

# REFUGEE WELCOME ZONES

*An initiative of the Refugee Council of Australia*

## **Who is the Refugee Council of Australia?**

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national peak body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who support them. RCOA promotes the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies towards refugees and asylum seekers through conducting policy analysis, research, advocacy and public education on refugee issues.

## **What is a Refugee Welcome Zone?**

A Refugee Welcome Zone is a Local Government Area which has made a commitment in spirit to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding the human rights of refugees, demonstrating compassion for refugees and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community.

This public commitment is also an acknowledgment of the tremendous contributions refugees have made to Australian society in the fields of medicine, science, engineering, sport, education and the arts. By making this Declaration it is hoped that local government will be encouraged in their continuing efforts to support the men, women and children who make the difficult journey to Australia to seek our protection.

The Refugee Welcome Zone initiative began in June 2002 as part of Refugee Week celebrations. At the time, 15 Councils and Shires in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia were declared Refugee Welcome Zones. Today, with more than 70 Local Government Areas having declaring themselves Refugee Welcome Zones, the initiative has proven to be a great success in connecting local governments with the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers.

## **What is the process for becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone?**

The majority of Refugee Welcome Zones have been declared after an initial proposal by a community or church-based organisation that is subsequently supported by an approach from RCOA. If you would like your local Council or Shire to become a Refugee Welcome Zone, here are some suggested steps:

- Write a letter of proposal to your Mayor and Councillors. It is important to highlight the level of community support for refugees and asylum seekers, the benefits of becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone and opportunities to work with local groups and organisations and support groups. You should also enclose a copy of the Refugee Welcome Zone information sheet for Councils (available for download here: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/rwz/RWZ\\_InfoSheet\\_Councils.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/rwz/RWZ_InfoSheet_Councils.pdf)).
- If you work for a local organisation or are part of a community support group which provides assistance to refugees invite your Mayor and Councillors to visit you. This provides a great opportunity to showcase the work you do.
- Request an opportunity to present the proposal at a Council meeting.
- Contact RCOA to let us know about your proposal. We can provide further information and advice and approach your Council to support the proposal.

The process for becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone is very straightforward. It simply involves the Council signing the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration, which is “a commitment in Spirit to welcoming refugees into our community, upholding the human rights of refugees, demonstrating compassion for refugees and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in our community”. However, the decision to become a Refugee Welcome Zone often takes some time and is voted upon according to Council policy and procedure which can vary from Council to Council.

To mark the occasion of becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone, many Councils and Shires choose to hold public signing ceremonies. These provide an opportunity to highlight the initiative and acknowledge the work of local groups and individuals that support refugees and asylum seekers. If possible, a representative from the Refugee Council of Australia will attend the ceremony to present a Certificate of Appreciation.

### **Why become a Refugee Welcome Zone?**

Local Government has historically played an important role in assisting refugee settlement and promoting community harmony. Since the end of the Second World War, Australia has become home to over 750,000 refugees and we have a proud history of settling refugees from all over the world who have gone on to make an enormous contribution to our economic, social and cultural life. Becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone is a way to continue this proud tradition of supporting the settlement of refugees.

Signing the Declaration can also promote harmony, social cohesion and respect for human rights in your local community. It is a great way to demonstrate support for refugees and take a strong stand against racism and discrimination. It can help to raise awareness about the issues affecting refugees, foster a culture of mutual respect and promote an appreciation of cultural diversity.

Becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone can also encourage the development of a more coordinated approach to supporting refugee settlement. It can motivate Local Government and local organisations and support groups to work together more effectively so as to improve settlement outcomes for refugees.

### **What are the obligations and responsibilities of Refugee Welcome Zones?**

The Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration does not confer any formal obligations and Refugee Welcome Zones are not required to uphold any statutory responsibilities or financial commitments. The signing of the Declaration is simply a way of demonstrating broad support for the principles it contains. Any actions or activities undertaken by Refugee Welcome Zones to implement the Declaration are voluntary.

However, while signatories to the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration are not required to undertake any specific activities, any initiatives which help to create a welcoming atmosphere and assist the settlement of refugees and their communities are welcomed and encouraged.

### **How can Refugee Welcome Zones support refugees?**

There are many simple things that your Local Government Area can do to welcome refugees to your community:

- Develop a Local Government policy relating to refugees and asylum seekers or review existing policies.

- Offer funding for community-based projects which support the settlement of refugees.
- Hold community picnics and gatherings to encourage families from different backgrounds and community organisations to meet.
- Build partnerships and work collaboratively with local community groups and service providers to enhance support for refugees settling in your area.
- Organise an event during Refugee Week, such as a street fair or festival.
- Host a community meeting with newly arrived refugees and guest speakers from refugee support organisations to find out how your Council can best support refugees in your community.
- Hold a multicultural film festival.
- Coordinate with local libraries in the area to develop an English tutoring program for newly arrived refugees.
- Liaise with the Red Cross to run information sessions for newly arrived refugees who have been separated from family members and relatives.
- Hold a public forum to enable guest speakers from refugee backgrounds to share their stories.

