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EXAMINING KEY FACTORS WHEN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING SKILLED AND PROFESSIONAL MIGRANTS TO REGIONAL AREAS: THE CASE OF THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRAL QUEENSLAND REGION

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ABSTRACT
Attracting and retaining skilled and professional staff is a global issue requiring urgent attention (Haslam McKenzie 2008). Consequently, the attraction and retention of professionals to regional and remote areas has received considerable attention from the Australian, State and Territory governments (DOTARS 2006; LGAQ 2008; Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan 2004; SCORD 2004; Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008). Several studies further recognise that a combination of evolving global and national trends have increased skilled labour shortages (Holland, Sheehan & De Cieri 2007), net migration from regional and remote areas to metropolitan areas (Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan 2004) and the inability for regional areas to retain skilled and professional migrants (Hugo 2004; JSCM 2001; Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008). In the case of attracting and retaining skilled and professional migrants in regional areas, some studies now concede the importance of examining family and individual wellbeing factors for migrants (Haslam McKenzie 2008; Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008). Our study extends several recent studies (LGAQ 2008; Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan 2004; Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008) and will further examine some implications of skilled migration for Queensland’s rural and regional areas, the community relations environment in rural and regional Queensland and the wellbeing of newly arrived skilled migrants and their families. Unique to our study is the specific focus on the wellbeing factors of skilled immigrants and their families. The multi-staged research will focus on exploring and examining the existing migrant settlement programs that enhance community health, happiness and wellbeing in the Australian Central Queensland region.

Keywords: Skills Shortage, Skills Attraction, Skills Retention, Public Private Partnership, Skilled Migrants Settlement.

INTRODUCTION
Due to the economic downturn that is negatively affecting the world’s economies including the most prominent ones such as the United States, the 15-nation Euro-zone and Japan are now in recession, and are forecast to decline by 1.4 per cent by the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2009) amid the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. The impact on the Australian economy is still under the scope of researchers as it is not clear what effects the world’s financial situation will have on Australia and particularly on the Australian regional areas such as Central Queensland.

The Institute of International Finance (IIF 2009), a North American association that represents more than 375 of the world’s major banks and financial institutions, projected the world economy would shrink 0.4 per cent in 2009, after 2.0 per cent growth in 2008. The Central Queensland Region’s economy is not aloof from this severe recession. Thus, a strategic plan for employment must be developed to keep the Central Queensland economy healthy, smart and strong, however big the challenge.

Recession is technically defined as a decline in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that lasts for at least six months, creating a contraction in the business cycle. Many macroeconomic indicators such as the measurement of GDP, investment, industrial capacity or capacity utilization, business profits, spending, and consequently employment which also affects household income are impacted negatively during periods of recession. Consequently, governments increase their spending, as has the Australian government which has initiated the stimulus packages and reduction of taxation, to leverage the Australian economy.

The Queensland government could take advantage of the world’s economical situation through the appropriate formation of innovative public and private partnerships through the development of an appropriate set of policies to improve the effectiveness of attracting and retaining skilled workers. As research has demonstrated, during tough times there is always room for innovation. Innovation management is also about improvement of processes or finding a better way to do things efficiently (Santa 2008).
For a developed country like Australia, attracting and retaining New Arrivals who include (skilled migrants, refugees and interstate workers) to live and work with families in diverse remote and regional Queensland, and contributing to building sustainable regions for the future is a challenge. These countries are experiencing skill shortages, ageing populations, low birth rates, falling consumption and production, and consequently serious implications for the economic sustainability of the region and global competitiveness. Thus labour market flexibility in terms of mobility is important to attract, retain and for the host community to welcome new arrivals and recognises the benefits that the migrants make to the region. It's important that new arrivals to regional areas find it attractive and the host community welcoming so they can settle in with their families. Overall well-being of the skilled and professional migrants is critical as they contribute to the economic growth and development of the country and addressing the skill shortage of the economy in remote, rural and regional Queensland, Australia. There is a clear connection between skill shortages and migrant intake all over the world. Gaps in economic performance and regional inequalities can be addressed by fostering PPP in attracting and retaining new arrivals/migrants to not only increase productivity, and narrowing the gaps between region and capital cities for sustaining long-term prosperity but also improving standard of living and economic growth of the region.

