

Newly arrived migrants – new Victorian drivers

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Abstract

There is significant concern for the road safety of newly arrived people from other countries who settle in Victoria on humanitarian grounds. Most concern relates to safe driving and understanding the Victorian road system, including the licensing process.

The TAC is contacted for information or statistics relating to new arrival drivers compared to the general driving public. This is because these drivers are seen by the public as being at greater risk of crashing and greater risk of causing crashes than Australian born or those who have settled from countries with a motorised society.

A number of organisations have responded to this concern by establishing support programs, including education and on road supervised driving practice; licensing; purchasing a vehicle; and the roles of Police, the courts and the Sheriff's office.

In response to this emerging issue, the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) commissioned research to develop an understanding of the road safety issues and experiences of new arrivals in the lead up to and following licensing as a Victorian driver, including participation in locally developed programs, often funded by the TAC Community Road Safety Grants.

This paper will report on Victoria's experience in addressing actual and perceived road safety issues in emerging communities, including the findings of the research.

Key words

New arrivals, refugees, driver education, community programs

Introduction

Humanitarian migrants (refugees and asylum seekers) enter Australia through processes managed by the Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). The Settlement Grants Program (SGP) is a Federal Government grants program through the DIAC, which provides funding to organisations to help new arrivals settle in Australia. DIAC also funds the Adult Migrant English Program to assist newly arrived immigrants to develop basic English language skills.

According to data from the DIAC, Australia received around 13,500 refugees in 2009, comprising both onshore and offshore entrants. Each year, Victoria receives around 25

percent of the total refugee intake, or approximately 3,000 people. Humanitarian migrants accounted for 6.5 per cent of Victoria's migrant intake in 2009, with most arriving from Iraq, Burma and Afghanistan.

In the five years from July 2005 to June 2009, almost 2,000 humanitarian migrants were directly settled in regional Victoria and it is expected that this number will increase over the coming years from direct and secondary settlement as living costs in the Melbourne metropolitan area increase.

Limited public transport options and the need to obtain and keep employment mean that new arrivals often wish to obtain a driver licence. Many new arrivals, especially those accepted under refugee/humanitarian programs, can find it difficult to obtain a licence. The challenges they face include:

- Lack of experience in a motorised society
- Not having held a licence in their country of origin
- Limited experience with licensing systems and bureaucracies
- Language barriers in relation to dealing with the licensing authority, sitting the tests, comprehending written materials and information, etc
- The costs associated with driver licensing – especially in relation to obtaining driving lessons and obtaining supervised experience
- Access to cars and licensed supervising drivers to assist in preparing for the test and solo driving.

There are no data available in Victoria that allows for the assessment of new arrival crash involvement. The Victoria Police crash report form does not include items to capture this information and licensing data collected by VicRoads is not able to be used in a format to identify new drivers from less-motorised countries.

Evidence from Sweden and the United Kingdom indicates that the crash risk of new arrivals, particularly those from less motorised countries, is higher than for Swedish and UK born drivers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that humanitarian migrants entering Victoria confront a number of problems relating to their mobility and safety, in addition to the broader range of settlement challenges.

Given the community concern, the anecdotal evidence and the results from the Swedish studies, the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) have concluded a study to understand the road safety issues for newly arrived migrants.

The study involved three stages. The initial stage focused on stakeholder consultation to understand the key issues for new arrivals and the projects developed to address these issues. Another component involved a survey to determine the driving experience of new arrivals prior to coming to Australia and since their settlement in Victoria. The aim of the survey was to understand crash involvement, infringements and the level of understanding among new arrivals of specific road safety issues such as use of child restraints. To help inform policy and program development, a literature review was also undertaken to ascertain if previous research had been conducted into the road safety issues faced by new arrivals.

Support Programs for New Arrivals in Victoria

Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) has convened a Victorian working group to address the issues faced by new arrivals, particularly those entering Victoria as humanitarian migrants. The Victorian New Migrants Driving Working Group comprises representatives from AMES, VicRoads, the TAC, Consumer Affairs Victoria, the Multicultural Commission of Victoria and the RACV. The Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship participates in meetings.

