



Refugee Council
of Australia

AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM 2012-13
Community views on current challenges and future directions

COMMUNITY VIEWS ON POST-ARRIVAL SETTLEMENT SUPPORT

In October and November 2011, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) held national consultations with refugee and humanitarian entrants and service providers to canvass community views on issues and future directions for Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. These consultations informed a submission to the Immigration Minister and Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) that can be found at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/intakesub.php. Due to the large number of consultations held and the volume of feedback received regarding post-arrival settlement support, RCOA has compiled the following as a supplementary document to the main submission to capture more detail on particular settlement issues.

The following provides a summary of issues raised in response to the ten consultation questions on post-arrival settlement support (see Appendix for list of consultation questions) under the headings:

1. Successes and gaps in post-arrival settlement support;
2. Reviewing current models of settlement service provision;
3. The settlement experience of refugees who arrive onshore;
4. Unaccompanied minors; and
5. Employment transitions, income management and education.

1. SUCCESSES AND GAPS IN POST-ARRIVAL SETTLEMENT SUPPORT

1.1 Examples of good practice

Australia's resettlement program for refugee and humanitarian entrants is among the most sophisticated and comprehensive in the world, with successive Federal and State governments demonstrating strong support towards maintaining settlement services as a budget priority within the migration support system. The suite of on-arrival settlement services provided to refugee and humanitarian visa holders through DIAC includes the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS), Settlement Grants Program (SGP), Complex Case Support (CCS), the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and Telephone and Interpreting Service (TIS). State, local and other Federal government departments provide a range of other services supporting refugee and humanitarian entrants, such as torture and trauma services in each state and territory funded through the Department of Health and Ageing, and English as an Additional Language (EAL) programs in schools funded through Commonwealth and State education departments. Non-government, community and ethno-specific organisations provide services and support at a local level and in a wide variety of ways.

Overall, community members who participated in RCOA's consultations gave positive feedback about the settlement services they received, with some appraising service standards as better than

in Canada and the United States. Some examples of good settlement services, provided by service providers and community members during consultations, include:

- Free online resources on parenting in different languages, produced by Melbourne's Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre with Federal funding;
- Improved health services and access in the Dandenong region through the initiatives of Southern Health and the Refugee Health Network;
- The ACT Services Access Card which provides easier access to essential government services in Canberra;
- Calvary Health Refugee Mentoring Program in Canberra where mentors provide people of refugee background with experience of life in an Australian workplace;
- The use of music and art therapy at Milpera State High School in Brisbane to improve mental health for students of refugee background;
- University of Newcastle's program to support students at risk of disengaging and placing them in a mentoring program linked to employers;
- AMEP classes in Wollongong which include health education sessions;
- A Refugee Maternity Service, which includes interpreter support, at Brisbane's Mater Hospital; and
- The Driver Education for Adult Humanitarian Entrants program at Edmund Rice Centre at Mirrabooka in Perth.

1.2 Regional settlement

With face-to-face consultations held in 14 regional centres this year, community views on refugee settlement in regional areas came to the fore. A number of regional service providers reported excellent regional settlement outcomes and advocated the expansion of settlement in regional areas. Advantages of regional settlement discussed included affordable housing, the availability of work, a quality lifestyle and a greater sense of community and welcome for new arrivals. Regional resettlement was welcomed as a way of reversing the trend in Australia of people moving from smaller centres to metropolitan cities. Consultation participants argued that a greater focus on regional settlement would also alleviate pressures in major metropolitan cities, particularly pressures related to housing affordability and availability and job opportunities.

However, service providers warned that not all regional settlement was great settlement. Regional settlement would only work where there were real job opportunities. Albury, Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Wonthaggi and Shepparton, for example, reported positive resettlement experiences. Over the past 10 years, former refugees in Albury have found employment, enrolled in university and bought cars. In Coffs Harbour, former refugees were working, had qualifications recognised and were studying up to post-graduate level. On the other hand, representatives from refugee communities in Toowoomba, Shepparton, Morwell and Newcastle, for example, reported growing frustration and despair at the low levels of employment. Many participants cited racism and the unwillingness of large companies to employ people from African background as major barriers in the labour market. There were also reports of people leaving their jobs because of racism in the work place. The inability of former refugees to find work was manifesting itself in low self-esteem and was a source of friction in households that increased the risk of domestic violence. People from African countries spoke at the consultations about their willingness to work but also their despair of rejection and racism.

