

Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Impact Evaluation Project

Research Paper A: Profile of AMEP clients 2003-2019 (2022)

Executive Summary

- The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is the longest running program of its kind in Australia. It is designed to help new migrants and humanitarian entrants who have less than vocational English to learn or improve their English skills to facilitate their better social and economic participation in Australian society.
- The AMEP was established in 1948 to assist refugees from post- World War II Europe to settle in Australia. Australia's migrant population profile has become more diverse since then, as has the delivery and content of AMEP, but the overarching goals remain the same.
- The AMEP Impact Evaluation Project seeks to better understand the broader societal impact of AMEP on migrant outcomes, beyond improvements in English proficiency. The findings of the project will be used by the Department of Home Affairs to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the AMEP to support increased learner engagement and improve migrant outcomes.
- About 403,000 persons were enrolled in the AMEP over the reference period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2019.
- Female clients represented 65% of all AMEP participants, with male clients representing the remaining 35%.
- 97% of AMEP clients were aged between 18 and 65 years of age. 77% of female clients were aged under 45 years, compared with 72% of male clients.
- Visa type differed by gender. For female AMEP clients, 63% were on a Family visa, 21% Humanitarian visa and 16% Skilled Migration visa. For males 42% were on a Family visa, 44% Humanitarian visa and 14% Skilled Migration visa.
- 90% of clients who exited the AMEP spent three years or less enrolled in AMEP.
- During the reference period, on average, each client received 332 tuition hours within AMEP (equal to about 66 days, or 17 weeks, full-time). Consistent with the design of the AMEP, clients with Humanitarian visas received the highest amount of tuition (414 hours - equal to about 83 days, or 21 weeks, full-time) and clients with Skilled Migration visas received lowest amount (286 hours - equal to about 57 days, or 14 weeks, full-time).
- The level of English proficiency of AMEP clients was higher upon AMEP exit than at program entry. While this paper does not account for other influences on AMEP clients' English proficiency, the encouraging observation of improved English proficiency for AMEP clients suggests the program meets its primary purpose.

Introduction

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Impact Evaluation Project helps the Australian Government to better understand the drivers of AMEP participation, and the broader impacts participation have on employment and welfare outcomes for migrants. It consists of topical papers that utilise the broad ranging government information held within the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP).

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The AMEP Impact Evaluation Project began as a collaborative research initiative between the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families Over the Life Course (the Life Course Centre) in July 2019. Jurisdiction over the AMEP subsequently moved from DESE to the Department of Home Affairs (the Department), making the Department custodians of the AMEP data and the key stakeholder in the AMEP Impact Evaluation Project.

During the reference period, the general AMEP scheme had several changes to limits on enrolment and completion timeframes. In April 2021, changes to the *Immigration (Education) Act 1971* removed the 510-hour limit on free English tuition, extended eligibility from functional to vocational English and removed time limits for enrolling, commencing and completing English tuition for eligible visa holders. This paper uses AMEP client data, and eligibility requirements for the reference period 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2019 to describe the profile of AMEP clients, and hence does not reflect the changes to the *Immigration (Education) Act 1971*, implemented from 2021 onwards.

This research paper has been co-funded by the Australian Government in partnership with the Life Course Centre.

Aim of the paper

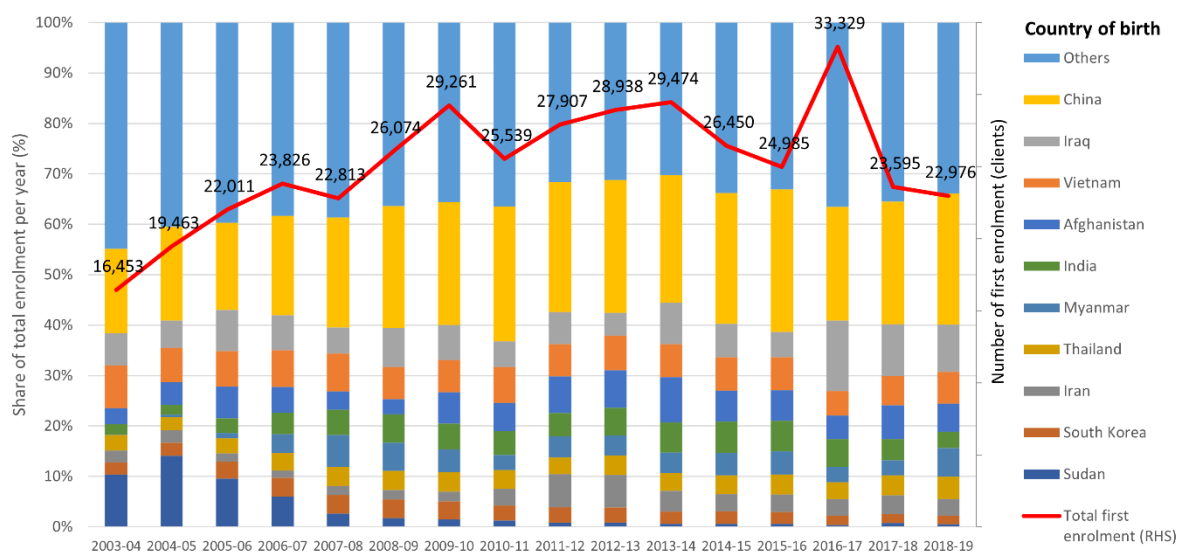
The aim of this paper is to investigate who participates in the AMEP.