Each organisation provides support to Victorian community groups through a range of approaches that target particular issues from licensing to purchasing a vehicle to road safety and the roles of Police, the courts and the Sheriff's office as follows:

- AMES is a settlement provider funded by DIAC and other sources and conducts a range of support programs for new arrivals, including humanitarian migrants.
- The TAC established the Community Road Safety Grants program to provide community groups with opportunities to address local road safety issues within the context of the Victorian road safety strategy. In seven rounds to date, 145 projects have been funded of which 28 focus on road safety for new arrivals, totalling almost \$450,000 in grants.
- The RACV, through its community grants program, has funded programs to address mobility and road safety issues for new arrivals.
- VicRoads, as the licensing authority, supports new arrivals to obtain their driver's license and offers interpretation services and is developing materials to support culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities to understand the licensing system.
- VicRoads L2P program, funded by the TAC, provides on-road supervised driving practice for disadvantaged learner drivers aged under 21 years, to enable them to acquire the mandatory 120 hours supervised driving practice to be eligible for a probationary license.
- Victoria Police Multicultural Liaison Officers are located in Police regions and provide support to CALD communities on a range of matters, road safety being just one of many.
- The Victorian Multicultural Commission conducts a grants program to fund a range of projects focussing on the CALD communities and issues.
- Consumer Affairs Victoria has developed a DVD which provides information on licensing, road safety, buying a car and the role of Police and the justice system. With support from VicRoads, the DVD is available in eighteen community languages.
- Most Settlement Grants Program projects funded by DIAC include some form of driver education.

In several projects, funding from multiple sources has been obtained to conduct driver education programs. As at April 2009, 15 targeted new arrivals projects were operating across regional and rural Victoria, and 16 in metropolitan Melbourne. An additional 15 L2P programs were operating across the state, in which disadvantaged young refugees can participate.

Projects funded through grants programs typically include a classroom based component ranging from 2 to 11 lessons with funded or subsidised driver instructor sessions, and in some instances, on-road supervised driving practice provided by volunteer mentors, similar to the L2P program for disadvantaged young Learner drivers.

Findings from the Literature Review

As reported by Compsec Services (2010), there has been limited published research since the review conducted by Harrison in 2007. Harrison's report discusses information collected concerning the general CALD context in Victoria, road safety research and programs relevant to CALD groups, public health research and programs relevant to CALD groups, and the beliefs about road safety issues held by CALD residents and those working in the CALD area. A range of recommendations included better collection of data and further research into the specific issues that many new arrivals face. According to Comspec Services, the road safety and licensing issues facing new arrivals as they seek to integrate into Australia remain largely unchanged.

The current review found recent international research evidence, where studies have been undertaken to further explore the traffic safety of immigrants in Sweden, suggesting that cultural values and traffic norms in an individual's country of origin have an influence on their traffic sense and safety in subsequent countries of residence. This research also suggests that immigrants are not a homogenous group and that risks may differ between immigrants from different areas, across different ages, genders, education levels and exposure to the traffic environment. Further, attitudes towards seat belt and child restraint use also differed between groups of immigrants. The researchers concluded the need for increased knowledge regarding traffic policies, norms and regulations, the development of clear, well-thought out specific messages regarding restraint use and the development of traffic safety programs for specific groups.

The current review also reported on recent research and activity within Australia, finding that:

- As raised by Harrison (2007), issues associated with the complexity of CALD communities, the absence of a strategic approach to addressing road safety issues facing new arrivals and the absence of clear data defining the size and specific nature of the road safety problem in Victoria are still valid.
- There is further documented evidence recognising the settlement issues facing specific newly arriving groups in Victoria and their involvement the legal system due to traffic and safety issues, with recommendations to offer support to migrant groups to reduce interactions with the law.
- In line with the Swedish research previously mentioned, there is some evidence from New South Wales to suggest that attitudes and use of child restraints among families from NESB differ to those from ESB, with the former demonstrating less knowledge of appropriate restraint use yet more confidence in this knowledge than those from English speaking families.

Findings from the Consultation Phase

The TAC and the RACV commissioned Comspec Services Pty Ltd to consult with key stakeholders and selected TAC Community Road Safety Grants project recipients in an effort to determine the current situation in relation to new arrival safety issues and programs currently operating in Victoria.

The review included consultation with the project officers responsible for a sample of selected TAC Community Road Safety Grant projects concerning new arrival issues. Nine projects were selected by TAC/RACV for inclusion in this consultation. TAC sent each selected community group an email inviting their participation in this review. Seven of the invited recipients indicated a willingness to participate and were consequently consulted during June

2010. Discussions were also held with a further group that was seeking funding for a proposed project to address the needs of newly arrived migrants in their community.