The concept of Public and Private Partnerships (PPP) can be applied to provide strategies to improve migrant workers and their families overall well-being, as government cannot do this alone. Government needs the partnership from NGO, private sector businesses, developers, builders, university, local employers and businesses to provide the essential economic, social and community infrastructure (Medhekar, 2003 and McKenzie, 2007). Government at all three levels, along with the corporate business sector, trade unions, educational institutions along with the commitment of the host community partnerships play a key role to take on the joint responsibility to attract and retain professional and skilled migrants if they want their regions to have industrial and economic sustainability into the future and for the New Arrivals to reach their full potential. Due to remoteness of the region which results in deficit of infrastructure facilities and lack of easy access to essential services such as health, education, training, housing, library, community services, employment and career development opportunities, lifestyle, taxation incentives to attract migrants to remote areas, public utilities, telecommunication facilities, quality of lifestyle (SCORD, 2004) and above all welcoming host community are considered as key infrastructure needs to attract and retain New Arrivals.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Skilled Labour Shortage**

The Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST), defines skills shortages as occurring when employers are unable to fill or have considerable difficulty in filling vacancies for an occupation, or specialised skill needs within that occupation, at current levels of remuneration and conditions of employment, and reasonably accessible location(DEST, 2002: 3). The Australian Government’s National Skills Shortage Strategy currently cites several causes of skill shortage. They include strong economy with low rates of unemployment; growth of new industries with few ready-skilled tradespeople available; relocation of new industries into different regions with a different skills base; lack of interest in particular industries among potential job seekers; location of industry, or project-based work, in rural or regional areas with a small skills base; technology changes within an industry, especially production, resulting in new methods and therefore skills needs; and changes in underpinning skills needs to successfully undertake trade training for example, Year 12 maths for technology trades (DEST, 2005).

In a report targeting three Western Australian regions, Tonts et al (2008) ascribe the acute shortage of skilled and unskilled labour to a range of demographic, social and institutional factors, such as an ageing population, changing education and training choices on the part of young people, and perhaps in some cases negative perceptions about living in the regions. Consequently, for many businesses and public sector institutions, difficulties in securing or retaining staff have undermined productivity, profitability and/or the quality of service delivery. Further, this has constrained local and regional economic growth which, eventually, will impact on the performance of the State and even Australian economies (Tonts et al 2008, p.1).

Davies and Tonts (2007) explain the high rates of sectoral variability in the nature of skilled labour shortages. They posit that the sectors most affected include: agriculture, forestry and fisheries; construction; and manufacturing. Furthermore, there is also a geographical dimension to labour force change in the region, with growing areas experiencing shortages in sectors such as manufacturing, construction and services, while declining areas face widespread shortages, largely as a result of their inability to attract and retain workers. Davies and Tonts (2007, p.5) have put forward the key factors that influence skilled labour markets and the complex nature of their interaction. Of particular importance are:

- Global pressures – including international trading conditions, global economic growth, economic reform, and the growth of a global labour market.
Industry demand – which is influenced by global economic conditions, as well as domestic markets. Quite clearly the more prosperous local and regional industry, the higher the demand for skilled (and other) labour.

Government policy – particularly as it relates to economic and employment policy. While in an increasingly globalised economy, the role of governments in determining growth is diminished, it nevertheless remains an important player through labour regulations, import-export policy, education and training infrastructure development, and other regional development policies.

Labour supply – including a market of suitably skilled workers, the age structure of the population, and labour availability within particular geographic areas (ranging from local areas to broader global labour markets).

Characteristics of place – which is often overlooked by economists, but is crucial in determining the geography of labour. The level of local services and amenity, local economic conditions, location and accessibility, cultural traits/characteristics, and population structure are all important in shaping labour force trends, locational choices, and migration patterns. (Davies & Tonts 2007, p.5).