Results

Information displayed in this paper is derived from the Department of Home Affairs AMEP client dataset submitted into the MADIP for all AMEP clients enrolled from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2019. There were 403,000 AMEP participants represented in this dataset. Results are presented in financial year rather than calendar year, as this aligns with the Department's reporting around program budgets and the reporting for other MADIP datasets that support this analysis.

On average, across the reference period 2003/04 – 2018/19 approximately 25,000 migrants were enrolled in AMEP per year as new clients (see Figure 1), for a total of around 403,000 persons. Some descriptive figures are provided below to describe key aspects of this large and varied group of migrants, including enrolment profile across time by country of origin, gender, age group, visa type, hours of tuition and more.

Figure 1: AMEP new client enrolment numbers by country of birth and financial year



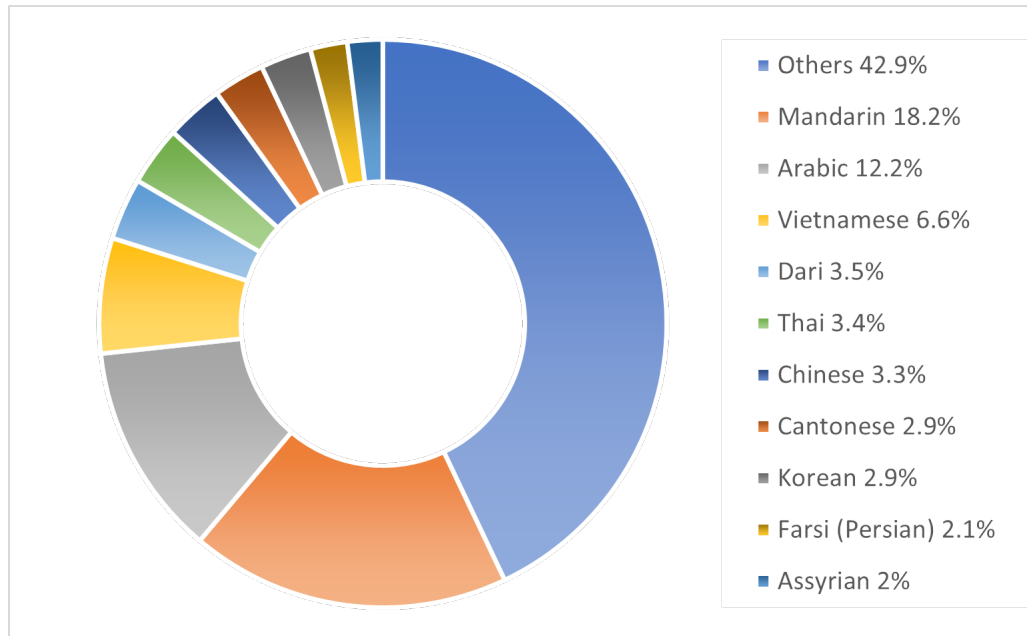
Note: Figures are calculated from the full sample of all AMEP clients provided by the Department of Home Affairs.

Figure 1 represents the number of new clients enrolled at AMEP during the period 2003/04 – 2018/19, showing that the number of new enrolments was gently increasing up to 2013/14, before fluctuating significantly thereafter. However, there were still almost 23,000 new AMEP participants in 2018/19. Over the reference period, the top 10

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countries of birth for AMEP clients were China, Iraq, Vietnam, Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Iran, South Korea and Sudan. Clients from these 10 countries represent about two thirds of all clients participating in AMEP during the same period.