The interviews were conducted following a brief review of the TAC Community Road Safety Grant applications and interim/final reports (where possible, and as provided to Comspec Service by TAC) and involved the collection of detailed information about each project and target group. The interviews sought to obtain specific information relating to the following:

- Summary of the program: including specific details of the program approach, commencement and completion dates, details of the key issues the program seeks to address.
- Primary audience/target group: including methods of participant recruitment, transportation to and from the session, level of program take-up/extent of reach given need in the community, key benefits for participants. Evidence base/model on which the program was developed: including background as to why the approach was selected, whether existing resources or program material are used to implement the program and if so what and how?
- Total cost of the program: in terms of funding source, key cost areas and challenge/benefits about sourcing funding in the future.
- Implications and limitations of the program, for the target group or in general
- Unintended consequences of the program and documentation of these
- Key areas of risk and other emerging issues including extent and evidence of risk as a driver, a passenger, a pedestrian and as public transport user.
- Sustainability and future plans for the program in terms of costs and program coordination.

Comments raised during the consultations are summarised as follows:

- Several programs target single mothers and women who have their learner permits and are seeking to graduate to a probationary licence.
- The programs target newly arriving migrants from a range of backgrounds; including those from Sudan (most commonly), Sierra Leone, Burma, Afghanistan, and Arabia. Recruitment of participants is often via case work, internal referral pathways, discussions with community leaders and advertising in local and community newspaper.
- The needs of these groups consistently relate to difficulties with mobility, transport and employment. However, the costs of licensing and learning to drive and inherent lack of road exposure and experience with the Australian road environment further inhibit licence attainment and safe driving practices.

In terms of the type of programs offered:

- Each program offers some form of education sessions (from 2-3 sessions up to 11 sessions) that are facilitated by presenters from local Victoria Police, VicRoads and RACV, with several also including representatives from the Magistrates Court, the Sheriffs' Office, Consumer Affairs Victoria and/or local motor mechanic shops. Each session usually runs for a couple of hours. These sessions cover a range of topics, including, though not limited to the following: Road Safety and Australian Road Rules; the implications associated with following (or not following) the law; assistance with purchasing, registering and insuring a motor vehicle; key aspects of the Victorian legal

system; and regulations and requirements around obtaining a learner and probationary licence.

- Most programs follow this up with the provision of professional instructor sessions (average of 5), which are either fully or partly subsidised (often depending on funding constraints), as part of the program cost. Several projects have used professional instructors from the same background as the target group themselves, noting a reduction in language barriers.
- Seven of the nine programs consulted also offer a volunteer mentoring program whereby a community volunteer is given some training to act as a supervisor driver to further increase the driving experience of the program participants once the professional instructor sessions are complete. Many projects have been successful in receiving donated vehicles, from either local car retailers or on-loan with agencies such as AMES. Several of the projects consulted are using dual-powered vehicles for the volunteer program. The amount of success with recruiting and retaining volunteers varies, though the importance of the 'fit' between the learner and the volunteer is believed to be critical.

In terms of outcomes for participants:

- There is a general perception of benefits far greater than knowledge acquisition around road safety and obtaining a licence. Many reported general increase in life skills, particularly where intensive education sessions have been offered over a period of time. Projects consulted report increases in community connectedness of those involved, with flow-on involvement in other community programs and perceptions of feeling more accepted within their own community. Anecdotally, those consulted believe that the programs also generate a greater understanding regarding the responsibility of driving and the legalities associated with being a road user in Victoria.
- Further, it is noted that the interest in and value of such programs is strong (both from participants and those delivering the programs), with most programs indicating that the level of need within the community is much greater than the number of participants able to benefit from the funded programs.

In terms of program sustainability, the greatest costs are associated with program coordination (which are considerably greater for those models offering a volunteer mentoring program) and the costs of providing subsidised professional instruction and/or vehicle maintenance and petrol. Where programs are continuing to operate in lieu of program funding or are seeking further funding, many are considering requesting a contribution from participants to help cover the costs of professional instruction sessions and ongoing vehicle costs.

Findings from the survey phase

The TAC and RACV commissioned Kerry Alexander Research to undertake a quantitative survey to determine the road safety experiences of newly arrived humanitarian migrants.

The survey examined the following issues:

- Licensing, driving and crashes in country of origin
- Licensing, driving, crashes and traffic infringements since arriving in Australia/Victoria
- Transporting children and use of child restraints
- Seat belt use among those who do not drive.

Methodology

The methodology for this research required a balance between pragmatism and robust research design. The target audience was recently arrived migrants with refugee status aged 18 years and older who had arrived in Australia within the last five years. Respondents needed to be driving (licensed or not) or wishing to drive.