Some participants recommended more information about the benefits of living in regional centres should be made available to refugees and asylum seekers before resettlement to Australia or release from detention facilities. As one participant noted: "The Government needs to do a lot more in promoting regional settlement where you can have a nice house with a backyard, where you can get a job, you can walk to TAFE and there are ESL (English as a Second Language) centres in the local schools."

1.3 Key gaps in settlement services and support

Settlement challenges and gaps in services and support were again key topics of discussion at this year's consultations. This section is not intended to provide an exhaustive analysis of gaps and challenges in settlement support but instead to summarise the most pressing issues raised by consultation participants and outline their ideas for addressing these challenges.

Many participants in this year's consultations noted the interconnectedness of settlement gaps and challenges. For example, difficulties in accessing stable long-term housing was seen to impact on education outcomes, as children may have to change schools several times if their families move. Similarly, lack of English skills and lack of access to affordable transport options were seen to limit employment opportunities. Employment itself was seen as being linked to mental health and wellbeing. One community leader noted that "it's a bit difficult to talk about issues like health, education and housing separately because they are all interconnected". It was felt that the interrelationships between settlement issues necessitated a holistic approach to addressing the various gaps and challenges.

It is important to note that many of the key gaps in settlement services and support noted by consultation participants were ongoing concerns highlighted through RCOA's submissions in previous years. Considerable frustration was expressed by some participants that these issues still had not been addressed despite concerns being raised with RCOA and others on multiple occasions. In the words of one refugee community representative: "People keep holding these meetings and nothing happens. When you [RCOA] get opportunities to talk to higher people, say: 'People are getting tired of meetings without outcomes'."

1.4 Empowerment and involvement of former refugees

A key issue raised in a number of consultations is the continued lack of engagement and empowerment of refugee and humanitarian entrants in determining their own settlement pathways. As one service provider described in a submission to RCOA:

The dominant paradigm of settlement at present is based on service provision and is framed in terms of meeting needs, dealing with problems, shortcomings and the negative effects of the refugee experience. We need to re-frame this in development terms — personal development for the individuals concerned, creating individual economic careers/futures, enabling them to participate and contribute to their full potential in the life of this country — and community development for the groups involved.

Many people, and particularly former refugees themselves, felt that the skills and personal attributes of people coming under the Humanitarian Program were often overlooked in Australia by settlement and other services and within the broader community. A number of consultation participants also raised concerns about the marginalisation of ethno-specific organisations by mainstream welfare organisations and the need to reinvigorate the involvement and empowerment of refugee entrants, communities and organisations in Australia's approach to post-arrival settlement support.

1.5 Education and training

A key issue raised by many participants in this year's consultations concerned young people from refugee backgrounds who are placed in mainstream schools at a level appropriate for their age but not for their language skills or ability level. It was noted that the inability of young people to participate at school can lead to frustration, depression and disengagement from the education system. It was suggested that there is a need for better transition support for young people entering mainstream education and for those moving from high school to vocational training. Several community members also highlighted the need for additional educational support for young people outside of school hours. Concern was expressed that parents felt unable to support their children sufficiently with homework and assignments due to a lack of English language skills and an inability to afford private tutoring.

English language training was noted by both service providers and community members as an area in which additional support was needed, particularly given the impact of English skills on employment prospects. At the same time, however, some community members expressed concern that the obligation to attend English language training prevented them from securing employment and felt it would be preferable to learn English on the job rather than through formal training.

One service provider noted that refugee and humanitarian entrants often had unrealistic expectations about education and training, assuming that it would quickly lead to employment, and then experiencing depression and frustration when they were unable to find work despite devoting significant time to study. Concern was expressed by some service providers that some refugee and humanitarian entrants focused on training courses which did not significantly increase their prospects of securing employment. Some may select training in areas which are not relevant for the employment opportunities available in their local area, or in which it is difficult for people from non-English speaking backgrounds with a history of disrupted education to compete on the same level as native English speakers with university qualifications.

Particular concern was expressed that people may forego English classes to attend vocational training that in the end did not greatly assist them when seeking employment (see also section 5.1). One participant also raised concerns about training providers acting unethically when recruiting refugee entrants, noting that some providers targeted people waiting at Centrelink offices. It was suggested that careers counselling could assist refugee entrants (including students and young people) in selecting more appropriate training opportunities.

The costs and difficulties associated with recognition of overseas qualifications were again raised as an issue of concern. One service provider noted that this was a particularly significant issue for people aged 50 or over who were required to undertake lengthy retraining in order to have their qualifications recognised. Securing employment at the end of their training consequently becomes more challenging due to their age.

