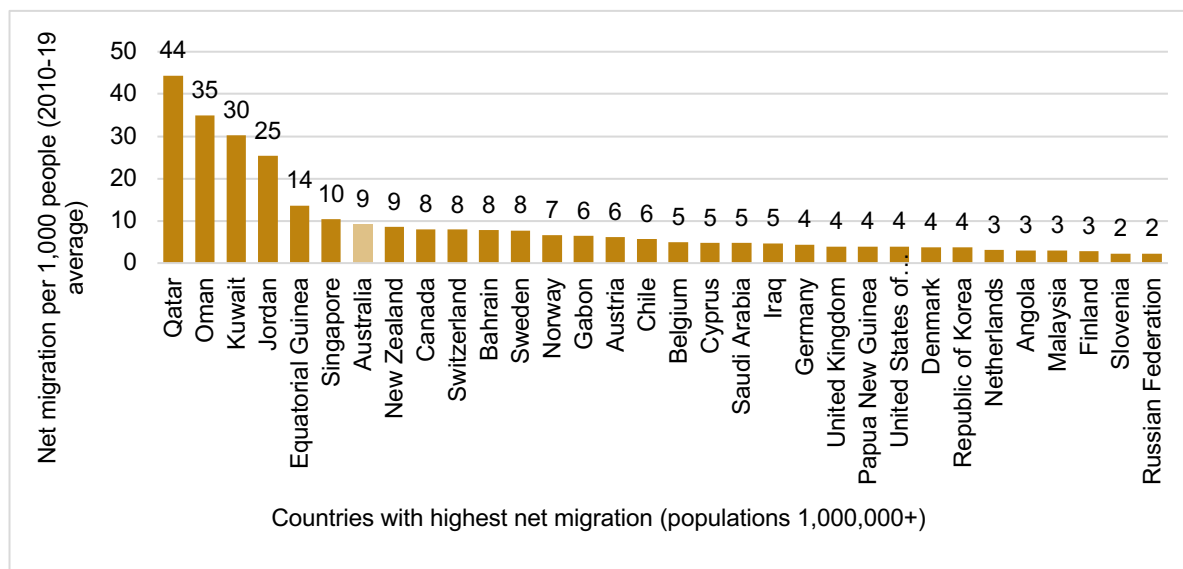
Figure 1 Net migration in migration countries, Average of 2010-2019

Source: Data from United Nations (2022), analysis by O'Donnell.
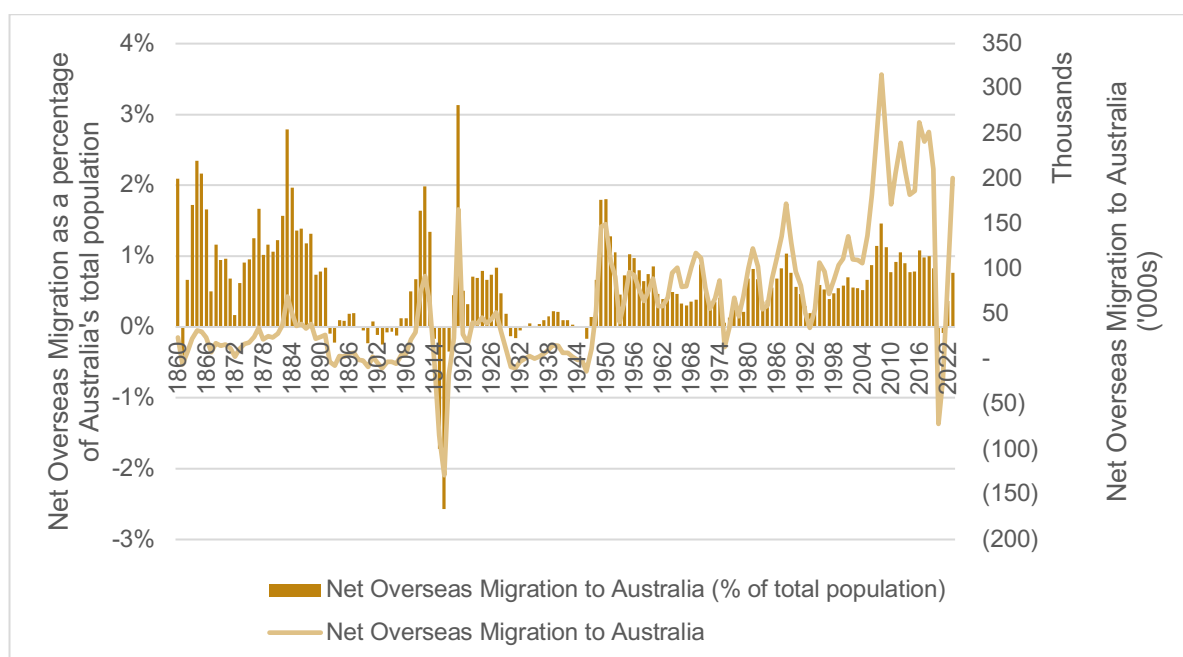
Figure 2 Net overseas migration to Australia, 1860-2023

Source: Data from Gamlen & Sherrell (2022), analysis by Gamlen.

Immigration increasingly insulates Australia from what would otherwise be drastic population ageing. In 1981, three out of every ten births in Australia were to immigrant women, but by 2019 the figure had double to six of ten. In the same period Australia's total fertility rate[1] declined from 1.90 to 1.58, far below the rate of 2.1 required for the population size to remain stable (Gray et al, 2022; Figure 3). The basic problem of population ageing is that fewer working-aged people must support more elderly people. Australia fills the gap by importing much of the missing labour force and has mostly been able to do so despite limited and costly pathways to permanency. An added economic bonus is that migrants tend to do the jobs that native-born workers cannot or will not do, while an added demographic bonus is that immigrants often make a higher contribution to fertility than their Australian-born counterparts (Baffour, Raymer & Evans 2021; Figure 4).
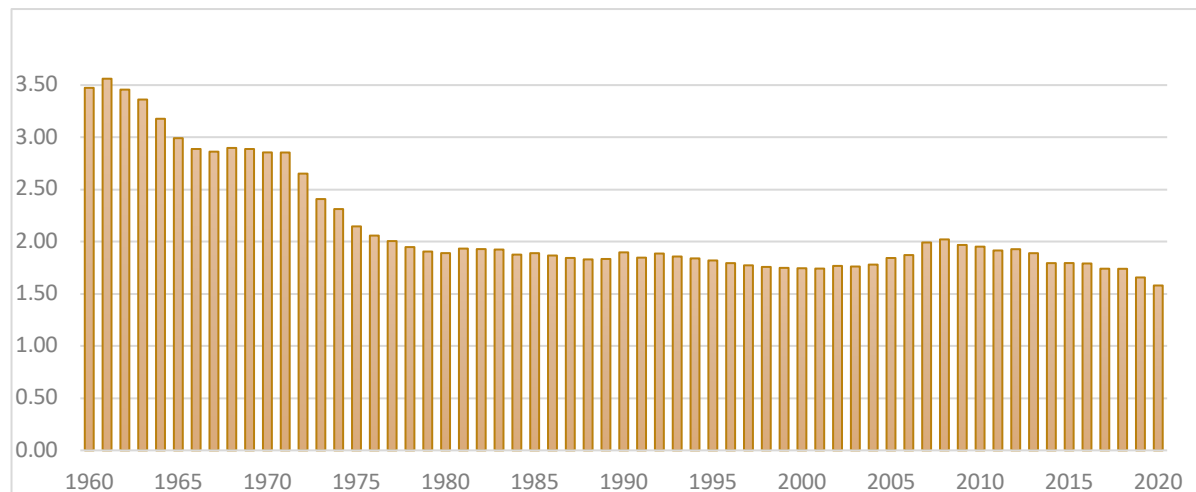
Figure 3 Australian Total Fertility Rate, 1960-2020