The survey was administered by Community Guides engaged by AMES. The survey was generally administered in the respondent's own language and recorded in English on a hard copy questionnaire. Community Guides are newly arrived immigrants who speak English and are employed on a casual basis by AMES to assist other new arrivals from their own countries to integrate into Australia.

The Community Guides were briefed on the project and trained in survey administration principles by the research team that comprised Kerry Alexander Research, the TAC and the RACV. The training addressed confidentiality, accuracy, avoiding bias and involved role play. During the interviewer training, feedback on format, usability and wording of the questionnaire was obtained from the Community Guides and the questionnaire was simplified as a result.

Interviews were conducted in November 2010, with 90 per cent of interviews conducted face-to-face, six per cent conducted by phone and the origin of others was not recorded. Data entry was conducted by Lighthouse Data Collection. 557 completed usable interviews were obtained from respondents who met the selection criteria. 514 interviews were conducted in Melbourne by 26 Community Guides. A further 43 interviews were conducted in regional Victoria: 20 in Mildura, 14 in Geelong and nine in Shepparton. Due to the small sample sizes in individual locations, the regional interviews were combined in the analysis.

While the data provides a first step to understanding some of the issues associated with new arrivals and road safety in Victoria, it is not possible to infer that this is a random sample or to determine how representative the responses are of the population of new arrivals in Victoria. Further, as in any survey, accuracy or honesty of responses cannot be ascertained. However, the following steps were taken to maximise these:

- Respondents were not required to provide a name or contact details and no details were recorded on the questionnaire
- The interviews were conducted in the respondent's own language, in their own community
- The interviewer assured the respondent of their anonymity

Sample description

Of the 557 completed interviews:

- 346 were with males and 206 were with females aged between 18 years and 50+ years
- 84 per cent of respondents were aged between 21 and 49 years of age
- 66 per cent had either a Learner Permit, Probationary Licence or Full license, with 34 per cent not holding a license. 25 per cent held an overseas licence.

The majority of respondents (79 per cent) were born in the following seven countries:

- 26 per cent in Burma
- 12 percent in Iraq
- 9 percent in Afghanistan
- 9 percent in Ethiopia

- 8 per cent in Sri Lanka
- 8 per cent in Sudan
- 7 per cent in Bhutan.

This is consistent with data from AMES which details the main countries of origin of refugees who have settled in Victoria from January to December 2010.

Places lived and vehicle overseas

Before coming to Australia, just over half of the respondents had lived in a city, one fifth had lived in a village and just over one third had lived in a refugee camp. All of the respondents from Bhutan, more than half of the respondents from Burma and one third of those from Sudan had lived in a refugee camp. Those who had lived in camps were less likely to have had an overseas driver's licence or to have obtained a full Australian drivers licence.

New arrivals, had considerably higher access to vehicles since arriving in Australia compared with their vehicle access prior to coming to Australia. Among respondents, 80% have a vehicle at their house, while only 50% had access to a vehicle prior to coming to Australia. Access to a motorcycle was, however, higher prior to coming to Australia.

Driving overseas

One third of respondents had driven a vehicle in another country at some time. A higher proportion of respondents from Sudan, Bhutan and Burma had not driven overseas, in keeping with the large proportion of respondents from these countries who had lived in refugee camps. 16% of those who did not have any type of overseas driver's licence had driven overseas (67 people). Almost two thirds had driven a car and half had driven a motorcycle. Most (89%) of those with an overseas licence reported having undertaken an on-road driving test, some also with a written paper test (33%). One tenth reported just paying money (possibly a bribe) but not undergoing a test of any kind to obtain a driver's licence.

Driving in Australia

When travelling around in Australia, three quarters of respondents mainly used public transport, almost half usually drove themselves and one quarter were usually driven by other people. Melbourne residents were considerably more likely to use public transport or to drive themselves, while those living in regional areas were more likely to be driven, use taxis or ride a bicycle. Two thirds of respondents had driven in Australia at some time, which was twice as high as the proportion that had driven overseas. 7% of those who did not have an Australian licence (14 people) reported that they had driven in Australia at some time, which is around half the rate of reported unlicensed driving overseas (16%). Nine of these people indicated that they drove every day or most days, while four reported driving a few times a month or less and one did not answer. Almost one third of those who drove in Australia had driven for less than six months. This is consistent with the duration of time respondents had lived in Australia (one third had been in Australia one year or less) and the high proportion of those with a learner permit or probationary licence.

Licensing in Australia

Australian licence status reflects the relatively short time respondents had lived in Australia. Of those who had driven in Australia:

- 31% had a learner permit.
- 43% had a probationary licence.

