







# The NDIS reform bill has been passed – will it get things ‘back on track’ for people with disability?

By **Helen Dickinson**.

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The government has passed a bill that will pave the way for sweeping reforms to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

In late March many in the disability community were surprised when the government introduced a new piece of legislation to get the NDIS “back on track”. The route of the bill through parliament has not been easy and many in the disability community have been highly critical of it, even calling for the current reforms to be scrapped altogether.

On Wednesday, NDIS Minister Bill Shorten said agreement had been reached with states and territories about how they will work together regarding the scheme. The provision of “foundational” disability support and services outside the NDIS has been a sticking point.

Why has this bill been so controversial? And now amended reforms have passed, what will

3 beforehand. This meant there had not been public discussion and although some Disability Representative Organisations had been given details, they had been asked to sign non-disclosure agreements to prevent them talking about it. This was at odds with NDIS review recommendations that rules and changes should be co-designed with people with disability and adhere to the principle of “nothing about us, without us”.

When the bill was introduced to parliament there were also two major processes – the NDIS review and the disability royal commission – that had delivered recommendations about disability services and supports and had not yet been responded to by the government.

Since then, there has been a response to the disability royal commission widely panned as “lacklustre and disappointing”. But we still haven’t seen a government response to the NDIS review recommendations released at the end of last year. This means the government is legislating before outlining what changes it will make in response to the review.

The bill was referred to a senate committee for further investigation. In what would become an

Today, that has happened.

Given the government's goal of containing the scheme's costs and growth, the disability

Some in the community has accused the government of whipping up public outrage about the only a small number of people are approved to receive under the scheme.

One solution to reducing the costs of the scheme suggested by the NDIS review was that a foundational supports strategy should be developed that would take some of the pressure off.



# Non-hybrid workplaces limit autonomy and flexibility, breed resentment

By **Sue Williamson**.

Published online August 12, 2024 by **The Mandarin**

Last week the NSW government released a circular directing public servants to return to the

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A notable feature of this circular is it does not mandate the number of days required to be worked

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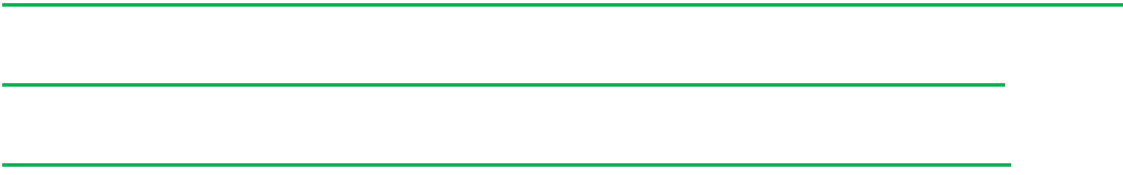
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This position therefore still enables hybrid working. However, the circular does not state this and

and work from home (or a hybrid) 70% of public

Additionally, more than two-thirds of the NSW public sector are women, and since women still





Chaired by disability rights lawyer and activist, Natalie Wade, the taskforce met with more than 2,200 people with disability, allies, service providers and others over three months. The taskforce

should be funded and what should not. But the timescales for consultation are very short, which might prevent all those who are interested from engaging on this topic.

The government now needs to decide how it wants to act on the provider and worker registration taskforce's advice.

The taskforce report acknowledges further consultation with the disability community is needed.

# Our careers have a melody

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 17 July 2024, by **The Mandarin**

What is a career?

The list of jobs I have had might describe my career. However, it does not assume continuity of

For most of us, a career includes progress in competence and advancement in hierarchy. In this light, a career might be a pattern of related roles and knowledge through which I have deliberately moved throughout my working life. Success might be measured by how far I have climbed the greasy pole of the organisational hierarchy.

between understanding and imagination. This is a way to understand a career not as a set of jobs

The relationship between individual and organisation can be indistinct and impermanent. When, knowledge I had accumulated that made me eligible for the role?

We sometimes refer to the 'art of management', but our conversations are dominated by the 'mechanics of management'. We should think more about the 'art of career' and less about the 'mechanics of a career'. The following four thoughts offer a place to start thinking about a career and what it could be.

We think about careers as a series of movements between jobs. They are a stop-start thing rather than a continuous, always-in-motion thing. So, we think about a career as something that can stop at a time of our choosing.

But a career does not stop. It persists. It is continuous. If a woman leaves the workplace to have a which I am paid? If not, what distinguishes a career from 'life'?

I am living and therefore indivisible and continuous? If a career is indistinguishable from 'life', are

They are if I believe I become stripped of my 'life' when I go to work. For the time I am at work, I am a creature of the organisation, provided with the mindsets and tools to do the job. I shed my work persona and re-applied my 'life' on my way home.

Reducing a career to a series of jumps between jobs makes it easier to act on but reduces the possibility for speculation and imagination about a career because we get locked into a mechanical (and limited) set of options.

If a career is inseparable from my 'life', how would that change how I approach it, and how might organisations structure careers differently?

Where does that leave us if we abandon the need to 'manage' a career through a series of job jumps?

Music can be a series of notes. I can learn to read notes, but musicians reading the same notes hear the music. They hear the melody; they see the notes not as individual parts but as a continuous whole.

The same goes for language. You can see and read the words, but you know what they mean beyond the sequence that makes up a sentence. You are hearing the whole idea that is made up

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# Milestone gender pay gap metrics show we still have a way to go

By **Sue Williamson**.

Published online 21 June 2024, by **The Mandarin**

We have just witnessed a watershed moment for the Commonwealth public sector. We now

This is a milestone. While larger private sector organisations have been required to report

parental leave. Agencies should include targets as they continue to develop and implement their gender equality action plans.

The data used in the scorecard was collected in 2021-22. It therefore predates many of the reforms undertaken by the Australian government last year to progress gender equality in the APS.

The report is a benchmark, and we will be able to track further progress to achieve gender equality in future reporting cycles.



# Want to change the 'system'? If yes, then read this

By **Vindhya Weeratunga**.