**Geography and Extent of Skills Shortage in Australia**

While skill shortages are prevalent throughout Australia, their impact is most felt in regional and remote parts of Australia. Too often the analysis of labour markets overlooks geographical reality and spatial processes. A long tradition of research in the field of economic geography has emphasised the considerable spatial variations that occur in the economic performance of regions. The reasons for this are extremely complex, but include: The availability of natural resources; The productivity of local industries; The use of technology; Levels of capital investment; Accessibility and strategic locational advantages (e.g. access to markets, proximity to transport etc.); The quality of infrastructure; The educational characteristics of local and regional populations; The availability of skilled and unskilled labour; Demographic structure; Social conditions and amenity; and Governance arrangements. Davies and Tonts (2007) emphasise that the spatial unevenness of these attributes means that the characteristics and performance of regional and local economies vary considerably across geographic space. They posit that the spatial variations are particularly important for understanding labour markets, since the differing local and regional conditions lead to geographical differences in demand for labour. In short, labour markets are affected by a range of local and non-local factors. Thus, local business, and its demand for jobs, is ultimately dependent on intraregional, national and global labour markets, the demographic structure of labour markets, education, services, transport, lifestyle preferences and government policy. What this highlights is that local labour markets are, in effect, in competition with one another. In other words, there is not simply local competition between businesses (and other organisations) for skills, but wider regional competition.

The outcome of this spatial competition is often a movement of skilled labour from one place to another (Green and Owen, 2003; Green et al, 2004; Green et al, 1998). This can be conceptualised with reference to a simple push-pull model of labour mobility, where ‘push factors’ encourage people to leave a particular workplace/location, and ‘pull factors’ attract people to new locations/workplaces. For each individual and household, these factors will vary, though some generalisations can be made. Push factors include: limited career opportunities; low wages; poor working conditions; few training opportunities; low levels of social and environmental amenity; and high costs of living. Pull factors include: high wages; flexible employment practices; opportunities for career advancement; and high levels of social and environmental amenity. It is important to recognise that the mobility of labour is shaped by a range of factors and cannot be regarded as a commodity divorced from its social context. People make decisions about where they live and work not simply on the basis of the availability of employment or high wages, but according to complex lifestyle choices centred on, inter alia, family and social networks, service availability, housing, and environmental conditions (Hugo, 2005).

Where flows of labour from one region to another do occur, they can have significant impacts on local and regional economies. For those economies that are expanding rapidly, the in-migration of labour can underpin further economic growth and expansion, population growth, and increasing demand for economic and social infrastructure. By contrast, for those losing labour, the impacts can include chronic skills shortages, contracting local economies, and inability to pursue new economic opportunities, and the degradation of social capital and sense of community.

**The Role of Immigration in Alleviating Skills Shortages**

Davies and Tonts (2007) highlight a short term solution to the problem of skilled labour shortages being migration. They note that the Commonwealth government has a range of skilled migration programs in place that are aimed at dealing with the needs of regional areas. However, Davies and Tonts suggest that skilled migration programs pose their own challenges, noting that while they can help to alleviate problems in the short term; their longer term value is still open to question. Some of the
critical issues in regard to skilled migration include the willingness of migrants to remain in regional areas in the long term, the level of inter-regional competition for skilled migrants, and the social match between migrants and their host communities.

Skilled migration has been viewed as a significant part of the skills shortages solution. It appears attractive to industry since it allows Australian industry to entice workers that have been trained abroad. Skilled immigration provides business with a low cost and relatively rapid solution to impending specific labour shortages. However, skilled migrants have had some difficulties, including local conditions that have proven to be unaccommodating of their cultural and language differences (Hawthorne, 1997 and 2001).

Alongside training and education, considerable attention is being given to various migration programs. Australia currently has a range of measures in place to facilitate the immigration of skilled labour. This includes both permanent migrants, as well as temporary migrants who are able to stay in the country under a range of different subclasses of visa. The impact of skilled migration outside of Australia’s cities has been limited, with 83 per cent of migrants settling in the capital cities. However, the evidence suggests that those migrants who arrive under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme tend to remain within their initial region and make an important contribution to local employment needs (DIMIA, 2005).

