

Community Demographics

Afghan/ Hazara Community –

The largest and fastest growing group of refugee and asylum seeker community members in the Sunraysia Region. There are an increasing number of families coming to settle in Mildura and surrounds as well as a large number of men living as singles with their families not in the country. While some community activities involve both families and singles, due to cultural reasons many community activities and interactions are separated for either those with families, or for singles. New community members are of all ages and the population of the community is approximately 55 families and 200 single men with a smaller number also residing in Robinvale but who also visits to Mildura regularly.

Burundian Community –

The region has welcomed a steady number of Burundian community members over recent years and it is currently our second new and emerging community group. The population of this group is approximately 19 families. New arrival community members arrived as humanitarian refugees and are of all age ranges, with the majority arriving as families. In the last few years the number of new community members arriving from this country has reduced, with new arrivals now coming as linked to families and friends currently residing in the area.

Tamil Community –

Increasing number of Tamil community members coming from Sri Lanka, approximately 23 individuals in Mildura and 13 individuals in Robinvale. Majority of new community members are Asylum Seekers on Bridging Visas and are male living as singles in the 25 – 35 year ages group. Although there is a small growing number of new community members on humanitarian visas. A significant proportion of this community who arrive in Mildura tend to transition to reside in Robinvale, but continue to spend a significant about of their time in Mildura. This community also tends to be close nit and self-reliant, while also engaging with broader Sri Lankan community members residing in the area. The group is also quite transient in nature with many moving onto other locations to pursue work, study community opportunities elsewhere.

Other communities –

The Sunraysia region also receives smaller numbers of families and single male refugee or asylum seeker new arrivals from other countries such as; Iran, Iraq, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Pakistan, and Kurdistan. New community members from these groups generally arrive as sponsored places with local family or friend support from those already living in the region. Also, in the early to mid-2000's the region welcomed a significant number of Sudanese refugees. The region does not now receive new arrivals from this community, however some families remain locally.

Importantly the region also welcomes new arrival community members from a range of other countries who are not refugees or asylum seekers, but who have needs and require support. This includes community members arriving on family migrations stream, skilled Migrant and regional sponsored migration scheme. In recent years this has included individuals and families from countries such as; Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Pacific Island communities etc. In many cases there are existing

community groups and peer networks to support newly arrived community members from these countries, but as in the broader community, there are instances of some new arrivals who are isolated and have support and engagement needs (particularly women with low level of English proficiency).



Community Plan Process and Development

This community plan has been developed based on a series of consultations carried out by Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC) between April to June 2015. This process was undertaken for the joint purpose of developing the SMECC Strategic Plan 2015 – 2018, and for reviewing and revising ‘RAP community plans’. These plans are developed internally by SMECC as part of program requirements for its Refugee Action Program (RAP) funded by the Victorian Government.

These consultation processes were led by intern Gabrielle Murphy, an RMIT University student studying Bachelor of Arts (International Studies), who joined with SMECC specially as an external person to lead this task. Consultations were also carried out by SMECC Engagement Worker Farjana Alam-Rankin in support of Ms Murphy, and the processes were overseen and by SMECC Program & Development Manager Andrew Rankin.

In reviewing and assessing current issues and continued success SMECC consulted stakeholders from various groups that are integral to SMECC operations and in supporting new and emerging community members in the region more broadly. This included SMECC staff, clients, key service providers, the SMECC board and CALD community groups. Individual interviews/questionnaires as well as group workshops were the preferred method of consultation. These changed according to each stakeholder group and their involvement. Language support was also used where required. For consultation with community groups, focus group meetings were a key part of this process. Additional 1-2-1 formal and informal meetings were also held with community representatives. SMECC’s process focused on the importance of generating input not only from the community members themselves, but also feedback from its own staff and of other service provider stakeholders to help ensure a well-rounded view of strengths, gaps and opportunities for supporting new and emerging

community groups in our region.

Through extensive consultation with over 40 immediate stakeholders and groups, many provided insight as to what SMECC and the broader support sector are doing well, how they could improve, and how to support the empowerment of new and emerging communities. Stakeholders consulted through this process included: Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC), Sunraysia Community Health Services (SCHS), Chaffey Secondary College (CSC), Mildura West Primary (MWP), Migration Services, Department of Human Services (DHS), Mildura English Language Centre (MELC), Mildura Senior College (MSC), Victoria Police Mildura, Department of Justice (DoJ), SuniTAFE, Headspace Mildura, Healthy Together Mildura, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network (NMLLEN), The Twitezimbere-Burundian Community, The Afghan and Muslim women's community, The Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker community, The Congolese community, Migrant students (from MELC, CSC and MSC), SMECC Staff and the SMECC Board.

