

English Language for New Arrivals – A Right or a Privilege?

A Background Paper on the Refugee Population and provision of ESL support in Toowoomba, Queensland



Over the past ten years Toowoomba has become home for over 1500 refugee background people. This emerging population is diverse in its background and faces a number of challenges in the settlement process.

One of the key challenges and pathways to belonging is a high level of competency in understanding and using the English language. This paper draws together available data to describe the diversity within the refugee background population. It also details the barriers which exist preventing access to English language and educational support.

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2010

FOREWORD

This research was undertaken in conjunction with the Toowoomba Social Justice Commission by a student as part of the final work placement component of the Bachelor of International Relations degree at La Trobe University. The project was largely unfunded except where certain data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics had to be paid for.

The Toowoomba Social Justice Commission (TSJC) hopes the report will be available to be used by a number of organizations in a variety of ways across Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. Organizations that may benefit from the report include the Toowoomba Regional Council's multicultural division, Mercy Family Service Multicultural Community Advocacy, Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre (TRAMS), Spiritus, Queensland Program of Assistance to the Survivors of Torture (QPASST), the English as a Second Language coordinator for Catholic Schools, Lifeline, Mission Australia, and the heads of various ethnic refugee associations. These organisations will benefit from an easily accessible collation of relevant data for their works in the region. Much of the research draws on the experiences and data of the organisations themselves. It is hoped access to the report will enhance existing information and sharing links between local organisations. The TSJC anticipates that the conclusions and analysis within the report will be an effective advocacy tool for use within the wider community and with government and non-government organisations. Such advocacy could include applications for more generous funding, enacting policy change, raising community awareness and garnering support for the expansion of future projects.

The author would like to extend special thanks to Mark Copland of the Toowoomba Social Justice Commission, Amber Copland and Celia Warr of the Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre, Charlie Ryan of Spiritus, David Barton of Mercy Family Services and the many others that willingly devoted their time and expertise throughout the course of the project.

This is an edited version of the paper submitted by Robert Johnson to Latrobe University as part of his requirement for a Bachelor of International Relations Degree. The Social Justice Commission endorses and supports the research which has been undertaken. The conclusions drawn and recommendations made are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Social Justice Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba. The Commission thanks Robert Johnson for the work that he has undertaken. This research has been commissioned to further our understanding of refugee resettlement in a regional area in Australia. It is hoped that this can spark further debate and analysis which will bring about a greater degree of dignity for refugees settling in our local community.

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1.0 KEY MESSAGES

The following has adopted a dual-faceted approach to the complicated and delicate issue of refugee resettlement in Australia. Firstly, the report has attempted to elucidate upon previously fragmented and dispersed data relating to the quantitative composition of refugee communities in Toowoomba. It draws on a number of government statistics as well as local non-government organisations in an attempt to build an accurate picture of refugee resettlement in Toowoomba during the last ten years (2000-2010). Through use of this data in conjunction with general literature on the subject of resettlement, the qualitative focus has been narrowed to encompass issues relating to access to, quality of and experiences with English as a Second Language (ESL) by former refugees in Toowoomba.

The report identifies strategies and practices, utilized by some local organisations that are effective in improving English language skills. It also identifies where there are deficiencies in the provision of ESL services, including systemic deficiencies, curriculum deficiencies and deficiencies in the realities of resettlement in Australia experienced by former refugees. Current initiatives and schemes (both government and non-government) form the point of reference from which recommendations are made as to how better deliver ESL proficiency to targeted groups. Furthermore, such recommendations have been made in consultation with local service providers as well as reference to a wider body of literature.

- ✚ Former refugees in Toowoomba are culturally, linguistically and demographically diverse. While there have been higher proportions of Sudanese resettlement in Toowoomba over certain years this trend has changed in the latter part of the decade to a more diverse ethnic composition of former refugee populations. There also exists a *great diversity intra-ethnically* which renders the resettlement experience a complex one even among ethnic groups.
- ✚ Some former refugee groups may be not be benefitting as much as others from current methods of ESL delivery. This is due to a number of specific factors which can be considered systemic or particular to the resettlement experiences of former refugees.
- ✚ While there is significant cooperation on a variety of issues between and among local NGOs and government organisations, some fragmentation of organisations does exist especially around the areas of childcare provision and alternative ESL learning environments.
- ✚ ESL services represent critical pathways in the realization of equality of opportunity for former refugees. They provide the opportunity to make a successful transition to the workforce or further tertiary study to achieve professional employment. They are critical in assisting families in adjusting to the momentous cultural change associated with resettlement. English proficiency empowers people to take control of their immediate circumstances and forge a life for themselves in a new and often challenging environment. Without constant monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the specific language, literacy and numeracy needs of newly settled former refugees may go unmet. This could result in a disengaged refugee population whose potential goes unrealized.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 PARTICIPANTS

There were two types of participants in the research phase of the report. Specialist English language, literacy and numeracy teachers currently employed in teaching people from a refugee background and people within local organisations who have expertise in refugee resettlement issues and who are actively involved in community work related to refugee resettlement.

The four ESL teachers working in Toowoomba who were consulted are employed by a diverse range of organisations. These included Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, Mission Australia, The University of Southern Queensland and local high schools. One of the participants was a teacher under the auspices of the Adult Multicultural Education Service. Another was employed by the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP). The remainder worked either in Public Schools or in conjunction with the University of Southern Queensland (USQ). All of the participants had extensive teaching experience and displayed substantial understanding of issues relating to the education of former refugees.

The following six people were also consulted on the educational and related issues facing refugee learners in Toowoomba.

- ✚ A local youth worker employed by Drug Arm Queensland and who previously has worked with other local organisations providing alternative educational pathways to disengaged youth.
- ✚ Two case workers within the Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Service (TRAMS) who have extensive experience in refugee resettlement within the Toowoomba area.
- ✚ The head of Spiritus, a local organisation which receives the majority of the tender for the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services program. This program is dedicated to meeting the immediate resettlement needs of refugees and aims to assist in referrals for ongoing casework.
- ✚ The coordinator for the Partnership Brokers initiative which is a government initiative designed to ensure that literacy and numeracy among youth meets national targets. The objective is to fill the educational gaps by facilitating inter-organisational partnerships in the region that enhance educational outcomes.
- ✚ A multicultural worker involved in the Community Action for a Multicultural Society which targets a range of refugee and migrant settlement.

2.2 APPROACHES TO THE RESEARCH

A number of databases were used to provide a demographic snapshot of former refugees in Toowoomba. Specifically, the Australian Bureau of Statistics provided useful 2006 census information relating to age, sex, income, and employment type by country of birth. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) databases provided an accurate snapshot of age, sex and English proficiency upon

year of visa grant by visa sub-class for those arriving in The Toowoomba area. Such data collection is designed to be a useful resource for local organisations to refer to in their own works. Furthermore the data collection was designed to highlight some of the issues and challenges relating to refugee resettlement over a period of years.

Following the insights provided in the collection of raw data a series of interviews were undertaken with the aforementioned industry professionals to gain a deeper insight into the issues raised in the analysis of the data. In conjunction with this line of inquiry a number of reports and academic articles were consulted to lend legitimacy and build a deeper understanding of the issues relating to the acquisition of the English language by former refugees in Toowoomba. Through this consultation a number of successful interventions already in practice in Toowoomba were identified. In addition based on this research a number of recommendations have been formulated to augment current practice and perhaps assist (if adopted) in improving the ability of former refugee communities to learn and utilise English to improve their lives.

2.3 ISSUES OF GENERALISATION AND STATISTICAL DEFICIENCY

Given the small number of participants and the natural individualistic biases of people's own experiences it is impossible to claim that the findings of this study reflect the realities of all ESL learners or of all the professionals working with them. Also given the very narrow methods of statistical collection by government sources the conclusions drawn here are by no means exhaustive and every attempt has been made to research assumption further within the academic literature and in conjunction with participants. However, findings that have been cited have been supported generally across the board by participants and hence may be valuable in informing future directions of ESL policy.

3.0 CONTEXT

3.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE

This study explores the demographic realities of refugee communities in Toowoomba. It then attempts to investigate the particular factors impacting on the quality of the ESL environment in Toowoomba. By doing so it attempts to contribute to generating a clearer picture of the realities of refugee resettlement in Toowoomba including ways in which ESL services can be improved.