Source data: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Births Australia 2020. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Analysis by Gray et al (2022).
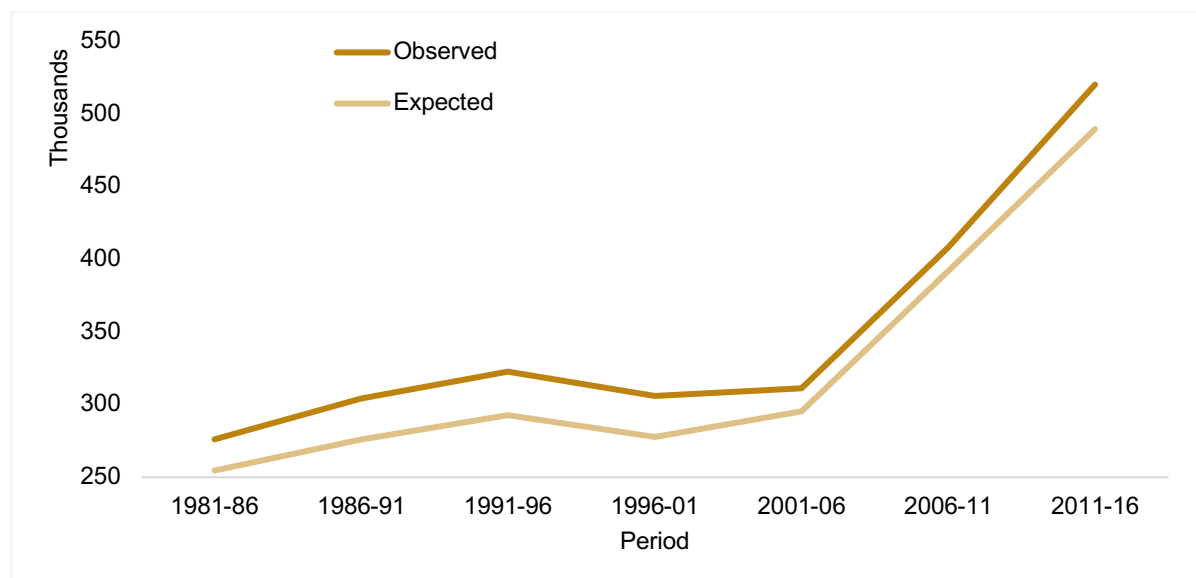
Figure 4 Observed and expected (calculated using Australian born birth rates) immigrant births, 1981-2016
Source: Baffour, Raymer & Evans (2021).

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[1] The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) measures the average number of children born to women in child-bearing ages 15-49 years old.

Australia now faces growing competition from other countries with ageing populations. For the past two centuries Australia's few competitors for migrants were former British colonies such as Canada and New Zealand. However, after decades of population growth during which they supplied Australia's immigrants, many formerly emerging economies are now ageing themselves (Gamlen, 2019b). China's population is projected to peak in 2022 then halve by 2100, while India's population is projected to peak in the 2060s then decline (United Nations, 2022; Figure 5). As these other countries pass through demographic transition from youthful, less-developed migrant-sending countries into ageing, more-developed migrant-receiving countries, Australia will not only lose its major sources of immigration – it will also gain large nearby rivals for shares in a shrinking global population. This likely explains why the United Nations projects that net migration to Australia will decline to 140,000 people per year between 2022 and 2100 (United Nations, 2022; Figure 6), below Australian Government (2022) projections of 235,000 people between 2024-25 and 2032-33.
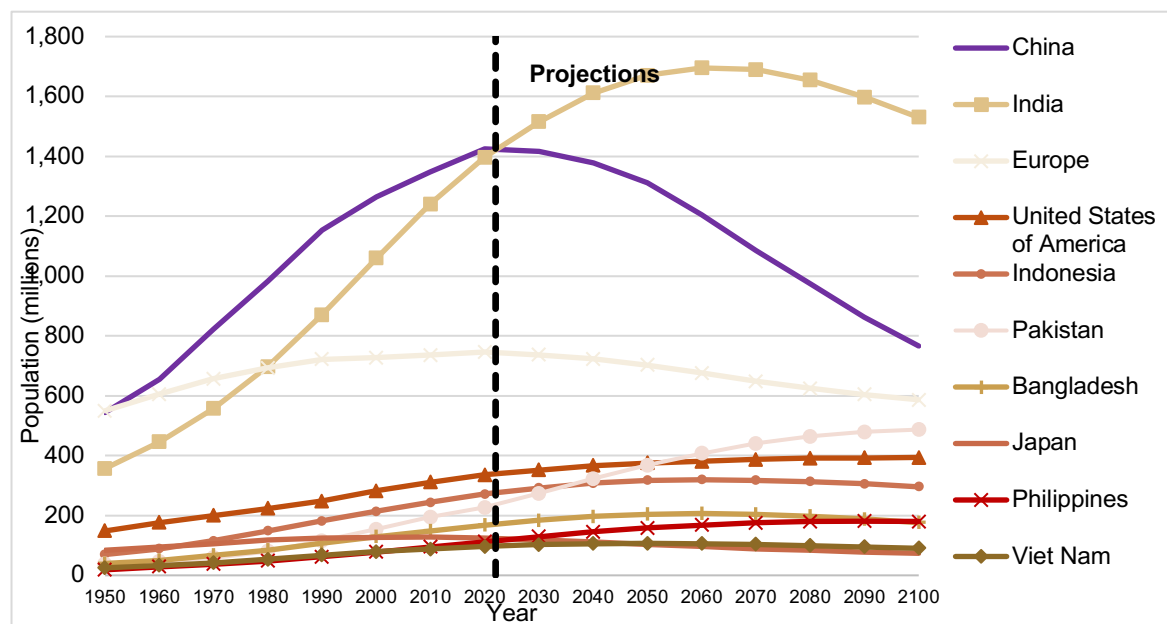
Figure 5 Current and projected population size, select countries, 1950-2100
Source: Data from United Nations (2022), analysis by O'Donnell.
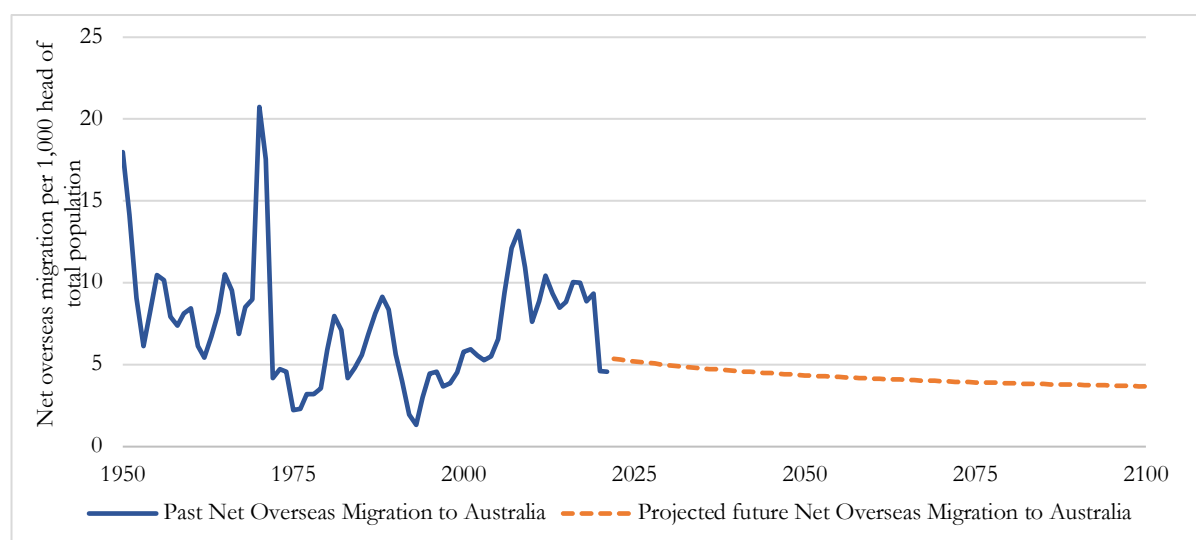
Figure 6 Past and projected net migration to Australia
Source: Data from United Nations (2022), analysis by O'Donnell.

