

Introduction

1. Thank you for inviting me here to outline Australian migration policies in the context of the workshop's interest in the role of family reunification in facilitating the successful integration of migrants.
2. This is an important topic and question for policy makers and I commend the IOM for creating an opportunity for dialogue on it between members.
3. Australia has for a long time and does take a practical approach to this matter - if you like, there is less of an emphasis in our approach on rights, whether these be a right to migrate, or the rights of migrants. Although these are of course very important.
4. Rather, we have put at the heart of policy design and implementation the question of attributes, capacities, capabilities.
5. That is, what are the attributes that incoming migrants should have in order to increase the probability of successful integration? And for those who don't have these on arrival, what are the attributes and skills that we need to prioritize in terms of helping them settle?
6. There are two issues identified in the Migration and Families Background Paper circulated for the workshop that provide a useful way to highlight Australia's migration settings. The first relates to the well-known problems associated with people living in another country whose status is "irregular".
7. As the paper notes, migrants whose status is irregular may well be at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, and their ability to integrate is undermined.
8. Australia's approach to this is to minimize the chance of a non-citizen being in the country whose status is irregular.
9. Our national migration settings - the foundation of which is a universal visa system - and the border and administrative infrastructure through which this is implemented are geared to first prevent someone entering the country without a valid visa; and second to manage those whose status becomes irregular after they have arrived.
10. The historical evolution of this framework to regulate migration means we have comprehensive records for everyone who enters and stays in Australia.

This is very important and a huge divided for the effective settlement of migrants and their family members.

11. And significantly, when used in conjunction with census data, it enables policy makers in Australia to study the impact of migration and settlement policies on migrants over time.

12. The second issue identified in the Background Paper relates to what it considers to be a tension between an economic approach to migration and its impact on family units.

13. The paper says, to quote, that "focusing the family reunification debate on the perspective of economic impact and shifting immigration policy towards preferences for skilled labour migration increases the duration of family separation."

14. In Australia's experience, this need not be the case. In fact, over the past two decades, Australia has managed a fundamental rebalancing of its migration programme, shifting to an emphasis on skilled migrants.

15. But this, as I will show, has not been at the expense of family separation. To the contrary, the transformation has enabled, and arguably even been built around, the family as a migrating unit.

The Migration Programme [SLIDE ONE]

16. Migration to Australia is very carefully managed and is guided by national policy concerns and interests. I think we are one of only a handful of countries that has formal programmes.

17. Looked at from the highest level, we operate three dedicated programmes for

- skilled migrants
- family migrants, and
- humanitarian migrants.

18. Each year, the government sets the total number of permanent migration and humanitarian places that will be made available.

19. The total is gauged with close reference to national and global economic circumstances, social and demographic factors, and so forth.

20. All key departments of state or ministries have a chance to comment on and shape the programme through our cabinet system of government. And there is a very careful budgetary process through which the associated benefits and costs of the migration programme are built into their budgets and planning.

21. What this means is that the migration programme can be adapted and shaped on a yearly basis with reference to national level drivers and pressures. This flexibility is very important.

22. **[SLIDE TWO]**. This slide has two features worth highlighting.

23. First, it shows the flexibility and adaptiveness of Australia's migration intake over 20 years, as it gears up and gears down according to the government of the day's priorities and national economic fundamentals.

24. Second, it illustrates the point I made earlier about the rebalancing of migration intakes from the mid 1990s, so that the focus shifts from family to skilled migration, getting us to the current settings whereby skilled migration sits at just over two thirds of total migration.

25. This reflects a national prioritization of migrants with certain attributes, capabilities, and capacities. In particular, what Australian research on migration settlement indicates to be the three critical success factors:

- proficiency in the national language (English)
- educational attainment, and
- economic participation or employment.

26. The greatest proportion of Australia's migration programme is therefore selective. It is designed to foster permanent migration by people who are educated, proficient in English, and will either come directly into a job once here, or possess desirable attributes from a labour market or entrepreneurial perspective.

27. In designing the migration programme, Australia recognizes the role of the family unit in integration.

28. **[SLIDE THREE]**. What this slide reflects, is how skilled migration to Australia is also typically family migration. I have removed people coming to Australia through the dedicated family stream altogether. This is just skilled migration.

29. What it shows, is that, over the last five years, Australia has brought just over 600,000 migrants through the skilled programme. More than half - nearly 55 percent - of the total skilled programme aren't the skilled migrant, but the family of the skilled migrant!

30. Our skilled migration programmes have been designed to attract people with the attributes Australia wants, but not at the expense of leaving their families behind.

31. Working together with the dedicated family migration programme, which is for family reunification and family formation, the migration programme is designed to minimize the fracturing effect of migration on family units.

32. **[SLIDE FOUR]**. Migrants coming to Australia can bring, if they have a family, their partners and children, and, dependent relatives. This slide shows that typically they are coming with their partner and children. There does not need to be a stark choice between economically focused, skilled migration and family units - particularly close family members.

33. People migrating as families develop roots - they are less torn in terms of their commitments, it is a significant investment to relocate and rebuild as a family, and so there is more at stake. Their children go to school, build friendships, etc.

34. Overtime, this encourages strong links to the nation at all levels, from ties to local communities, through to a sense of affiliation with the nation, its identity, interests and prospects.

35. It is therefore tempting to suggest that enabling family, as opposed to individual, migration is pivotal to social integration.

36. Australia's developing research in this area however paints a far more complicated picture.

37. Not all migrating families have the same capacity to integrate. And members within the same migrating family unit will have more or less stronger integration into the workforce or other institutions depending on their skills and attributes.

38. Many migrants coming to Australia, particularly through the dedicated family and humanitarian streams, do not have proficient English language skills, educational qualifications or high level skills in demand. This is reflected in **[SLIDES FIVE AND SIX]**.

39. Skilled migrants and their family members have strong labour market participation rates. But the rates are significantly lower for other migrant categories.

40. So at the policy design level, it is not enough to facilitate family migration.

41. The lesson here is that it is important to consider how settlement policies and services can best help the process of integration for individuals.

42. In Australia, for example, we offer significant English language training to those with little or no proficiency - this could be the partner of a highly skilled migrant who has a job and strong command of English.

Conclusion

43. Key points restated.