



Settlement
Council
of Australia

Submission: Australia's Humanitarian Program 2023–24

Settlement Council of Australia

June 2023

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 the vast majority of settlement agencies across Australia providing direct services and support to people of migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Our members include organisations large and small, who are committed to the successful settlement of migrants and refugees across the country. Their services range from greeting new arrivals at the airport, through to assisting them to secure housing, learn English, make social connections, access services and find their first job. Australia's settlement services are recognised as being among the best in the world.

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Introduction

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission regarding Australia's Humanitarian Program 2023–24. Australia's commitment to resettling refugees is fulfilled through the Humanitarian Program, which is complemented by settlement services that are vital in assisting humanitarian entrants as they start their new life in Australia. We acknowledge and appreciate the Australian government's commitment to the Humanitarian Program, but we have a few recommendations for the program below.

Expand Humanitarian places

Based on the global humanitarian situation and Australia's capacity to provide support, SCOA is calling for an increased humanitarian intake. UNHCR global resettlement estimates have drastically increased from 1.47 million people in 2022 to 2.00 million people in 2023.¹ Despite this, for the last three years, Australia's planned humanitarian intake has been capped at 13,750 places, and the program has not been fulfilled since 2018-19. Last year (2021-22), 124,236 applicants lodged applications offshore while only 11,545 offshore visas were granted.² Despite the Labor Party's 2021 commitment to expand the Humanitarian program to accommodate 27,000 humanitarian and 5,000 community sponsorship positions, the Government has not yet expanded the program. The benefits of a larger intake include long-term economic contributions, cultural diversity, and Australia's moral obligations to assist those in need.

The Humanitarian Program should remain non-discriminatory and should take in those in greatest need. 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.

Recommendation 1

Expand the Humanitarian Program to 27,000 places as soon as practicable and 5,000 additional community sponsorship places.

Complementary pathways

Australia has several complementary programs or pilots which allow for various avenues for refugees to find safety beyond the established Humanitarian Program. These programs include the Community Support Program (CSP), Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) and the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot. While the current government has committed to making community sponsored programs additional, at present visas allocated are not additional. These programs should be in addition to the Humanitarian Program so as to not substitute UNHCR-referred refugee places. The CSP eligibility criteria's strict approach, particularly the emphasis on being 'job ready,' gives priority to individuals with the highest levels of education and skills, rather than those who are most in need of resettlement. It is

¹ UNHCR. (2023). *2023 Projected Global Resettlement Needs*. Available online at: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/62b18e714.pdf>

² Department of Home Affairs. (2022). *Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program: 2021–22*. Available online at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/australia-offshore-humanitarian-program-2021-22.pdf>

recommended that the government prioritise humanitarian need as the main criterion and remove the connection between the CSP and employment, English language proficiency and age. Furthermore, it is suggested that a review be conducted to ensure better alignment between the CSP and CRISP, enabling easier sponsorship of family, friends, or other individuals through named sponsorship, as CRISP presently only permits unlinked applications.

Refugees and others in humanitarian need have skills, educational and employment aspirations, and families in Australia that make complementary pathways relevant.³

It is important that all migrants and refugees who arrive in Australia are able to access settlement support. Refugees arriving through complementary migration pathways are likely to have similar experiences and needs to other refugees when it comes to navigating life in Australia. While the pathways of arrival may differ, these individuals have fled their home countries due to persecution, conflict, or other dire circumstances and have sought safety and protection in Australia. Like any other refugee, those arriving through complementary migration pathways face various challenges and adjustments when settling into a new country. These challenges may include language barriers, cultural differences, limited social networks, and unfamiliarity with the local systems and services. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that adequate settlement support is available to assist these individuals in their integration process.

Settlement support services play a vital role in helping refugees adapt to their new environment and build a successful life in Australia. These services encompass a range of initiatives, including language classes, employment assistance, housing support, healthcare access, educational opportunities, and cultural orientation programs. By providing such support, the government and community organisations aim to empower refugees and facilitate their integration into Australian society.

Recommendation 2

Settlement support should be available to all migrants and refugees who arrive in Australia regardless of their mode of arrival.

