



# Refugee Council of Australia

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## **OPPOSITION PLUMBS NEW DEPTHS IN ATTACK ON REFUGEE ARRIVALS**

The Federal Opposition has achieved the seemingly impossible and managed to plumb new depths in the refugee policy debate with its wilful distortion of the findings of a report on the settlement of new arrivals, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said the Opposition's statement today on the Settlement of New Arrivals report represented a new low with the Coalition now attacking the entire Refugee and Humanitarian Program in its attempt to score political points.

"The Opposition's statement on the report reads like a parody of demonising political rhetoric about refugees, inviting the Australian public to fear 'a toxic social cocktail' of welfare dependency, entitlement, enclaves and intergenerational social problems, all manipulated by people smugglers," Mr Power said. "It is the sort of effort of which a satirist would be proud but, bears little resemblance to the report's findings."

The Settlement of New Arrivals report draws together findings of voluntary surveys from 5,378 refugee and humanitarian entrants who have arrived in Australia in the past five years. It shows that, at the time of completing the survey, 36.5% were employed or in business for themselves, 14.6% were unemployed and 46.7% were studying (a quarter of them also employed), with others caring for family or retired.

"This report shows that the first five years in Australia is a period of rebuilding and transition, in which refugee and humanitarian entrants spend time learning English, improving their skills and seeking entry to the Australian workforce," Mr Power said.

"While the Refugee and Humanitarian Program is focused on saving lives in peril rather than increasing Australia's skill base, it does bring to Australia a group of people who are younger than the national average and ready to make long-term commitments to their new society. Of those surveyed in this report, 35% have a technical or university qualification, the overall national figure is 39%.

"The Opposition makes much of the fact that 89% of refugee and humanitarian entrants surveyed are receiving Centrelink benefits of some kind. However, it is plainly wrong to suggest that this equates with long-term employment or a lack of willingness to work. More than 6.5 million Australians receive some form of Centrelink assistance, including millions of parents with pre-school or school-aged children.

"Shadow Minister Scott Morrison uses the report to continue his relentless attack on asylum seekers who arrive by boat. What Mr Morrison failed to reveal is that boat arrivals make up fewer than 5% of all Refugee and Humanitarian entrants who arrived in the five years covered by the survey.

"The only point of the Opposition's interpretation of the report that we agree with is that more needs to be done to address the barriers faced by many refugee and humanitarian entrants. From our consultations with communities around Australia, we hear much about the frustrations with the varying levels of support offered to refugees by Jobs Services Australia agencies and the lack of understanding of many Australian employers of the skills which many refugee and humanitarian entrants can bring to the Australian workforce.

"We expect that our elected representatives will act in the interest of the community and respond appropriately and effectively to the needs of new arrivals, not try to misrepresent their challenges for base political motives."

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The Refugee Council of Australia represents  
non-government organisations and  
individuals working with and for refugees  
in Australia and around the world