Service providers at one consultation suggested that gaps in education and training could be partly addressed by providing educational opportunities for refugees living in protracted situations overseas. It was proposed that this could contribute to more positive settlement outcomes for refugees who were eventually resettled in Australia, while also contributing to protection outcomes for persons who were not resettled by enhancing their access to livelihoods. A similar suggestion was put forward by a former detainee with regards to increasing educational opportunities for asylum seekers in detention.

1.6 Employment

"I'm not happy sitting at home doing nothing. We're not lazy." (Community member, Toowoomba)

Participants from refugee communities expressed a strong desire to work but continued to highlight significant challenges in securing employment, including lack of English language skills, lack of Australian work experience, ineffective employment transition support (see section 5 on Job Services Australia) and limited employment opportunities. Some community members expressed fear that ongoing unemployment could lead some community members down negative pathways. Concern was also expressed that adults were expected to accept work below their qualification or skill level which has an impact on children not aspiring to study and pursue higher goals.

At the same time, several consultation participants noted the link between stable employment and emotional wellbeing. Regular income was seen as a means for refugee entrants to avoid dependency on welfare support, reassert control over their lives and contribute to the community. A service provider in regional New South Wales noted that during the peak fruit-picking season, when more employment opportunities were available, they saw fewer refugee and humanitarian entrants presenting with depression and mental health issues. In the words of the provider: "We

see our clients smiling. They're starting to envisage a future for themselves.”

Consultation participants noted the need for more opportunities to undertake apprenticeships and internships or start social enterprises in order to develop hands-on experience and familiarity with Australian workplace systems and culture. It was suggested that volunteering opportunities could also be utilised in this manner. However, several participants noted the reluctance of some employers to hire people from refugee backgrounds, due to a perception that they lack skills or because of racism and discrimination. One community leader noted that employers in his area were “reluctant to employ people who are visibly different”. Some also noted that racism in the workplace can lead to people dropping out of work. It was suggested that there is a need to support employers and create incentives to hire people from refugee backgrounds, address misconceptions and combat racism in the workplace.

A number of participants felt that local councils and state and federal government departments could be more proactive in providing employment opportunities to people from refugee backgrounds. Several noted that government bodies often had policies in place to support indigenous employment and suggested that similar initiatives be implemented for refugee entrants.

Several service providers noted the need for increased support for refugee entrants seeking employment. It was suggested that career counselling or advice was needed to assist people in choosing a realistic career path and pursuing appropriate educational, training and work experience opportunities. Some providers noted that successful employment support programs run by their organisations in the past had been unable to continue due to a lack of funding.

1.7 Health

Significant concerns were raised by both service providers and refugee communities during this year's consultations in relation to difficulties in accessing mainstream health services, including both generalist providers such as hospitals and GPs and specialist providers such as optometrists, dentists and psychologists. It was noted that some mainstream health services lack experience or confidence in working with people from refugee or non-English speaking backgrounds and this resulted in a reluctance to work with these groups. One consultation participant provided the example of a hospital which refused to treat a woman from a non-English speaking background who required intensive treatment. The hospital eventually agreed to treat the woman after a volunteer intervened on her behalf. Several providers emphasised the need to work closely with mainstream health services to raise awareness of the needs of people from refugee and non-English speaking backgrounds and increase competency in working with these groups.

Use of interpreters by health professionals was highlighted as another major issue. Concerns were expressed that the lack of interpreting services can result in long waiting times for treatment and that some health professionals did not use interpreters at all. A service provider in a regional area, for example, noted that only one GP in the local area was willing to accept patients from non-English speaking backgrounds. One service provider noted that community-based mental health services were unable to meet demand from refugee and humanitarian entrants due to a lack of funding for interpreters and lack of access to TIS. This in turn placed pressure on services which specialise in working with people from refugee backgrounds, as they were often referred back from mainstream services. Several participants called for allied health professionals and community-based mental health services to be given free access to TIS, and for state health departments to explore ways of regulating the use of interpreters in the health sector so that health care providers were obligated to communicate with clients with limited English through an interpreter as a means of ensuring duty of care to them.

A number of service providers in regional areas highlighted the lack of transport for attending specialist appointments outside of the immediate area as an issue of concern. While it was acknowledged that this problem was not specific to refugee entrants, it was noted that people from refugee backgrounds often had significant health needs which required specialist treatment more often, and consequently, they were disproportionately affected by this issue.