Published online 18 June 2024, by **Daily FT**

Changing the purpose of a system changes the system profoundly, even if all the elements and interconnections remain as they are

*"If a revolution destroys a government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves... There's so much talk about the system. And so little understanding."*

– Robert Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance

system" again. But how do we do this, practically?

or any other, as some magical creatures who can perform wonders. Management literature has contributed to this thinking, conceptualising various leadership styles, from servant leadership to transformational leadership. However, a critical missing component in this thinking is the a community, etc. We often forget that leaders are in that leadership position because of the interrelationship that they have with those they lead. When we replace a leader, what we do is

A 'system' is made of three key aspects: elements, interconnections, and purpose. Elements include and values that hold the elements together. Purpose, the most important determinant of how a system behaves, is the outcome that we are aiming to achieve.

I've read social media posts where some claim/imply that replacing everyone in the Parliament will bring about a system change. In reality, however, even if we substitute every single person in Parliament (elements), there will be no change in the system, if the interconnections and purposes remain unchanged.

as demi-gods, treat them as those answerable to us, to serve us? Changing interconnections in a system can change it drastically.

Now think, what if we keep the same parliamentarians and the election laws, but we change the 'purpose' of the system. What is the purpose of our government? One thing about purpose is that it's not what is written or said by the leaders; the purpose is deduced by actions. Having seen what our national leaders are doing, I am not sure what the purpose of our Government is.

purpose is 'seen' in what the system does rather than what the system says it aims to do. Changing the purpose of a system changes the system profoundly, even if all the elements and



interconnections remain as they are. What this means is that by changing a leader, we can't change

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Would a President without the majority support in Parliament be able to change any interconnections (e.g. laws) or the purpose of the Government? Are parliamentarians capable of

system we live in. It's easy to blame something or someone else, to shift the responsibility away from ourselves, but the reality is that we cannot absolve ourselves of the responsibility of creating

In Plato's Republic, Socrates compares the State to a ship: "The uneducated voting on policy is as illogical as a ship taken over by a crew with no knowledge of sailing". Education doesn't come

# Work or home? Navigating hybrid working arrangements

By **Sue Williamson**, Helen Taylor, Uma Jogulu.  
Published online 29 May 2024, by **Apolitical**

While the battle rages on between employees and managers about where work should be

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- The problem: Employees and employers are 'battling' over when and where work should

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employee engagement and retention if certain conditions are met.

Our 2023 research with almost 80 Australian Public Service (APS) managers was conducted before mandatory caps on the number of days APS employees could work from home were removed.

more than middle managers and employees and tended to delegate opportunities to staff on-site.

strategies to address it. These include the use of anchor days, where employees and teams commit

objective metrics. Additionally, building an inclusive culture is seen as important in alleviating

Given the importance of autonomy in employee motivation and engagement, enabling employees

# Threatened species have declined 2% a year since 2000. Nature positive? Far from it

By **Megan C Evans**, Brendan Wintle, Hugh Possingham.  
Published online 17 May 2024, by **The Conversation**



But given our species and ecosystems are steadily declining, year after year, to maintain a trajectory is simply to embrace the decline. It's not nature positive at all. The government could make minor improvements, slowing the collapse, and claim it was improving the lot of nature.

Imagine if our GDP growth was negative and the government's goal was merely to slow its decline

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Instead, Labor is planning for biodiversity decline to continue, while describing it as "nature positive".

Watching over the steady decline of our species and calling it nature positive makes about as much

In coming weeks, the government will introduce bills to parliament to establish two new agencies, Environment Information Australia and Environmental Protection Australia. But there will be one bill missing – the reformed federal environment laws, intended to give teeth to the nature positive push.

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Australia's reformed environmental laws are described as Nature Positive. Are they? Department

# Zen and the 'wicked problem' of AI and digitalisation

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 15 May 2024, by **The Mandarin**

Every technology was once the technology that would change the world.

creates layers that enable rapid recombination that creates new outputs and opportunities.

Second, digital technologies are generative. The ability to transform and reuse information as content has been an innovative boon and the source of social media disaster. AI has taken technology's generative characteristics to new places, leading to problems in AI ethics and embedded

Third, there are people. This takes us back to lesson one. What technology delivers in practice is rarely consistent with what the designers think it will do because people interact with it. People interacting with technology is a wicked problem.

Strategy and planning in the wicked world of technology implementation should begin with a

The most basic question about new technology is how today's ethical values and norms will apply

The dynamism of technology and the uncertainty it creates may leave strategists and planners grasping for relevance. However, lesson two hints at where the effort should be applied. It requires

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The objective is not to produce a perfectly articulated strategy accompanied by a detailed implementation plan. Rather, the challenge is identifying and focusing on the core human questions and responding.

Planning and action begin with a clear-eyed understanding that policy, strategy, and implementation

and issues that arise from interaction. Planning involves determining what system-level changes will be needed to capitalise on the most immediate opportunities and prevent the most pressing harm to people and performance. Options are alternative system-level courses of action that transcend or circumvent strategic risks as they are known today or immediately foreseeable.

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which are inherently underpinned by the principles of linear management models seen through a rear-view mirror. Retrospectively assessing 'failure' is a contemporary challenge for all organisational leaders wrestling with wicked problems.

The difference between traditional problem-solving and working with wicked problems has been likened elsewhere to the difference between throwing a stone and throwing a live bird. The stone's trajectory can be calculated precisely using the laws of physics, while the bird's trajectory is far less predictable.

AI is the latest technology to show us that the world is less predictable than we want to believe.

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# EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: An Uneasy Balance between Solidarity and Responsibility

By **Kelly Soderstrom**

Published online 14 May 2024, by **Australian Institute of International Affairs**

Last month, the European Parliament narrowly voted to pass a landmark raft of legislation called movement of people, especially asylum seekers, into the European Union (EU).

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the passage of the Pact as a balance between “solidarity and responsibility.” But what does this mean, and how does the Pact do this?

