

Settlement Council of Australia

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Mixed outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers in expert panel recommendations

The release of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers report on Monday marks a significant development in refugee and asylum policy in Australia. In reviewing the recommendations outlined in the Expert Panel report there are positives and negatives for asylum seekers and refugees. “It is a complex area of policy, and requires a multifaceted approach, as is clear from the wide range of recommendations” said Sky de Jersey, SCOA Executive Officer.

“On the positive side the recommendation for immediate increases to the Humanitarian program to 20,000 provides greater numbers of people with protection. The suggested changes to the Special Humanitarian Program and the Family Reunion program will also ease current pressures. The settlement sector is well placed to assist the proposed numbers of arrivals, with our strong settlement programs regularly dealing with peaks and troughs in service delivery, and new cohorts of arrivals.”

“The focus on strengthening regional protection frameworks is also welcome. It is hoped that, over time, this will foster improvements in protections for asylum seekers in the whole region, as well as in Australia. It has long been argued that refugee issues are international, and thus Australia’s response needs to address the issue beyond the focus on our borders.”

“There are however, significant causes for concern in key recommendations. The reintroduction of off-shore processing will continue to place vulnerable people in psychologically untenable limbo with little prospect of status resolution. The removal of family reunion within the SHP for those who have arrived by boat will also greatly impact people in their settlement as family reunion and restoring shattered families is a key factor in successful settlement. Australia will continue to need to support asylum seekers and refugees in the community as they struggle through these further hurdles to building a safe, secure life” commented Ms de Jersey.

“Australia’s commitment to the Refugee Convention and the associated rights it provides to individuals must remain our guiding principle” stated Acting Chair, Ricci Bartels.

“The recommendation calling for research funding is also welcomed – the public debate on this issue has been informed by misinformation, fear, prejudice and stereotypes. Provision of accurate information through research on the spectrum of issues involved in people movement will enhance future conversations, be they at the policy or community level.”

SCOA maintains that the focus of policy development and conversation about asylum seekers and refugees should always be grounded in a humanitarian interpretation of Australia’s enduring commitment to our international obligations.

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