Some service providers highlighted a need for ongoing mental health support after refugees had exited HSS. It was observed that refugees often experienced a “honeymoon” period during the initial months of settlement and, as a result, some mental health issues may not manifest themselves until several months later. Concern was expressed that after this time, people may no longer be eligible for funded services but cannot afford to pay for private counselling. It was also noted that there was a need for counselling for settlement-related trauma, as opposed to trauma experienced pre-arrival. One service provider suggested that there should be a specialised SGP stream for this form of counselling. Additionally, some providers identified a need to consider options for more culturally-appropriate counselling and support services. Suggestions include counselling services in refugee and humanitarian entrants’ own languages (as opposed to counselling sessions being relayed through interpreters) and using arts-based activities such as music and dance as a form of therapy.

1.8 Housing

Some of our clients say: “Why did you bring me to Australia when there’s nowhere to live?”
(Service provider, Dandenong)

The lack of affordable housing was raised as a key issue at the majority of consultations. In the words of one service provider, “accommodation consumes all organisations on a daily basis”. A number of refugee community members expressed concern about the large proportion of their income being spent on rent. The difficulties faced by people on a low income (particularly those reliant on support from Centrelink) in securing appropriate housing were also noted. Several participants observed that the lack of access to housing could lead to “couch surfing” and overcrowding as refugee entrants were compelled to live with extended families due to the absence of other housing options. It was also noted that lack of awareness of tenancy rights could leave refugee entrants vulnerable to exploitation by landlords.

Concerns were again raised that the high cost of housing often compelled refugee entrants to move to areas where housing was cheaper, which in turn could result in isolation from services and support. In the words of one service provider: “This is not fair. We welcome them with one arm and we’re slapping them in the face with the other.” Other participants reiterated the difficulty of securing affordable housing close to employment opportunities, noting that transport costs could cancel out savings on rent.

The challenges faced by large families in particular were noted by a number of participants. As one service provider commented “If it’s a family of more than five people, it starts to become a headache.” Another expressed concern that the lack of suitable housing options could break up large families, as they were forced to live across several different properties due to their inability to secure a single property suited to their needs. Several participants noted that landlords and real estate agents were often reluctant to lease properties to large families.

Several suggestions were put forward for resolving housing challenges. Many consultation participants called on the Government to play an active role in addressing the lack of availability of affordable housing. One service provider emphasised the importance of good relationships with real estate agents to securing appropriate housing for their clients. Another highlighted the need for HSS providers to ensure long-term housing security before exiting refugee and humanitarian entrants from the program. It was noted that leases often expired soon after people had exited HSS, and they must find new leases without support, placing them at risk of homelessness. One participant, noting the lack of ongoing housing support after people had exited HSS, suggested that a tenancy service be considered within SGP funding.

Young people were highlighted as a group particularly at risk of homelessness or housing stress. It was noted that young people face difficulties in securing their own accommodation as they may not be able to sign leases. One participant noted lack of data on homelessness amongst unaccompanied minors and asserted that they should be prioritised as a vulnerable group. It was

also noted that young people from refugee backgrounds faced difficulties in gaining access to appropriate crisis accommodation, public housing and transitional supported accommodation.

1.9 Youth, family issues and older people

The increased focus on young people in the HSS program was welcomed. At the same time, however, several participants continued to highlight young people as an at-risk group and emphasised the need for increased support and services to meet their needs, particularly in light of the large proportion of young people arriving through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Some called for additional funding for dedicated youth workers, to provide more opportunities for support workers to get involved with young people on a regular basis and offer intensive support to young people at risk of disengagement.

Participants also highlighted the need to create opportunities for young people to express themselves, engage with their communities and build peer-support networks. Several noted that sport can act as a particularly effective means of bringing young people together. It was also noted that sport can serve as a vehicle for providing information and other services, for example in relation to sexual health.

The impact of the settlement experience on family relationships was again noted as an issue of concern. Intergenerational issues, changing power relationships and the stresses associated with settling in a new country, particularly when family members faced difficulties in learning English, securing employment or dealing with past trauma, were highlighted as factors leading to conflict, family violence and relationship breakdown.

Overall, there was a general consensus about the need for early intervention to address family and relationship issues before they reach a point of crisis. It was noted that dedicated programs on family violence for refugee background communities were limited and there was a need for more culturally-specific information and support. Another participant observed that family violence and child protection services were not culturally-responsive, with the result that young people continued to live in risky circumstances and often chose not to report incidences of violence or abuse. At the same time, concern was expressed that child protection was a confusing and sensitive issue for parents and that families may be reluctant to seek help for fear of having their children removed. The need for better engagement between child protection authorities and refugee background communities was noted. It was also suggested that child protection issues should be included in a structured cultural orientation program.

