



Hugo Report – a welcome acknowledgement of a distinctive contribution

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) embraces the release of the report, *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants* prepared by Professor Hugo. The report documents the distinctive and important contribution humanitarian entrants make in all areas of Australian life, and with analysis framed around population, participation and productivity. The Report's depth, breadth and rigorous approach to qualitative and quantitative data make it an important research milestone for the settlement sector.

The Report carries enormous weight within the settlement sector in that it further cements and quantifies evidence (besides the anecdotal evidence) such as the difficulties humanitarian entrants find in 'occupational skidding' where new arrivals find it difficult to get jobs commensurate with their qualifications. This evidence shall assist the Settlement sector to help lobby for greater recognition of overseas qualifications by employers for humanitarian entrants and assist job applicants to utilise these qualifications in Australia. These skills that could be used in Australia are not being exploited; the country has skills shortages in many areas these need to be matched not just with skilled labour migrants, but also with humanitarian entrants.

The Report identifies the significant contributions humanitarian entrants have made in Australia. It marks the particular contribution humanitarian entrants make in regional Australia, where refugees fill specific employment niches such as agriculture and highlights the high levels of humanitarian entrants establishing their own businesses.

We welcome an acknowledgement of the contributions to the social and cultural sector from humanitarian entrants; these are presented, through careful analysis of statistics and discussion on the definitions and cultural interpretations of volunteering within refugee communities. The Report provides needed clarity on the impact of cultural frameworks on volunteering and social engagement, which is particularly relevant given that humanitarian entrants often come from a collective cultural orientation framework (as opposed to the individualistic framework which is more the norm in Australia). It is clear that refugees significantly enrich Australia's social capital in the voluntary sector, both within refugee communities and the broader community at large, and that this contribution can be underreported due to differing cultural interpretations of volunteering.

The finer details of settlement are also explored in depth, providing important research findings to the sector on a wide range of settlement issues, for example the relationship of learning English to acquiring employment, and the challenges and discrimination faced by refugees as they enter the job market. The Report comments on the high value refugees place on education (particularly for their children), the benefit of which is clearly demonstrated in the statistics for second generation humanitarian entrants as they engage in Australian life and job markets.

There is much to be gained for the sector in a detailed reading of the research findings as they relate to settlement, the services provided to humanitarian entrants, and the process through which humanitarian entrants establish their lives in Australia. The Report comments that the framework of the settlement sector is currently oriented on a welfare model, recommending that settlement services be oriented towards a community



development approach, focusing on the strengths and resilience of humanitarian entrants. Settlement agencies see daily evidence of the determination, intelligence and grace refugees bring to what is an acknowledged difficult life transition. The settlement sector welcomes moves to strengthen community empowerment and the enrichment this will bring to our multicultural nation. SCOA notes the recent shifts within the Humanitarian Settlement Services program towards a strengthened approach to case management and targeted focus on youth (amongst a range of changes). It is too early to assess the impact of these changes, but it is expected settlement services will be better able to assist refugees build new lives in Australia.

The findings in relation to the impact on the settlement sector of competitive short term funding cycles are echoed by SCOA members in consultations during May across the country. The impact of funding pressures on service delivery is not unique to the settlement sector. The sector works hard to ensure that services for humanitarian entrants are not adversely affected but it remains a challenge given the operational constraints faced by agencies. The Settlement Council calls for the government, in particular the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), which funds the majority of settlement services, to work with the sector to build strong organisations which in turn will strengthen the support provided to refugee communities across the country.

The Settlement Council looks forward to working with the settlement sector and the government to understand and implement the findings of this important study. It is clear that humanitarian entrants are already making a unique and distinctive contribution to Australia, and the settlement sector is keen to create an environment where the strength, resiliency and diversity of humanitarian entrants can flourish.

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