Who is a refugee?

The term 'refugee' is applied to people who satisfy the criteria specified in the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). According to the convention:

A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

Refugees are in essence fleeing their country in fear for their lives or personal safety, having often experienced war, civil conflict or prolonged violence. They may spend years in harsh conditions in refugee camps awaiting resettlement in a new country. The country in which they are granted residence may be completely different from their home country culturally, linguistically, economically geographically and climatically.

Since January 2000 to the present Australia has resettled over 100 000 former refugees.¹ In Toowoomba there are a range of organisations which operate to assist in making this transition as smooth as possible. Without the initial settlement support in the form of assistance in finding accommodation, initial household goods, caseworkers for navigating various government organisations such as Centrelink or visa claims for family members and English language support the settlement process would undoubtedly be more difficult for former refugees.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the demographic composition of refugees in Toowoomba from 2000-2010?
2. What are some of the factors, systemic and personal, which impede new entrants' abilities to acquire English as a language?
3. How can these issues be addressed?

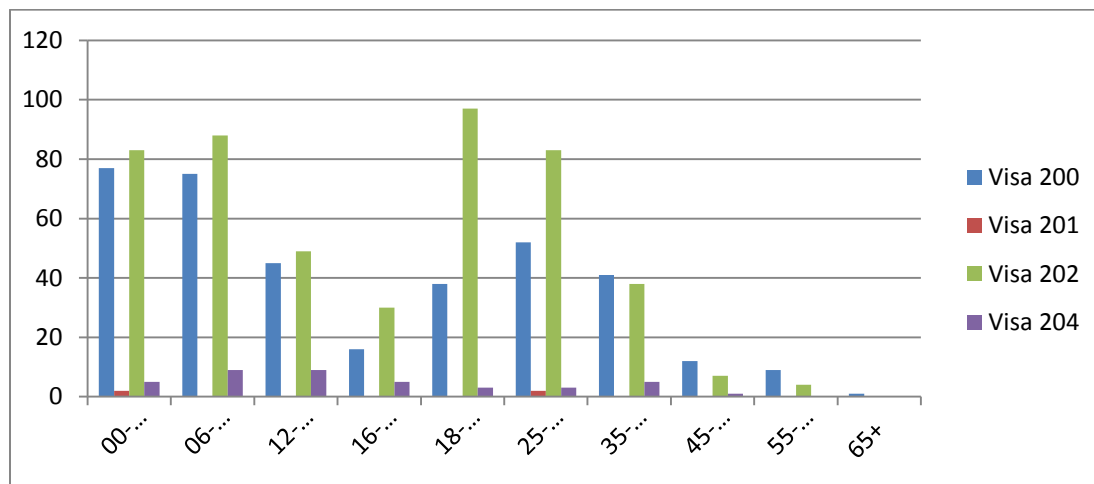
¹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Reporting Facility (website), http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement_external/SettlementServlet?ACTION=GETREPORT&REPORTID=RnMDKnHKawdJgLMdtXGrP48iUuCGp0fVIU3eEock

4.0 STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT

4.1 REFUGEE COMPOSITION

According to the DIAC, since 2000 Toowoomba has resettled 918 asylum seekers under visa classifications 200, 201, 202 and 204. The Global Special Humanitarian Visa (Subclass 202) is for “people who, while not being refugees, are subject to substantial discrimination and human rights abuses in their home country.”² In order to qualify for this visa, applicants must be sponsored by a citizen or permanent resident within Australia. This Visa covers those who are not officially referred to the Australian government by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) and have not (as yet) been identified by the UNHCR as a refugee. This can be due to delays in processing given the (insert statistics from Refugee council report) high demands on the U.N. refugee processing system. The 202 subclass was introduced by the Australian government to enhance Australia’s ability to assist those that fall outside Australia’s current international obligations by conferring the ability to grant *de facto* refugee status independently of U.N. recommendations when petitioned by existing resettled families or independent parties. The unequal access to settlement services in Australia by 202 visa holders will be discussed later. Some 480 people have been granted permanent residency in Toowoomba under this Visa Subclass.

Figure 1: Entrants’ composition in Toowoomba by visa sub-class and age on arrival: Jan. 2000- Jun. 2010



Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Reporting Database

Asylum seekers granted the Refugee Visa sub-class 200, have like all refugees, been deemed to have suffered persecution in their country of origin. The majority of these visa holders have been identified as refugees by the UNHCR and referred to the Australian government for processing. Holders

² Department of Immigration and Citizenship website, “Visas, Immigration and Refugees,” <http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/202/>

of this visa subclass are eligible for the full gamut of settlement services. Some 366 recognised refugees have been resettled in Australia under the auspices of this Visa category since 2000.

The U.N. has given special consideration to the plight of women fleeing persecution with their children who face continued harassment or victimization having fled their home country. This visa can be extended to immediate dependents and spouses. This visa currently represents between 10-15% of all applications in Australia³ and with 40 entrants in Toowoomba represents about 4.5% of the total resettlement there.

The In-country Special Humanitarian Visa (Subclass 201) represent those unable to flee persecution suffered in their home country and have been deemed on a case by case basis to be eligible for resettlement.

It is interesting to note that in keeping with national trends Toowoomba has resettled more people under the 202 visa than the 200. The 202 Visa allows for current residents who are often former refugees themselves to sponsor people they may have previously known, thereby rebuilding links among communities that have been shattered due to conflict, while strengthening existing support networks in areas of resettlement. This visa is not in addition to resettlement commitments by the Australian government but rather as part of existing allocations. That demand for resettlement far outstrips the willingness or capacity of the government but is beyond the purview of this report.

Figure two is a graph designed to illustrate the country of origin of the 918 resettled former refugees and humanitarian entrants from 2000-2010 under the refugee and humanitarian visas. A few points should be made prior to its analysis. Firstly it should be noted that the 200, 201, 202 and 204 subclasses comprise the entirety of direct resettlement in Toowoomba during the period.⁴

Secondly, these statistics do not account for what may termed secondary intra-migration. Unlike secondary migration where asylum seekers may have the legitimacy of their asylum claim called into question by the destination country upon arrival due to travel through one or more countries deemed safe under international law for the purposes of refugee resettlement;⁵ secondary *intra*-migration deals with asylum seekers and refugees whose visa claims have been successful and may have migrated from another city or town within Australia to Toowoomba. DIAC statistics deal solely with immediate resettlement locations within Australia upon arrival and as such cannot account for this phenomenon.

Consultation with the Kobi House clinic at the Toowoomba base hospital who are part of the Refugee Health Queensland (RHQ) initiative revealed the potential scope for unaccounted for secondary intra-migration. The clinic provides an initial nursing assessment for newly arrived refugees settled through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme (IHSS), catch-up programs for vaccinations,

³ Department of Immigration and Citizenship website, "Visas, Immigration and Refugees," <http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/204/>

⁴ Direct resettlement means those who have come directly to Toowoomba from camps abroad or other Australian off-shore facilities. The data supporting this came from the DIAC Settlement Reporting Database.

⁵ Legomsky, S.H., Secondary Refugee Movements and the Return of Asylum Seekers to Third Countries: The Meaning of Effective Protection, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 15 (4), 2003, p560.

some treatment for ailments revealed during pre-screening and referrals to local General Practitioners for ongoing health care.⁶ The keeping of records on refugee patients in the initial consultation phase was only begun in October of 2008. However these records indicate that some 140 clients had received the initial treatment they were eligible for under resettlement schemes. When one considers that according to the DIAC only 68 people from the period reviewed⁷ were allegedly resettled in Toowoomba one begins to understand the complexity of the secondary intra-migration phenomenon. When consultation with a number of service providers occurred it was found that all had only limited data on clients they had serviced. Given that each of these could be a potential secondary intra-migration candidate we can say that the combination of independently generated statistics, anecdotal evidence and media reports leads to an estimate that there is anywhere up to 1200 *additional* entrants unaccounted for by the DIAC settlement reporting facility.