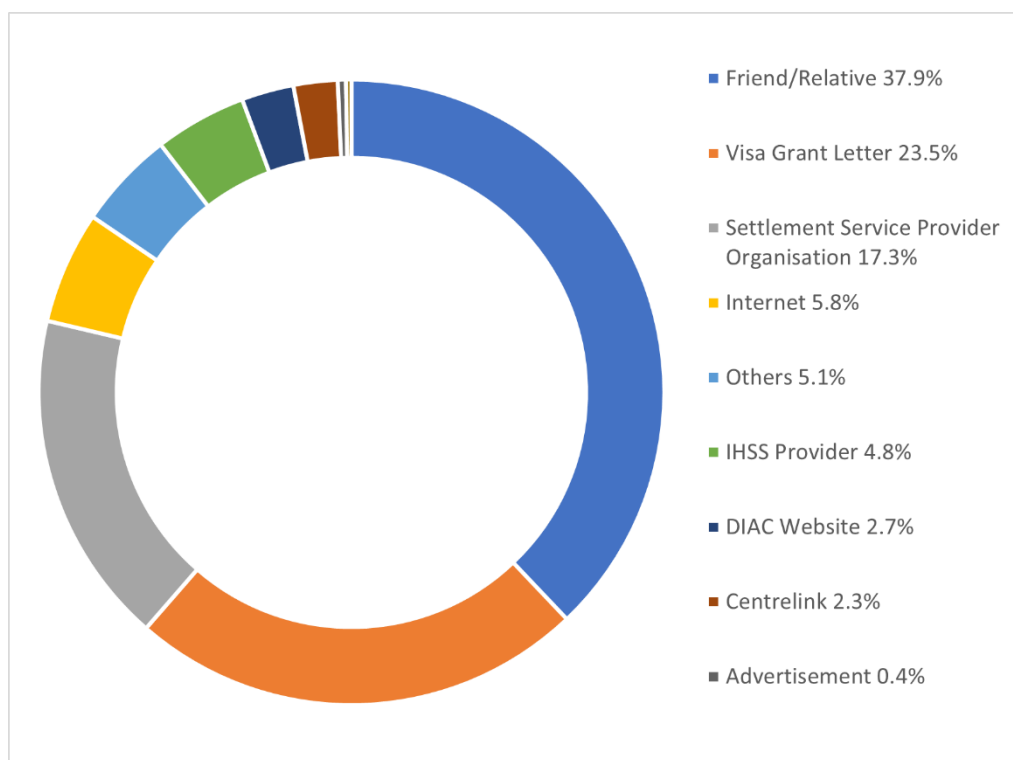
Figure 2: Client language spoken at home at time of registration with AMEP



Note: Figures (in percentages) are calculated from the full sample of all AMEP clients provided by the Department of Home Affairs. Client language spoken at home is self-reported.

Consistent with the country of birth profile of AMEP clients, Figure 2 indicates that, at registration time, the most common languages other than English that AMEP clients spoke at home were Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese, Dari, Thai, Chinese, Cantonese, Korean, Assyrian and Farsi (figures in percentages).

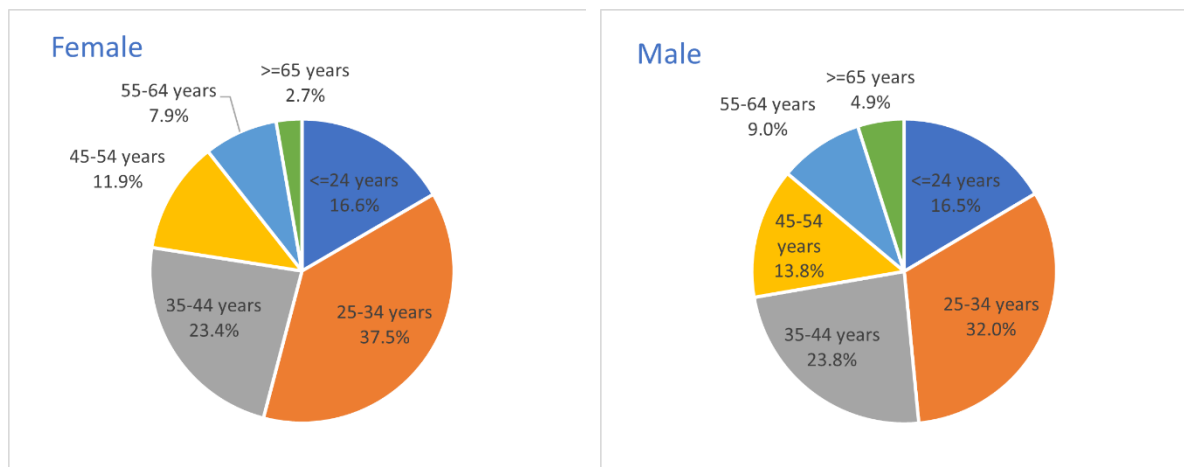
Figure 3: Where did client first hear about AMEP?



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Figure 3 suggests that, for new clients, the most common source of initial information about AMEP is from friends or relatives (representing 37.9% of all sources), followed by the Visa Grant Letter (23.5%) and settlement service provider organisations (17.3%).