Community sponsorship

SCOA has long called for community sponsorship to be additional (complementary) to the planned Humanitarian intake. We welcome commitments by the current government for community sponsorship to be additional and that this commitment is actioned soon. By allowing community sponsorship to be additional and complementary aligns with the idea that multiple approaches and collaborative efforts are necessary to address the global refugee crisis effectively. By expanding the available options for refugee resettlement, both through the planned Humanitarian intake and other complementary pathways, Australia can demonstrate its commitment to humanitarian values and extend a helping hand to those in need, while also harnessing the power of community engagement and solidarity in the resettlement process. The

³ Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia. (2023). *Australian Complementary Pathways for Refugees: Policy Principles*. Available online at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023_Complementary-Pathways-Principles.pdf

Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) program, launched in 2022, should also be a permanent feature of our migration program.

Recommendation 3

The Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) program should be additional to the current Humanitarian Program, and a permanent feature of our migration program.

Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot

The Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, which is set to conclude in June 2023, should be continued and expanded as a permanent complementary pathway for skilled refugees to come to Australia. This program, which allows skilled refugees a pathway to live and work in Australia recognises the potential and valuable contributions that skilled refugees can make to the Australian workforce and society as a whole. Skilled refugees bring a range of skills and experiences from their home countries, which can enrich workplaces and foster innovation. The program allows Australia to showcase its commitment to humanitarian principles, while also benefiting from the contributions of skilled refugees to its society and economy.

Recommendation 4

The Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, which is set to conclude in June 2023, should be continued and expanded as a permanent complementary pathway for skilled refugees to come to Australia.

Settlement Support

Australia has world renowned settlement services and our consultations with members have highlighted the sectors readiness and community support for an increased intake of humanitarian entrants in Australia. The settlement infrastructure is capable of, and the sector is ready to settle many more refugees, as evidenced by the sudden arrival of Afghans in 2021, and Syrians and Iraqis in 2015. The settlement sector in Australia is well-established and coordinated and provides comprehensive services and support to refugees, with the ultimate goal of helping them achieve successful outcomes. However, in recent years, the organisations delivering the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program have faced consecutive funding cuts which have reached a critical level, with staff burnout and financial pressures threatening the quality-of-service delivery, and ultimately settlement outcomes. While we welcome the Government's decision to remove the 5-year eligibility criteria for migrants and refugees to access this service, the sector will struggle to keep up with this unprecedented demand without urgent investment.

Recommendation 5

Expanded settlement services need to be funded adequately.

Regional settlement

SCOA has long advocated for sustainable regional settlement for both migrants and refugees. When done right, regional migration can be a win-win for both the regional location and the migrant or refugee. Migrants and refugees have the potential to contribute to population growth in regional areas, address labour shortages and start businesses, and enrich the social fabric of communities.

Suitable humanitarian entrants, with the support of government, settlement services, and the community, can thrive and meaningfully contribute to these communities. However, for a more viable and sustainable regional settlement, we recommend increased funding for infrastructure and services, including settlement services in regional areas. In addition, we recommend funding to build the capacity of local communities, build proper infrastructure, and ensure employment support is in place.

We support the government's removal of the 50% regional settlement target in favour of a program which aims for achieving better settlement outcomes. But there are many regional settlement success stories across Australia, and we hope for this trend to continue.⁴

Recommendation 6

Ensure regional refugee settlement is accompanied by the necessary investment in infrastructure and services, including adequately resourced settlement services.

Conclusion

In this submission we have provided several recommendations to expand and improve Australia's Humanitarian Program from 2023 onwards. Overall, these recommendations from SCOA aim to enhance Australia's Humanitarian Program by expanding the number of places, improving settlement support services, making complementary programs permanent, expanding settlement support, and ensuring adequate funding and infrastructure for successful settlement of refugees to Australia.

⁴ SSI & The University of New England. (2023). *From the 'resistant' to the 'champions' Community attitudes during the first four years of refugee settlement in Armidale, NSW*. Available online at: https://www.ssi.org.au/images/insights/Community_attitudes_toward_refugee_settlement_in_Armidale_Report_2023_1.pdf

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Expand the Humanitarian Program to 27,000 places as soon as practicable and 5,000 additional community sponsorship places.

Recommendation 2: Settlement support should be available to all migrants and refugees who arrive in Australia regardless of their mode of arrival.

Recommendation 3: The Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) program should be additional to the current Humanitarian Program, and a permanent feature of our migration program.

Recommendation 4: The Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, which is set to conclude in June 2023, should be continued and expanded as a permanent complementary pathway for skilled refugees to come to Australia.

Recommendation 5: Expanded settlement services need to be funded adequately.

Recommendation 6: Ensure regional refugee settlement is accompanied by the necessary investment in infrastructure and services, including adequately resourced settlement services.

References

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