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WITH LUCINDA WRIGHT FROM LEGAL MINDS

THINKING

MIGRATION

Most of us know that migration has made a significant contribution to the increase of our population and has resulted in the vibrant, diverse society that characterises Australia today.

Since 1945 more than seven million people have settled here. This number includes some 700,000 people who came under refugee and other humanitarian programs. This financial year, the Australian Government's migration program is for a total of 168,700 new settlers.

A much larger number of people come to Australia on a temporary basis as tourists, to study, or to work. For instance, in the year 2008-2009 more than 340,000 people came to work here and 320,000 came to study.

But how does migration impact on regional areas such as the New England?

How many of these people do we come across in our daily activities? Although most new arrivals congregate in the major metropolitan centres, a significant number come to the New England region.

They may come to visit family and friends, or stay for a few weeks as back packers on working holiday visas, picking fruit or working on farms.

Some are sponsored by employers to work in occupations as diverse as dentistry, veterinary research and farm management. In Armidale we enjoy encounters with international students studying at UNE. Their cultural diversity enriches our community life when they participate in local activities, such as the recent Autumn Festival.

Some of these temporary residents decide to stay in the region for a longer period, perhaps as academics in teaching posts, or as specialised workers whose skills their employer wishes to retain. Others may have formed relationships with Australians.

Across the region we enjoy the variety of exotic cuisines and goods offered in our restaurants and shops by settlers from many countries.

To encourage migration to regional areas the Government has specific programs

with more flexible requirements for states, regional authorities and employers to sponsor skilled and business migrants. Local regional councils are interested in promoting the New England to attract migrants. Regional Development Australia (Northern Inland) assists employers by certifying their nomination of a worker to fill a genuine vacancy the employer has been unable to fill locally.

Recruitment agencies (such as GrahWil in Tamworth) specialise in locating suitable overseas candidates for employers, and professional migration agents offer services to individuals and businesses to help streamline the migration process.

A small, but noticeable group of refugees have been encouraged to settle in our region. Arriving with nothing, and cut off from their homes and community, they are assisted by volunteer groups such as Sanctuary, who facilitate their airfares and help organise housing and other services. Even the most ordinary transactions

(banking, enrolling in schools, accessing Centrelink services, or learning to drive) can be daunting.

In the New England we provide a safe, caring environment with opportunities for education and work not available in their war-torn homelands. Migrants are also able to access the services of the not-for-profit Northern Settlement Services and a specialised refugee nurse located in Uralla.

As New Englanders, we know what a great way of life our region can offer. In turn we benefit from the marvellous diversity of skills, customs, and experience that migrants bring to us. We're also fortunate to be able to provide a comprehensive network of professionals to assist them to navigate the complexities of the migration process and ease their settlement into our community.

Lucinda Wright, Migration Consultant, Legal Minds

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