This is especially pertinent to funding allocations that take place on a “pay per unit” basis⁸ such as the IHSS scheme. Given that the IHSS scheme is an initiative of the DIAC it is reasonable to assume funding tenders are based upon the records cited in the figures above. Regardless given a lack of statistical records by local organisations in receipt of the IHSS tender it is likely that little consultation has occurred between these organisations and the DIAC. This is supported by anecdotal evidence gleaned through consultation with local organisations that reveals an overstretched and fatigued resettlement workforce attempting to cope with a caseload beyond their funding capabilities. Therefore given a “pay per unit” funding model applied to an underestimated client base and understaffed service providers, it is likely that service gaps are bound to emerge alongside distorted funding allocations for the recipients of secondary intra-migration.

Recommendation: If an accurate estimation of refugee and humanitarian entrants in Toowoomba is to occur it is recommended that local organisations build upon existing records by carefully documenting the origin of incoming entrants. This would require cross-collaboration between educators, service providers and government organisations to ensure that funding is targeted correctly and is adequate to meet the unanticipated changes in the demographic of incoming clients.

As figure two illustrates 57% of all incoming refugees and humanitarian entrants in Toowoomba from 2000-2010 have been from the Sudan. This trend reached its peak in 2004 with 116 Sudanese arriving directly in Toowoomba. From 2004 onwards there has been a steady decline in the numbers of Sudanese arriving in Toowoomba. However there are at least 527 Sudanese currently residing in Toowoomba. . As previously stated this number is only an absolute minimum and does not account for what could be substantial secondary intra-migration.

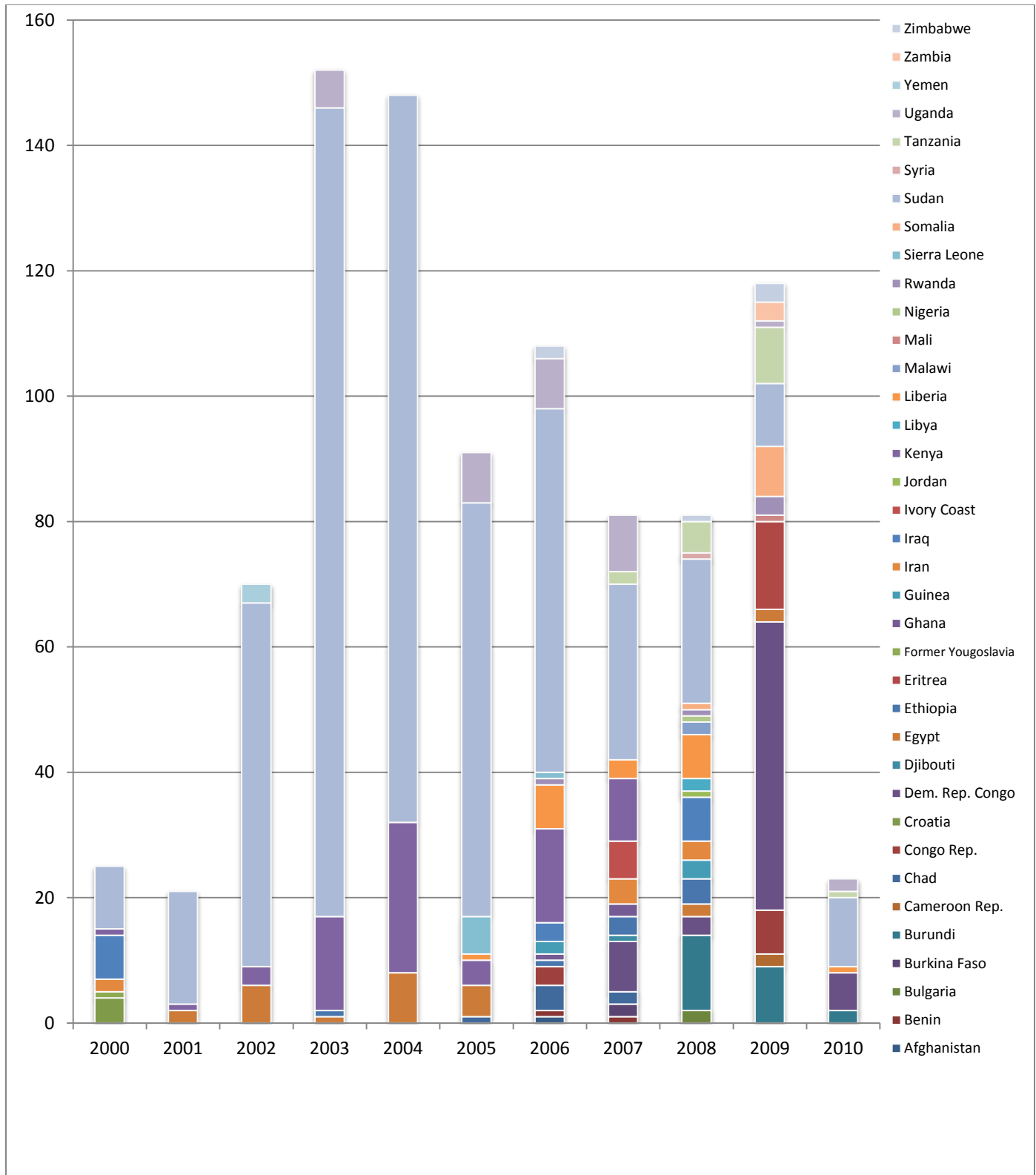
What is also interesting to note is the diversification in ethnicity of incoming refugee and humanitarian entrants. There is a common misconception in Toowoomba in recent years that the vast majority of the former refugee population is from the Sudan. This idea is partly generated by

⁶ Mater Hospital Website, “Refugee Health Queensland,” <http://www.materonline.org.au/Home/Services/Refugee-health/Refugee-Health-Queensland.aspx#toow>

⁷ The period in question was October 2008-October 2009.

⁸ Refugee Council of Australia, “Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program: Community Views on Current Challenges and Future Directions”, February 2008, p24.

Figure 2: Refugee Arrivals in Toowoomba: Visa Sub-Class 200, 201, 202 and 204, 2000-2010.



Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Reporting Database

mainstream media and local news who have reported the successes of the resettlement of Sudanese in response to the decisions by the Toowoomba Regional Council to accept large numbers of refugees compared to previous years.⁹ Indeed prior to 2000 the numbers of entrants to Toowoomba under refugee or humanitarian visas were marginal or non-existent. A distinct shift in local policy towards resettling many people from the Sudan has overshadowed the recent trend towards diversification in the public eye.

This enhanced public visibility of the Sudanese community has been entrenched by ongoing and shameful (albeit unsuccessful) campaign efforts by organisations such as the White Pride Coalition of Australia (WPCA) to discredit multiculturalism by citing a propensity for violence and crime among Sudanese populations. The fact that the crime rate among newly arrived humanitarian entrants has no greater proportionally than any other facet of society is not within the purview of this report. Suffice to say that the publicity this kind of example brings, especially during years where the proportion of incoming Sudanese are higher than later years, assists in overshadowing the fact that nearly half of all incoming refugees are from a multitude of countries. It should also be noted that the annual multicultural festival, an initiative of the Toowoomba Regional Council, has seen its largest year and undoubtedly contributes to the growing awareness of ethnic diversity in Toowoomba.

Today Toowoomba resettles refugees from a broad range of countries. Since 2007 Toowoomba has seen the direct arrival of 63 people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, fleeing the Mobutu regime, spillover of the Rwandan conflict which resulted in the notorious genocide in 1994 and the second Congo war just prior to the first multiparty elections in 2006. Burundian (23), Liberian (19), Tanzanian (17), Iraqi (17), Ethiopian (8), Iranian (9), Eritrean (14), Somali (9), Rwandan (5) and Ugandan (28) illustrate the change in the composition of direct incoming entrants. Notably Toowoomba largely accommodates the majority of former refugees from the African continent. This by no means indicates cultural homogeneity. In fact the ethnicity and languages spoken within these countries are as diverse as Australia itself. French, Dinka, Arabic, Acholi, Persian, Swahili, Lingala, Yally, Kirundi, Kamer and Farsi are just some of the dialects and ethnicities shared by former refugees and illustrates that former refugee communities are far from a homogenous mass.