Several participants in this year's consultations raised issues relating to older people from refugee backgrounds. One participant welcomed the resettlement of older family members through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, noting that this relieved family members in Australia of the pressures of supporting relatives overseas. At the same time, however, other participants noted the need to ensure that older people from refugee backgrounds, and their families, received adequate and appropriately tailored settlement support. A service provider expressed concern about older people being at risk of isolation due to poor English and lack of community connections. Another provider noted that some refugee and humanitarian entrants were not attending English classes so that they could care for older relatives.

It was noted that older people often required more intensive settlement support due to their more complex needs related to health, disability and securing appropriate housing. This in turn leads to a need for greater resources for settlement service providers to address these more complex needs. One service provider observed that an 85-year-old newly arrived refugee in poor health required perhaps 10 times the level of service support of that required by a healthy 30-year-old, something which HSS contractors did not consider in the tendering process.

1.10 Financial issues

Some refugee entrants felt they were under financial stress as the support available through Centrelink was insufficient to cover the varied expenses of settlement. Concern was expressed by some participants that they could not afford goods and services such as computers, sporting activities for children or driving lessons. One participant stated that they sometimes could not afford even basic food items after meeting the combined costs of rent and utility bills.

1.11 Legal and migration advice

The lack of affordable migration advice was again highlighted as a key gap in settlement services. Concern was expressed that a lack of migration advice could present a barrier to family reunion. Some service providers in regional areas noted a particularly urgent need for migration advice, observing that refugee entrants were forced to travel to capital cities for professional advice due to a lack of local services.

A number of service providers again reported incidents of former refugee who had been exploited by door-to-door salespeople signing people up to contracts which they did not understand due to poor English skills, or offering fraudulent contracts. One consultation participant provided the example of a door-to-door internet salesperson who signed a man from a refugee background up to a contract for an internet service, even though he didn't have a computer. The man was then pursued for defaulting on payments.

1.12 Driving and transport

Several participants noted that refugee entrants attempting to gain a driver's licence to secure employment found the high cost of professional driving lessons a significant obstacle. Some service providers noted that they had run successful driver education programs but these were insufficient to meet demand or had been discontinued due to lack of funding. A service provider in Western Australia reported that refugee entrants would have to travel to Sydney if they wished to undertake a computerised driving test in their own language, as the test was not available locally. Some participants noted that the difficulties faced in obtaining a driver's license had prompted some people driving unlicensed, expressing concern that this had led to fines, accidents, cars being impounded and criminal charges.

A number of participants also raised concerns relating to public transport. Some participants in regional areas noted that public transport was not adequate to meet the needs of communities settling in the area, which resulted in refugee entrants missing out on services or facing difficulties in accessing employment. Another participant noted that using public transport could become difficult for larger families when different children needed to be accompanied to different locations.

1.13 Translating and interpreting

Several participants highlighted challenges in securing interpreters in the languages of new and emerging communities. One service provider observed that there was a delay in providing interpreting services for emerging communities as new interpreters were trained and accredited. It was noted that securing interpreters even for well-established languages could be difficult in regional areas. Another participant noted that maintaining interpreting services was difficult, as interpreters were often on casual contracts and could not continue to provide services once they secured full time employment.

Some concerns were raised in relation to the appropriateness of interpreting services provided. One service provider, for example, noted that young people were reluctant to talk about certain issues through interpreters from their own communities. Another participant noted that male interpreters had been sent to accompany women to doctor's appointments.

Finally, a number of service providers raised concerns about government departments and mainstream service providers, including police and health services, failing to use interpreters. One provider noted that this had resulted in their organisation “spending a fortune on interpreting fees”.

2. REVIEWING CURRENT MODELS OF SETTLEMENT SERVICE PROVISION

The past 12 months has seen some significant changes to models of settlement service provision for refugee and humanitarian entrants. At this year’s consultations, RCOA asked for feedback on changes to settlement services – in particular, the HSS, AMEP, SGP and torture and trauma services – and how service users and providers thought these new models were tracking. Questions were also asked about how the needs of Woman at Risk visa holders and people with a disability were being met by settlement services.

