

Who are Refugees?



Australia is a signatory to the 1951 United National Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (The Refugee Convention) and its 1967 Protocol.

The Convention defines a refugee as anyone who:

“...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (or her) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (or herself) of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his (or her) former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Environmental disasters, armed conflicts and gross human rights abuses have resulted in many millions of refugees around the world. The figure is approximately 42 million with 80% comprising women and children, and 22 million are people outside their country of origin and unable to return. These are the people that the international community, as signatories to the UN Refugee Convention and Protocol, has an official responsibility to assist. Australia, as a member of the international community, has an obligation to share this responsibility.

Brisbane City Council, *Community Life Program: Refugee Strategy*, (June 2002) p.3

Australia's Humanitarian Program

Australia has one of the three largest humanitarian programs in the world, alongside the USA and Canada. Australia's Humanitarian Program helps to fulfil our international obligations under the United National Convention relating to the status of refugees, and has two components:

The offshore component offers resettlement as a means of protection for people in humanitarian need who are overseas and have no other option available to them and

The onshore component offers protection for people already in Australia, who arrived on temporary visas or in an unauthorised manner, and who meet the definition of a refugee in the Refugees Convention.

The make-up of Australia's Humanitarian Program has changed substantially in recent years in response to shifting crisis points and resettlement need across the world. The Humanitarian Program is currently focused on Africa and the Middle East. Of the 13,000 places available nationally annually, under Australia's Humanitarian Program approximately 70% were granted from Africa, 26% from the Middle East and South West Asia, and 3% from Asia and the Pacific.

DIMA: *A Volunteer's Guide*: (2005) p.2

Settling in Brisbane

Australia's refugee program fulfils an international obligation and it is because of this obligation that Brisbane has refugee communities.

Refugees living in Brisbane are here only because they were forced to leave their countries due to circumstances such as war, natural disasters, gross discrimination or systematic oppression. They are here because their own governments cannot provide protection, or indeed, perpetrate human rights abuses on their own citizens.

Brisbane City Council, *Community Life Program: Refugee Strategy*, (June 2002) p.6

On-arrival assistance to humanitarian entrants...

Humanitarian entrant's on-arrival needs are considerable. A warm welcome, assistance in helping entrants gain basic skills necessary to adjust to their new surroundings, and practical assistance with unfamiliar tasks can help new arrivals to settle.

Many of the on-arrival assistance to humanitarian entrants are provided through integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services (IHSS) service providers such as MDA and includes:

- Meeting at the airport and taking them to accommodation.
- Offering companionship and friendship.
- Helping to familiarise entrants who are not used to urban environments with amenities such as electricity (ovens), gas stoves, telephones, flush toilets, running water.
- Explaining emergency services, what they are and how to access them.
- Accompanying to medical and other health appointments.
- Explaining the costs and billing procedures for amenities like electricity, phone, water.
- Establishing a bank account, applying for Medicare, registering with Centrelink.
- Access to public places like shopping centres, libraries, medical centres, pharmacies.
- Familiarisation with Australian foods and cooking methods.
- Assisting them to find outlets where they can buy culturally appropriate produce.
- Assisting parents to enrol children in school and information about schooling system, including uniforms, school shoes, lunches, parent meetings.
- Linking people to relevant ethnic community, religious or other relevant organisations.
- Use of public transport, including reading timetables, bus routes, buying tickets.
- Allaying fears or misconceptions about people in authority eg doctors, police, school principles.
- Assisting to find permanent accommodation.
- Explaining Australian cultural practices and social norms eg shaking hands, maintaining eye contact during conversations.

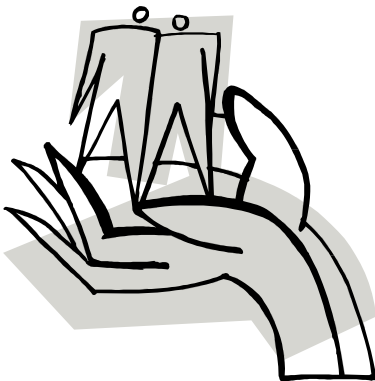
DIMA, *A Volunteer's Guide*, (2005) p.8.

Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Support

The fundamental principles underlining this support...

- Humanitarian entrants are individuals who have the inherent right to respect for their human rights.
- Humanitarian entrants are able to exercise choice.
- Humanitarian entrants are informed and involved in decision making.
- Services are designed and administered so as to promote humanitarian entrants' competence and to discourage dependency.
- The health and wellbeing of humanitarian entrants are protected.
- The best interests of children are taken into account.
- The least intrusive and the least disruptive options which offers the highest degree of stability and certainty is selected.
- Traditional, cultural and religious values are respected.
- Services and decisions are ethical and humanitarian entrants are not exploited.
- Services promote participation of humanitarian entrants in the wider community and their understanding of their legal obligations.
- Organisations providing services are accountable to those who use their services and the Commonwealth.
- Humanitarian entrants are enabled to access services in a coordinated way which minimises gaps and duplication between services received.

DIMA, *CSR Management Handbook*, (2004)



Carla Tongun (Sudan)

“...Until the war in Sudan we had a good life and plans for our children. Then everything is taken away in the blink of an eye and you have to flee for your life...You go to a new country but you don’t know where to, or how to, start. You leave behind those you know, your family and community.

But the Government and service providers did so much to make our lives easier. I want to thank the Australian Government for supporting us and giving my children a new future. I look forward to when they finish their education and join the workforce, so they can give back to a country that has given us so much.”

DIMA, *Australia’s Support for Humanitarian Entrants*, (2004-05) p.18