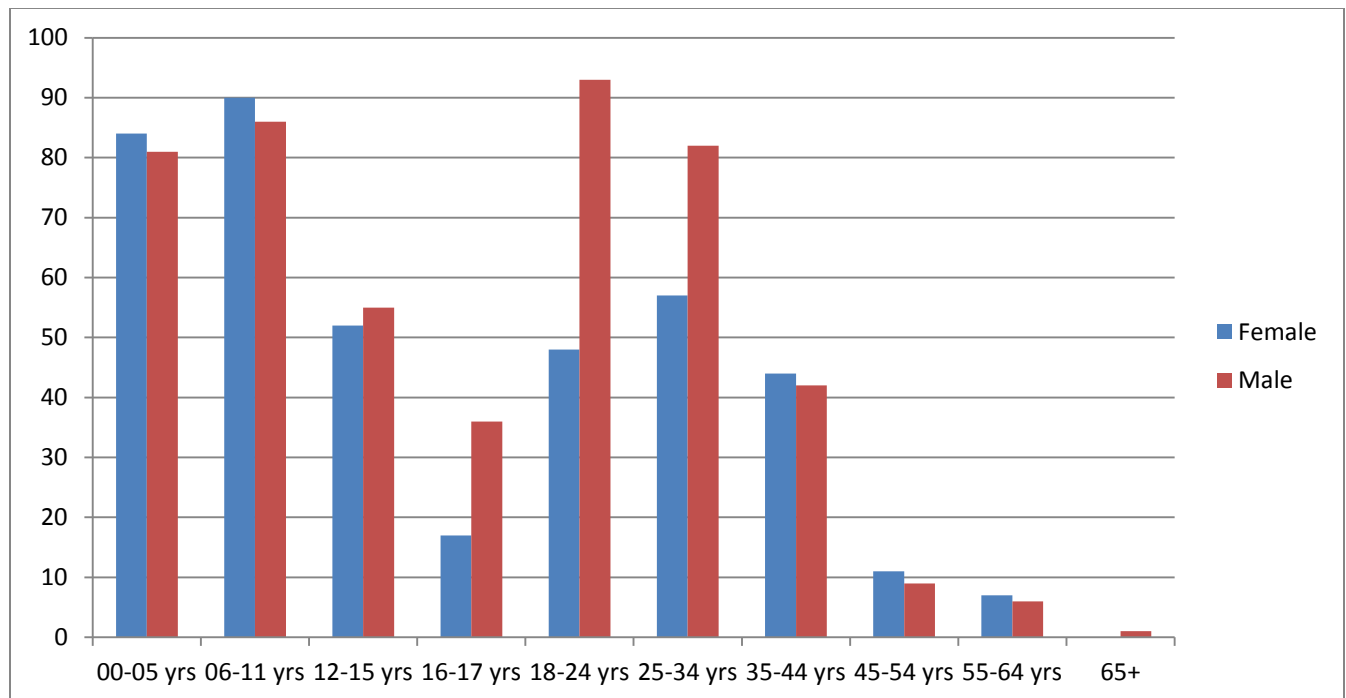
4.2 GENDER and AGE

54% of former refugees having arrived directly in Toowoomba are male. This compares with a national average of 50.3%. In the instance of the 16-34 year old age group the number of males significantly outstrips that of females. Men of this age are significantly more likely to be at risk of violence by militant factions in war-torn countries both by forced conscription and when perceived as a threat by militant groups. When compared to the national average men comprise 54% of 16-17 year olds, 52% of

⁹ 7.30 report Transcript 16 Jan 2007 <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s1828115.htm>
See also ABC AM radio Tamworth AM - Tuesday, 16 January , 2007 08:26:00 Reporter: Brigid Glanville
<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2007/s1828017.htm>

18-24 year olds and 47% of 25-34 year olds.¹⁰ This is compared with 67%, 65% and 58% respectively in Toowoomba. While Australia as a whole has maintained a gender balance in accommodating refugees it

Figure 3: Gender Composition by Age of Direct Refugee Arrivals in Toowoomba 2000-2010



Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Reporting Database

appears that Toowoomba has a proportionally higher rate of males in these age groups. In contrast women have a slight majority between the ages of zero and eleven years of age. This contrasts with the national average where there are slightly more males granted refugee and humanitarian visas. Australia has been called upon to recognize that women are often more at risk than men in conflict zones due to the prevalence of rape and the fact that militants are predominantly men. Given current statistics it appears that the Women at Risk Visa has yet to be utilized to its full potential. Although given that children are also covered under this visa the 37% of total entrants under the age of 11 years in Toowoomba is heartening.

Recommendation: That Australia increases its quota of refugee places to accommodate greater numbers of particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children.

With regard to education 62% of incoming entrants in Toowoomba are over twelve years old. This means that as in the case of Sudanese where there are significantly low levels of prior education learning English, not to mention catching up on educational basics we take for granted is likely to be significantly challenging. Even in cases where the country of origin has a reasonable standard of primary

¹⁰ DIAC settlement reporting facility
http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement_external/SettlementServlet?ACTION=GETREPORT&REPORTID=TVgAX1ko3paXfS8jGICXUs9EG3xaTKk1PoeynlC2

or secondary education but in a language other than English it is still an immense challenge to learn English at such a late stage when pressures of high school, entering the workforce or attempting to get into university are prevalent on the horizon. The successes and shortcomings of English language tuitions services will be elaborated on later. However suffice to say that the ages of 12 years and onwards are of significant concern to this study as particularly disadvantaged groups in the acquisition of English.

4.3 ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Figure 4 illustrates the level of English proficiency of incoming entrants into Toowoomba as assessed by the DIAC. The assessment occurs prior to resettlement in Australia and is simply designed to gauge general levels of English proficiency in the absence of any English language requirements to qualify for humanitarian and refugee visas. It can be seen that upon arrival over 85% of respondents are deemed to have non-existent, poor or very poor English language skills. This result does not account for those whose results have not been assessed or recorded and when accounted for could render the result as high as 95%. Notably the 18-34 year old age group had the highest rates of “good” English results. This could be due prior primary education for these age groups before protracted conflict destroyed critical educational infrastructure (both human and non-human).

Figure 4: English proficiency upon arrival in Toowoomba as assessed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2000-2010.

| | AGE ON ARRIVAL | | | | | | | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|
| | 00-05 yrs | 06-11 yrs | 12-15 yrs | 16-17 yrs | 18-24 yrs | 25-34 yrs | 35-44 yrs | 45-54 yrs | 55-64 yrs | 65+ yrs | |
| ENGLISH PROFICIENCY | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Good | 1 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 21 | 16 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 57 |
| Nil | 126 | 124 | 58 | 12 | 24 | 49 | 34 | 8 | 11 | 1 | 447 |
| Not Recorded | 27 | 20 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 67 |
| Poor | 10 | 23 | 27 | 31 | 87 | 66 | 46 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 300 |
| Very Good | 1 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 30 |
| Total | 165 | 176 | 107 | 53 | 141 | 139 | 86 | 20 | 13 | 1 | 901 |

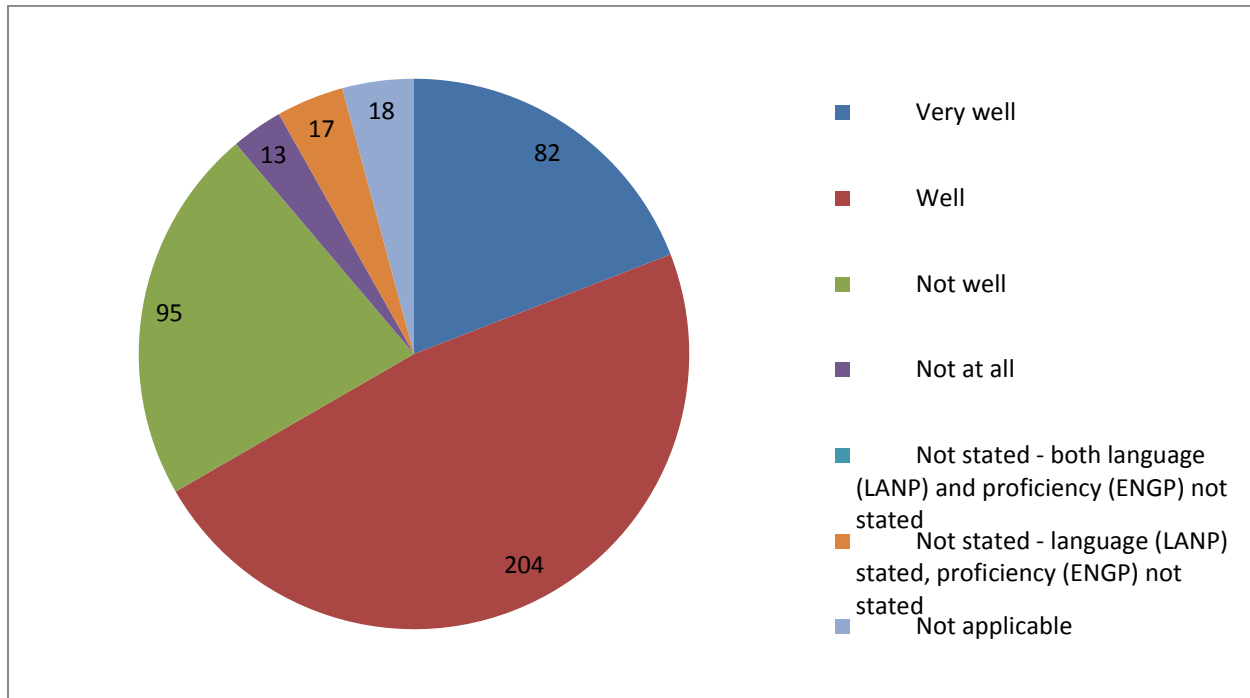
Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Reporting Database