Solidarity refers to cooperation among EU member states. It typically relates to resource sharing, §  
solidarity means providing funds to EU members to support resources for asylum seekers as well

obligations of states to provide international humanitarian protection. This is particularly true under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has a right to seek and enjoy asylum, and under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which details where and when asylum must be provided by states. Earlier EU regulations and directives in the Common European Asylum System also detail obligations of member states to provide humanitarian protection.

The central tension in asylum governance is between humanitarian protection and sovereignty.

government to control who crosses into its territory and accesses protection and resources. International humanitarian protection challenges this claim because, in certain circumstances,

from the government.

way to do so which does not stop them from being able to discharge their obligations associated with sovereignty. States thus seek to strike a balance between sovereignty and responsibility in

In the case of a multi-level governance system such as the EU, state responsibilities in asylum governance become complicated by member state responsibilities towards each other. These mutual, inter-state responsibilities stem from an obligation to maintain the legitimacy and cohesion of the EU. Member states must not only maintain their own sovereignty but must also work in

Within the multi-level system of the EU, striking a balance between sovereignty and humanitarian



# Defence middle managers decide department priorities don't apply to them

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 7 May 2024, by **The Mandarin**

observation that Defence seems resistant to change and how he thought that might be changed.

In short, Yannopoulos' response was in three parts: consistent communication in an enterprise as large as Defence is hard, Defence has many competing communication priorities, and middle managers keep deciding that Defence priorities do not apply to them.

Like many large organisations, working in Defence feels like Groundhog Day. The same problems rise lamented middle managers' 'learned helplessness' as a barrier to reform over twenty years ago.

Defence leaders need a new place to begin their analysis of the reform problem.

Defence is not alone in facing rapid, unpredictable, and, in some cases, unprecedented change.

There are four main types of system traps: novelty, strategic lock-in, poverty, and rigidity.

Robodebt had all the hallmarks of a novelty trap. The novelty trap stems from an obsession with

It is unrealistic to assume that enterprises without high levels of system thinking capabilities can effectively engage in a system-based approach to transformation. This might be why calls for 'systems approaches' have not transpired into actions and outcomes.





# Does human work have to be efficient?

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trialled to entice the workforce back.

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There is a sense that burnout is a form of contagious hysteria. ~~See~~ a

The hidden cause of burnout is often a loss of autonomy (the choice in how work is done), respect (the breaking of the psychological contract about what is fair and reasonable), and agency  
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autonomy, respect, and agency leads to feelings of helplessness.

challenge historical practices, increase personal autonomy, and invest in upskilling to improve capability are the most effective ways to reduce burnout and simultaneously increase opportunities for innovation and creativity.

people reconceived their relationship with how work is done. This continues to play out in workplaces nationwide and has been given a kick-along by technologies like AI.

Attempts to return to the past are met with reluctance. Persisting along this path quickly leads to discontentment. In a time of widespread skill shortages and freedom from location, workforce mobility increases. These decisions are not necessarily based, as they once were, on advancement but instead on work-life integration and opportunity.

When work no longer works, people move to where the work works for them.

How we lead and manage organisations is as much a technology as AI, yet less attention is paid to  
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# Australia's long-sought stronger environmental laws just got indefinitely deferred. It's back to business as usual

By Euan Ritchie, **Megan C Evans**, Yung En Chee.  
Published online 17 April 2024, by **The Conversation**

We've long known Australia's main environmental protection laws aren't doing their job, and we

But yesterday, the government walked back its commitments, deferring the necessary reforms to





to surface, test and renegotiate. Along the way, they confront the losses precipitated by change,

This recalibration can be painful when identities and worldviews, deeply 'baked in' and intertwined our very conception of humanity, are challenged or changed.

An important technique used in Barbie was that of opening up new freedoms and choice points for Dreamland. The characters moved beyond polarised choices towards new open-ended questions. Dreamland had been about just Kens and Barbies, stuck in set patterns and living with tense undercurrents and ignorance; Ken subsumed and craving special attention from Stereotypical Barbie and Barbie oblivious of the realities of pain and suffering and how it might deepen her appreciation for a life beyond plasticity. After the jolt of the provocation of feelings of death and

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but what it means to be a fulsome human.

*communities through loss.*

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# Choice and control: Are whitegoods disability supports? Here's what proposed NDIS reforms say

By **Helen Dickinson**.

Published online 12 April 2024, by **The Conversation**

The government's recently introduced bill aims to get the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) "back on track". Against a backdrop of concerns over the scheme's cost, it sets out changes

There is a promised transformation in terms of how NDIS support packages are calculated. § participants in how they spend their budgets.

payment of utility bills, online gambling, perfume, cosmetics, standard household appliances and G

mean disabled people lose opportunities for independence.

The changes outlined in the bill will move the NDIS towards a needs-based assessment.

This will be supported by the use of functional assessment tools, removing some need for people to collect evidence from medical professionals.

"Your needs assessment will look at your support needs as a whole," NDIS minister Bill Shorten said on the day the bill was tabled. "And we won't distinguish between primary and secondary disabilities any longer."

At the moment plans are made up of a number of categories of funding and line items that set out how plans should be spent. The NDIS review noted this process is often confusing for people and

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# Hybrid working in the APS: From productivity to performance to outcomes

By **Sue Williamson**, Helen Taylor, Uma Jogulu and Judy Lundy.  
Published online 2 April 2024, by **The Mandarin**

Our latest research on hybrid working suggests that a shift is occurring in the Australian Public Service (APS), from a predominant focus on productivity to performance to outcomes.

Last year we spoke with more than 80 APS managers and supervisors who managed employees working hybridly (where some part of the week is worked at home, and the rest is worked on the employer's premises). We also asked about productivity and performance in a hybrid setting.

has either increased or stayed the same since the widespread shift to working from home. This continues a trend we have observed through our research going back to 2020.

public sector. Trying to assess the impacts of working from home on productivity is even more  
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We have previously suggested that the focus needs to switch from productivity to performance.

teams and organisations.

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# Draft NDIS bill is the first step to reform – but some details have disability advocates worried

By **Helen Dickinson**.