This Review of Australia's Migration System therefore comes not a moment too soon. Twenty-eight years have passed since the system was last reviewed (Dept. of Home Affairs, 2022). Meanwhile the global context for migration has become far more volatile. A long, steady post-WWII age of migration has given way to a period of total mobility shutdowns, repatriation spikes, sea-change and tree-change moves, and explosive migration surges (Gamlen, 2020). In the wake of Covid-19, growing humanitarian, development and environmental crises are driving more migration through low-wage channels, while digital transformation and a high-risk-high-cost international travel environment are reducing the incentives for migration through high-wage channels.

In this turbulent and increasingly competitive global context, it is critical that Australia develops a resilient migration system that delivers security and prosperity for the country as a whole. This requires both safeguarding social cohesion and maintaining an environment that attracts people to Australia, working hard to bring them here, and ensuring that they are fully engaged in Australian society once they arrive. In our view, the key to achieving these goals is to abandon a narrow view of migration as an issue of security or the economy. Australia must embrace a more connected, interdisciplinary, and integrated approach to understanding and managing the way migration fundamentally transforms societies.

Based on this, we submit the following key considerations and recommendations to the Government's Review:

- Recognise that migration is not just an economic issue
- Optimise the contribution of international students to Australia's education and training systems
- Address the specific needs of regional Australia
- Build on Australia's increasingly positive attitudes to multiculturalism
- Remove barriers to migrants' participation in the labour market
- Engage community and industry stakeholders in migrant transitions to employment
- Reconsider over-reliance on temporary migrants in essential sectors
- Provide an adequate social safety net for all workers in strategic sectors
- Remove migration from the Home Affairs portfolio
- Build wider capacity to understand and manage migration
- Establish a National Institute on Human Migration and Mobility
- De-link labour exploitation policies from migration policies
- Prepare systematically for more Pacific migration.

1. Enrich the economy, with a focus on productivity growth

"The smartest thing anyone has ever said about migration," according to Harvard migration economist George Borjas (2016), was what the Swiss novelist and playwright Max Frisch said about guestworkers to Europe in the 1950s and 60s: "We wanted workers, we got people instead".

1.1 Recognise that migration is not just an economic issue

One does not have to agree with Borjas to grasp the validity of this insight. International migration is not like international trade or international finance because people have agency, while widgets and money do not. Framing Australia's migration system narrowly as a tool for 'enriching the economy' misses this insight. The risk of such an economistic framing is that it quickly loses social license. This was observed in 2016 in both the UK and the USA, where explicitly anti-immigration campaigns triumphed in both the Brexit Referendum and the US Presidential Election. These campaigns were successful even though (or even because), the opposing campaigns consistently articulated a strong and clear economistic case for immigration based on robust evidence (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014).

To broaden this point, we submit that it is unwise to continue understanding and managing migration exclusively within the silos of the economy and security. Migration is indeed a major source of economic enrichment, but it is not only or primarily an economic tool (contrary to the framing of the Review's Terms of Reference). Migration does indeed have important security implications for Australia, but it is not solely or primarily a security issue. It has been treated as such within the Australian Government's focus on national security and sovereign borders since 9/11. Successful reform to Australia's migration system can only result from delivering security and prosperity without sacrificing other societal goods.

Managing migration to achieve wider goals requires fostering broader and more deeply informed public deliberation about the issue. It requires the ability for a wider range of individuals and organisations to contribute to more nuanced conversations about the role of migration not just within the economy and national security, but within Australian society, culture, politics, the natural environment, and population change more broadly. The ability to have these kinds of public discussions about migration depends on building migration research and management capacity beyond government – a topic which is addressed later within this submission.

2. Complement Australia's education and training systems and the skills of Australians

The Terms of Reference invites us to think about how immigration can supply the skills that are required by Australian employers, but are not being grown locally by Australia's own education and training systems. This is a long-standing focus of Australian immigration policy which already benefits from the dedicated attention of key institutions such as the National Skills Commission. Instead of dictating to the Commission, we focus here on what we regard as under-addressed aspects of the intersection between migration and Australia's education and training systems: the need to optimise the contributions of international students to these systems, and the need to address the specific situation of regional Australia.

2.1 Optimise the contribution of international students to Australia's education and training systems

Australia's education and training systems are already benefiting from the contribution of migrants as innovators, educators, students, and citizens. The 2021 Census highlights that many migrant groups in Australia and their children have significantly higher participation rates in university education than the native-born population. Within our university campuses, having diverse cohorts of immigrant and Australian teachers and students helps prepare Australian students to engage in the global economy.

In terms of further education and training, the Building a New Life in Australia survey (Cheng et al., 2021) suggests that the most vulnerable cohorts of immigrants, such as older and female refugees, obtain the greatest economic participation benefits from government supported employment programs. Training providers for migrants therefore need strong connections with specific industries to develop the human capital valued within local labour markets.