***How has your organisation, community or council welcomed refugees?  
Send in your past and upcoming events and initiatives to [info@refugeecouncil.org](mailto:info@refugeecouncil.org)***

***We'd like to hear about program or event, big or small!***

## Current Refugee Welcome Zones

There are currently 75 Refugee Welcome Zones in Australia.

New South Wales: Armidale Dumaresq Council, Ashfield Municipal Council, Auburn Council, Bankstown City Council, Bathurst City Council, Blacktown City Council, Blue Mountains City Council, Burwood Council, Campbelltown City Council, Canterbury City Council, City of Sydney Council, Coffs Harbour City Council, Dubbo City Council, Fairfield City Council, Gosford City Council, Griffith City Council, Hornsby Shire Council, Ku-ring-gai Council, Lake Macquarie City Council, Leichhardt Municipal Council, Lismore City Council, Liverpool City Council, Manly Council, Manly Council, Marrickville Council, Moree Plains Shire Council, Mosman Municipal Council, North Sydney Council, Penrith City Council, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, Randwick City Council, Rockdale City Council, Sutherland Shire Council, Waverley City Council, Willoughby City Council, Wollongong City Council

Victoria: Bass Coast Shire Council, Brimbank City Council, Campaspe Shire Council, Casey City Council, Darebin City Council, Greater Bendigo City Council, Greater Dandenong City Council, Greater Geelong City Council, Hepburn Shire Council, Horsham Rural City Council, Hume City Council, Maribyrnong City Council, Melbourne City Council, Mildura Rural City Council, Monash City Council, Moonee Valley City Council, Moreland City Council, Mount Alexander Shire Council, Port Phillip City Council, Surf Coast Shire Council, Swan Hill Rural City Council, Whittlesea City Council, Yarra Ranges Shire Council

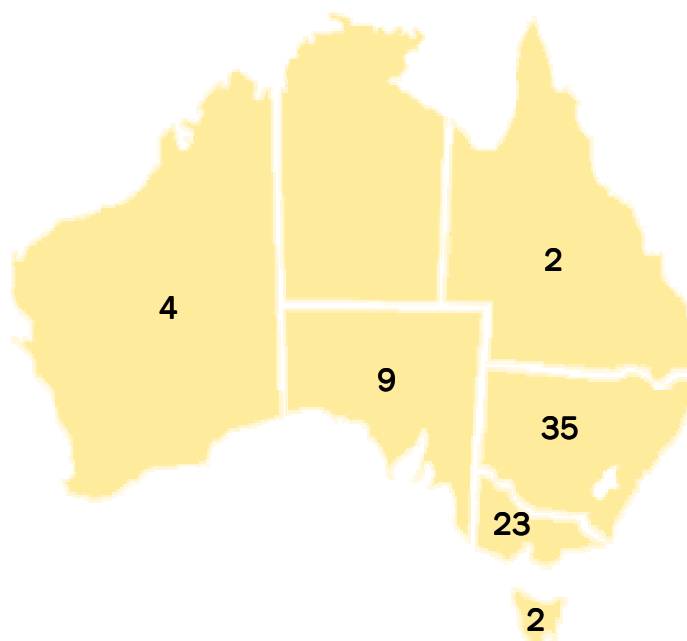
South Australia: Campbelltown City Council, Gawler Town Council, Marion City Council, Mitcham City Council, Murray Bridge Council, Norwood, Payneham and St. Peters City Council, Port Adelaide Enfield City Council, Prospect City Council, West Torrens City Council

Queensland: Brisbane City Council, Townsville City Council

Tasmania: Hobart City Council, Launceston City Council

Western Australia: Bassendean Town Council, Fremantle City Council, Subiaco City Council, Vincent Town Council

*Map of Refugee Welcome Zones in Australia*



# The Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration

(Council crest/logo)

The \_\_\_\_\_ Council,

Declares the Council of \_\_\_\_\_ a

## Refugee Welcome Zone

*This Declaration is a Commitment in Spirit to*

**Welcoming** refugees into our community,

*Upholding the **Human Rights** of refugees,*

*Demonstrating **Compassion** for refugees and*

*Enhancing cultural and religious **Diversity** in our community.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
[name and title of signatory]

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*This Declaration is proudly supported and endorsed by the*



Refugee Council  
of Australia

The Refugee Council of Australia is a national umbrella organisation representing over 150 organisational and 550 individual members. The aim of the Refugee Council is to promote the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies toward refugees and asylum seekers by the Australian and other Governments and their communities.

To obtain an editable copy of the Declaration for signing by your Council or Shire, please contact us on (02) 9211 9333 or [info@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:info@refugeecouncil.org.au)