What is not able to be gleaned from this information is the *ability* of entrants to acquire English language proficiency. For example, while the author acknowledges the heterogeneity and dynamism of any culture, one could recognize in the Sudanese tradition a “highly oral form of linguistic socialization.”¹¹ This refers to the way in which tradition and learning is passed along using songs, storytelling, poetry etc. In short in ways that unlike the western tradition does not rely on the written word to impart information. Even where primary school educational institutions have been built in the Sudan underfunding and protracted conflict have diminished its efficacy and denied education to

¹¹Burgoyne, U., Classroom management strategies, *The National Centre for Vocational Education Research*, June 2007, p13.

generations of Sudanese.¹² With regard to former colonies it may be the case that there has been ongoing primary or secondary educational infrastructure which exposes learners to a structured learning environment, albeit not in English. This could equip these learners with the tools necessary to more efficiently acquire the English language and also provide them with universal languages such as mathematics. Hence while it appears while all entrants have begun with a very limited grasp of English it is possible that its acquisition may be easier for some than others. This will be further elaborated upon at a later time.

Figure 4: English Proficiency of Direct Toowoomba Entrants According to the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census.



Source: ABS 2006 Census.

As figure 4 shows, for entrants arriving prior to 2006 there appears to be a marked improvement in the English language abilities of respondents. Over 70% appear to have acquired good or very good English skills. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) respondents who answered “Not Applicable” were those who only spoke English at home. This means that just over 25% of respondents were deemed themselves to have a limited grasp of English. This seems to be a fairly straightforward conclusion to draw *prima facie*. There are however a number of additional points that must be considered.

There is a strong possibility that self-assessment overconfidence can mask true English abilities. Learning another language is an exciting and rewarding experience. Progress in the classroom and an ability to apply these skills in an everyday environment can instill a sense of confidence in ones own abilities. Without knowledge of the level of proficiency experienced by native speakers it is feasible that

¹² Ibid., p14.

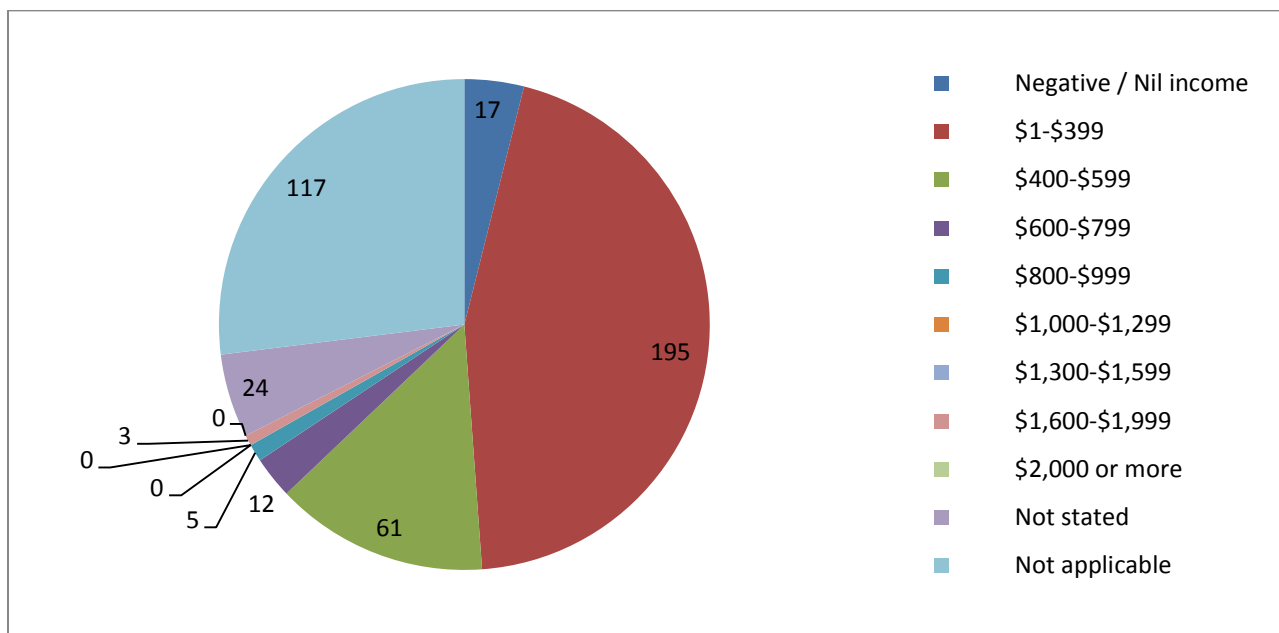
an overestimation of English language abilities could occur when reporting in the census. Of course this explanation is not exhaustive and it could also be feasible that an under-confidence in abilities could manifest in demanding classroom environments and the overwhelming experience of resettlement.

Figure 4 shows the responses of 429 participants. This compares with 615 direct arrivals into Toowoomba during 2000-2006. If the secondary intra-migration phenomenon is considered the number of former refugees present who did not respond to the 2006 census could be significantly higher. One possible explanation for non-response is quite simply not having enough English to be able to complete the lengthy and complicated census survey. Certainly translators have been employed to assist in the process. However given that translation services cost money and even where they do not, translators are often engaged in more immediate resettlement needs it is worth considering that a significant number of people have not responded due to a lack of the English skills required to complete the survey along with limited provision of free translation services. This could revise the actual number of people with limited English skills upwards.

The census data itself is an imperfect measure. In providing the self assessment respondents are not required to differentiate between written, verbal and numeric fluency. Respondents are not required to distinguish between functional, conversational and academic levels of fluency. Thus, proficiency levels are a subjective measure in this case and cannot provide conclusive evidence of an effective ESL system. When taken together with income, education and employment data we are better able to use these high levels of English proficiency to draw conclusions about ESL program efficiency. It is to these measures we now turn.

4.4 INCOME

Figure 5: Average Weekly Income for People Living in Toowoomba who were Born in the Sudan.