Employers prefer workers with Australian qualifications and experience, partly for their local knowledge, and partly because it saves the costs of international recruitment. An example sector is residential aged care. This was a recruitment focus for the Pacific Labour Scheme, but instead most recruits through the scheme have been meat workers (~70%) and agricultural workers (~20%) (Curtain & Howes, 2022) This is partly because aged care facilities depend heavily on migrant labour but lack sufficient funds to recruit internationally through the current system. They therefore seek to recruit migrant workers who are already in the country without access to better paid work. There is a significant problem meeting the needs of Australia's aging population, which results from the inefficiency of Australia's current migration system.

The University and TAFE sectors are major engines of the immigration system through recruiting international students on temporary visas. The pandemic has widened and revealed pre-existing fault lines in the system. The primary issue is it involves a transactional relationship with temporary student-migrants. Universities use fees from international students to subsidise their research and higher education costs for domestic students. International students are used to perform locally undesirable low-skilled jobs in Australia.

Academics and policymakers are concerned about Australia's dependency on international student migration. It detrimentally affects the higher education systems' quality and stability, student experiences, and Australia's reputation and relationship with international students' home countries. This is not conducive to Australia's efforts in integrating with international friends and partners.

Since international student migration is a lifeline for the Australian higher education sector and economy, Australia needs to strengthen its migration system. It will require higher education institutions to amend their funding models and improve international students' experiences by providing linguistic and cultural support to ensure they are competitive upon graduation. In addition, the Government should fully fund domestic teaching and research, which will reduce international student exploitation and help to produce a more integrated tertiary system.

For example, Australia has a high demand for child-care services, which require skills in child development. However, currently, TAFE does not provide its domestic and international graduates with employment pathways and language skills. For graduates, both are crucial for competing in the Australian job market and integrating into society. For Australia, they foster economic growth and enable communication.

2.2 Address the specific needs of regional Australia

Community sponsorship models for migrant settlement in Canada and Germany have emphasised the importance in immigrant settlement of connecting migrants to employment, training, education, and social and civic opportunities and structures. These multi-level approaches to migrant integration – that bring together national, state, and local authorities – maximise both the effectiveness of integration support and the benefits to meet the specific needs of local communities.

Unlocking the potential of migrants is partly about building a system that delegates and empowers local communities wanting and needing migrants. Australia's centralised migration system is a 'one-size fits all' approach that provides limited concessions to states, territories, and employers in recruiting migrants. We can learn from the Canadian model, which delegates power to provinces (or regions). Rather than applying to the central government, communities request migrants based on their needs, and upskill them to address local skills and labour shortages.

Our immigration system provides insufficient support for migrant welfare, integration into regional communities and permanent residency. In the past Australia has had strong post-arrival services and has offered incentives for migrants to stay permanently. A recent study showed that government-supported employment programs enhanced the economic participation of vulnerable groups such as older and female refugees (Cheng et al., 2021). But these programs are now scantly available to those most in need. In addition, regulations such as immigrants needing to reside in regional areas for two years before applying for permanent residency boosted the regional population by approximately 80 percent.

Categories such as the Temporary Graduate Visa that allow graduates from regional institutions living in regional areas to reapply for an extension, continue to exist. However, there are fewer opportunities for migrants to permanently live in regional Australia and contribute to its economy. Thus, if we want migrants to succeed in regional areas and contribute to Australian society, we must rethink their recruitment, training, community formation, and skill sets, including reintroducing incentives and programs for regional settlement.

2.3 Recognise that both high- and low-skill migration are essential parts of the system

Another point to highlight alongside a focus on high-skilled migrants, is that Australia's economy has also been enriched throughout its history by *less-skilled labor*. This is not typically seen as the purpose of Australia's migration system. While 'high skill' has been a key component in migrant selection across a range of migration streams, after arrival there has been less attention to the skill-level of employment of migrants in Australia. Many workers on temporary visas in Australia are concentrated in precarious and less-skilled positions, which does not represent their motivation, human capital, or capacity to upskill in Australia.

The Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) formalised this by creating a managed pathway for people to work here, mainly in horticulture. The motivation for this pathway was to fill the gap in the low-skilled labour market, which in the past was filled by backpackers who are not currently as available. Nevertheless, the economy is significantly enriched by accessing these skilled workers, who have sought to fill jobs that local workers are not inclined to. But this contribution could be even more mutually beneficial to workers and the economy if the migration system paid more attention to upskilling.

There is an education and employment disconnect emerging in Australia. An emphasis on skilled migration and student migration is resulting in immigrant cohorts that are highly qualified, but whose human capital is often not matched to their labour-market outcomes. This is for a range of reasons, including discrimination. One of the challenges for Australia is ensuring that this disconnect is minimised, as it has in other developed economies. On the other hand, the Federal Parliament has recently had a series of inquiries into temporary migrants and low skilled migrants, and how they have been exploited within different sectors of the economy (Senate Select Committee on Temporary Migration, 2021). There needs to be a greater effort to protect not just migrant rights, but the rights of all workers in those sectors.

3. Unlock the potential of migrants

Australia's current migration system was put in place when the country was less diverse than it is today. The new levels of complex diversity make this an exciting and socio-economically dynamic new phase for the country, but also bring a wide range of new challenges that require innovative regulatory and governance responses.

3.1 Build on Australia's increasingly positive attitudes to multiculturalism

Australians place measurably high and increasing value in the ideal of multiculturalism, providing an important asset in efforts to strengthen the social, economic, and legal integration of immigrants (Table 1). In the 2022 Mapping Social Cohesion survey, 88 per cent of Australians said multiculturalism has made Australia stronger (O'Donnell, 2022). This proportion has increased from 77 per cent since just 2018. Much of this increase has been driven by older Australians and people outside the major cities – who have traditionally been less receptive to and supportive of immigration, diversity, and multiculturalism.

The Mapping Social Cohesion survey asks a range of questions around attitudes to migration and diversity. On all these questions, the trend has been pointing in a positive direction. A snapshot is provided in Table 1, where for example, the proportion of respondents who agree that immigrants make Australia stronger has increased from 63 per cent in 2018 to 78 per cent in 2022. Likewise, the proportion who disagree that immigrants take jobs away has increased from 64 per cent in 2018 to 78 per cent in 2022 (O'Donnell, 2022).