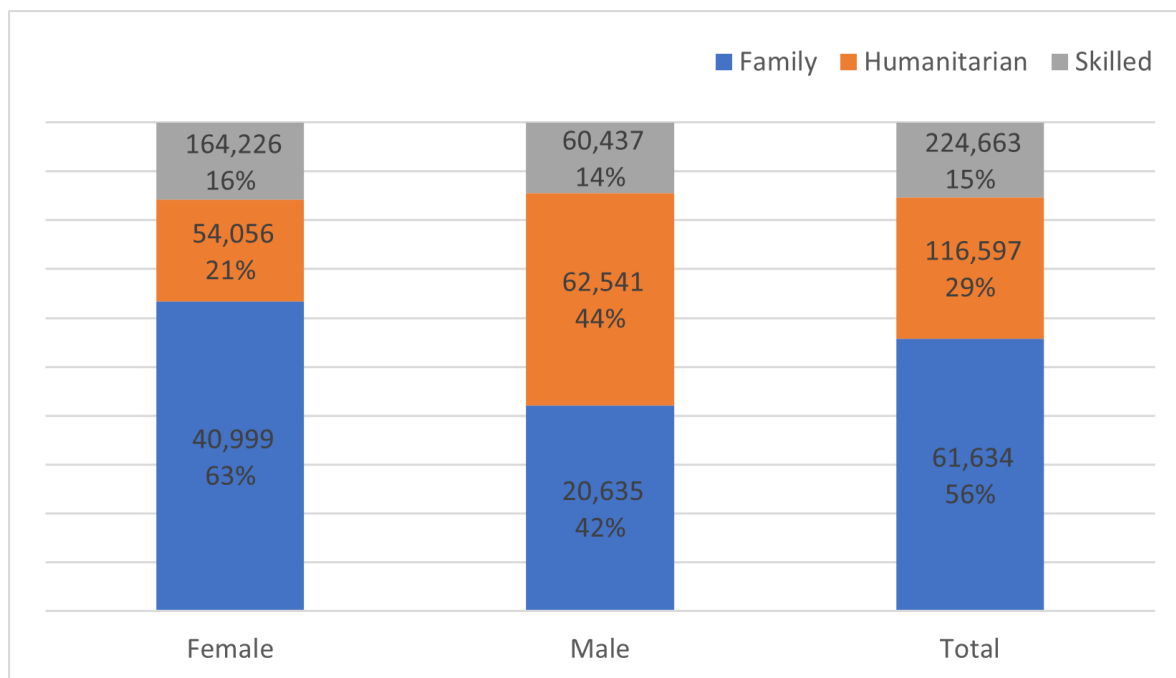
Figure 4: Client age group at time of AMEP registration



Note: Figures (in percentages) are calculated from the full sample of all AMEP clients provided by the Department of Home Affairs.

Figure 4 indicates that almost all (97%) clients first enrolled in AMEP when they were at working ages (i.e., between 18 and 65 years of age). Female clients, who represent 65% of all AMEP clients, have a slightly younger age-profile than male clients.

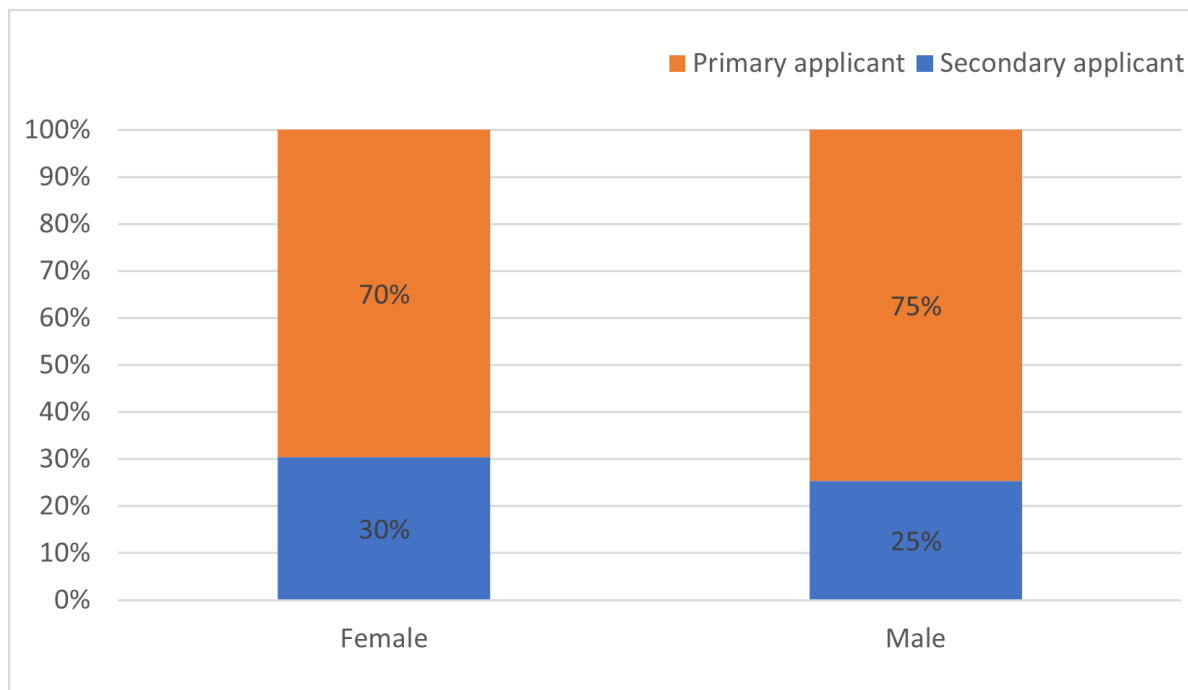
Figure 5: Visa migration category of AMEP clients



Note: Figures (the top figure indicates the number of clients, and the bottom number shows percentages) are calculated from the full sample of all AMEP clients provided by the Department of Home Affairs.