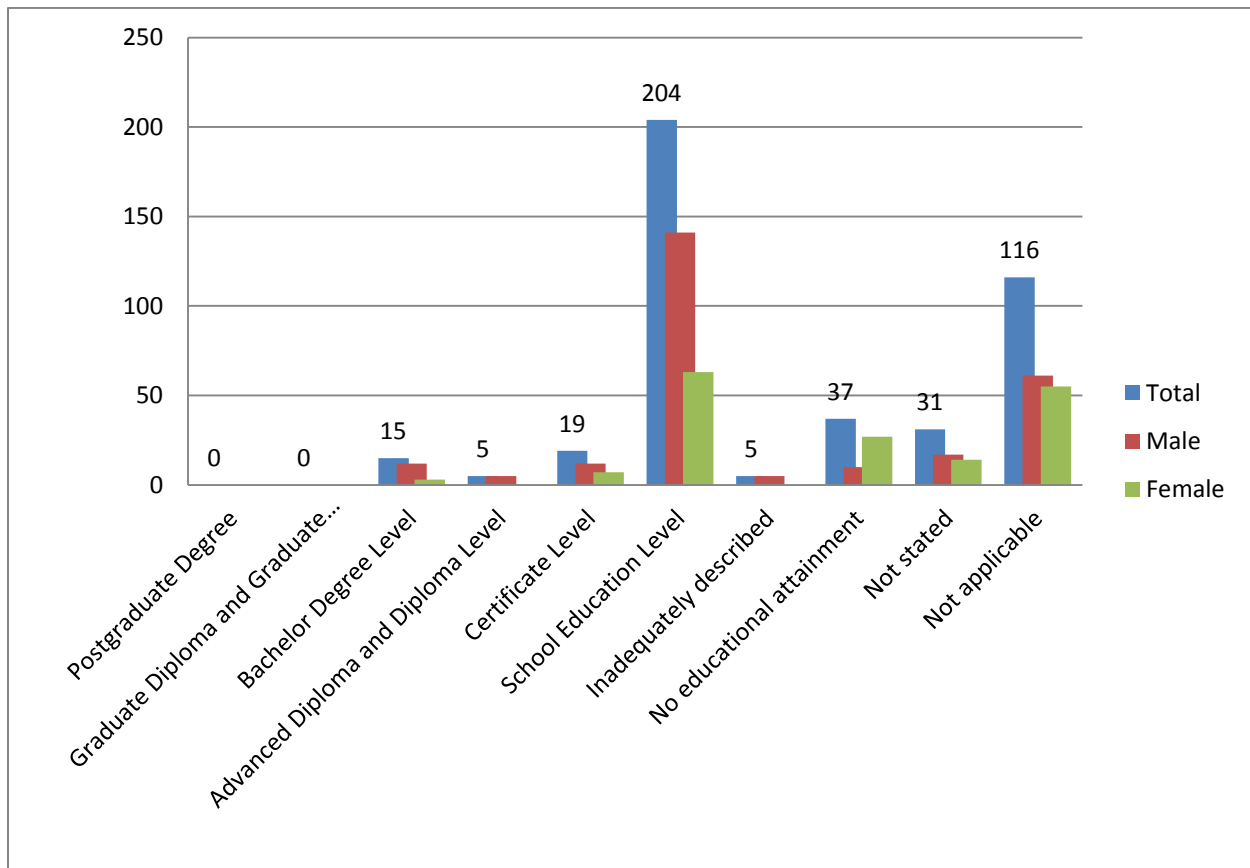
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census

The majority of entrants prior to 2006 in Toowoomba overwhelmingly originate either from Kenya or the Sudan. As the only data available at the time of writing was 2006 census data it is data on these two groups which will be provided here. However given the previously illustrated trend of ethnic diversification in refugee populations it is advised that any future study consult more current statistics in ascertaining varying income levels.

As figure 5 shows nearly half of Toowoomba’s Sudanese community survives on either nil/negative income or \$1-\$399 per week. These figures are indicative of a welfare level of subsistence. It is interesting to note that a similar proportion of people who are earning well below the national average have also reported that they speak English well. English proficiency is certainly an effective pathway into gainful employment yet the data here indicates that this may not necessarily be the case with regard to Sudanese.

4.5 EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT

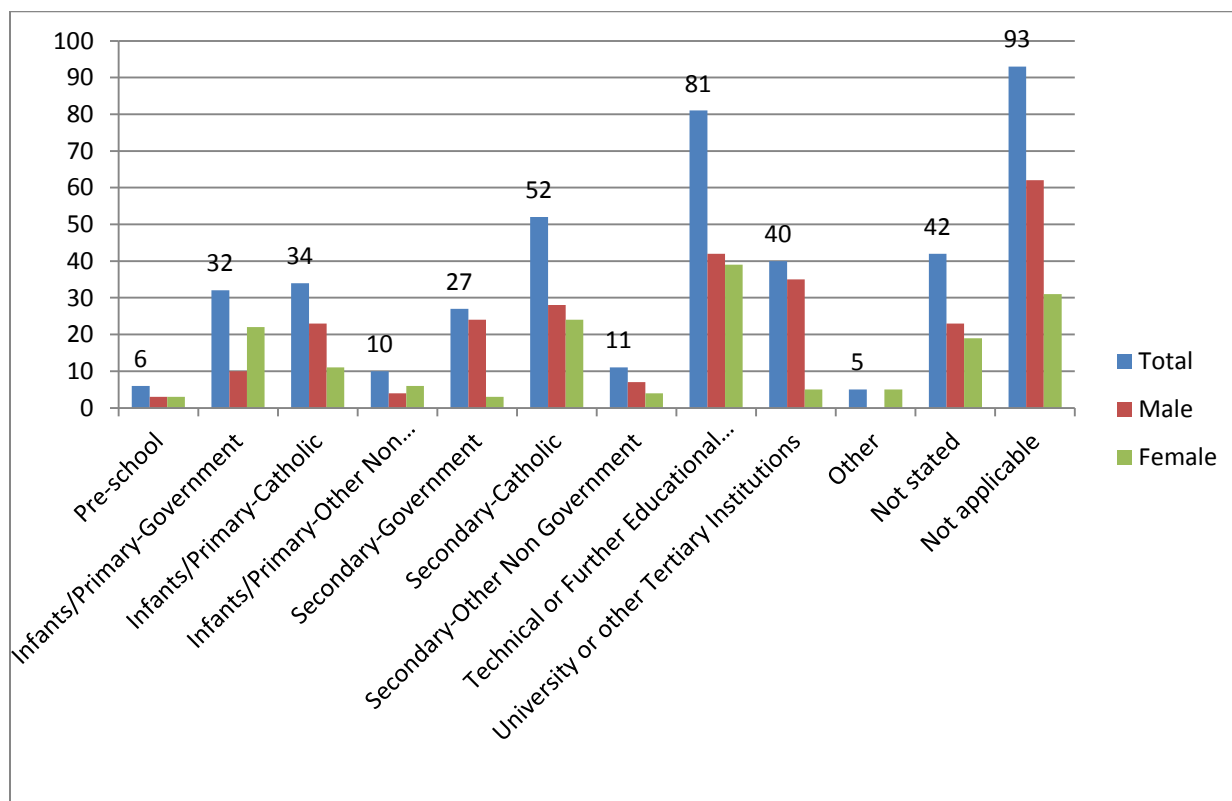
Figure 6: Level OF Education Attained by Sudanese in Toowoomba



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census

Figure 6 shows the highest level of education attained by Sudanese in the 2006 census. The vast majority have attained school level qualifications. However such figures do not indicate quality of education provided, retention rates, results and precisely what level of school education has been achieved e.g. year 12 or year 10. An attempt to provide an indication of program quality will be attempted in the next sections. The “not applicable” variable here means persons under 15 years of age. What is also interesting is the extremely low level of university qualification attainment by the Sudanese population (3.7%) when compared to the national average of nearly 20%.¹³ This particular gap is one reason for the investigation into ESL service provision in the Toowoomba region. Another reason is made clear when one compares the high levels of school education attainment with the labour force status in Figure 8. It appears that less than 25% of Sudanese are employed in the workforce. The