For this development of this document, *New & Emerging Communities: Community Plan 2015*, objectives and focus areas were drawn from the SMECC Strategic Plan 2015-2018 Implementation plan and Mildura RAP Community Plan developed by SMECC.

Our Key Themes, Issues and Needs

Employment Opportunities:

- CALD community members, particularly new and emerging community members, feel that employment opportunities are a key priority for them.
- The complexity of our broader employment and training sectors is seen as a significant barrier, as are issues of skills recognition.

Access to services:

- New and emerging community members often do not seek from services and stakeholders help due to low self-esteem or low self-belief, and due to language barriers.
- New community members from different cultural and language groups find local services systems difficult to navigate and confusing in many cases, particularly when different services are responsible for providing support for different parts of a linked issue.

Language barriers:

- The inability to speak or understand English stops a large majority of newly arrived migrant groups from communicating with people and services.

- However, many refugees and migrants do not regularly attend English language classes or seek the available English help due to conflicting priorities such as; irregular seasonal work commitments; family and day-to-day orientation/ support commitments; undiagnosed or unsupported psychosocial needs.

Young people

Young people from new and emerging communities highlighted particular issues and concerns including but not limited to:

- lack of awareness of the variety of broader youth community activities available for them to participate in;
- cultural norms placing extra household responsibilities on them compared to other young people, not allowing them sufficient time for studies and/or recreation;
- contradiction between learning Australian culture at school which can conflict with culture at home and parents are worried about a disconnect
- young people are placed in positions of responsibility to provide language support for their parents in the community as they have good English language skills and their parents do not.

Women

- Many new and emerging community women are isolated and unable to take part in the wider community due to household commitments and expectations. As the traditional family caregivers, women often stay at home to look after children and other household chores..

Mental health

- The mental health of newly arrived community members from refugee & asylum seeker backgrounds is an ongoing concern. The trust of talking and confiding in strangers (ie. Counsellors and other professional services) is also a very Western idea and can stop many from seeking help.

Community Leadership

- There is difficulty in properly engaging and communicating with community members through their leaders. As of mid-2015 key communities including the Afghan and Burundian communities have taken steps to refresh their community groups.
- It is important that ethnic 'communities' are not viewed as single homogenous groups, particularly by services and institutions. As with the broader society, there is rarely one leadership group which represents or communicates well with all members of their ethnic community. There are frequently many differing peer groups within each community.

Our Top 5 Objectives

Improved employment and income generation outcomes

Support new and emerging communities, with a focus on women, to develop projects which improve personal skills and provide opportunities to produce services/ items for sale to generate income for individuals and community groups

Support English language and job readiness skills development

Engagement and ongoing support of new and emerging community members to participate as volunteers community projects

Improved English Language skills and other educational outcomes

Increase range of and access to English language skills development classes, courses and other community opportunities for new and emerging community members

Skills and experiences that will increase confidence to be effectively orientated and engaged within the Region, including support services

Engagement of new and emerging communities in planning and participating in community events and activities which build personal skills and community connectedness

Advocate to, and build capacity of, local services and businesses to help ensure new and emerging communities receive fair and equitable treatment in accessing services

Strengthen knowledge and external information sharing between service providers, the broader community, and new and emerging community groups

Continue to support key new and emerging community group representatives and leaders to build skills and structures to enable increased engagement and support of their peer groups.

Support asylum seeker community members to access information and technical support around policy developments linked to their legal rights and responsibilities, and to increase availability of social supports to them

Support of women from new and emerging communities, particularly isolated women

Engage and reduce barriers to participation of isolated women in social, recreational and educational activity opportunities. Placing a particular focus on isolated groups such as; those with young children and younger married women.

Engagement of youth and families, to improve family and broader community connectedness

Continue to engage, provide social support and develop leadership among young people from new and emerging communities

Engage and support young people, particularly young women and girls, to participate in youth services activities and social/ recreational community opportunities