



Settlement
Council
of Australia

Submission: Australia's Humanitarian Program 2022-23

Settlement Council of Australia

AUGUST 2022



The Settlement Council of Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate, the Ngunnawal people. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which migrants and refugees settle across Australia, and on which our sector operates.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to our lands and waters.

About the Settlement Council of Australia

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is the peak body representing services across Australia supporting new migrants and refugees. We are committed to building an Australia where every migrant and refugee feels at home, together with our membership which is over 110 members strong and counting. SCoA's network is Australia's single largest body of experts in working with migrant and refugee communities, and in cultural responsiveness. 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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Introduction

SCoA is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Discussion Paper on Australia's Humanitarian Program for 2022-2023. Australia's Humanitarian Program ensures Australia meets our humanitarian commitment to resettle refugees. Australia's world class settlement services play a crucial role in supporting humanitarian entrants as they begin their life in Australia.

From 2020-2021, COVID-19 caused an enormous reduction in resettlement places globally. However, from 2022, as leading resettlement states resumed humanitarian programs, it is crucial for Australia to review its Humanitarian Program to ensure it is used as effectively as possible as a protection tool to meet the needs of the most vulnerable refugees.

With emerging conflicts and the shrinking resettlement space globally, there is an urgent need to increase the humanitarian uptake by Australia. There is also an urgent need to expand durable solutions to include complementary pathways that are sustainable and fully harness community goodwill in the sponsorship of refugees. This would ensure the Australian government meets its humanitarian commitments, safeguards our country's world class settlement services, and promotes good settlement outcomes.

In the pages that follow, we outline key considerations for the 2022-2023 Humanitarian Program. We make recommendations for fully utilising existing programs and capacity within the community, settlement sector and UNHCR, among others.

Our submission is based on previous consultations conducted over the past 12 months, in which issues relating to the Humanitarian Program were raised across the SCoA network.

Increase Humanitarian Intake

UNHCR estimated that global resettlement needs for 2022 will be 1.47 million people, and this figure is expected to increase.¹ The available global resettlement needs outweigh available quotas as less than one per cent of refugees are resettled each year. Australia has consistently ranked as one of the top five refugee resettlement countries in the world.² Over the past few decades, Australia has strategically used resettlement as a protection tool, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable such as women and girls. However, the Humanitarian Program ceiling decreased by a total of 10,000 places in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and only 5,947 visas were issued in the Humanitarian Program in 2020-21.³

Our consultations with members have highlighted the sectors readiness and community support for an increased intake of humanitarian entrants in Australia. In 2021 with the sudden evacuation of over 4,000 Afghan nationals, settlement service providers proved they could rapidly mobilise and scale up their operations. Such a rapid and comprehensive response in a situation of crisis simply would not have been possible had there not been existing settlement infrastructure to leverage. In addition, the sector has shown through COVID-19 lockdowns and

¹ UNHCR (2021), 'UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2022,' available online at: <https://www.unhcr.org/eng-au/protection/resettlement/60d320a64/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2022-pdf.html>

² Ibid

³ Department of Home Affairs (2021), '2020–21 Humanitarian Program Outcomes,' available online at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/australia-offshore-humanitarian-program-2020-21-glance.pdf>

quarantine that it is still able to function and deliver essential services. The settlement infrastructure is capable of, and the sector is ready to settle many more refugees. The sector has proved through the settlement of 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq in 2015 that it has the experience and capabilities for an increased undertaking.

Australia's settlement sector has the expertise and experience to ensure refugees who arrive experience successful outcomes, and SCoA has a range of policy and program recommendations to maximise this success.⁴ The settlement sector has been able to support refugees and migrants primarily through the following federally funded programs:

- The Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), which provides intensive support to humanitarian entrants up to their first 18 months after arrival in Australia. This support includes sourcing accommodation, providing initial orientation, enrolments in schools, linking with health services and other immediate needs to live an independent life in Australia.
- The Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program, which provides less intensive support to humanitarian entrants and other eligible vulnerable migrants for up to 5 years after arrival, as well as providing capacity building support for communities.
- The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides English language tuition to eligible migrants and refugees.