Figure 7: Type of Educational Institution attended by Sudanese



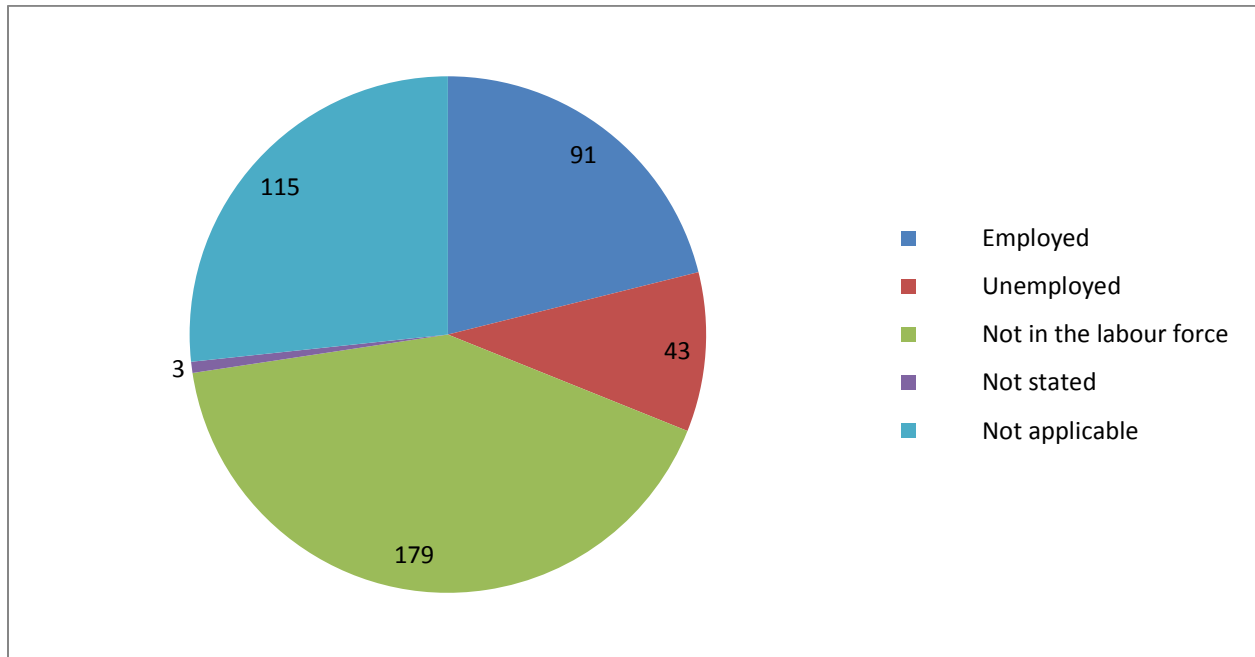
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census

“not applicable” variable in figure 8 means persons under 15 years of age. This figure of 115 is more than matched by school attendees in the types of educational institution attended (fig. 7), which leads to the conclusion that the not applicable category are more than likely all engaged in some kind of

¹³ O’Reilly, B., Education and Training: How Does Australia Compare Internationally? *Year Book Australia*, 2002, Accessed on the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Website*.
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%20Article122002?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=1301.0&issue=2002&num=&view=>

school-based study. However, when one considers that 222 respondents are not in the labour force or unemployed and yet a high percentage are considered to have achieved a school standard education, the standard of education and quality of English language services should be investigated. Furthermore when considering the “not applicable” variable in figure 7 means not currently attending an educational institution it is necessary to ask *why* this is the case given the extremely low levels of English language proficiency on arrival in Australia shown in figure 4. It is to this we now turn through an evaluation of the ESL programs in Toowoomba.

Figure 8: Labour Force Status of Sudanese in Toowoomba



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census

Recommendation: That education providers increase organizational transparency. Specifically retention, results and student demographics data be freely available upon request so that a more comprehensive evaluation of the success of their ESL programs, inter alia, can be undertaken in the future.

5.0 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

5.1 ESL PATHWAYS

AMEP's current mission statement is to "maximize participation of migrants and refugees in the Australian community through the provision and management of a quality national English language program which meets the needs of its clients." The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) began in 1948 to provide English language services to migrants in the aftermath of world war two.¹⁴ Over time the program was expanded to include all new arrivals in Australia, namely under humanitarian and refugee programs. The idea was that English language tuition was a right for all new arrivals in Australia.

Since 1998 under the Special Preparatory Program (SPP) an initial 100 hours of English language tuition was made available specifically for humanitarian entrants who have had difficult pre-migration experiences e.g. experiences of torture and trauma or a disintegration of education infrastructure in their countries of origin. 510 hours of English tuition is available for entrants should they register for the service within three months of arrival. Commencement of the program must begin within one year. In addition to this those with less than seven years of formal schooling prior to the arrival date are afforded an additional 400 hours of ESL tuition.¹⁵

Once a minimum of 460 hours of the AMEP program is completed entrants are allowed an additional 800 hours of tuition under the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program which is linked to Centrelink and Job Network Providers. This program is an initiative of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and targets those identified as unemployed, looking for work, who are not studying full-time, jobseekers whose first language is not English and who are citizens or permanent residents.¹⁶

For school aged entrants the opportunity to learn English in Intensive English Centres (IECs) at high schools is supposed to be a viable option for entrants. A number of faults with this system will be elaborated on later, however suffice to say that according to the 2008 Australian Refugee Council Report IECs are located only in capital cities, making them virtually inaccessible to rural residents.¹⁷ Furthermore where they have been emulated in regional areas they are of a substandard quality and are severely understaffed. This has been witnessed first-hand in Toowoomba and referred to directly in interviews with education providers.

¹⁴ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Review of the Adult Migrant English Program: Discussion Paper, July 2008, p8.

¹⁵ Refugee Council of Australia, "Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program: Community Views on Current Challenges and Future Directions", February 2008, p39

¹⁶ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants," May 2003, p260.

¹⁷ Refugee Council of Australia, "Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program: Community Views on Current Challenges and Future Directions", February 2008, p 41.

A number of tertiary ESL programs exist designed to create a bridge between functional studies and university entrance. The English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) are two such examples and are run from the University of Southern Queensland (USQ). There are issues with fees, retention and curriculum difficulty in these programs which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Hence it can be seen that there are indeed a number of ESL options available to humanitarian and refugee entrants. The way in which these programs are run and the extent to which they fulfill their stated objectives is a different question. Issues of a systemic and personal nature can mar the efficiency with which such programs operate. Consultation with local service providers and a corollary study of the literature reveals the very particular ways in which English Language Proficiency is not being delivered and the ways in which it is effective.

5.2 BARRIERS TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Inflexible course start dates and eligibility requirements for the AMEP preclude the possibility of immediate commencement. Entrants are required to enroll in the AMEP program within three months of arriving in Australia.¹⁸ This is supposed to impress upon entrants the importance of English language classes but ignores immediate resettlement issues such as housing and healthcare which are also priorities to entrants. It seems foolish to place time-based enrolment conditions on access to ESL services given their importance to a successful transition to Australian life. Research indicates that it can take two years for second language learners to become fluent in basic communication, but between four and seven years to gain academic fluency. In the case of refugees where schooling may have been disrupted by war or other strife studies suggest this can take up to ten years to achieve.¹⁹ Hence to allocate a finite period of entitlement or enrolment deadline creates unnecessary obstacles to successful acquisition of English language skills.

A lack of understanding by clients of childcare options appears to be creating a barrier to English language acquisition. Consultation with key stakeholders within the AMEP program in Toowoomba reveals an ignorance of the obligations under the AMEP tender to link clients with childcare facilities that meets state and territory regulation, meets the needs of AMEP clients and cultural sensitivities of the clients, be located near enough that travel to and from is not more than 30 minutes from the client and be provided without cost to the client.²⁰ The knowledge of how to access and the availability of childcare service is particularly important to refugee-type visa holders who may have no family networks in Australia. Having time away from children, especially for women who may be culturally bound to care for children, is of crucial importance if entrants are to realise the right to gain an education provided for under the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.²¹ AMEP providers have cited a lack of

¹⁸ Refugee Council of Australia, "Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program: Community Views on Current Challenges and Future Directions", February 2008, p43.

¹⁹ Miller J., Mitchell J., and Brown J., "African Refugees with Interrupted Schooling in the High School Mainstream: Dilemmas for Teachers." *Prospect Journal: An Australian Journal of TESOL*, 20 (2), 2008, p19-33.

²⁰ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants," May 2003, p270

²¹ UNHCR, Article 22 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

resources both financial and human in meeting their childcare pathway obligations. It appears there is a gap which needs to be addressed in this area if Australia is to live up to its own AMEP objectives as well as those agreed to under international law.

Childcare services must be highly specialized as many refugee families have never had to leave their children with strangers.²² The Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Service (TRAMS) provides quality care on-site for children of former refugees while simultaneously augmenting existing ESL services with regular English conversation classes of their own. Given their status as an IHSS sub-tender recipient through the Spiritus organisation in refugee resettlement this particular organisation is uniquely placed to identify and respond to the needs of entrants in the areas of childcare and supplementary English tuition. Currently these services are provided on a solely voluntary basis and at no charge to clients. If TRAMS or a similar service was to extend childcare services and provide a structured ESL program it is recommended that funding for a significantly larger venue and relevant accoutrements be provided to complement existing work. This would also allow the existing AMEP program to outsource home-style tuition as part of its existing tender obligations in a professional manner²³, while simultaneously building critical inter-organisational pathways among key stakeholders.