		2018	2019	2020	2020	2021	2022
		% of respondents					
IMMIGRANTS MAKE AUSTRALIA STRONGER	Strongly agree	17	17	19	21	23	24
	Agree	46	50	53	53	53	54
	Total agree	**63**	**67**	**71**	**74**	**76**	**78**
MULTICULTURALISM GOOD FOR AUSTRALIA	Strongly agree	25	25	26	27	29	30
	Agree	51	55	58	57	57	58
	Total agree	**77**	**80**	**84**	**84**	**86**	**88**
IMMIGRANTS BRING NEW IDEAS/CULTURE	Strongly agree	17	17	22	22	23	23
	Agree	59	61	60	61	62	63
	Total agree	**76**	**78**	**82**	**83**	**84**	**86**
IMMIGRANTS GOOD FOR ECONOMY	Strongly agree	14	17	18	22	22	25
	Agree	60	60	63	61	63	62
	Total agree	**74**	**76**	**81**	**83**	**86**	**87**
IMMIGRANTS MAKE GOOD CITIZENS	Strongly agree			40	43	43	47
	Agree			50	49	49	47
	Total agree			**90**	**91**	**92**	**94**
IMMIGRANTS TAKE JOBS	Strongly disagree	12	14	15	16	17	20
	Disagree	52	51	55	55	58	58
	Total disagree	**64**	**64**	**70**	**71**	**75**	**78**
IMMIGRANTS ARE NOT ADOPTING VALUES	Strongly disagree		5	6	7	7	8
	Disagree		26	32	32	34	38
	Total disagree		**31**	**39**	**38**	**41**	**46**

Table 1 Australian attitudes to immigration, diversity, and multiculturalism, 2018-2022

Source: O'Donnell (2022) Mapping Social Cohesion

3.2 Remove barriers to migrants' participation in the labour market

Unlocking the latent potential of migrants for Australia's economy and social cohesion, necessitates providing opportunities and pathways for their full social and economic integration.

In terms of social integration, migrants typically report high average levels of trust in other people and in government (Table 2). However, immigrants, particularly those who have arrived recently, report a lower sense of belonging in Australia and less participation and involvement in their communities (O'Donnell, 2022). To a considerable extent, this is a function of time spent in Australia. As shown in Figure 7, the proportion of immigrants who have a great sense of belonging in Australia increases the longer that people have been in Australia. The proportion of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds who are involved in social, community and civic groups also increases the longer that they have lived in Australia.

	2018	2020	2022
% Who feel a great sense of belonging in Australia			
Australian born	64	70	59
Foreign born, speaks only English	45	53	46
Foreign born, speaks other language	48	41	35
% who think most people can be trusted			
Australian born	39	49	50
Foreign born, speaks only English	44	51	47
Foreign born, speaks other language	51	53	52
% who think the Federal Government can be trusted all or most of the time			
Australian born	25	53	42
Foreign born, speaks only English	28	54	42
Foreign born, speaks other language	40	60	42
% who say they are happy			
Australian born	76	80	79
Foreign born, speaks only English	77	78	80
Foreign born, speaks other language	86	80	76
% who are satisfied with their financial situation			
Australian born	61	75	65
Foreign born, speaks only English	64	72	68
Foreign born, speaks other language	60	63	56

Table 2 Personal and social well-being of Australian and foreign-born populations before and since COVID-19

Source: O'Donnell (2022) Mapping Social Cohesion

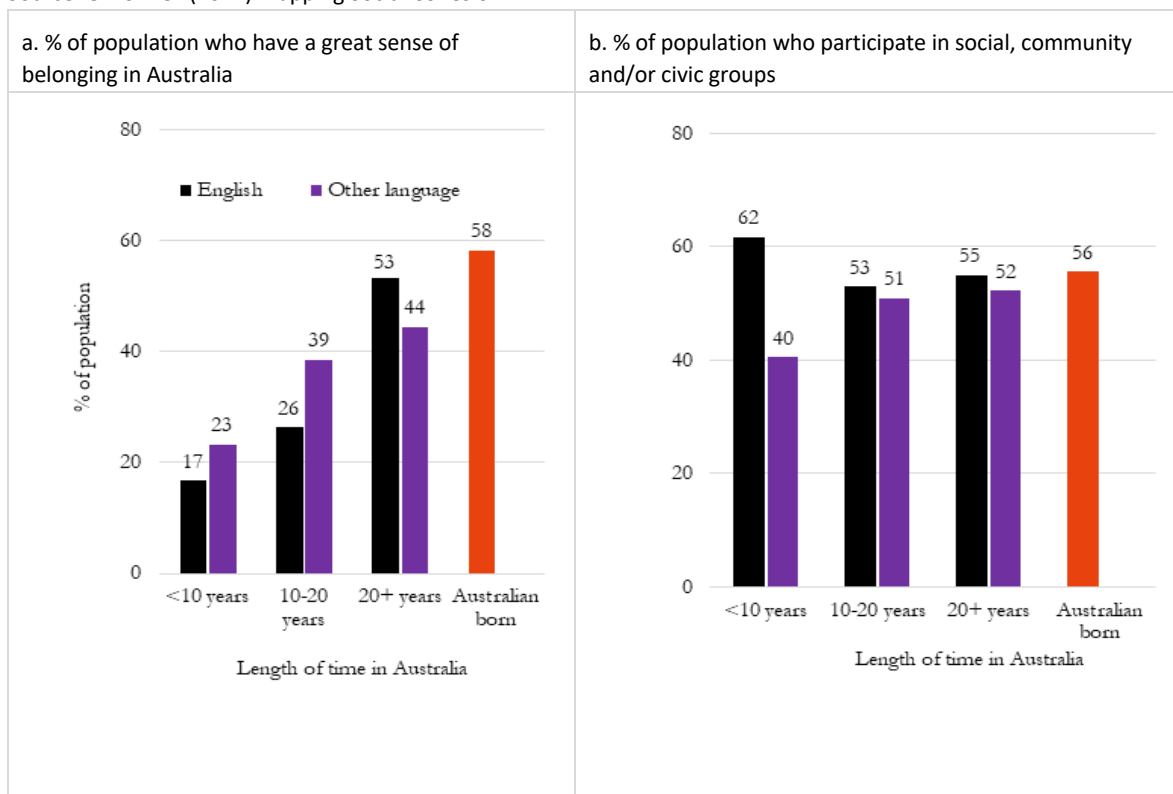| a. % of population who have a great sense of belonging in Australia	b. % of population who participate in social, community and/or civic groups

Figure 7 Social integration of immigrants in Australia by first language and length of time in Australia, 2022. Source: O'Donnell (2022) Mapping Social Cohesion

The social integration of immigrants is a process therefore, and one that is aided and impeded by their surrounding social and economic environments. The experience of discrimination, for example, is damaging to the social integration of immigrants. After controlling for a range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, people who have experienced discrimination based on their skin colour, nationality or religion are significantly less likely to feel a great sense of belonging, personal worth and social inclusion in Australia (O'Donnell, 2022).

The personal and social well-being of immigrants is likely to have been adversely impacted by the disproportionate and inequitable outcomes and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Immigrants and immigrant-rich communities have been more likely to contract and die of COVID-19 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; NSW Health, 2022). They were also less likely to be eligible for JobKeeper (Shergold et al., 2022) and more likely to have become unemployed (National Skills Commission, 2022). Furthermore, immigrants were more likely to have been fined for breaching public health orders (Rahman, 2021). Qualitative research suggests members of diverse communities feel they have been blamed for the spread of COVID-19 in Australia in a way that has ignored their pre-existing vulnerabilities particularly their reliance on employment in essential occupations and industries and their general socioeconomic disadvantage (Prentice, 2021; Prentice & O'Donnell, 2022).