While skilled migration can be a useful means of providing a short term fix to particular skills shortages, it does have limitations:

- It does not resolve the broader structural issues that contributed to the skills shortage in the first place;
- Other countries are also in competition for skilled labour, which means that there is a limited global supply. This increases wage and non-wage (lifestyle) competition for workers;
- At a broader social justice level, the ‘poaching’ of skilled labour from developing countries further undermines these economies and the prospects for development;
- The extent to which new migrants are able to adapt to living in rural areas is still to be fully understood

**Skilled Labour Attraction and Retention**

Attracting and retaining skilled and professional staff is a global issue requiring urgent attention (Haslam McKenzie 2008). Consequently, the attraction and retention of professionals to regional and remote areas has received considerable attention from the Australian, State and Territory governments (DOTARS 2006; LGAQ 2008; Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan 2004; SCORD 2004; Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008). Several studies further recognise that a combination of evolving global and national trends have increased skilled labour shortages (Holland, Sheehan & De Cieri 2007), net migration from regional and remote areas to metropolitan areas (Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan 2004) and the inability for regional areas to retain skilled and professional migrants (Hugo 2004; JSCM 2001; Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008). In the case of attracting and retaining skilled and professional migrants in regional areas, some studies now concede the importance of examining family and individual wellbeing factors for migrants (Haslam McKenzie 2008; Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008).

Several studies have advanced reasons as to why rural, regional and remote postings are increasingly becoming unattractive to skilled and professional staff. These include high workloads, professionals’ inability to attain an appropriate work/life balance due to staff shortages and high demand for their services, a drop-off in volunteering, depleted service and sporting clubs, mental health and youth issues, staff turnover problems and frustrations with government’s apparent lack of interest (Haslam McKenzie 2008). In a bid to address skill shortage as well as stem the migration of skilled and professionals from regional and remote areas, the Australian, State and Territory governments adapted an immigration programme that encourage skilled international migrants to settle in regional Australia (DIMIA, 2005).

This was achieved through the introduction of various visa categories, such as the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS), that required skilled migrants to locate for at least a minimum of two and up to three years in regional areas outside of Australia’s major capital cities (Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008). As noted by Wulff and Dharmalingam (2008, p.147), the success of that programme depended on not just attracting increasing numbers of settlers but more importantly on retaining them in the long run in regional Australia. It was imperative that policymakers pursued innovative strategies and ways of encouraging migrants to remain in regional areas, particularly given the attraction of the large cities with their high concentrations of overseas-born migrants and associated support services (Wulff & Dharmalingam 2008, p.148).

Hugo, Khoo and McDonald (2006) examine recent initiatives by the Australian and Queensland government that sought to increase the share of national skilled migration moving to regional areas. They conclude that the deliberate regional recruitment has combined with a resources boom to significantly increase the numbers of skilled migrants coming to Queensland.
However, having attracted skilled and professional migrants to rural, regional and remote areas of Australia, all levels of governments now find themselves faced with the problem of retaining migrants. Miles, Marshall, Rolfe and Noonan (2004) have highlighted problems related to the retention of overseas professionals that had been attracted to regional Queensland. These included lack of professional development, cultural support, less diverse culture, activities and lifestyle. Another study focusing on migrants to regional areas (LGAQ 2008) proposes that Councils, State Government departments and communities should provide a wide range of services and engagement opportunities to newly arrived individuals and families. These, it was felt, would enhance the wellbeing of skilled immigrants and their families. The wellbeing factors were especially important in rural and regional areas where there is relatively little settlement infrastructure and often no resident cultural, linguistic or religious community to support new arrivals. The LGAQ report (2008) proposed a concerted effort to coordinate both the attraction and retention of skilled migrants to Queensland, highlighting the need for coordination across the three spheres of government towards developing a strategy of retention of migrants once they have settled. A contribution from the above studies is the suggestion that any approach to filling vacancies with overseas workers should be accompanied by support programmes for the new immigrants to help them settle and remain in regional areas.