Proficiency in English is critical to successful learning outcomes for former refugees.²⁴ Maximising learning outcomes is inextricably linked to the maximization of reach, retention and results. These three criteria are key measures of success of the AMEP program by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA). In consultation with local stakeholders of the AMEP and other ESL programs they have been used in evaluating effectiveness of local programs.

Reach refers to the extent to which eligible people take up ESL entitlements. With regard to public schooling adequate reach is a foregone conclusion given mandatory requirements to enroll in school. The quality of ESL programs here is a matter for results and retention. In other programs including homework assistance reach could be improved by promoting greater flexibility in class times and locations. By offering weekend and night time classes, people are given the opportunity to receive tuition at times that may be more convenient for them. One of the key obstacles to overcome here is the severe shortage of ESL teachers in the region now and into the future.²⁵ Thus to extend program reach education incentives for ESL teaching qualifications, the political will to create additional teaching venues and openness to the idea of more flexible ESL services is required.

Recommendation: That a greater number of venues at a variety of times be created to increase the availability and flexibility of existing ESL programs. This must include the ability to continue ESL entitlement hours where they were left off rather than a deadline where unused hours lapse. An alternative to this would be allowing for participants' unused hours to be allocated to another client who may have need of them.

²² Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Review of the Adult Migrant English Program: Discussion Paper," July 2008, p23.

²³ Multicultural Development Association, "Senate Inquiry into the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing, June 2010, p 5.

²⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission, "African Australians: Human Rights and Social Inclusion Issues Project: A Compendium Detailing the Outcomes of the Community and Stakeholder Consultations and Interviews and Public Submissions," June 2010, p 62.

²⁵ Queensland Studies Authority Website, "English for ESL Learners Trial Syllabus: Final Evaluation Report," May 2010, p3.

http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior/snr_esl_07_syll_trial_final_report.pdf

Results refer to the extent to which English learning objectives are achieved. There a number of barriers to achievement of results by participants which are both systemic and personal and are present in ESL programs within schools as well as without. Perhaps one of the most salient systemic issues affecting results is related to curriculum content and suitability. In one sense some former refugees and Sudanese in particular may have no prior schooling. This means that the foundations of schooling that are taken for granted such as primary level numeracy, the knowledge of the planets, the alphabet etc. have not been taught. The curriculum taught in the AMEP, LLNP and high schools was designed to teach migrant children with an assumed level of previous schooling.²⁶ Use of this style of curriculum is unsuitable for teaching former refugees with no prior schooling and denotes a general inadequacy in the policy environment to meet a diverse spectrum of learning needs of former refugees.

A related issue deals with placing students of mixed abilities in the same class. This has been cited generally within Toowoomba as a significant problem. Educators have trouble catering for all levels of proficiency simultaneously and consequently a situation exists in ESL programs where learners may be disadvantaged by course content that is too challenging or not challenging enough. In public schools there is an issue with age appropriate education where students are assigned to a grade based on their age rather than academic ability and so are disadvantaged by syllabus content far beyond their English language abilities.²⁷ Another example here is the nearly 70% drop-out rate from ELICOS courses at the University of Southern Queensland by former refugees with little prior education due to the extreme level of difficulty.²⁸ This example points to a lack of intermediate level classes to help bridge the gap between the functional English offered by local government funded ESL programs and the more rigorous demands of English in an academic sense.

There is a need to create a sense of importance of English language learning. AMEP ought to be given greater priority by government agencies as people often due to Centrelink demands leave classes to go to employment, often in menial labour roles where English skills are of little importance and lose the chance to better their English skills and contribute to Australian society. Often students defer the course half-way through and then pick it up again after some time and find they only have a matter of months to complete the course while previous knowledge may have been lost in the interim. This requires an active stance by government agencies such as Centrelink supported by high quality interpreting services to impress upon entrants the flexibility of government appointments when English language classes are concerned.

The above systemic issues that have been raised are far from exhaustive. However they serve to illuminate some of the inadequacies present in ESL services in Toowoomba. It should be stated categorically that the current programs do certainly assist many individuals in gaining a functional proficiency in English, that is the ability to navigate through everyday social and some work situations. Functional English classes allow people to get a glimpse of Australian life and services. They help reduce the social isolation associated with resettlement. However some groups are quite simply disadvantaged

²⁶ Sidhu, R., & Taylor, S., Educational Provision for Refugee Youth in Australia: Left to Chance? *Journal of Sociology*, 43: (2007), p283.

²⁷ Multicultural Development Association, "Senate Inquiry into the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing, June 2010, p6.

²⁸ This statistic was provided by an employee of the ELICOS program who due to the sensitivity of the information prefers to remain anonymous.

in their learning environment under the current system. The answer lies in the ability of policymakers to assigned greater attention and resources to create a learning environment that caters for all ages and abilities. As it stands the author is in agreement with Singh who identifies an undifferentiated learning environment that ignores the particular needs of particular groups²⁹, in this case those of former refugees with little prior schooling.

Recommendation: That greater attention and resources be directed towards creating a curriculum and learning environment that caters for more ages and ability levels. This includes within public schools, in government funded ESL projects and in programs designed to bridge the gap between functional levels of English fluency and the more rigorous requirements of university and other tertiary studies.

²⁹ Sidhu, R., & Taylor, S., Educational Provision for Refugee Youth in Australia: Left to Chance? *Journal of Sociology*, 43: (2007), p286.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

The study has revealed an increasing diversity among the demographic composition of incoming entrants. Given this increasing diversity it is inevitable that providers will be increasingly operating in a more complex environment. Settlement needs are likely to require greater cultural knowledge and training on the part of service providers to meet the challenges of this changing environment in Toowoomba. Hence it is critical that there are close links between AMEP and other ESL providers and other services like Centrelink and job networks. This communication will enable stakeholders to operate in an environment of greater information and if augmented with greater funding could enhance the efficiency of the Toowoomba service industry.

The systemic deficiencies cited point to a need for reform in the ways in which ESL services both privately and through public schools are delivered. Curriculum designed for ability and prior education levels is critical to efficiently delivering ESL services. A more tailored and holistic approach to ESL service delivery would allow entrants to maximize the benefits of English language education. It is also recommended that greater intermediate level ESL programs be implemented to allow entrants to bridge the gap between the largely functional styles of English taught in local programs and the more rigorous demands of tertiary preparation courses. By taking the time to tailor programs for clients results can be improved and the existing funding is likely to become more effective in addressing program goals.

Greater attempts must be made to increase the flexibility of ESL programs to enhance the potential to reach out to possible candidates with a greater number of class times, dates and venues. Given the highly specialized learning needs of entrants with little previous schooling ESL curriculum in the future must become more specialized and responsive to cater to a variety of ages and abilities. This will remain a critical area to address if the government is to reach its stated national targets of 90% attainment rate of year 12 or year 12 equivalent by 2015.³⁰ In particular public schooling must extend and broaden its existing ESL programs to allow students to maximize learning outcomes. Furthermore more concrete pathways must be set in place to facilitate meaningful transitions for entrants to higher learning or ongoing remedial English classes.

These realities point to a critical need to improve education and pathway outcomes for disadvantaged groups such as newly arrived entrants with very little English. To this end more concrete communication pathways between organisations must be implemented to ensure that clients are receiving the best services possible. This should include more flexibility on behalf of organisations that are able to create obstacles to effective English language acquisition such as Centrelink. The current environment in Toowoomba is one of fragmentation with many organisations operating with individual mandates independently of one another. Hence more substantial inter-organisational cooperation must be implemented to improve the overall service environment.

³⁰ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, School, Business, Community Partnership Brokers: Program Guidelines 2010-2013, December 2009, p5.

Finally ancillary services such as childcare and NGO ESL services play a critical role in *enabling* clients to participate in ESL programs. Without full understanding of the obligations to assist in providing such services, organisations may do clients a significant disservice in their attempts to provide assistance in achieving education outcomes. Without constant monitoring and evaluation mechanisms service providers may fall short of their obligations to provide ancillary services to clients. This can result in the disengagement with and disempowerment of entrants attempting to better their circumstances through the pursuit of the English language.

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