These outcomes have coincided with declining levels of national belonging, happiness, and financial well-being. As shown in Table 1, foreign-born Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds were more likely to trust other people and the Federal Government in 2018 before COVID-19 than the Australian-born population, and more likely to report being happy. However, this gap disappeared during COVID-19 in 2020 and 2022. Feelings of trust, belonging and financial satisfaction increased during COVID-19 for the Australian-born population but showed no such increase for immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. Such inequitable outcomes damage the social integration of immigrants and impede the realisation of their full contribution to Australian society.

3.3 Engage community and industry stakeholders in migrant transitions to employment

For humanitarian migration and migration more broadly, employment underpins successful settlement and integration into Australia. Leaders in government and industry especially senior managers human resource (HR) professionals play a vital role in the recruitment and workforce integration of people from refugee backgrounds. This needs to be two-way process of working not just with industry, settlement agencies but also holistically supporting migrants. Cross-sector partnerships with the voluntary sector and local government agencies are valuable in offering detailed knowledge of community networks and the practical requirements of employing refugees to ensuring the job readiness of prospective employees.

The economic benefits of this locally collaborative approach to integration are significant. It was estimated that the contribution of Afghan humanitarian migrants to the regional development of Young were between $2.4 million and $2.7 million over 18 months from mid-2001 to 2003 (Stilwell, 2003). Equally Bendigo has experienced economic growth because of new migrants and refugee resettlement (Hirst et al, 2021). Enriching the economy, with a focus on productivity growth through migration involves an integrated approach to offering meaningful employment that considers not just work but also the health, educational and community outcomes under-pinning successful migration.

In industry, organisations can empower HR professionals in the recruitment and workforce integration of people from a refugee background. Simple practical activities include the translation of policies and procedures, and standardising induction and training that advances practical work skills whilst further developing linguistic proficiency. Employee on-boarding and internship programs can provide refugees and migrants with the opportunity to obtain realistic job previews, gain a deeper understanding of workplace structures and cultures, as well as validate and demonstrate their overseas credentials.

4. Help build Australia's sovereign capabilities and address challenges associated with the aging population, climate change and new technology

Sovereign capabilities are the things that Australia must be able to do by itself (O'Neill, 2022). Most obviously, thinking about migration in terms of sovereign capabilities encourages us to consider how Australia can proactively recruit overseas talent in key strategic sectors. From this perspective the key question is: What share of niche skills must be imported before we can build a specific sovereign capability?

However, thinking of migration in terms of sovereign capabilities also invites us to evaluate the strategic resilience of our labour market to external shocks, and to reconsider over-reliance on temporary immigration in essential sectors. From this perspective, the key question becomes: What portions of its workforce must Australia be able to grow by itself?

4.1 Reconsider over-reliance on temporary migrants in essential sectors

Balancing the contributions of locally grown and imported labour is particularly important in relation to sectors and industries without which the country cannot function. The most recent Australian Census reveals that many of our key occupations continue to rely on successive waves of migration. Some 60% of our information and communications technology (ICT) professionals are overseas born, 58% of our food trades workers, 48% of our cleaners and laundry workers, 41% of our health professionals, 40% of our road and rail drivers.

The pandemic highlighted that some essential areas of the economy are highly dependent on migrant workers who lack the benefits of full membership in Australian society. These include areas that might be thought of as essential to Australia's sovereignty, including agriculture, healthcare, and construction, which determine Australia's ability to feed its population, save lives, and maintain essential infrastructure. What are the implications of that workforce just evaporating in a crisis? COVID-19 provided an answer: during the pandemic we saw that such sectors, in Australia and other countries, experienced critical blockages in areas such as food production and distribution, healthcare, and construction.

In other countries, the experiences of the pandemic have led to calls for greater diversity in the international recruitment pool of key workers, to reduce the risks involved in reliance on a single international source of labour. To build Australia's resilience and strategic capabilities, it is essential to have a mixed approach to the international recruitment of key workers. That means being strategic about international migrant recruitment, rather than simply trusting the efficiency of the international labour market to provide what Australia needs in terms of a secure workforce. This too is part of seeing immigration as a major long-term contributor to Australian society, and not merely an economic problem.

4.2 Provide an adequate social safety net for all workers in strategic sectors

When thinking about migration in relation to sovereign capabilities, the example of temporary migrant workers during the pandemic forces us to re-consider what proportion of the workforce in strategic areas should be imported, and what proportion should be locally grown and trained. It also forces us to reconsider the treatment of overseas workers during periods of dislocation, where Australia shamefully did not provide adequate support for temporary residents during times of trouble. More broadly, the pandemic highlighted that it is in Australia's interest to provide many currently temporary migrants with better support including language training, language services (e.g., translation and interpreting), and access to the social safety net, because they are literally 'essential workers' in times of crisis.

5. Compete globally for highly skilled migrants, including by improving clients' experience of the immigration process

Currently Australia's migration system is not producing a uniformly good client experience (Department of Home Affairs, 2022). There are three interlocking issues from the client's perspective: time, money, and complexity. Migrants must pay a lot of money, wait a long time, and endure a very confusing process. Many anecdotes have emerged about people giving up on moving to Australia and choosing Canada instead, simply because they cannot manage the paperwork or persevere with the Australian systems. There are anecdotes of economic migrants caught inadvertently in Australia's security and policing systems. The points system, which rewards extremely high English language test scores (i.e., higher than the threshold for entrance to most tertiary institutions), increases time, stress, and cost (Frost, 2017). These examples indicate that client experience is not the top priority in current arrangements. As the Home Affairs Minister noted in her latest address to the National Press Club, the current system focuses on "how we keep people out, rather than who do we want in, and how do we get them here" (O'Neill, 2022).

5.1 Remove migration from the Home Affairs portfolio

Designing a migration system focused on client experience will be difficult if not impossible so long as migration remains a subset of national security and policing. This is a wider system issue that needs to be discussed and addressed. The decision to move immigration into the Department of Home Affairs, in the historically peculiar post-9/11 context, has created an over-emphasis on links between migration issues and security issues. This has led to an excessive focus on risk mitigation, worst-case scenarios, and compliance, rather than client experience. If you are a hammer, everything looks like a nail; if immigration is part of security, every migrant looks like a security risk.

Refreshing and re-focusing the culture and management of the migration system on wider goals and achieving better client experiences therefore requires moving the immigration portfolio out of the Department of Home Affairs. An overly securitised immigration apparatus cannot achieve jobs, skills, population growth, and nation building. Immigration requires strategic, generational thinking, rather than short term operational decision making, or which is subject to political exigency. A resilient migration system requires a dedicated public service focal point for government-wide migration issues that is not beholden to a single sub-set of government priorities, because it spans them all.

5.2 Build wider capacity to understand and manage migration

Alongside a necessary rethink of where immigration sits within Government, there is a broader institutional capacity-building challenge regarding migration that needs to be addressed in this country. A by-product of over-securitization and over-centralization in Australia's current migration system is that decisions are too often made by senior officials parachuted in from distantly related portfolios, with little or no specialist training or operational understanding of migration that would allow them to speak meaningfully about the effects of policies. A resilient migration system requires senior migration policymakers to be intimately aware of what is happening on the ground, where intervention may be warranted, and what are the implications of different policy responses. Developing such knowledge will require migration managers to collect their intelligence from a much broader range of sources, stakeholders, and experts than they are currently able or willing to recognise.