**Settlement of Migrants**

With increasing ageing population and decreasing fertility issues, Australia will continue importing skilled workforce from overseas specifically in areas of major skills shortage such as Information technology, health and engineering areas. Whilst more families settle in Regional areas seeking for peaceful lifestyle and remote areas offer high paid jobs many migrants still prefer to settle and live at Australia’ main urban centres. Not surprisingly, the term "Regional and Remote areas" has become quite misleading and now, has been replaced by "Designated area" in order to provide a more balance concentration of migrant population.

The Australian Migration Policy is seeking to consciously re-direct all government efforts to support Settlement process of migrants within designated areas. However, this is not easy task. Some of the Settlement Schemes stemming from the shift in Migration Policy have failed to balance the distribution of migrants within designated areas due a series of structural issues in the system.

First of all, temporary skilled migrants are not subject of settlement Migration strategies by Federal Government. Employer sponsors become "liable" - in general terms - for all sponsored individuals. In 2006, Department of Immigration and Citizenship spent 30 Billion Dollars on local and global expos to attract workforce from United Kingdom, South Africa and United States. Furthermore, a total of $32 million is available for the Settlement Grant Program in 2008–09. Of this, approximately $22 million were invested on Refugees and Permanent Residents settlement across Australia. Meanwhile, no funding was allocated to assist skilled migrants coming to Regional Areas of Australia when this particular subclass visa recipient grew 16% in comparison to 2005 (see table 1). This highlights the current Australian settlement programs area is based on the visa status of the individual rather than the need of the individual for assistance.

**Table 1:** Migrants by major visa category 2004–05 to 2007–08

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<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>13 178</td>
<td>14 144</td>
<td>13 017</td>
<td>13 014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>41 740</td>
<td>45 290</td>
<td>50 080</td>
<td>49 870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>77 880</td>
<td>97 340</td>
<td>97 920</td>
<td>108 540</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporary Resident</td>
<td>198 273</td>
<td>227 856</td>
<td>265 279</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(Source: www.immi.gov.au, 2009)

The Temporary Resident category of visas includes those in the skilled worker, social and cultural, and international relations stream, but not short-term visitors and students (See DIAC).

Secondly, While QLD local government are struggling to maintain and develop their core business activities (Rubbish, Roads and Rates) within amalgamated areas, State Government looks after land Crown matters and Immigration grant visas migrant settlement seems to be a "grey area" that no government tier owns. As of today, remarkable efforts from community volunteers are being organised around of "Welcoming committees". Those volunteers based on principles of community cohesion assist new members of the community with free English classes, institutional advocacy, employment referrals, etc.
More Migrants are also settling within Regional areas through the State Specific Migration Mechanism (S-MMs), in which a State Government organisation provides sponsorship to an individual whose skills are in demand in a particular region of that State. The problem with this subclass is that sponsored individuals come to Australia without work and seeking for work in a specific area, where presumably those skills are in high demand.

Furthermore, large Industry and businesses seem to provide fairly good settlement packages to migrants which include great salary packages, entertainment subsidies and company bonuses. On the other hand, small and family size businesses can not compete with large organisation financially wise. So, they have two options. Some organisations will work in very low cost effective manner by linking with community based organisations to provide some kind of settlement assistance and services for the employees and family services. And some others will not provide any assistance at all to their employees.

Some of the most prominent determinants of settlement for migrants within Regional and Remote communities are, family, culture, educational opportunity for children, health status, Housing, Transport, food availability, leisure activity and weather conditions. Besides the push effect (disruptive conditions in home country) or full factors (opportunities for betterment) understanding settlement determinants provides designated areas with an unique opportunity of formulating effective and sustainable settlement strategies. For instance, "finding a job" is a crucial factor of settlement for the "bread winner" however the challenge is to create more job opportunities for spouses in Regional areas.

It is also believed that an effective settlement program can actually maximise the full potential of all family members later on. Hence, the importance of a well coordinated, holistic and effective partnership among key community stakeholders to assist within newly arrived families within designated areas. An effective settlement strategy requires the ongoing commitment and involvement of government, industry and community in order to guarantee the sustainability of this strategy (LGAQ, 2008).

