BACKGROUND
It is widely acknowledged that Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) immigrants to Australia face many barriers to their participation in society, and that government settlement policies have a major impact on the way immigrants adjust or assimilate to life in their host nations. However, the key role played by sport remains ignored by most ‘mainstream’ immigrant settlement studies and policy makers in Australia. This is especially the case for soccer, played or officiated by an estimated 260 million people worldwide according to a study by the sport’s global governing body in 2006 (an increase of 23 million participants from the figure recorded in 2000) (Kunz, 2007) and renowned in Australia for its long history of immigrant participation. The aim of this policy brief is to summarise the role soccer has played, and continues to play, in Australia’s numerous CALD immigrant communities.

This policy brief is based on a study undertaken in the metropolitan area of South Australia between 2007 and 2013. The core component of the study was a survey of 127 immigrants (of any background) to Australia and their descendants who had been or currently were involved in some capacity with a semi-professional or amateur level soccer club located in Australia. This included players, coaches, board members, staff, volunteers, members, parents and partners. All respondents were aged 18 or older. The survey was a semi-structured questionnaire, which asked questions about basic demographic details, cultural identity, participation in a soccer club, and their connection to soccer teams in Australia and overseas.

IMMIGRANT ADJUSTMENT IN AUSTRALIA
Since the end of the Second World War Australia has been transformed economically, socially and culturally by immigration, from a predominantly British nation to a far more diverse, multicultural one (Castles and Miller, 2003, pp.199-201). Australia’s postwar immigrants have arrived from many different regions, and in distinct waves (Jupp, 2007). Skilled, temporary immigration has also risen significantly in the last two decades, a significant shift from the emphasis on permanent settlement in the 20th century (Hugo, 2006). Settlement policy has undergone major changes since the Second World War, with assimilation being replaced by multiculturalism as official policy in the 1970s (Jupp, 1998, pp.138-141).

The Australian version of multiculturalism protected the rights of CALD settlers to practice cultural maintenance (within the boundaries of Australian culture), which has been identified as improving self-confidence and easing homesickness (Jupp, 2007, p.81). Despite the success of multiculturalism, however, many arrivals – particularly humanitarian entrants and refugees – face significant barriers to inclusion in Australian society. Multiculturalism also favours those who are more integrated with the predominant ‘Australian’ culture; for example, only cultural organisations publish notices and other information in languages other than English, and the vast majority of private schools having strong connections to Catholicism or Christianity (Castles, 1992).
THE ROLE OF SOCCER IN IMMIGRANT ADJUSTMENT

Soccer’s position as a dominant sport in the homeland of many immigrants to South Australia since the Second World War is undoubtedly a factor in its popularity among these groups. Participating in a soccer club gave CALD immigrants an opportunity to engage with a familiar activity in an alien place, often among people of a similar cultural background. It is therefore unsurprising that many clubs formed by postwar immigrants featured names, insignia and colours associated with the cultural homeland of participants. Clubs formed by immigrant communities provided new arrivals with access to a group with common cultural traits, language and ideals. ‘Mainstream’ sports in South Australia, such as Australian Rules football and cricket, were unlikely to be familiar to most postwar immigrants and thus unable to lessen homesickness in the same manner as soccer.

Despite the origins of immigrants to Australia changing across multiple waves since the Second World War, soccer’s unrivalled global popularity suggests that it can continue to play a role in the adjustment of immigrants, regardless of their cultural background. The research confirms this; while 44 per cent of first generation immigrants interviewed believed that soccer had directly helped them to adjust to life in Australia, this was also true for half of those who arrived in the 1990s and 56 per cent of those who arrived since 2000. Furthermore, only 15 per cent of arrivals since 1990 stated that soccer had no influence on their adjustment.

Participation in soccer clubs also helps immigrants to break down loneliness. Respondents universally indicated that creating or expanding their social network was central to why soccer had helped them to adjust. This confirms previous research in this area that had argued Australian soccer clubs enabled immigrants to mix within their own migrant community, in addition to other groups (Unikoski, 1978; Lock et al., 2008). This impact also goes beyond playing soccer; Figure 1 shows that survey respondents had performed a variety of roles at their soccer clubs (though the majority had been players, some in addition to other roles). It was clear that soccer clubs enable immigrants to have regular positive social interaction, build networks, and form long-term relationships through their involvement with the club. This included single immigrants meeting future partners at their soccer clubs.

SOCCER AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Soccer clubs play a role consistent with the notion that participation in a social network encourages trust among group members (Putnam and Goss, 2002). Trust is central to the generation of social capital; participation in soccer clubs has been crucial to this process for immigrants to South Australia (Cox and Caldwell, 2000). Soccer clubs are a social space where immigrants can regularly congregate to expand their social networks.

It was clear from the survey results that soccer clubs have an impact on the lives of migrants beyond their participation as players, staff or supporters. There are many benefits generated by participation, which can be classed as social capital. Participation at a soccer club helps to break down barriers between groups, widen social networks, create lasting relationships, allows migrants to find employment (thus leading to greater socio-economic mobility), educates new arrivals about local cultural values and assists them in learning the language. These factors are all crucial to the adjustment experience, especially for immigrants arriving alone.