- 23% had a full licence.
- 3% (13 people) did not have any permit or licence from Australia.

One respondent did not answer the question on licence type, hence this section has one less respondent who drove in Australia unlicensed, than reported elsewhere in the report (14 people).

It appears that new arrivals find the Australian licensing system difficult:

- 15% of those who had a learner permit took three or more attempts to obtain their permit
- 26% of those who had a full or probationary licence took three or more attempts to obtain their licence.

While around half of those who attained a learner permit and licence reported having obtained help with licensing, most of this 'help' was informal assistance from family or friends. One tenth of learner permit holders reported that they had help from a migrant or community centre to obtain their permit while a smaller proportion of drivers reported help from these organisations to obtain a driver's licence.

Crashes in Australia and overseas

12% of respondents reported that they had had a crash when driving in Australia, while 14% reported having had a crash when driving overseas. Of the 47 people who reported that they had crashed when driving in Australia:

- 34 reported having had one crash.
- Nine reported having had two crashes.
- Three reported having had three crashes.
- One person reported having had four or more crashes.

The countries of origin from which the highest proportions of drivers had crashed when driving in Australia were from non-motorised countries. When compared to the TAC Road Safety Monitor (2010), 17% of all Victorian drivers had reported a crash within the last five years.

Infringements and fines

Three quarters of respondents reported that they had not been caught or fined for traffic (non-parking) infringements in Australia. Speeding was the most frequently reported infringement with 15% of respondents reporting speeding infringements. When compared to the TAC Road Safety Monitor, 18% of Victorian drivers reported receiving a speeding infringement notice in the past five years. Of the twenty people (5%) who reported being caught for unlicensed driving, 17 were from non motorised countries.

Compliance with seat belt wearing was quite high, and higher than use of child restraints (see below).

- 99% of drivers reported always wearing a seatbelt when driving.
- 97% of drivers reported always wearing a seatbelt as a passenger.
- 95% of non-drivers reported always wearing a seatbelt when driving in a car.

Of the 16 people who reported never or sometimes not wearing a seatbelt, seven were from less motorised countries.

Driving with children

41% of respondents who drove in Australia drove with babies or children aged up to seven years old. Two respondents who were unlicensed reported driving with children. While reported use of child restraints was quite high, the survey did not determine whether the correct type of restraint was used for each child or whether restraints were used correctly, due to the complexity in obtaining this information. When driving with children under seven years old:

- 91% reported always using a child restraint of some type, which is consistent with the results of the TAC Road Safety Monitor (2010).
- 73% reported never using a seat belt instead of a child restraint.
- 93% reported never driving child without a restraint of some type (seat belt or child restraint).

Respondents from less motorised countries appeared to have poorer compliance with child restraint laws.

Conclusion

Road safety is an important issue for all communities. The TAC and its road safety partners have developed a comprehensive and effective range of interventions to reduce road trauma in Victoria. In 2010, the lowest annual road toll on record was recorded in Victoria (287 deaths). Serious injuries also continue to decline as targeted measures are implemented.

From a community perspective, it is evident that driver education programs are deemed an important conduit for new arrivals in terms of mobility and economic and social participation. What isn't understood is whether new arrivals to Victoria are at greater risk of crashing and if so, do such programs improve road safety for this group by means of measurable crash reduction? Based on review of international studies and research, it appears that the risk of involvement in a serious crash is higher for new arrivals than drivers born in a motorised country and that this is especially true for drivers from societies with low levels of motorisation. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that new arrivals in Victoria have similarly elevated risks of crash involvement.

However, in analysing the data from the questionnaire it appears that new arrivals' self reported behaviours are consistent with the general Victorian population as reported in the TAC Road Safety Monitor 2010. Ideally, comparison of self reported behaviours with licensing and infringement data would provide a clearer insight to specific road safety issues for new arrivals and particular groups within these communities. As this data is not available, these initial findings need to be taken with caution. Further, length of time of licensure could also indicate reduced exposure when compared to the Victorian population and this should also be considered within these findings.

When considering the input from stakeholders, it appears that mobility and licensing are the key issues faced by new arrivals in their efforts to integrate within their new communities. Licensing and mobility have significant implications for ability to participate socially and economically. Resources, such as those funded through the Community Road Safety Grants Program, to support road safety are an important for groups that assist new arrivals to settle in Victoria.

The TAC and RACV would expect that the road safety community continue to look into issues for new and emerging communities and that the findings from this initial research would inform broader policy areas including mobility, licensing, employment and social access for these communities.

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