Published online 27 March 2024, by **The Conversation**

Since the review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) released its recommendations in December, there has been a series of Town Hall events to discuss them around the country – but no actual changes. Today the government introduced a new bill to make way for NDIS reform.

Disability minister Bill Shorten said “legislation and rule changes are the key to unlocking a trustworthy and sustainable NDIS and will enable the government to drive change”.

What changes does the bill suggest? And what do people with disability need to know about what

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are needed to modify the NDIS Act and to allow for those changes to take place. One big motivator for action is the government’s commitment to moderate cost growth of the NDIS – rather than see it grow to more than one million participants and cost up to A\$100 billion a year by 2032.

without co-design with them. Reports suggest disability advocates who did see the bill before its introduction were subject to non-disclosure agreements. The government says co-design will take

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Although states and territories asked the government to delay introducing this legislation because of concerns over foundational supports, the bill does not mention them. It is mostly focused on the scheme and the work of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) that administers it.

There are a large number of changes outlined in the bill and there will be a lot to unpack in coming weeks. Broadly these focus on:

- how people access the scheme and plans are created
- how participants can spend funds
- how the NDIA can step in if they have concerns funds are not being spent effectively
- the powers of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.
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At the moment the scheme lists impairments that are likely to give people access to the scheme,

The review argued this was unfair because people may have a similar level of need as a result of a

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function and daily activities.

The changes outlined in the bill will move the NDIS towards a needs-based assessment.

This will be supported by the use of functional assessment tools, removing some need for individuals to collect evidence from medical professionals.

"Your needs assessment will look at your support needs as a whole," Shorten said. "And we won't distinguish between primary and secondary disabilities any longer."

given the controversy over proposals to introduce Independent Assessments a few years back.

The bill also outlines changes to how individuals can spend their plans.

At the moment plans are made up of a number of categories of funding and line items that set out how plans should be spent. The NDIS Review noted this process is often confusing for individuals and limits how s aould be sgs-evideo800080057004a't

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Home and community care programs to support people under 65 years of age with less intensive disability needs help with some shopping or cleaning, their only option for support may well be to apply to join the NDIS.

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within the NDIS are dependent on having foundational services in place outside the scheme. Foundational supports are a key priority in the reform process.

The development of a foundational supports strategy should not have taken states and territories by surprise. The day before the NDIS Review was launched in December, National Cabinet reached its decision to share foundational support costs equally between the Commonwealth and states and territories. And at the end of January, the Commonwealth committed A\$11.6 million over two years to support the development and implementation of the foundational supports strategy.

Although fresh reports say state and territory leaders fear “uncosted” foundational supports, premiers were reportedly given an indication of additional costs at the December National

foundational services are needed in their jurisdictions and how many people might want to access these. Given the NDIS Review recommended better and more detailed data collection, many of these governments likely don't have good enough data to easily understand what the demand for these services might be and therefore what they might cost.

While states and territories appear to have signed up to the general direction of reform, the latest systems of support.

Debates over which parts of government should fund which services are not new. But focusing on who pays for what misses the bigger picture.

Getting a system of foundational supports in place is essential not only for the sustainability of the NDIS but also for all those disabled Australians who are currently going without necessary supports to live their lives. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, Australia has a commitment to protect the rights of people with disabilities and ensure their full inclusion in society.

The NDIS is one part of realising this commitment, but it will not be able to achieve this on its own.

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Disability advocates argue delaying tactics from states and territories are unacceptable and reform needs to happen now. The federal government seems committed to the top recommendation of same pace.

# Don't just give me a cupcake!

By **Vindhya Weeratunga.**

Published online 8 March 2024, by **Daily Mirror Sri Lanka**

As International Women's Day approaches, many institutions gear up for their annual celebrations of their female workforces. In the aftermath of last year's celebrations, the glossy press releases and social media posts painted a picture of companies showering their female workforces with

accomplished women. All these are, undoubtedly, well-intended and wonderful initiatives, BUT

What tangible changes await women in the workplace after these celebrations are over?

The purpose of International Women's Day (IWD), according to UNESCO, is to assess the progress women have made in the social, economic, cultural, and political arenas so that we know where we stand compared to other countries. In other words, the progress made towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

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these initiatives appear progressive, how many men take advantage of such initiatives? Are they truly involved in the caregiving responsibilities? And more importantly, are companies actively encouraging their male employees to do so? Are men made aware of why taking this leave is important? The reality is, according to published data, the uptake of paternity or parental leave is very low, worldwide. Men are often hesitant to take leave as they fear career implications. It's not just about introducing policies; it is also about the effective implementation and monitoring of it.

In addition, some companies boast that they have a high percentage of women and that their





# Taming the consulting industry when 'doing the right thing' is an objective reality

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 19 February 2024, by **The Mandarin**

The inquiries into the consulting industry have returned, providing fresh insights into ongoing transgressions, misunderstandings and leadership hubris. Soon, the committees will pivot from raking over the coals to considering the future.

The Department of Finance is seeking industry input on a Supplier Code of Conduct supporting clauses to include in commonwealth contracts effective April.

However, it is important to understand what you are regulating when designing regulation for an industry that has steadfastly refused to be regulated.



Positive regulation should shift the focus from remedying ethical breaches based solely on compliance with the rules to an upstream focus on seeing the reality of the relationship between buyer and supplier.

It would shake up our view of clients and consultants to include regulations that deal with the raw

# Population can't be ignored. It has to be part of the policy solution to our world's problems

By **Jenny Stewart.**

Published online 8 February 2024, by **The Conversation**

There is a growing consensus that environmental problems, particularly the effects of climate change, pose a grave challenge to humanity. Pollution, habitat destruction, intractable waste issues and, for many, deteriorating quality of life should be added to the list.

Economic growth is the chief culprit. We forget, though, that environmental impacts are a consequence of per capita consumption multiplied by the number of people doing the consuming. Our own numbers matter.

Population growth threatens environments at global, national and regional scales. Yet the policy agenda either ignores human population, or fosters alarm when perfectly natural trends such as declining fertility and longer lifespans cause growth rates to fall and populations to age.

