



HOW INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS RELY ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES

JIA TINA DU and SAFIROTU KHOIR look at how libraries contribute to migrants forming social capital and resilience in their new home.

The results of the [Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census](#) showed that more than a quarter (26%) of Australia's population (6,163,667 people) were born overseas. As one of the most trusted government services and public institutions, public libraries provide sound services for both local people and international migrants and are ideally situated and suited also to help migrants generate social capital.

Public libraries not only collect, curate, and provide access to materials, but they also provide spaces for facilitating social activities and by virtue can trigger [social capital formation for immigrant populations](#) and community resilience. The concept of social capital, along with its associated human capital, has become an important tool in discussing integration, community development and social inclusion in the context of immigrants.

Research shows that social capital can be looked at under [two categories](#): bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital emerges between people who share a commonality, such as people in the same ethnicity. Bridging social capital however, occurs when different people are brought together. Both of these categories can be seen at work in public libraries.

There are also [four types of capacities](#) that are required to adapt well in a new land: economic development; social capital; information and communication; and community competence. And public libraries, seen as relaxing and welcoming spaces that can generate the formation of social capital, are clear contributors to migrants adapting to their new home.

A [recent research project](#) investigated how immigrants who were born in the top five Asian countries (India, China, Vietnam, Philippines and Malaysia) engaged with public

libraries during their settlement in South Australia. The research showed that the role of public libraries in generating social capital is considered significant in facilitating successful immigrant settlement in Australia. The Asian immigrants used public libraries a lot and leveraged their capabilities to become valuable members of a multicultural Australia that values and supports their diversity.

It is in the mandate of public libraries to help international migrants gain access to information resources and provide them with community access in a new place. When creating public libraries programs, considering the needs of the migrant community, (such as digital literacy, the need for language programs, providing opportunities to meet local people, and improvement of daily life) helps to integrate migrants into their new home. Forming social capital through public libraries is very important for migrants to Australia and the society as a whole; this can be manifested through informal exchanges and interactions between individuals and their community, helping individuals solve problems and thereby building trust. We are calling for building a strong partnership between researchers, service providers and immigration communities on this important theme. 🌐

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