Figure 5 shows that while the largest share of female clients (63%) held a Family type visa, Humanitarian visas were the most common type for male clients (44%). In addition, consistent with the design of skilled migration policies, which require skilled migrants to have a certain level of English proficiency, only about 15% of all AMEP clients held a Skilled Migration type visa.

Figure 6: AMEP clients by primary visa applicant status



Note: Figures (in percentages) are calculated from the full sample of all AMEP clients provided by the Department of Home Affairs.

Figure 6 shows a small gender difference in the primary visa applicant status among AMEP clients, with a slightly higher proportion of male clients listed as primary visa applicant (75%) than female clients (70%).

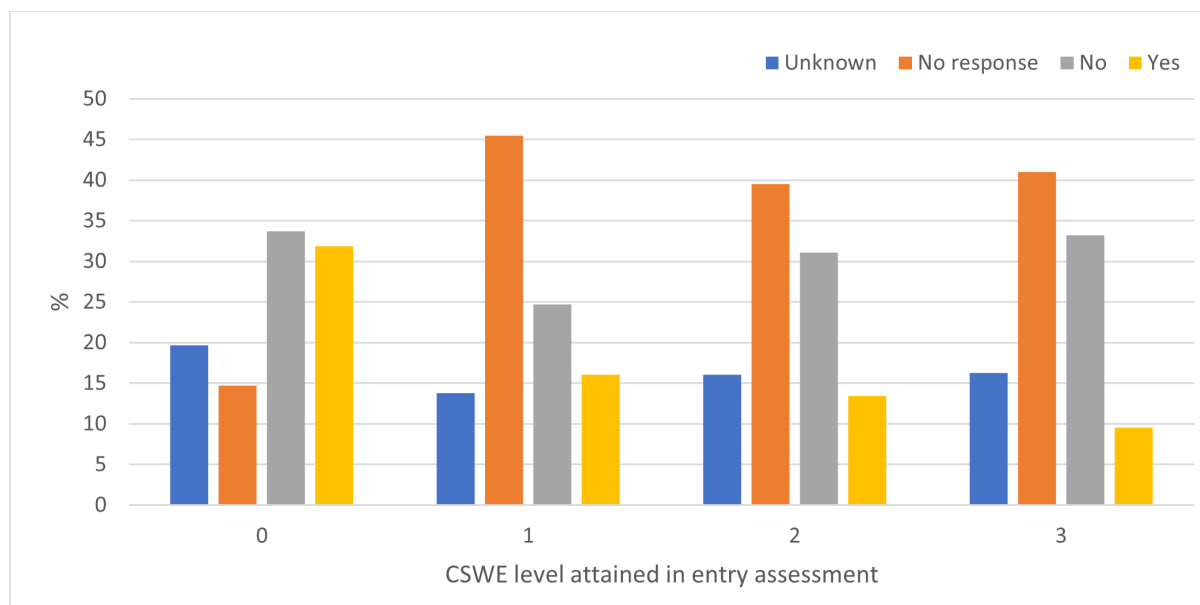
Figure 7: AMEP client self-reported labour market status by CSWE level attained in entry assessment



Note: Labour market status is self-reported by the clients. A higher level of Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) indicates a greater level of English proficiency.

Figure 7 suggests that AMEP clients who were already employed at the time of program registration tended to have a higher starting level of English language proficiency, as measured by level of Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). While there is no clear relationship between the AMEP clients' level of English proficiency and the probability of being unemployed, we note that clients with a lower level of English proficiency appear less likely to respond to the question asking about their labour market status.

Figure 8: AMEP client self-reported income support status by CSWE level attained at entry assessment