That there are still too many of us is a problem few want to talk about. Fifty years ago, population was considered to be an issue, not only for the developing world, but for the planet as a whole. Since then, the so-called green revolution in agriculture made it possible to feed many more people. But the costs of these practices, which relied heavily on pesticide and fertiliser use and relatively few crops, are only now beginning to be understood.

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Many would agree overpopulation is a problem in many developing countries, where large families keep people poor. But there are too many of us in the developed world, too. Per person, people in high-income countries consume 60% more resources than in upper-middle-income countries and more than 13 times as much as people in low-income countries.

particularly around London and the south-east, became more crowded still.

Similarly, the Netherlands, one of the most densely populated countries, had just under 10 million inhabitants in 1950 and 17.6 million in 2020. In the 1950s, the government encouraged emigration to reduce population densities. By the 21st century, another 5 million people in a tiny country certainly caused opposition to immigration, but concern was wrongly focused on the ethnic composition of the increase. The principal problem of overpopulation received little attention.

Australia is celebrated as "a land of boundless plains to share". In reality it's a small country that consists of big distances.

As former NSW Premier Bob Carr predicted some years ago, as Australia's population swelled, the



# Dissent is not a dirty word

By **David Schmidtchen**.



Without dissent, the danger of self-perpetuating errors increases. Blind spots in decision-making get bigger. Critical thinking is stunted. Silence and powerlessness become the norm. Protecting reputation becomes more important than doing what is right.

Until everything went bad at PwC, the senior leadership probably thought everything was good. There is a lesson there for all leaders.

Leaders have two roles in creating the conditions for constructive dissent: they must facilitate dissent and resolve dissent. Success in both roles requires a more nuanced understanding of

Dissent is not always good or virtuous. Dissent can come from those who are disengaged, and disloyal. People in this category are small in number and often well-known. This is a performance management issue.

The larger group are those who are loyal but concerned for the group. These dissenters are

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Some people dissent because their moral convictions and personal values are in danger of being

Given the varied sources of dissent, it should be normal behaviour in leadership teams.

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Leaders permit dissent but are responsible for facilitating how it improves decision-making and resolves differences of opinion. There is great value and less risk in taking the time to integrate new information, adjust to accommodate different perspectives, and cohere around a robust

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The view of dissent as resistance to be overcome rather than useful feedback is pervasive. For

interpreted as obstruction. Middle managers, reluctant to give up old habits, are often called the 'permafrost layer' when they speak up. Undoubtedly, there is, in some cases, an element of this.

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constantly in play: Who is watching? Will I be heard? Will it make a difference? What can be gained? What can I lose?

Encouraging dissent requires an openness to diversity in thinking. It requires people to willingly challenge the 'obvious' and to ask (out loud) 'the dumb question'. Sometimes, it requires a child's eyes, the person who can say, 'The Emperor is naked.'

We all need to acknowledge the realities of politics, self-interest, and dissent in leadership teams that navigate competitive pressures and tensions and constantly make trade-offs in uncertain conditions.



# Does ethics pay?

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 24 January 2024, by **The Mandarin**

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corporate failure. As we learn more, the usual suspects surfaced: employee concerns were ignored, reputation.

Are we becoming habituated to these failures?

Do we all shrug our shoulders and say, 'Well, that's just business, isn't it?'

Quentin Beresford's book *Rogue Corporations* is a sobering reminder of how common business

He recalls how competition and regulation were disrupting the car industry. The feeling inside the company was “beleaguered” and “threatened”. A strong tribal mindset of ‘we vs them’ ran through the company. Ford’s culture, systems and accountabilities shaped individual and collective decisions toward achieving business goals while minimising moral questions.

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the conditions for that outcome were set well in advance and not questioned until after the disaster had unfolded.

Reward and punishment are two sides of the same coin, and both are focused on compliance,

Moral and ethical decisions are embedded in social relationships. To make good decisions, leaders  
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community.

The more tenuous the relationship or the more distant the leader is from the impact of decision-  
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There is a need to change the frame in which business decisions are made, moving away from  
one where self-interest is incentivised, and business leaders are distant from the impact of their  
decisions. Decision-making's ethical and moral dimensions must be better accommodated and not  
considered an academic pursuit to be ignored. Ethical questions in decision-making are the starting  
point and trump all other considerations.

People are the foundation of ethical decision-making; the systems and culture are enablers.  
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# NDIS review changes require trust between government and people with disability

By Sophie Yates and **Helen Dickinson**.

Published online 22 January 2024, by **Committee for Economic Development of Australia**

The recent independent NDIS Review is likely to transform both the scheme and the broader disability support ecosystem. If the reforms are to achieve any of their intended effects,

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and the broader disability support ecosystem.

The 26 recommendations (and 139 supporting actions) cover many topics, including: supports outside the scheme, access, planning, supported decision-making, psychosocial disabilities, housing, information and market stewardship, First Nations participants, workforce, quality and safety, and implementation and governance. It is impossible to summarise them all here, so we

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One contributor to rising scheme costs is a greater number of participants than planned, rising from

have been partially driven by incomplete data when estimates were made, but is also thought to be driven by states and territories scaling back their disability support. This means that in some places the NDIS is the only support for people with disability.

To address this 'oasis in the desert' problem, the review recommends foundational supports, jointly funded by state and territory governments (50:50 with the Commonwealth) and delivered outside the NDIS. These might include information provision and linkages to services, plus more targeted services like home-based support (e.g. shopping and cooking), aids and equipment, early childhood support and psychosocial support.

The NDIS was never intended to be the only way to get disability supports in Australia, so this recommendation will assist people with disability who aren't on the NDIS to access supports and will decrease the inequality between those on the scheme and the far bigger group who aren't.

There are likely to be some big changes to scheme access and planning. The lists that allowed some people automatic access based on their diagnoses will be removed, and participants will instead be granted access based primarily on functional need rather than medical diagnosis – although the tools to effectively assess functional need across a wide range of disability types do

Currently, once people have been accepted onto the scheme, their individual budgets are determined by setting out support needs on an activity-by-activity basis. In the new system, people will instead have their budgets set based on high-level needs (which already occurs in similar systems such as

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on outcomes, which may be a way to drive more innovation in services and supports.