This funding could be further optimised by adopting various recommendations SCoA has made in relation to settlement programs. Some recommendations for reforming settlement services include, but are not limited to, consulting people with lived and practice experience to inform change and increase funding so that it is commensurate to the outcomes expected of settlement programs. Other recommendations include the co-location of services (services in the same building/close by) to allow service providers to easily collaborate to provide culturally responsive services, removing limitations to accessing SETS, and a tiered model of service delivery to allow resources to be better used to meet the specific needs of individual clients. Please refer to our submission to ['Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees'](#) for fuller detail. We look forward to reforms to settlement programs to ensure services are as best placed as possible to meet an increased intake.

While it is understandable, Australia must take all practical steps to make up for the thousands of humanitarian places not filled between 2020 and 2022. This will be a tangible expression of responsibility and burden sharing, and a true reflection of Australia's ethos and commitment to the protection of refugees. SCoA hopes these unfilled places from 2020-2021 will be carried over.

We welcome election commitments made by the Australian Labor Party to increase Australia's annual humanitarian intake to 27,000 spaces per year. This would be consistent with the Global Compact on Refugees, and Australia's commitment to human rights. An increase in Australia's Humanitarian Program as a protection response to emerging International Armed Conflict (IAC) and Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC), climate change, and addressing the backlog in durable solutions caused by COVID-19, would be similar to responses by the USA and Canada, who are also ranked as top resettlement countries. Given the high demand globally

⁴ Settlement Council of Australia (2022), 'Submission: Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees,' available online at <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SCOASU1.pdf>

with many refugees in protracted situations, it is imperative that Australia work quickly to fill its commitment of 27,000 humanitarian spaces. We note the government is taking action to process visas faster,⁵ and hope this also includes the swift processing of humanitarian visas. Leading resettlement countries such as the USA and Canada have increased their refugee intakes for 2022 to 125,000⁶ and 84,795⁷ respectively. These humanitarian commitments highlight the urgent need for resettlement as quickly and as safely as possible. SCoA looks forward to the return of more ambitious resettlement targets.

In increasing the humanitarian intake, we recommend an increase in the proportion of the program drawn from UNHCR referrals, given that they are based on set criteria established to identify refugees in need of resettlement.⁸ Australia should leverage this existing infrastructure developed by UNHCR over several decades to identify and process refugees identified in need of resettlement.

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government should implement its commitment to increase Australia's annual humanitarian intake to 27,000 spaces per year as soon as possible.

Community refugee sponsorship initiatives

SCoA commends the Australian government for incorporating the following Community Refugee Sponsorship (CRS) initiatives as core components of its Humanitarian Program:

(i) Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) which will enable groups of everyday Australians to welcome refugees into their local area from 'day one' of their Australian journey.⁹

(ii) Community Support Program (CSP) which makes it possible for people and businesses in Australia to support a person in humanitarian need to come to Australia and assist them in their settlement journey,¹⁰ if they meet the following criteria:

- are aged between 18 and 50,
- have functional English language,
- have an offer of employment or a pathway to achieve self-sufficiency within 12 months and,
- reside outside their home country in a resettlement priority country.

The incorporation of two community refugee sponsorship initiatives in its 2022-2023 Humanitarian Program represents Australia's commitment to expanding resettlement through

⁵ The Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs (25 July 2022), 'Government taking action to process more visas faster,' available online at: <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/AndrewGiles/Pages/processing-more-visas-faster.aspx>

⁶ The White House, (20 June 2022), 'Statement by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. on World Refugee Day 2022,' available online at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/20/statement-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-on-world-refugee-day-2022/>

⁷ Government of Canada, (14 February 2022), 'Supplementary Information for the 2022-2024 Immigration Levels Plan,' available online at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2022-2024.html>

⁸ UNHCR (2011), 'UNHCR Resettlement Handbook,' available online at: <https://www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf>