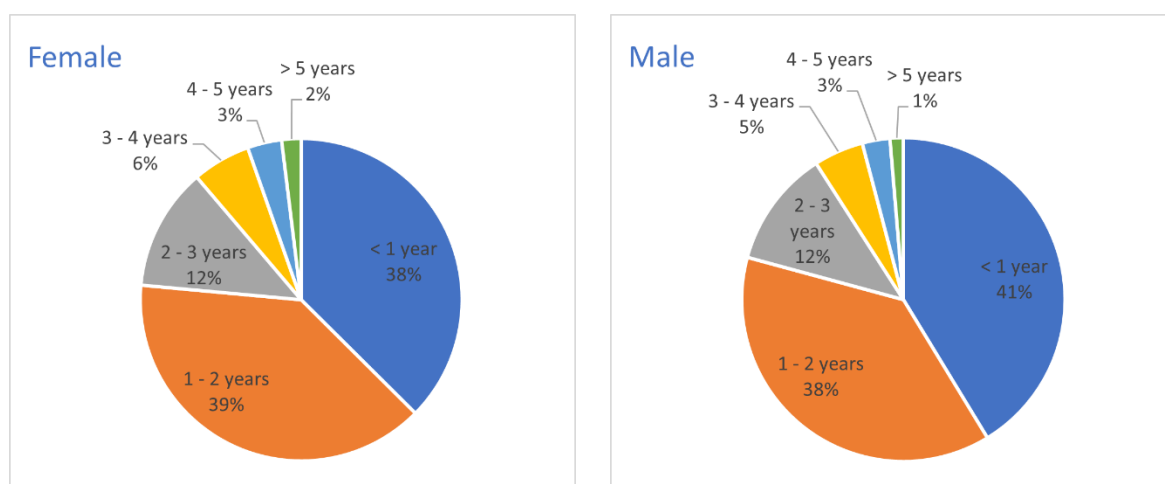


Note: Income support status is self-reported by the clients. A higher level of Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) indicates a greater level of English proficiency.

Figure 8 reports AMEP clients' self-reported income support status by level of English proficiency as described above. We note that at the time of registration with AMEP, the proportion of clients reporting receipt of any type of income support reduces with a higher starting level of English proficiency. This supports the observation in Figure 7 suggesting that being employed is associated with higher levels of English proficiency.

However, there is no clear association between the clients' level of English proficiency and their reporting that they do not receive any type of income support. For example, in Figure 8 we observe a large proportion of AMEP clients having their income support status recorded as "Unknown" or "No response". These patterns of missing information when using self-reported data limit our capacity to accurately identify the labour market and income support status of AMEP clients. These data limitations have been addressed by linking AMEP data with more objective administrative data such as Personal Income Tax, Payment Summary and Social Security and Related Information in the accompanying AMEP Impact Evaluation research papers relating to Income Support and Employment Outcomes.

Figure 9: Average time enrolled in AMEP

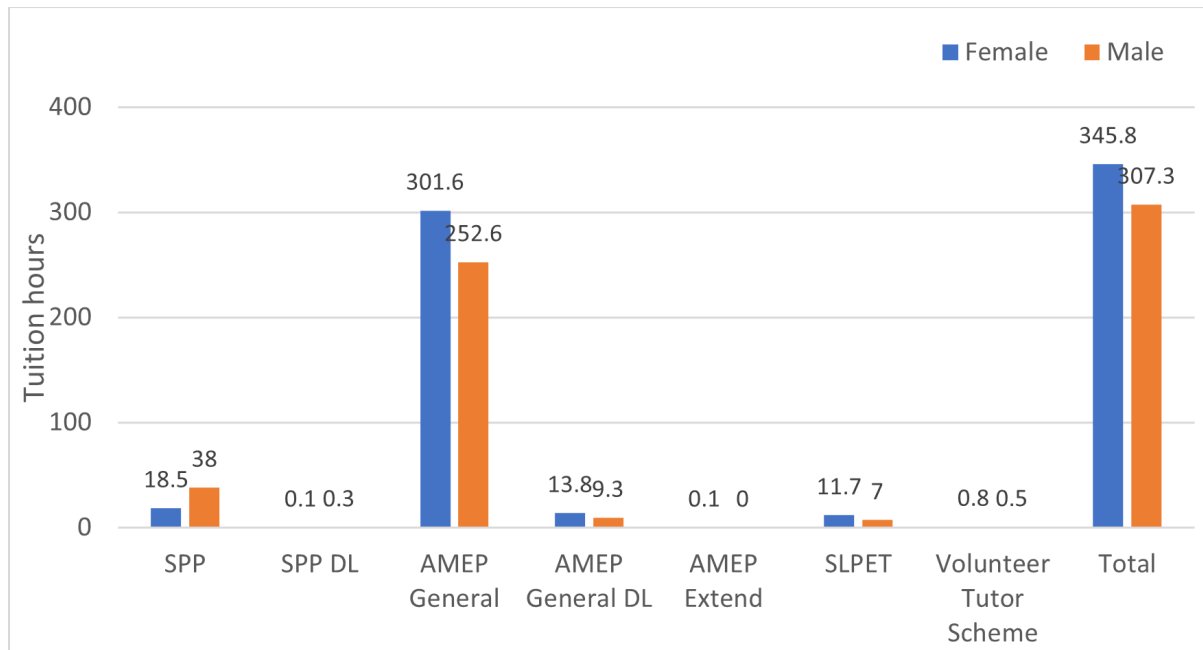


Note: Figures are calculated for exited clients. The total time the clients spent at the AMEP is calculated by comparing the last and the first time we observe them to have a positive tuition hour in the data.

Figure 9 shows 90% of clients who exited AMEP spent three years or less enrolled in the AMEP.