Meanwhile, an even greater impediment to widening the information net is that, over the past decade at least, non-governmental organisations – including charities, research institutes and press agencies – have experienced reduced capacity to discuss migration in an informed and insightful way. Some commentators have suggested a decline in the capacity of non-governmental organisations to freely collect information and comment openly about migration-related issues without jeopardising their funding. The standard of

journalistic commentary on migration and refugees has declined, resulting in a shallower and more polarised political debate over these issues.

Examples where false beliefs about migration have driven public opinion, media debates and policy outcomes include the regular re-occurrence of moral panics concerning: 'Ethnic gangs in cities', despite immigrants having lower crime rates than native-born Australians (Bernier et al, 2020); 'Stopping the boats', despite the most irregular migrants arriving in Australia by air (Hartley et al 2019); 'Immigrants stealing Australian jobs', despite evidence that they do jobs that locally-born workers cannot or will not do (Coates et al, 2022); and 'The racist, anti-immigrant nature of Australian culture', despite that Australian attitudes to immigration and multiculturalism are high and steadily rising by international standards (O'Donnell, 2022).

The result of such periodic moral panics is that migration policy is often the outcome of ad hoc defensive responses to political attacks, rather than the outcome of well-reasoned deliberation based on rigorous evidence. As well as thinking about where in government the migration bureaucracy should sit in Australia's future migration system, there is a need to consider:

- What institutions around society need to be equipped with knowledge and skills about how migration works and how to manage it?
- How can Australia provide the necessary capacity in those institutions where it does not exist, so that a wider range of stakeholders can contribute to better-informed public discussion of migration and its implications?

5.3 Establish a National Institute on Human Migration and Mobility

Building a resilient migration system for Australia's future cannot be achieved through a few months of consultation every three decades. It involves cultivating resilient institutions that can conduct rigorous, independent research and analysis, to inform and advise the government of the day on policy for the present, and for the future. Such an institute should be purposed and resourced to hold decision-makers and opinion-shapers accountable to world-leading standards of conceptual, methodological and empirical rigour.

This is not a job for well-connected dilletantes. There are clear risks of simply outsourcing these functions exclusively to government departments, think-tanks, and quasi-non-governmental organizations (QUANGOs) like the United Kingdom's Migration Advisory Committee: it results in policy-based evidence, often put together by consultant-researchers with general skills and strong political networks but limited real domain knowledge – who are being paid directly by interest groups to support a specific political stance on migration.

What Australia – and the Asia Pacific region – needs is a venue for world-leading scholarship and informed public debate on migration, that is institutionally, politically, and financially independent and dedicated to maintaining the highest academic standards. This venue should convene leading migration experts across academia, policy, non- government organisations, and industry, to share knowledge, collect evidence, question assumptions, and inform solutions to major challenges related to the movement of people. It should become the Asia-Pacific base for the world's leading international experts on issues of migration, who can act as conduits that connect Australia with the latest developments in migration research and policymaking globally.

It is remarkable that such an institute does not yet exist, because there are few issues that speak more to Australia's identity as a nation, and to its place in the world, than the issue of human migration. Establishing such a repository for deep technical expertise should be considered a key long-term pillar of a strategically resilient Australian migration system.

6. Provide clear pathways to permanent residence and citizenship and reduce the exploitation of migrant workers

Reducing labour exploitation requires addressing the over-securitisation of immigration. A growing body of research demonstrates that a heavy emphasis on border control measures and immigration status directly contributes to exploitation of labour migrants (de Genova 2007; Tazreiter and Burridge 2022).

6.1 De-link labour exploitation policies from migration policies

Migration systems that make either employers or partners arbiters for migration status place employers, or partners in a position of immense control. It enables migration status to be used as a tool for subjugation. Over-securitisation can also make it harder for authorities to respond effectively to labour exploitation, evident in human trafficking cases. Currently, police investigations (which may be initiated as a suspected trafficking case) often ends up as deportations (Molland, 2018; Gallagher, 2006; Shih, 2021). This is a key reason many victims are reluctant to come forward and cooperate with law enforcement authorities. In turn, this hinders effective prosecution of traffickers and exploiters.

Policy "firewalls" that de-link policies that target labour exploitation and migration status will help address this problem. There are important precedents elsewhere which shows that this is possible. For example, in the United States, some States have criminalised reporting migration status to immigration authorities as it is recognised that this turns immigration law into a form of extortion (Mikati, 2021). Thailand (despite its many limitations addressing exploitation of migrants) offers access to healthcare systems (even health insurance) regardless of migration status. Hence, migrants can seek healthcare without the potential threat of deportation. Similar de-linking strategies can be considered across a range of policy interventions, ranging from labour inspections (to uncover abuse), domestic violence and human trafficking investigations.

6.2 Preventing the exploitation of migrant workers by equalising rights for people on Australian soil

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) provides a key measure of how Australia's migration system compares to other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states which are seeking to attract similar cohorts of skilled migrants to boast their national economies. The most recent MIPEX survey argues that in policy-terms Australia has backslid on integration since 2015, particularly in terms of immigrant labour market mobility and the increasing fragmentation of access to residency and citizenship (MIPEX, 2020). MIPEX measures labour market mobility in terms of equal rights for migrant and native workers, and access to employment and training – currently Northern Europe leads this metric, while Australia is ranked as outside the top half of countries participating in the survey. Targeting these areas would restore Australia's reputation as a world leading in migration policy and protections for migrants.

Migrants need clear pathways to residence and citizenship and certainty about their status in Australia (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014). Uncertainty about transitions between temporary and permanent status in Australia represent significant deterrents to highly skilled migrants off-shore and limits the economic contribution of migrants on-shore. Simplifying processes for permanent and temporary visas around common requirements would enable employee retention and prevent the loss of human capital cause by migrant precarity (Productivity Commission, 2016; Treasury & Department of Home Affairs, 2018)

7. Foster enhanced integration (including people, trade and supply chain links) with international friends and partners

Migration is an important international issue. It directly affects Australia's relations with migrants' origin countries. However, Australia has tended to treat migration as a unilateral matter of sovereign border management, rather than an issue of international relations. This needs to change, not least because of Australia's changing geopolitical and geo-economic relationship with the Pacific region.