A new Navigator role will be created to help all people with disability access supports. Each person will be allocated a Navigator, funded through the new foundational supports system

supports, assist people to apply to the NDIS, and help those on the scheme to learn about

This has increased costs, but the review team also heard that the way the NDIS scheme supports children is often not based on best practice.

The review panel suggested children would be better served accessing foundational supports in homes, early childhood centres and schools, rather than relying on individual budgets for clinical

governments in foundational supports for children under the age of nine.

One of the most controversial recommendations relates to quality and safeguarding. Most NDIS payments currently go to providers who are registered with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, but there are relatively few registered providers and they tend to be larger

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To improve quality and safety, the review recommends mandatory registration for all providers, including light touch "enrolment" for low-risk providers such as suppliers of consumables. But our

# Where can we find ethical leaders?

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 10 January 2024, by **The Mandarin**

It is no small undertaking to be an ethical leader.

Ethical leadership is a personal commitment to navigating yourself and others through social contracts and norms, decisions and judgments, trusted relationships and self-interest, duties, responsibilities and accountabilities.

Ethical leadership is always personal. And, if we subscribe to the idea that leaders are at all levels,

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to building a pro-integrity culture grounded on culture, systems and accountability. A pro-integrity culture assumes ethical leaders.

In the most recent State of the Service report, 92% of respondents understood how their role and objectives of the APS.

Most also agreed their immediate manager is open and honest (82%), accountable (81%) and takes responsibility (79%). These compelling results suggest that the APS already has a strong pro-integrity culture.

that is sought-after and admired in aspiring leaders, but its presence or absence is observed in moments.

Integrity is a distinctive characteristic that is part of the psychological make-up of a leader, but it

as we have seen in repeated business and government failures, can be costly.

Surveys and questionnaires, such as the APS employee census, are valuable and useful tools, but they are not, and cannot be, designed to capture the nuance and immediacy of integrity.

There is a need to approach the issue differently, starting with the idea that integrity is not a

A different approach might put the leader, rather than the culture or system, at the centre. The objective would be to work out from where integrity is simultaneously the institution's greatest strength and weakness.

Mostly, there is a need to start with a more searching understanding of integrity in the APS.

There is an ideal of public service bound by the understanding that public servants learn their craft over time.

Public service careers have more in common with a vocation than a profession or trade. The lines between the three are easily blurred, but with a vocation, there is often a central ideal. There is a





Education and training inform the decision but the ability of a person to apply that knowledge, to  
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to take actions consistent with the public service ideal in conditions of risk and ambiguity will be the  
crucial difference in that important moment.

In implementing the actions of the taskforce report, there is an opportunity for the APS to be  
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opportunity.



# Integrity is where good leadership begins

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 12 December 2023, by **The Mandarin**

positive and sought-after leadership characteristic.

However, any strength overdone is a weakness. Recently, we have seen a culture of leadership in

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consistency is the key to utility and performance. So, much like a bicycle wheel, if the parts are all in order (tyre, rim, spokes and hub), then good performance follows. For organisations, if culture, systems, and accountability are in order, then good leadership performance naturally follows.

If only that were all there was to it. Unfortunately, integrity is not a naturally emergent property of effective compliance and sound measurement.

Integrity and good leadership: it's personal

Colleen Taylor's warnings were ignored, and the 'callous indifference' to her concerns led to her retirement. For Taylor, the impact was personal.

Integrity is where good leadership starts. It is a characteristic that is admired and sought after.

phrase 'frank and fearless'.

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promoted, a clear statement about the incentives for success is made.

But integrity is always personal. Good leaders are more than just technically competent; they are and evidence but also attuned to what's missing. They have a clear sense of their social obligations

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Culture, systems, and accountability are all important, but they are focused on preserving and protecting institutional integrity. The actions become one-dimensionally focused on the control

have shown that incentives and compliance approaches are the problem. Indeed, there is ample research evidence that compliance-based regimes lead people to be less rather than more likely

The challenge for business and APS leaders is to move past catch-all bromides like 'doing the right thing at the right time' or 'deliver the best outcomes sought by the government of the day'. At best, these are meaningless and, at worst, dangerous.

measures for these become the focus of leadership behaviour, then, as we have seen, integrity can

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# When it comes to trust, there's more to measuring than counting

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 4 December 2023, by **The Mandarin**

The Australian Public Service Commission has quietly released the 2023 Trust in Public

The Hayne royal commission into banking and the more recent inquiries into PwC and EY have highlighted the clear link between incentives, measures of success and behaviours. Incentives that consulting industries to impact employees and customers.

built into the scheme and its administration that contributed to reducing the quality of advice provided by the APS.

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Inevitably, talk of incentives leads to a recommendation for measuring and reporting on integrity  
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Measuring integrity has similar philosophical and methodological problems as measuring trust.

In everyday terms, craft is associated with customisation, care, and attention to detail.

Craft is valued because it is unique, authentic and different. Integrity is implicit in the practice of

Public servants make policy and deliver services based on choices and judgements about accessibility, openness, fairness, impartiality, legitimacy and participation.

Consequently, trust and integrity are central to the choices and judgements that public servants make every day. They are the outcomes of a craft practised well.

much as functional. Elegance and functionality are both central to craft.

functionality and sees elegance as a cost. The measures associated with performance indicators

The concreteness of numbers overwhelms the seemingly amorphous considerations of elegance

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how the parts work together to deliver the vision and strategy.

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of intent and circumstances. Functional measures remain important, but the data they are based on will always be limited and narrow the conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis. When



# The fish is still rotting from the head

By **David Schmidtchen**.

Published online 28 November 2023, by **The Mandarin**

Bob Garratt's central (and timeless) observations from his bestselling book, *The Fish Rots from the Head*, can be summarised as "bad leaders harm organisations" and "effective corporate governance is essential".