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Figure 10: Average tuition hours of AMEP access by gender



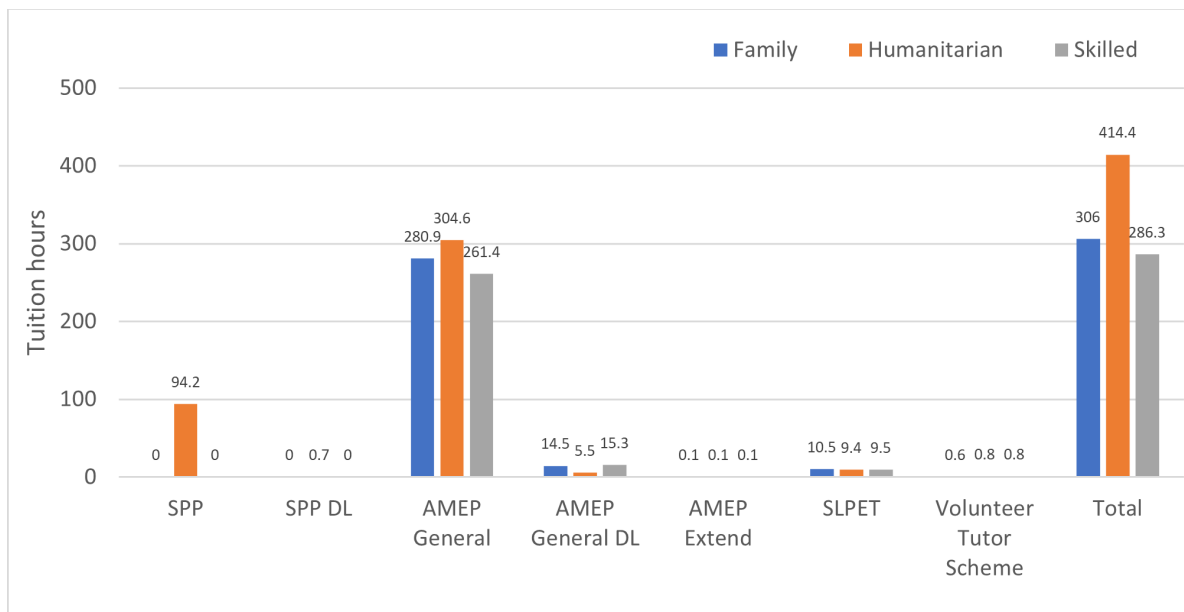
Note: SPP - Special Preparatory Program; DL – Distance Learning; SLPET - Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training sub-program. Figures are calculated for exited clients.

Figure 10 shows that, on average, each client received 332 tuition hours from all schemes (equal to about 66 days, or 17 weeks, full-time)¹, which is lower than the 510-hour limit set for the general AMEP scheme at the time. We also observed that, on average, female clients received about 40 tuition hours more than male clients.

¹ In this calculation, full-time AMEP is expressed as a 20-hour week comprising of 4 x 5-hour days. The 20-hour week is based on the AMEP contracts and guidelines since 2011 which define full-time classroom tuition as a minimum of 20 hours per week.

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Figure 11: Average tuition hours of AMEP access by visa migration category

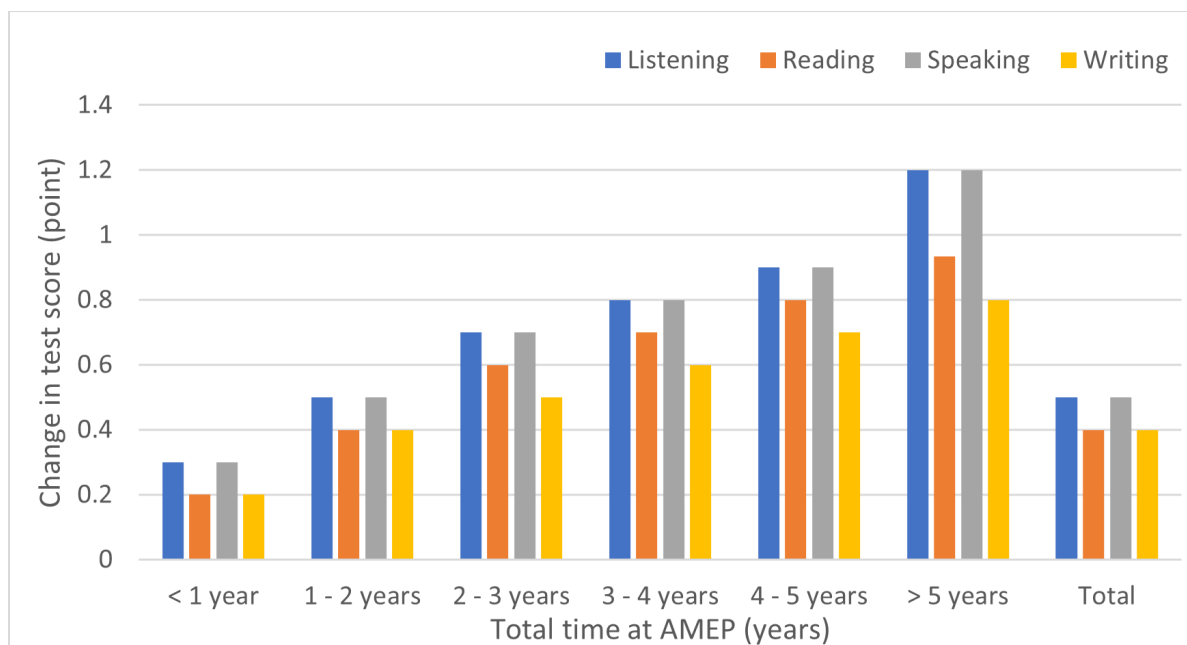


Note: SPP - Special Preparatory Program; DL – Distance Learning; SLPET - Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training sub-program. Figures are calculated for exited clients.

