



Refugee Council
of Australia

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ENTREPRENEURIAL REFUGEES BRING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS TO AUSTRALIA: NEW REPORT

The 740,000 refugee and humanitarian migrants settled by Australia since Federation have brought an entrepreneurial spirit and a strong commitment to education and volunteerism, a new report reveals.

The report, which draws together existing research on the impacts of refugee settlement, says that, once refugees are able to establish themselves in their new country, they bring significant economic, cultural and social contributions to Australia.

Researched and compiled by the Refugee Council of Australia for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Economic, Civic and Social Contributions of Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants* examines findings of 177 Australian and international research reports and articles.

“Refugees make substantial contributions to their new country – expanding consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets, bringing in new skills, creating employment and filling empty employment niches,” the report finds.

“There may be short-term costs as refugees are resettled and adjust to their new surroundings but, once successful integration has occurred, refugees are able quickly to make permanent cultural, social and economic contributions and infuse vitality, humanitarian values and multiculturalism into the communities into which they are resettled.”

The report notes that refugees are often entrepreneurial, as they face the need to set up and establish themselves in a new environment. Of the eight Australian billionaires listed in *Business Review Weekly’s* “Rich 200” list in 2000, five were former refugees or children of former refugees.

“Australia’s refugees and humanitarian entrants have found success in every field of endeavour, including the arts, sports, media, science, research, business and civic and community life,” the report says. “Refugees’ stories are extremely diverse; however, there are some commonly mentioned ingredients for success including having had community support; feeling motivated to ‘give back’ to society; and having access to training, English classes, mentoring and cultural, sporting and volunteering activities.

“Research conducted overseas confirms that, after overcoming initial barriers, refugees subsequently achieve a rapid convergence in earnings with other migrants and the native population,” the report notes. “International studies also conclude that, because refugees lack

the option to return to their homelands, they are more likely than other migrants to invest in country-specific human capital, such as education, training and citizenship.”

RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said he believed the report was a valuable contribution to the discussion within Australia about the role and contribution of people who have been refugees.

“Too much of the public discussion assumes that refugees are victims who need life-long support after being received in Australia,” Mr Power said. “The Australian experience has shown that this is far from the case.

“In fact, there is evidence to suggest the experience of losing everything – homes, livelihood and their country of birth – drives many former refugees to greater success. Around Australia, there are so many examples of people who ignored the barriers they faced and worked relentlessly to become high achievers.

“The limited research available suggests that this success ethic is passed on to the children of former refugees. A 2002 study of children of migrants showed that the Australian-born children of migrants from Poland, Hungary and Vietnam – most of them former refugees – outperformed children of Australian-born parents in education, employment and home ownership.”

Mr Power said the report highlighted that the experiences of Australian-born children of former refugees needed further research.

“As we looked at available research, we noted that the obstacles faced by refugees in Australia and western countries were often widely examined but their positive contributions, and the experiences of their children, had been given much less attention by researchers,” he said.

“We support the Australian Government’s initiative to commission further research on how former refugees and their children are faring economically, the extent of their social and civic contributions and the factors which assist them to succeed.”

The report, *Economic, Civic and Social Contributions of Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants*, can be viewed online at www.refugeecouncil.org.au

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