However, neither the temporary migrant nor the community in which they live will reap the full benefits of such an arrangement if the presence of migrant workers leads to social tensions due to their failure to ‘integrate’. It is thus in everyone’s interests to ensure that migrant workers are welcomed and made to feel at home no matter how long their stay. Providing temporary migrants and their families with some sort of assistance allowing them to participate more fully and comfortably in Australian life could therefore assist not just the migrants themselves, but also the communities in which they live.

The international experience would suggest that if efforts are not made to assist temporary migrants to live successfully in Australia for the duration of their stay, then exploitation, isolation and social ostracism may result, potentially leading to increased racial tension and disharmony (LGAQ, 2008).

Public Private Partnership

The Ministry of Public Affairs in British Columbia (cited in Schaeffer and Loveridge 2002, p. 170) defines PPP in the following terms: Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are arrangements between government and private sector entities for the purpose of providing public infrastructure, community facilities and related services. Such partnerships are characterised by the sharing of investment, risk, responsibility and reward between the partners. Public-Private Partnership defines cooperation between the public sector or government and the private sector. Partnerships are essential for planning and implementing federal, state and local government infrastructure initiatives in regional economic development. Partnership involves sharing of responsibilities, planning, developing objectives, financial risks and accountability (Gramlich, 1994, Webb & Pulle 2002).

In this paper, PPP is used as meaning a combination of public service restructuring and risk shifting that is undertaken to achieve, ‘leveraging public capital for infrastructure and other capital-intensive investments as well as provision of services’ in welcoming, attracting and retaining migrants in remote and regional Queensland, Australia to share responsibility in providing New Arrivals (skilled migrants, refugees and interstate workers) needs and demands in context of job opportunities, infrastructure facilities, essential services such as health, education schooling, accommodation, community facilities, childcare, recreation facilities, places of worship, interpretation language skills etc to improve their overall well-being. Given the budgetary constrains PPP-PFI (private finance initiates) for infrastructure development and service delivery can be adopted at all levels of Government and private sector for attracting, retaining and improving the overall well-being of the skilled migrants (Morris et al. 2002, pp. 74-76).

Nearly 200,000 skilled and professional migrant workers enter UK each year and work in urban areas of London and South East because of lack of essential facilities to attract them to stay in regional areas and only one in ten apply to settle permanently (SWESA, 2005). However, in recent years, the UK has relied heavily on foreign labour as a means of addressing skills shortages in certain industries and filling positions that local people are reluctant to undertake. Overseas workers have
helped to fill the UK skills shortage problem in recent years, but with rising unemployment rate of fourteen year high, domestic employees rebelling against foreign workers, depreciation of the pound, and with 50% tax rate for those earning over £150,000 – which comes into force in April 2010, many foreign skilled workers are now returning home (SWESA, 2005; Brochu & Abu-Ayyash 2006). According to HR Director of Spice Plc, Richard Harris’ Even in the recession we have problems with skilled labour, mainly in high-voltage connection operations – project engineers, commissioning engineers, sub-engineers – because they’re rare people.” (Martindale, 2009) Partnerships is a cost effective way for leveraging on informal community expertise which are essential in terms of sharing resources, staff, interpreters, accounting and legal firms, municipal governments, community organisations, to encourage integration for provide affordable housing for immigrants (Bauder , et al., 2001; Boucher , 2007; Wachsmuth, 2008; Balakrishnan and Wu, 1992; Bryant, 2003).

The Economic growth and development of a country depends on the development of economic and social (health, education, public utilities, employment opportunities, community services and housing) infrastructure. PPP for overall well-being of the skilled and professional New Arrivals to rural and regional Queensland, Australia and their contribution to the economic growth and development of the region is very significant. According to the Smith Institute study, the economic contribution to GDP from migrants is significant for example in UK migrants contributed 10% of GDP, accounting for only 8% in employment (Montanheiro 2002; Medhekar, 2003).

Infrastructure and support network is critical for the migrant’s settlement process which removes social and economic barriers to settlement. Skilled migrants contribute to the society in a productive way and increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country by opening up new markets and create local supply and demand for new goods and services, movement of people, fill skill shortages in the labour market and bring in cultural diversity. There is a need for improving not only quantity but also quality of (skilled and professional) migrant intake and provide necessary service delivery to meet the increased demand by the migrant community to attract and retain them in a particular geographic location.

