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Settlement Council of Australia Media Release: The 2021-22 Budget and what it means for Migrants and Refugees

Settlement
Council
of Australia

This year's Federal Budget will have a significant impact on migrants and refugees in Australia.

The Settlement Council of Australia today welcomed several initiatives in the Federal Budget directly supporting migrants and refugees. At the same time, the Council expressed concern about some measures and urged the government to ensure migrant and refugee needs are considered across the breadth of budget measures.

The Council praised the introduction of a reformed Adult Migrant English Program in 2023, investment in social cohesion, several critical measures to support migrant women's safety and wellbeing, and the significant investment in mental health support for multicultural communities.

In relation to migration levels, Melissa Monteiro, Chair of the Council, said *"The focus on making onshore temporary visa holders permanent through the 2021-22 Migration Program is a welcome acknowledgment from the government of the benefits of permanency for social cohesion and economic prosperity."*

Melissa continued *"Many of the initiatives in the budget address critical gaps which we have been advocating on, and we are pleased to see the government listening and responding to our sector."*

However, the Council is further concerned that the humanitarian intake of 13,750 has been referred to as a ceiling, rather than a target. The Council urged the government to take all reasonable steps to safely meet Australia's humanitarian commitments.

The budget did not include any measures that directly support settlement services, despite services experiencing heightened demand for support over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many services will in fact experience a reduction in funding due to the cessation for the Social and Community Services supplementation funding.

The Council is also deeply concerned by plans to expand the Newly Arrived Resident's Waiting Period. CEO of the Council, Sandra Elhelw Wright said, *"There are potentially dire consequences for migrants who are unable to work in their initial stages of migration."*

She added: *"It is precisely in these early stages that this support is needed most. The more support we provide migrants in their early stages of settlement, the quicker they find their way and give back. Being supportive and compassionate is in our economic interests."*

Ms. Wright also emphasised the importance of ensuring the breadth of measures across the budget consider the needs of migrants and refugees. This includes the very welcomed funding announced for Aged Care, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, mental health services, and others.

She said, *"We must ensure all Ministers, all portfolios, and all business units across government implementing their respective budget measures consider the needs of migrants and refugees and how they are being met by that funding."*

"Australians of migrant and refugee background make up a large proportion of the population – 21% of the population speak a language other than English at home, and 49% were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas."

"Funding allocated to support Australians must benefit all Australians. We must also consider the needs of those who are not yet Australian, but nonetheless make a critical contribution to our society and economy, and may very well one day become citizens."

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is the peak body promoting good settlement outcomes for migrants and refugees across Australia. We are committed to building an Australia where every migrant and refugee feels at home, together with our membership which is over 100 members strong and counting. We are a trusted source of policy advice, and a thought leader on enhancing the economic and social inclusion of migrants and refugees.

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For further comment, please contact SCoA CEO, Sandra Elhelw Wright at ceo@scoa.org.au or on 02 6282 8515.