

A migration system for Australia's future

Terms of Reference for the Independent Strategy Leads

Introduction

Australia is entering a period of considerable change and uncertainty. This includes economic, demographic and social challenges associated with an ageing population, slowing population growth, and waning productivity. Australian business and industries across the economy are grappling with critical skills shortages, and our economy would benefit from greater diversity and innovation. These are issues mirrored across countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Australia's migration system¹ has the potential to help address these challenges. Complementing employment, education, and training opportunities for the existing Australian labour force, migration can support a national transition to a more diverse economy, enhancing our sovereign capabilities and driving innovation and productivity.

To do so, we need a new strategic approach that reflects our longer term interests and core values. This will shape a simpler migration system that has broad public confidence, enhances our international engagement and competitiveness and unlocks the potential of migrants to effectively contribute to Australia both economically and socially.

Background

Migration is central to the Australian story; the 2021 Australian Census found that more than half of Australians were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas.

Successive waves of migration have shaped and influenced the development of a rich multicultural society, and the blending of histories and cultures has resulted in a unique Australian identity. Australia's long history of migration has also contributed to the prosperity that most Australians enjoy today. While it has served us for many years, more needs to be done to focus our migration system on our longer-term interests.

The last time Australia's migration system was significantly reformed was in 1994. Since then, it has largely developed through a series of incremental changes that have increased the level of complexity over time. The disruption associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has presented the Government with an opportunity to re-examine the purpose, structure and objectives of the migration system.

Goal

The goal is to develop a holistic strategy that articulates the purpose, structure and objectives of Australia's migration system to ensure it meets the national interest in the coming decades.

¹ Australia's migration system includes:

- Australia's temporary and permanent visa programs;
- the policy and legislative framework that underpins those programs;
- the systems and processes that support the administration of our programs, including how clients interact with the system, whether directly or through third party providers; and
- the settlement services and the multicultural policies and programs that support integration and foster connections and contribute to strong citizenship outcomes.

The migration system has the ability to shape our international reputation, and whether migrants feel welcome, safe and included. The way it is designed and managed also has the ability to influence broader public confidence and trust.

The Department's [Administration of Immigration and Citizenship](#) paper provides a useful overview.

Critical linkages

The Strategy will be informed by the discussions and outcomes of the [Jobs and Skills Summit](#), which took place on 1 and 2 September 2022, with a particular focus on supporting the complementarity of the migration program to Australia's jobs and skills agenda.

Task (scope)

Identify the reforms needed to create a simple, efficient migration system that can effectively:

- Enrich the economy, with a focus on productivity growth;
- Complement Australia's education and training systems and the skills of Australians
- Unlock the potential of migrants;
- Help build Australia's sovereign capabilities and address challenges associated with the aging population, climate change and new technology;
- Compete globally for highly skilled migrants, including by improving clients' experience of the immigration process;
- Provide clear pathways to permanent residence and citizenship and reduce the exploitation of migrant workers; and
- Foster enhanced integration (including people, trade and supply chain links) with our international friends and partners.

The Strategy will be informed by a review of the current visa framework, including both the temporary and permanent visa programs, and the processes and systems that support the administration of that framework. In doing so, it will consider the current limitations and opportunities to reform the visa processing systems, including through digital platforms, trusted and secure identities, cyber security, and enhanced data analytics.

Out of scope

- All other matters in regards to the migration system, specifically issues relevant to irregular migration and status resolution, regional processing and Operation Sovereign Borders.
- Functions and activities of the Australian Border Force, including but not limited to immigration compliance, removals and detention.
- Administered programs including grants.
- Public Interest Criteria required for approval of visas, including character, national security and health checking requirements.

Recommendations

The Strategy will include recommendations for reforms. These may include reforms to the visa framework, the policy and legislative framework, Information and Communication Technology systems and processes, and linkages with other parts of government.

Timing

An interim report from Strategy authors will be provided to the Minister for Home Affairs on 28 February 2023, and will contain key priority recommendations for the 2023-24 Budget.

Governance and reporting

The Strategy will be developed by three independent authors who will consult widely, both within and outside the Australian Public Service, including with distinguished Australians, academics, economic modellers, and civil society representatives.

The Strategy will have regard to the findings or proceedings of previous and ongoing reviews or inquiries and regulatory approaches in relevant overseas jurisdictions.

The authors will meet regularly with the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to discuss progress and findings. They will also engage regularly with Ministers from a range of other portfolios on areas of mutual interest.