PPP approach can be used and applied in welcoming, attracting and retaining migrants in remote and regional Queensland, Australia to share responsibility in providing migrants needs and demands in context of job opportunities, infrastructure facilities, services such as health, education schooling, accommodation, community facilities, childcare, recreation facilities, places of worship and interpretation language skills etc (Schaeffer and Loveridge 2002; ACID 2003).

Each region in Queensland is characteristic of its own social, cultural, economic, geographic, political and national endowment features, which in turn interact with the provision of infrastructure to determine the region’s economic development path and differences in performance (Higgins and Savoie 1997; Fujita et al. 1999). It is well recognised that regional Queensland’s existing infrastructure is deficient, restricting regional development as well as not being attractive to new arrivals. In the first three month the Australian economy grew by 0.4%, due to the government’s fiscal stimulus package resulting in an increase in infrastructure, consumer spending, first home buyers grant of $21,000 (available to immigrants as well) and an increase in exports.

This study acknowledges the likelihood of a multi-component nature of key drivers (i.e. health, education, housing, job and career opportunities and infrastructure), impacting on the design and implementation of settlement programs which are in turn influenced by government policies. Also, the research considers that effectively implemented settlement programs increase the probability of attracting and retaining skilled migrants in regional areas (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** The interplay between the key drivers for settlement programs that ensure attraction and retention of skilled migrants

Based on the review of the literature and the research model (Figure 1), this research proposes to answer the following research questions:
1. What are the key factors of attracting and retaining skilled and professional migrants to the Australian Central Queensland region?
2. Are the existing migrant settlement programs in the Australian Central Queensland region taking into consideration key factors to attract and retain skilled migrants?
3. Are the existing settlement programs impacting on the attraction and retention of skilled migrants to the Australian Central Queensland region?

METHODOLOGY

This is a multiphase research project that seeks the development of a framework through the identification of the initial key migrant worker and migrant family well-being factors that will assist in the formation or improvement of the existing PPP. This first stage of the multiphase research project will be focused on the identification of the key family and individual wellbeing factors when attracting and retaining skilled and professional migrants to the Central Queensland region. Convergent interviews with members of the CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) community will be conducted to expand the factors that emerged from previous research identified in the literature review, and particularly the LGAQ report (2008), which presented a clear picture of the wellbeing of migrants in Queensland regional and rural areas.

Convergent interviews have been chosen for the first stage of this research as in an in-depth interview technique with a structured data analysis process (Rao & Perry 2003), due to the lack of research on family wellbeing. Convergent interview is a technique used to collect, analyse and interpret qualitative information about a person’s knowledge, opinions, attitudes and beliefs through using a number of interviews which converge on important issues (Dick 1990; Nair and Riege, 1995). Converging interviews is a series of in-depth interviews that allows the researchers to refine the questions after each interview, to converge on the issues in a topic area. The convergent interview process involves conducting a series of long unstructured interviews, whereby data is collected during each interview, and then analysed and used for the content and process of subsequent interviews (Dick 1990). That is, the process in itself is structured but the content of each interview only gradually becomes more structured to allow flexible explorations of the subject matter without determining the answers. Convergent interviews are useful for the exploration of areas lacking an established theoretical base, as is the case proposed in this research. As one of the requisites of convergent interviewing is that the interviewee has to be knowledgeable about the research subject matter and also be able to contribute meaningful information to the exploratory research, we will use the snowballing technique (Aaker and Day, 1990) to select members of the community that have a recognised leadership role for this first stage of the research.