Figure 11 reports tuition hours by visa migration category, suggesting that, consistent with the design of the AMEP, clients with Humanitarian visas² received the highest amount of tuition (414 hours), followed by clients with Family visas (306 hours), and clients with a Skilled Migration visa received the lowest amount (286 hours). It is interesting to observe that while clients with Family visas have almost 30% more AMEP enrolments than clients with Humanitarian visas (See Figure 5), the latter consume over 100 more tuition hours (or 35% more) than the former.

² Humanitarian entrants are eligible for additional hours in recognition of additional challenges that they may face in building English language proficiency and literacy for settlement due to limited access to education prior to arrival, pre-migration trauma, health concerns and other factors that may impact on learning.

Figure 12: Changes in English proficiency by total time enrolled in AMEP



Note: Changes in test scores are calculated by subtracting respective test score at AMEP exit and AMEP entry. Figures are calculated for exited clients.

Figure 12 shows that the level of English proficiency of AMEP clients upon AMEP exit was higher than that at the point of entry into AMEP. Furthermore, while improvements in English proficiency were observed for all four tested domains of English, they appeared more pronounced for listening and speaking skills and for clients who spent longer periods participating in the AMEP.

Conclusion

The results presented in this paper suggest the AMEP improves the English language proficiency of participants, especially when they are engaged over longer periods, which suggests the core components of the program are working as intended.

Overall, about 403,000 persons were enrolled in the AMEP over the reference period 2003/04–2018/19, suggesting it is a popular program among migrants with a growing enrolment pattern observed across the first ten years examined, followed by some fluctuation thereafter. Some 97% of AMEP clients were aged between 18 and 65 years of age, which we can consider as being working age participants. About 65% of all AMEP participants across this 15-year period were female.

The top 10 countries of birth for AMEP clients were (high-low) China, Iraq, Vietnam, Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Iran, South Korea and Sudan. For AMEP clients, the most common source of initial information about AMEP was from friends or relatives. This suggests word-of-mouth is a powerful source of raising awareness of the AMEP in migrant communities. This knowledge may be helpful in designing future awareness campaigns.

Visa type differed by gender. For female AMEP clients, 63% were on a Family visa, 21% Humanitarian visa and 16% Skilled Migration visa. For males, 42% were on a Family visa, 44% Humanitarian visa and 14% Skilled Migration visa. These visa differences may reflect traditional roles surrounding child rearing and bread winning responsibilities, and work rights. Further research is needed to determine if this is true.

The general AMEP scheme (at the time) had a 510-hour limit for participants across the reference period. On average, each client received 332 tuition hours within AMEP (equal to about 66 days full-time), with female clients averaging about 40 hours more tuition than males. Consistent with the design of AMEP, clients with Humanitarian visas engaged with the program for the highest amount of tuition (414 hours) and clients with Skilled Migration visas received lowest amount (286 hours), on average. Around 90% of clients had exited AMEP within three years of enrolling in AMEP.

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Overall, the level of English proficiency of AMEP clients was higher upon AMEP exit than at program entry. While the data we have available cannot directly attribute all English proficiency gains observed among AMEP clients to the program itself, especially when we consider that clients are exposed to English via other settings in their new country, the observation that AMEP clients exit the program with demonstrably better English proficiency is suggestive that AMEP meets its primary purpose. Further research, using matched control groups of migrants who were potentially eligible for the AMEP but did not attend, is required to better understand the independent contribution of AMEP to migrant English proficiency.

Data notes

1. Breaking down results into male and female is based on gender identity as recorded on the historical data sets used in the analysis presented here. None of these data sources provided gender-diverse identification options at the time of their collection, though most have now been updated to accommodate this for future collections. Therefore, representation of male and female in this paper may be skewed towards sex at birth, and not take into account a person's preferred gender identity.
2. The current linked AMEP-MADIP dataset has incomplete tuition hours information for about 34,000 AMEP clients who enrolled in AMEP before 2011. This missing data issue means that some results may be biased, and care should be taken with interpretation.
3. Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) was the sole AMEP curriculum up until June 2017. Curriculum flexibility was introduced from July 2017 onwards - AMEP service providers can currently choose the curriculum that best meets their clients' needs.
4. Figures could also highlight the effect of spending time in a new country and being exposed to a new language.
5. The sample taken includes both English Speaking Background (ESB) and Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) migrants.
6. All client information used in this study was managed in a secure data environment, de-identified and access was restricted to authorised researchers.

Acknowledgment

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