⁹ Settlement Council of Australia (2022), 'Submission on Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees,' available online at: <https://scoa.org.au/submission-next-steps-to-improve-australias-settlement-and-integration-of-refugees>

¹⁰ Refugee Council of Australia (2021), 'The Community Support Program', available online at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/community-support-program>

complementary pathways. This is in line with paragraph 90 of the Global Compact on Refugees, and Australia's existing commitments to protecting refugees and assisting with durable solutions.¹¹

To ensure the Australian government fully utilises community goodwill to expand resettlement through complementary pathways of community sponsorship initiatives, SCoA recommends the below key approaches.

1. Community refugee sponsorship streams should be additional to the current refugee intake.

SCoA welcomes commitments by the current government to begin the CRISP which will support 1,500 individuals over four years.

We also welcome commitments by the Australian government to ensure community sponsorship places are additional to the existing humanitarian intake and encourage this to remain a core feature of the program. This is consistent with the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Canadian model in which community refugee sponsorship has been used to complement and not replace the government's existing resettlement program.¹² Similarly, community sponsorship programs in New Zealand and the United Kingdom fortify existing refugee protection channels and expand resettlement to meet growing needs.¹³

2. Align CSP with CRISP

We recommend the CSP be reviewed to further enhance its accessibility. The restrictive approach of the CSP eligibility criteria, especially the 'job ready' requirement, prioritises those with the highest education and skill levels, rather than those most in need of resettlement.¹⁴ The government should maintain humanitarian need as the primary criteria and not link the CSP to employment. These challenges were long identified by the Refugee Council of Australia and other organisations. They were also noted in the Shergold Review as ultimately frustrating the strategic use of CSP as a complementary pathway to resettlement.¹⁵ In addition, we encourage a review of how CSP aligns with CRISP to ensure named sponsorship is more accessible for those seeking to sponsor family, friends or other identified individuals, as CRISP currently allows only un-linked applications.

3. Alignment of CRISP with existing standards

In previous consultations, SCoA has emphasised the importance of ensuring both the CRISP and the main humanitarian entry pathway result in equitable levels of service and meet the same standards and oversight. This is especially important in relation to safety, noting the significant power imbalance between sponsor groups and new arrivals which can create a situation of vulnerability. In addition, we encourage strong consideration of the role of the National Settlement Outcomes Standards in relation to the CRISP to further enhance

¹¹ United Nations (2018), 'Global Compact on refugees' paragraph 90, available online at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4.pdf>

¹² The Canadian government has resettled 327,000 refugees through its private sponsorship of refugees' program since it was introduced in 1979. This figure has been additional to the over 1 million refugees resettled to Canada by UNHCR; Global compact on refugees, paragraph 95.

¹³ Refugee Council of Australia (2019), 'Canada's private sponsorship of refugees: Potential lessons for Australia', available at: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/canada-private-sponsorship/>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Shergold, P., Benson, K., & Piper, M. (2019), 'Investing in Refugees – Investing in Australia. The findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia,' available online at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf>

consistency between the different streams. Alignment would support the long-term sustainability of the program and prevent issues that have obstructed previous iterations from being sustainable or expanding further. SCoA would welcome the opportunity to engage in the evaluation of the CRISP with a view to contributing to alignment and long-term sustainability in the program.

Recommendation 2: Further improve the accessibility of the Community Support Program (CSP) and align with Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) to ensure named applicants can be more readily sponsored.

Afghanistan crisis response

SCoA congratulates the Australian Government and the Department of Home Affairs on its successful evacuation of Afghan nationals and recognises the positive humanitarian impact of saving so many lives in such a short period of time. We witnessed extraordinary support for Afghan evacuees from all parties – the Australian Government, the settlement sector, Afghan diaspora communities, former defence personnel, and the broader Australian public. All involved did the best they could to support Afghan evacuees considering the difficult circumstances and significant constraints within which all were operating.