Persistent senior leadership failings in Australia's public and private sector suggest Garratt's book





# Should people who had disability before they turned 65, be allowed to become NDIS participants after 65? We asked 5 experts

By Lucy Beaumont, Elizabeth Kendall, **Helen Dickinson**, Henry Cutler, Kathy Boschen, Mark Brown

Published online 2 November 2023 by **The Mandarin**

The question of whether there should be an age limit to joining the National Disability Scheme (NDIS) has been debated since its inception a decade ago.

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of support necessary.

Aged-care services are not always well placed to appropriately support these people. The more pressing issues are why aged-care supports do not offer appropriate disability supports and whether an age cap in the NDIS is discriminatory.

The objectives of the NDIS and federally funded aged-care programs are to ensure care recipients receive the support they need to participate in life. Those with equal needs should receive the same

The NDIS age cut-off is somewhat arbitrary relative to need. It was likely introduced so people with disability over the age of 65 would not receive subsidised duplicate services from both the NDIS and aged care programs. That would lead to waste and inequity.

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care services may not deliver as much value if they do not account for specialist disability needs. Rather than changing the NDIS, federally funded aged-care programs should instead ensure the same types of services that would be funded under the NDIS are also funded through aged-care programs.

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We cannot discriminate against people with disabilities, regardless of age. Further, the Age

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Compliance with these laws and obligations mean we would need to change NDIS eligibility for people over 65, whether they had a disability before then or not. We would also need to reallocate funding from aged care and the Commonwealth Continuity of Support Programme to the NDIS. Australians must also understand ensuring equity may reduce NDIS funding allocations and support availability.

changes to access. It is estimated every dollar spent on the NDIS creates \$2.25 in the economy. Understanding this return on investment could foster support from all sides of politics, the media, and business leaders.

Which scheme funds the support ought to be just an administrative detail. Yet, as the NDIS Review panel has commented, the NDIS has become an "oasis in a desert". People who do not quite meet the NDIS eligibility criteria (because of age, diagnosis, or support needs) do it tough compared to

In the long term, yes, the NDIS should soften the age limit, and grant access to people over

The sustainability of the NDIS depends on it not being the only ticket to support and inclusion.

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# What does working from home mean for harmful worker stereotypes?

By **Sue Williamson**, Helen Taylor and **Vindhya Weeratunga**.  
Published online 2 November 2023 by **The Mandarin**

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working in service delivery. She most likely has caring responsibilities. While this might be the

We conclude that while these groups of women can be seen to be ideal workers, a new, multi-dimensional ideal worker is emerging. We further conclude that this is undermining the ideal

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This means that the focus on traditional ways of working, which include long hours, constant

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# 'I want to get bogged at a beach in my wheelchair and know people will help'. Micheline Lee on the way forward for the NDIS

By **Helen Dickinson.**

Published online 26 September 2023 by **The Conversation**

If you have read anything about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in the last few years, you will have encountered many metaphors. The NDIS is the "lifeboat in the ocean", "an

boundaries. Disability activists, such as Rhonda Galbally, have documented the rise of the disability rights movement in Australia, which fought for the establishment of the NDIS.

*maintaining basic health. They wanted support to participate and to create the lives they chose – to come out of isolation, to live in the community, work, make friends and pursue interests like other people.*

rights. The former sees the role of the scheme, in collaboration with others, as enabling and empowering people with disability to engage with the community and broader society.

The latter provides funds to people with disabilities to act as empowered consumers within a demand. So far in the implementation, this logic has won out.

(which provide the basis for funding and services within the scheme) are not well-designed and providers are not willing to work in a way that meets the needs of the individual.

demands of the provider, doesn't ask for things to be done in their own way and doesn't display realised.

make society more accessible. This isn't just an issue of ramps or Auslan interpreters (although of

## Draining the ocean

Lee charts how, over the course of the implementation of the NDIS, the voice of people with disability has been eroded. It has been replaced by those of non-disabled people, often with

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Repeated narratives about the NDIS being a cost burden – pushed by the media and federal

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It is incumbent upon those of us within the non-disabled community to listen and act to create a more inclusive society.

Lee is still hopeful for the scheme, which has at its heart “the Australian ideal of the fair go”.

that lead people to act in ways that disregard the dignity and equal value of disabled people.

Lee argues we need to change the way people with disabilities are seen – as equal and and capable



# 70% of Australian students with a disability are excluded at school – the next round of education reforms can fix this

By Catherine Smith and **Helen Dickinson**.  
Published online 18 September 2023 by **The Conversation**

One of the early priorities is to improve outcomes for all students, “particularly those most at risk of K

Meanwhile, a wide-ranging NDIS Review, looking at the sustainability of the scheme, is also due

Earlier this month, Bruce Bonyhady, the chair of the independent review, said state governments need to build “foundational supports” in schools to reduce the strain on the NDIS. This follows our recent research that showed huge issues with the way students with disability are included

events or activities at school.

opportunity to better educate and support students with disability.

The National School Reform Agreement is a joint agreement between the federal and state governments that aims to improve student outcomes across schools. It also deals with funding arrangements. Each state or territory makes its own agreement with the federal government.

Within the bilateral agreements are activities that support particular student cohorts. But the current setup is not working adequately for students with disability.

In January this year, a Productivity Commission review noted many of the bilateral agreements

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The public value approach has resulted in important new provisions, which include:

- underpinned by a bias towards granting the request;
- removing the cap on the amount of time employees can work from home, and
- increasing the quantum of paid parental leave to 18 weeks for each parent over the life of
- The quantum of the pay rise is yet to be determined as Community and Public Sector Union members and other employees consider the government's latest 11.2% pay offer over three years. How pay fragmentation will be reduced is also still being negotiated.

Other important conditions have not been agreed to by the Australian Government in this bargaining

approach to future negotiations is likely to further improve APS pay and conditions of employment.

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Here, I summarise prevailing assumptions about the general workforce that may not necessarily correspond to the reality of vulnerable workers.

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organisational performance. There is also an assumption that applicants choose jobs based on a  
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These traditional assumptions about attracting applicants and job choices may not hold for vulnerable workers. While the general workforce may be able to choose based on their skills  
circumstances that may (or may not) be linked to their vulnerability.