In the second stage, data will be gathered through a self administered questionnaire. The questionnaire sections will be informed by the convergent interviews and the existing literature. The questionnaire will be administered to members of the CALD community that have migrated in to the Central Queensland region in the last 15 years and members of his/her family. We will use the drop off and pick up technique, to have control of the questionnaires distributed among the participants. In addition, a follow up and reminders will be used to attract the interest of the respondents of the questionnaire. Data will be analysed using descriptive statistics and the main findings will be tabulated to be able to process the third stage of this research. The third and last stage is open ended interviews with the LAMP - MCROs officers in the regional city councils covered by this research. The purpose of this third stage is to confirm the findings from the two previous qualitative and quantitative stages. In addition, this third stage purpose is to expand the description of the key family and individual wellbeing factors when attracting and retaining skilled and professional migrants to the Central Queensland region. Open-ended questions will be carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of minimising variation in the questions posed to the interviewees. This method is often preferred for collecting interviewing data when two or more researchers are involved in the data collecting process (Patton 1987:112). Truly open-ended questions do not pre-determine the answers and allow room for the informants to respond in their own terms (Patton 1987:122-3). This refers to using a special kind of questioning technique called ‘Funnelling’, which means asking from general to specific, from broad to narrow (Cohen & Manion 1994:277). Thematic analysis will used to identify factors relevant to the research (Kvale 1996; Sarantakos 2005) and allow the understanding and catering for the health and wellbeing of newly arrived skilled migrants and their families factors, which is an important and urgent social issue that transcends across Federal, State and Local Governments. This proposed research therefore intends to add to the body of information on the experiences and needs of skilled migrants and their families when moving to rural and regional areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Attracting and retaining skilled and professional migrants is a problem not limited to remote, rural and regional locations in Australia but it is increasingly a global problem in the developed countries and organisations throughout the world are seeking
innovative strategies (PPP) to reduce cost in terms of time, money and opportunities. Infrastructure deficit (health, education, affordable housing, child care services for families, schools, community services, employment opportunities, industries, utilities, etc) is one of the key reasons why remote and regional Australia/Queensland is not very attractive to the professional and skilled migrants in spite of the resource, agriculture, mining, tourism and cattle industries.

PPP is important strategy to welcoming, attracting, and retaining new arrivals which will assist the government to make policies as well as determine the resources available to meet the infrastructure demands in terms of health, education, housing, community services, interpretation services etc. Although the climate in Queensland may be warm, bright and sunny, the future of attracting and retaining New Arrivals skilled and professional migrants into the states remote and regional areas faces the prospect of stormy weather if appropriate and sufficient infrastructure and essential service delivery is not provided thorough PPP approach.

This research project’s aim is very significant in determining the key family and individual well-being factors to attract and retain skilled and professional migrants particularly to Central Queensland region, which has an economy that is unique amongst all states of Australia, with its comparatively large export-oriented agricultural, natural resource (coal, aluminium, magnesium and possibility of gold mining next year at Mount Morgan) energy and transport sectors. With its large endowment of rich natural resources, the Queensland economy has experienced strong growth over the last decade and particularly in the last five years due to natural resource and mining boom. This has been due in part to the strong pro-development policies of successive Queensland Governments, who adopted a more strategic whole-of-government approach to infrastructure planning.

Due to the dispersal of population and increasing economic activities across Central Queensland’s large landmass, as well as distance from trading partners, mining boom a responsive, timely and efficient emphasis is to be placed on Queensland’s Migration Policy in seeking supply of attracting and retaining overseas skilled migrant labour force and their families, which is critical in underpinning the continued smooth expansion, growth and development of the economy and global competitiveness of the Central Queensland region in particular. This study will also address the skill shortage problem faced by Central Queensland mining, medical services, and other industries, as overseas skilled workers will provide significant efficiency gains to the mining communities in the Central Queensland Economy.

Thus, this project is very significant for Central Queensland regional councils to pursue a skilled migration policy by providing attractive programs in the community which are not only family oriented but also skill oriented to attract self-reliant, skilled and professional migrants and promote the well-being of the migrant workers and their families, as these workers directly have a positive spill-over effect by increasing per capita productivity of workers, and transferring wealth to the Australian residents by the progressive taxes, (given the ageing population problem) and it also indirectly generates derived demand for local semi-skilled workers, reduces the dole queue and addresses skill shortage and the infrastructure bottleneck problem. Further, Central Queensland residents and businesses will also have a positive spill-over effect socially and culturally, as they interact with people from diverse races, cultures, religions, and languages, living and working in a multicultural environment. Australia will also gain overall by having highly skilled, educated migrant human capital from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

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