**Figure 1: Roles Performed at Soccer Clubs by Respondents (n=105)**

Source: Immigrant Survey, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Player, supporter and other</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player and supporter</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter and other</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player and other</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family of player</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both clubs formed by a group of a common heritage and by more diverse groups influence adjustment. It is conceivable that soccer clubs formed by a single migrant community can play a role in breaking down cultural barriers as they become patronised by a more diverse membership, thus exposing participants to other groups. Several respondents stated that soccer clubs enabled them to build relationships within the wider community as well as other migrant groups. This is indicative of the role of soccer clubs in generating both bridging and bonding social capital. It is also contrary to a conventional stereotype in Australia of soccer clubs being vehicles for ethnic exclusivity and an implied barrier to adjustment.

In actuality, immigrant participation in Australian soccer clubs does not appear to be widely encouraging insular behaviour and strengthening ethnic loyalties over ‘Australianness.’ Some 92 per cent of respondents identified as either ‘Australian’ or ‘half-Australian,’ including all with Greek or Italian heritage, two groups who have historically resisted assimilation through cultural maintenance and the establishment of ethnic networks and communities (Castles, 1992). Furthermore, only 6.4 per cent did not support the Australian men’s national soccer team, the Socceroos (either separately or in addition to another national team).

Some respondents explicitly stated that their participation in soccer clubs had helped them to socialise with the wider community and understand ‘Australian’ culture. According to Putnam (2000), bridging social capital is more valuable than bonding social capital as it is the result of trust and cooperation between different groups, thus promoting inclusiveness – a crucial factor in the adjustment of immigrants. Therefore, participation in soccer clubs plays an extremely important role in the settlement experiences of some migrants.

Interestingly, the survey results also indicate that South Australian soccer clubs can serve as vehicles for two-way integration, with both members of migrant groups and the wider community adjusting to one another within a soccer club. For example, migrant groups learn English and ‘mainstream’ cultural practices, while the wider community removes barriers through learning the cultural needs of immigrants. It could also be seen that the participation of the wider community in a sport traditionally known as the migrant sport is a process of two-way integration.

By being involved in a familiar activity with both the wider community and migrant groups, soccer allows migrants to adjust gradually; in essence, soccer mixes the familiar with the new, helping to ease the transition for immigrants to the new.

**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The results of the study confirm that participation in soccer clubs has been a major influence on the adjustment of some immigrants to life in South Australia, from a variety of backgrounds. Respondents stated that their participation in a soccer club helped them to build self-confidence and break down loneliness and homesickness, develop their English skills and gain an understanding of Australian cultural traits (in addition to the traits of other groups). Immigrants were also able to build relationships with mainstream Australians as well as other migrants, and find employment through contacts made at their clubs. This is clear evidence that soccer clubs play a significant role in increasing the rate of integration into wider society, rather than decreasing, as is the common stereotype.

These findings are also crucial for young refugees and humanitarian entrants; social interaction and support is key to the adjustment and mental health of CALD immigrants in English-speaking nations, though especially so in these cases (Sonderegger and Barrett, 2004). As soccer is a sport with global renown and a dominant game in many countries from which Australia’s immigrants originate from, it is likely that soccer can play a role in the lives of these arrivals. Soccer can also be a valuable social space for international students, who regularly face social and psychological adjustment problems but typically do not seek out counselling services – this is often due to cultural issues (Mori, 2000).

Soccer, as a familiar activity, can play a significant role in easing these concerns. More recent immigrants, from Asia, the Middle East and Africa, would be unfamiliar with ‘Australian’ sports such as cricket and Australian Rules football, with the exception of those arriving from nations, such as India, which have been profoundly influenced by cricket.

According to a study by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the world governing body of soccer, approximately 90 per cent of soccer players and officials worldwide are male. This suggests that soccer is not as relevant to female immigrants compared to males (Kunz, 2007). Women were limited to background (but nevertheless important) roles at soccer clubs during the peak years of European immigration, such as running the canteen and organising social events, before a small number of female presidents, chairpersons and secretaries emerged in the 1980s.
However, the rise of women’s soccer globally over the last 20 years – coinciding with the changing role of women in many immigrant communities – suggests there is potential for the sport to provide similar opportunities and benefits for female immigrants (Fortier, 2000). It should be noted that the psychological trauma experienced by many refugees is a significant barrier to the participation of refugee women in soccer (Robinson et al., 2006).

The findings also have implications for policy makers. While targeted sport programs for CALD immigrants help to build trust between groups and encourage social inclusion, most are short-term in nature and insufficient, and furthermore are centred around ‘Australian’ sports and at the elite level, benefitting a small minority of participants (SCOA, 2012). It is recommended that such programs are properly resourced and recognised as playing a role in integration by settlement services, and that, as a sport likely known to immigrants, soccer is given far more attention than it is currently receiving.

Sport is also not currently a component of the Australian government’s Onshore Orientation Program (OOP), nor is it included in the National Framework for Settlement Planning (NFSP) (DIAC, 2011; DIMA, 2006). Soccer could be incorporated into the OOP as a social activity, by introducing new arrivals to local sports clubs and assisting them in becoming players, volunteers or supporters. Soccer clubs and organisations could be incorporated into the NFSP as non-government stakeholders, providing them with access to immigrants identified as requiring assistance or orientation – who otherwise may not have the opportunity or inclination to join a club.

REFERENCES

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011, The Onshore Orientation Program, Department of Immigration and Citizenship: Canberra.
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2006, National Framework for Settlement Planning, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs: Canberra.