For instance, migrants and refugees confront unique obstacles when entering their host country's  
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Conventional research on career development assumes that employees navigate various career stages, steer their own career paths, and/or possess resources that support their development. In turn, this is based on an assumption that workers have access to suitable employment that facilitates their career growth and sustains their work. In actuality, vulnerable workers often work  
available job comes their way, regardless of its quality or working conditions.

# A New Way Forward or More of the Same? The EU's Responses to the Syrian and Ukrainian Asylum Crises

By **Kelly Soderstrom**

Published online 30 August 2023 by **Australian Outlook, Australian Institute of International Affairs**

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asylum seekers has come under increasing scrutiny given its contrast with the 2015 Syrian asylum crisis. Does the more welcoming reception of Ukrainian asylum seekers mark a progressive turning point in EU asylum governance?

The marked difference between EU and member state governance responses to the 2015 Syrian and 2022 Ukrainian asylum crises provides deeper insights into the drivers of EU asylum governance choices now and into the future.

Civil and political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa in the early 2010s precipitated the largest movement of forcibly displaced people to Europe since WWII. In 2015, almost 1 million

and Sweden accepted the most asylum seekers, with 1.2 million arriving in Germany by the end of 2016. Despite the high number of arrivals accepted by these nations, other countries, such as

relied on the Common European Asylum System to manage asylum administration, this was

member states at the periphery of the EU, especially Italy and Greece. Pressure on national asylum

from politicians to decrease the number of arrivals.

To reduce the number of asylum seekers travelling to Europe, the EU pursued a strategy of

on the Mediterranean Sea, and blocking the Western Balkan migration route. Many member states also reintroduced border controls, citing security concerns as the reason for the reintroduction of controls. Supranational agreements with third-countries, such as Turkey and Libya, provided states with incentives and support to prevent asylum seekers from reaching Europe.

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Poland each currently hosting about 1 million Ukrainians.

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internal management. This is especially apparent in the Commission's unprecedented activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). The TPD obliges EU member states to provide Ukrainian refugees with the rights to reside, seek employment, attend school, and travel freely within the EU for up to three years. According to the Council, the purpose is to "provide immediate and collective protection" for Ukrainians and "reduce pressure on the national asylum systems" of member states. Although member states faced similar pressures during the 2015 crisis, the TPD was notably

asylum governance towards responsibility sharing.

Although asylum seekers from other countries continue to travel to the EU, Ukrainian asylum seekers are often given special treatment. Ukrainian nationals are frequently allowed to quickly cross borders into the EU whereas nationals from other countries must wait for long periods of time before they can cross. Boats continue to traverse the Mediterranean, carrying asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East. These boats are often intercepted and turned back. Many boats do not

people died or went missing attempting to cross the Mediterranean. Despite these deaths, the EU and its member states continue to pursue a policy of deterrence. In 2023, the Italian government passed legislation inhibiting NGO assistance for migrant boats in distress (in an attempt to deter future boat journeys), while the Greek coastguard continued to push back asylum seekers

EU member states have been criticised for appearing to be more welcoming to Ukrainian asylum seekers than others. Many scholars, journalists, and humanitarian NGOs have accused the EU and some member states of being racist and Islamophobic in their responses. Ukrainian asylum seekers are predominately Christian, whereas refugees from Syria are mostly Muslim. In 2015, Hungarian





skilled people. It is the lack of such opportunities that is forcing people to move to other countries. In an ongoing study to be published at the end of 2023, we found that the main push factor driving Bhutanese to Australia was the 'lack of economic opportunities' in their country of origin. While

also include work-related issues, lack/poor delivery of services in Bhutan, and poor standards of

measures have been taken towards encouraging international remittances, there is still scope to capitalise on opportunities for "brain gain" and attracting investments from Bhutan's migrant population.

The government has realised that there is a problem and initiated major reforms. Under the theme "Transformation Bhutan", a series of governance and economic reforms have been implemented. One such reform, implemented in 2022, was to "transform the civil service" and improve governance

to Bhutan's tried-and-tested tourism policy of high-value and low-volume, and the tourism levy was increased from USD 65 to USD 200 per day. Similar transformation-related reforms are taking place reforms are yet to be seen. In the short term, however, the reforms are having the opposite effect, causing a great deal of uncertainty and consternation to the Bhutanese people.

To Thimphu's credit, the government has revised the pay of its civil servants in an effort to retain all levels, this is a substantial increase compared to previous revisions. The comparison, however, should no longer be year-to-year, and it has to be compared against the income earned overseas.

working at the minimum wage in Australia can earn more in a month than a government secretary in Australia.

There is a sense of urgency in Bhutan as it seeks to graduate from the least developed countries (LDC) category in December 2023. To grow its economy, Thimphu will have to keep more of its

quick returns, Bhutan has started to invest in "new-age businesses", such as bitcoin mining and to partially fund the recent pay revision in Bhutan. But the image of Bhutan as a cryptocurrency investor raised eyebrows when a couple of cryptocurrency companies that had listed Bhutan as one

# What should be the purpose of public service?

By **Catherine Althaus**.

Published online 7 August 2023 by **The Canberra Times**

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The movie *Living* featuring Bill Nighy is a poignant drama that should be watched by every public servant. It confronts the imperative question: should public servants play an active role in directly serving the community or should they only be passive implementation agents of the government

Nighy plays Rodney Williams, the quintessential umbrella-wielding, pin-striped, bowler hat-wearing British public servant who catches the train every morning with relentless predictability to serve the



Over Australian public administration history, we know that politicians have sometimes felt that the bureaucracy was too big for its boots and knew better than its masters. At other times, the bureaucracy has been hauled over the coals for its learned helplessness.

An institution that dynamically and adaptively uses its agency to actively serve the Australian government of the day but with the same kind of urgency and purpose that impelled Rodney?

That's my purpose in this article. To get us thinking that this is not only possible, but desirable. That's the kind of public service I want to be part of. As we engage in important times of APS04ant t

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