We further commend the government for committing to resettling an additional 16,500 Afghan nationals over the next four years, in addition to the 10,000 places for Afghan nationals within Australia's existing offshore program, announced on 21 January 2022. This translates to 14,500 places for the year 2022-2023. The increase in the annual intake of Afghan refugees signifies Australia's commitment to the protection of refugees and providing durable solutions to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Pressure on settlement services

While settlement services have longstanding capabilities, expertise and experience to facilitate increased resettlement, they are currently limited by a range of funding pressures. These funding pressures are particularly pronounced within the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program.

As previously mentioned, Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) is provided to humanitarian entrants for up to 5 years. Organisations delivering SETS have been severely affected by a cessation of Social and Community Services (SACS) supplementation funding in the FY 2020-21 which has affected organisational financial status, staffing, and service delivery capacity. In addition, the recent national 4.6% salary increase for most settlement workers has been one more pressure on providers. In a survey SCoA conducted in 2020 most organisations delivering SETS were forecasting reductions in staffing, at a time when demand for services was increasing due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis in Afghanistan, and other events.

The survey conducted by SCoA in 2020 showed that most settlement service organisations surveyed provided SETS (65.7%) as a primary service, and the remaining organisations

provided HSP (11.4%), and AMEP (8.6%), among others.¹⁶ This demonstrates the centrality of SETS in providing services to humanitarian entrants. The current funding pressures affect the majority of settlement services, but have particularly acute effects for providers in regional areas, as will be discussed further below.

The HSP and SETS programs could be better aligned and improved. For instance, as SETS is available to not just humanitarian entrants, but also other eligible visa holders, SETS takes up this additional load without a fee for service. Many new arrivals are not eligible for HSP and thus fall under SETS. With regards to the HSP, ongoing stable funding allowing a greater level of baseline capacity (i.e., staff/volunteers) is essential to better enable the HSP to respond to changing needs within the program. Often staff working in the HSP program are working hours beyond what is required in the funding contract and expending substantial funds servicing needs of clients due to funding reliant on client numbers. Constantly fluctuating funding further affects the depth of relationships that providers can maintain. The HSP funding model is also highly rigid with set schedule payments that are very prescriptive. Greater flexibility should be embedded into HSP contracts so that providers have the authority to act to meet the needs of clients. Services that work alongside HSP (such as AMEP and Centrelink) to support settlement should also have the capabilities to scale up their operations accordingly.

The capacity of settlement providers to deliver holistic and sustainable services would be further enhanced by a greater proportion of Workforce Australia contracts being awarded to settlement providers, and more licenses being issued. Employment is a key sign of successful settlement, however, there are not enough specialist refugee or CALD services in the current Workforce Australia arrangements. The government needs to work to address the challenges and barriers that prevent refugees and migrants from gaining employment in Australia.

SCOA is deeply concerned by the impacts of reduced funding on settlement outcomes and encourages the Government to review funding levels to ensure they are adequate to meet both current and future demand.

Recommendation 3: Restore SETS funding lost due to the removal of the SACS supplementation, and more broadly review and increase settlement funding.

Regional resettlement

SCoA welcomes the trend in the proportion of humanitarian entrants settled in regional locations from 42 per cent in 2018–19 to 64 per cent in 2020-21. Regional Australia contributes one-third of total national economic output. Its prosperity is thus critical to the future of the nation.¹⁷

The contribution of refugees and migrants in regional areas has been well documented to include population growth, revitalisation of local communities, skilled labour, cultural enrichment, and job creation among others. Regional settlement should be offered as an option

¹⁶ Settlement Council of Australia (2020), 'State of the Sector,' available online at: <http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/State-of-the-Sector-2020-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

¹⁷ Regional Institute of Australia (2019), 'Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Inquiry into Migration in Regional Australia,' available online at: <https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Files/Policy%20Submissions/2019/Sub-108-Regional-Australia-Institute.pdf>

to humanitarian entrants who might have a positive settlement experience due to their skills and knowledge in industries such as farming and animal husbandry. However, for migration to regional Australia to be successful, it must be sustainable and beneficial for both the local community and for the migrants themselves. Ensuring that migrants enjoy a quality of life that encourages them to stay in regional areas should be an important policy goal.¹⁸