7.1 Prepare systematically for more Pacific migration

For Pacific countries and Timor Leste, sending migrant workers to New Zealand and Australia is a way to relieve unemployment pressures and generate cash remittances, upon which many origin-country households depend. For these and other reasons, Pacific and Timor Leste governments have become increasingly interested in securing more and better migration access to Australia for their citizens. However, the only country that enjoys preferential access to Australia's labour market is New Zealand, because of the tight Trans-Tasman alliance that has survived since the British imperial era. The main historical channel for Pacific migration into Australia has therefore been via New Zealand, which has long been more open to the Pacific through access to New Zealand citizenship (Figure 8).
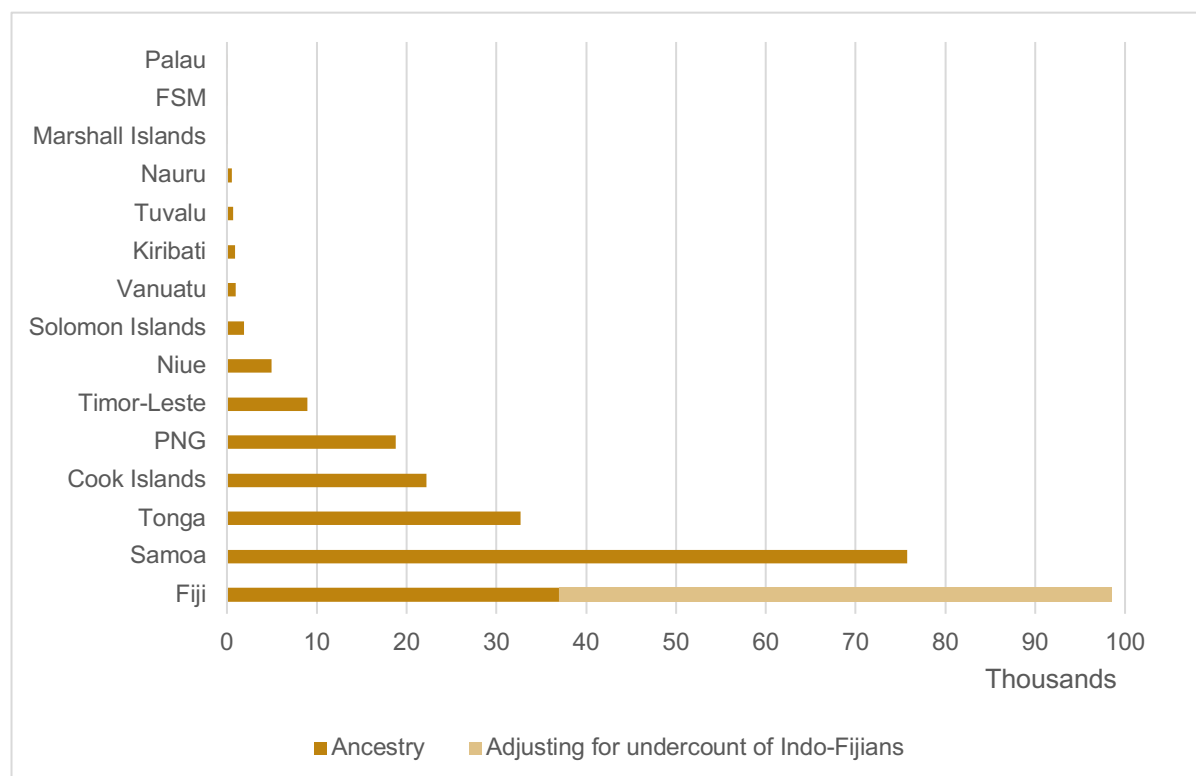

Figure 8 Country of heritage for people with Pacific Island heritage living in Australia, 2016

Source: Howes & Liu (2022). Note: By-country numbers do not apply double-counting adjustments; for example, a person claiming both Fijian and ni-Vanuatu ancestries is counted once against Fiji and again against Vanuatu.

This historical pattern is quickly changing. First, China's growing Pacific influence has markedly increased the priority Australia attaches to maintaining soft power in this geopolitical region. This in turn has made a range of Australia Government agencies more willing to heed the migration-related concerns of Pacific and Timor Leste governments, and to frame migration as an important platform for closer relations with our immediate region. Second, pandemic border closures have reduced the flows of international backpackers who had traditionally performed seasonal work in Australia, increasing the importance of the Pacific as a replacement

labour source. There are currently 31,000 Pacific and Timorese workers on Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), and this is projected to reach 35,000 by July 2023 (Shillito, 2022).

For both reasons, migration from the Pacific and Timor Leste is likely to increase in the coming years, and Australia's migration system must prepare for this carefully. Regular high-level bilateral meetings will be required with each sending country to manage the SWP and PLS streams. One option would be a regional compact on migration, in emulation of successful regional free mobility arrangements elsewhere in the world (Curtain et al, 2022). Another would be to reduce reliance on high-fee-paying international students to perform low-skilled labour by bringing in lower-skilled Pacific migrants to perform these jobs while being given them access to training and skills that complement the skills of Australians. Investing in the training of temporary migrant workers would be a way to connect with people in the region and to up-skill and support our neighbours, cementing Australia's relationships in the region.

In any case, more must be done to understand the current state of Pacific migration to Australia, in preparation for any future changes. For example, building on work produced from the 2016 Census (Howes and Liu, 2022), it will be necessary to analyse census, migration, and tax data to understand the socio-economic profile of existing Pacific populations in Australia – including for example their employment outcomes, wage and remittance levels, and settlement challenges. Such research will provide an essential evidence base to guide Australia's changing geopolitical and geo-economic engagement with its Pacific neighbourhood.

Conclusions

Our overall argument is that the Government should focus on building a more strategically resilient migration system than we currently have. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown Australia's extant migration system to be subject to global shocks. Our focus must be on building a more strategically resilient migration system, not only to endure such global shocks, but to drive recovery and shape future prosperity. This will require a broad reframing of migration as more than just a sub-set of security or economic management, but as a catalyst and force multiplier for generational, strategic national prosperity. Migrants come not just as economic actors, but as human beings who contribute to Australia's economy, society, culture, politics, and population change in complex and fundamentally important ways.

Continuing to treat migration in the same security and economic silos carries strategic risks. The current Government has explicitly acknowledged that placing migration in the security and policing silo leads to a focus on stopping people from getting to Australia, which creates major problems for the economy; a 'push' factor impeding migration processes and frustrating migrant aspirations. We also advise the Government to consider that the risk of switching migration into the economy silo is that this approach can very rapidly lose social licence, leading to disruptive consequences, as seen in the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump. Migrants too can react to their treatment as an 'economic resource,' withdrawing their social capital—and themselves—from the broader Australian landscape.

Taking a broader view of migration requires building national capacity to understand and manage the complex risks and rewards of migration. This should involve consideration of how to refresh and re-organise the culture and structure of the federal public service to strategically refocus on the broader range of ways that migration shapes Australia. It should also involve building capacity in non-governmental organisations including the media and migrant service providers, to help elevate the quality of public understanding and debate regarding the complexities that surround migration.

Relatedly, we advise re-building national migration research capacities, which have declined due to both generational changes, and to the increasingly polarised and fact-free character of migration debates that have evolved over the past decade. To help address the resulting shortfall in national research capacity, we propose the establishment of a National Research Institute on Human Migration and Mobility, to join up and

scale up Australia's ability to conduct independent, world-leading interdisciplinary thought leadership on migration, to drive better migration management outcomes at the local, national, and global levels.

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