Ensuring adequate specialist services for newly arrived refugees is critical to the sustainability of regional settlement. As discussed above, there are severe funding pressures on most SETS services – one of the central services available for refugees. This reduction has occurred despite the significant increase in regional settlement over the past four years. The current funding allocation is based on the 2016 census and does not factor in the increase in regional settlement. The increased pressure on SETS creates gaps in service delivery in regional areas. In a sector where the primary service provided is SETS, without increasing funding, the capacity of the sector to support increasing regional resettlement, the program will be placed at risk as humanitarian entrants will tend to migrate onwards to metropolitan areas, should they fail to successfully integrate and settle.

In addition to funding pressures, regional services are impeded by a lack of tailored models. Service delivery in regional areas differs greatly from service delivery in metropolitan areas due to a wide range of factors including a lack of local service, broad geographical spread of clients, lower levels of cultural competence in emerging regional settlement locations, and other factors. These factors are elaborated on further in our recent submission to the discussion paper on reforms to settlement services.¹⁹ Accordingly, we recommend a distinct funding model be adopted for settlement services being delivered in regional locations.

Housing and infrastructure are also major issues in regional areas. The inaccessibility of housing is an ongoing challenge for settlement providers especially in regional areas, some of which have become far less affordable due to COVID-19 and movement to the regions. Mechanisms to support increased access to affordable housing should be explored, including through considering how offers of community goodwill can be leveraged, and addressing issues surrounding bond assistance eligibility.²⁰ In addition, settlement providers should be consulted and leveraged to inform settlement planning so that settlement locations that have suitable housing supply are identified.

Recommendation 4: Review SETS funding for regional locations against updated demographic data, and consider adopting a distinct funding model for settlement services delivered regional areas.

Conclusion

Australia has had a generous Humanitarian Program for decades. However, the impact of COVID-19 on the program has been devastating in terms of providing durable solutions to

¹⁸ Regional Institute of Australia (2019), 'Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Inquiry into Migration in Regional Australia,' available online at:

<https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Files/Policy%20Submissions/2019/Sub-108-Regional-Australia-Institute.pdf>

¹⁹ Settlement Council of Australia (2022), 'Submission on Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees,' available online at: <https://scoa.org.au/submission-next-steps-to-improve-australias-settlement-and-integration-of-refugees>

²⁰ Settlement Council of Australia (2022), 'Submission: Senate Inquiry into Australia's engagement in Afghanistan,' available online at: <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Submission-to-Senate-Inquiry-into-Australias-engagement-in-Afghanistan-SCOA-January-2022-FINAL.pdf>

refugees. It is critical that any spaces not filled in Australia's Humanitarian Program in the past two years are carried over and there is a restoration of the lost refugee visas.²¹ SCoA welcomes the government's commitment to increase the annual humanitarian intake to 27,000 spaces per year and the commitment that any community sponsored places will be in addition to the government's Humanitarian Program. We welcome the reforms to Australia's community sponsorship initiatives but encourage the government to further enhance the accessibility of the CSP. Lastly, from the perspective of settlement services, SCoA is positive that we have the expertise and experience as a sector to ensure refugees who arrive experience successful outcomes, and we also have a range of policy and program recommendations that optimise outcomes even further for those who arrive.²² We look forward to reforms to settlement programs to ensure services are as best placed as possible to meet an increased intake.

²¹ Refugee Council of Australia (2022), 'Three refugee issues requiring urgent change in 2022,' available online at: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/three-refugee-issues-requiring-urgent-change-in-2022/>

²² Settlement Council of Australia (2022), 'Submission: Next steps to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees,' Available online at <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SCOASU1.pdf>

List of recommendations

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Recommendation 2: Further improve the accessibility of the Community Support Program (CSP) and align with Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) to ensure named applicants can be more readily sponsored.

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