Feedback from consultation participants was generally positive, with many people acknowledging and commending the Australian Government for its ongoing and significant investment into providing a system of support for new arrivals. A number of participants did, however, raise concerns about the lack of an overarching settlement framework and coordination between services, particularly across the different levels of government and between mainstream and settlement services. As one service provider in Bendigo said: “There needs to be better and clearer delineation about what federal, state and local governments are doing in terms of settlement support so each layer knows what the other is trying to do and resources are distributed appropriately. At the moment, funding is spread sporadically and community groups are running around getting little bits of money for this and that, but it’s not coordinated or part of a broader framework.” RCOA acknowledges that the Department is currently developing a Settlement Services Framework and looks forward to this being finalised and informing future settlement planning, funding and service coordination.

An emerging theme at this year’s consultations was the need for the settlement and asylum sectors to work more closely together, particularly in the context of the expansion of community detention arrangements, the introduction of bridging visas, and with significant numbers of asylum seekers receiving Protection Visas and moving through into settlement services.

As in previous years, many people spoke about the issues facing settlement services linked to short-term DIAC funding models in terms of poor staff retention, the inability of organisations to build capacity and plan and the lack of opportunities to provide appropriate professional development. Staff burn-out and movement out of the sector were mentioned in a number of states, including staff being recruited from settlement services into community detention services.

A number of service providers spoke about the challenges of liaising with the different government departments and state and national offices of DIAC and receiving different information from different branches of the same department. One service provider reported having to liaise regularly with five different sections within DIAC and receiving conflicting information and varied responses from each.

2.1 Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS)

The Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS) replaced the former Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) in 2011. Significant differences between the HSS and the former IHSS include the introduction of an onshore orientation component, greater emphasis on case management, including a focus on young people, and greater access to HSS services for Special Humanitarian Program entrants. Although the program is still in its first year, some of the elements of the new HSS which have been welcomed by services and service users are the increased focus on young people, the introduction of onshore orientation and the enhanced capacity of services to provide case management support.

The main areas of concern regarding the HSS that were raised in consultations included:

- *Funding and the roll-out of the HSS* – A number of services in different states were concerned with the lack of lead-in time from the announcement of successful HSS contractors to the commencement of services. Some services were overwhelmed in the first part of the contract by large numbers of referrals, with staff struggling with enormous caseloads, while others (including in regional areas) have not received enough referrals to sustain staffing levels. As services are paid in arrears, providers are struggling to plan and budget to maintain appropriate staffing in the context of such uncertainty.
- *Communication between DIAC and HSS providers* – Service providers were concerned about the lack of information being received from DIAC at the time new arrivals were referred. This was linked mainly to the referral of people being released from detention (see Section 3). Of particular concern was the lack of information, and therefore service preparedness, about people with special needs. For example, one HSS provider was unaware that a woman was pregnant before her family arrived and had sourced accommodation that was not appropriate for a family expecting a baby.
- *Focus on outcomes* – The focus in the HSS contracts on outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants was received well by some service providers, although questions were raised about the adequacy of funding to achieve particular outcomes. For example, the achievement of one outcome for one person may involve one visit or 15 but the HSS provider receives the same payment. In the context of a current caseload with particularly complex needs, the outcomes focus and funding model was seen as too inflexible. One suggestion was that providers have the flexibility to accommodate situations where refugee and humanitarian entrants elect not to access a particular service within the contract specified time line, or do not need a service and the provider is satisfied that there are no duty of care issues. This means that DIAC contract managers need to allow sufficient program flexibility for providers to meet performance measures while implementing a strengths-based approach.
- *Youth sub-plans* – Many people welcomed the increased focus on young people in the HSS, but some commented on the lack of consistency in the development of the youth sub-plans. Although the youth focus in HSS is very much in developmental stages, some consultation participants recommended that HSS services be given more support and training to develop youth models and resources and for the youth and settlement sectors to work collaboratively on this.
- *Accommodation* – Finding suitable accommodation presents a major hurdle for HSS services, with many service users and providers speaking about people being moved from short-term accommodation to short-term accommodation because of the local rental market and the generally poor standard of housing.
- *Torture and trauma counselling* – Some services felt that the HSS had lost an important element with the movement of torture and trauma services out of an integrated model to a separate funding body. Previously, the incorporation of torture and trauma counselling into the IHSS package meant that referral was more embedded. This year, many services spoke about the lack of clarity and referral pathways for HSS clients into torture and trauma services.
- *Volunteer engagement* – The new HSS model includes optional volunteer engagement, and volunteers in some contract areas spoke of frustration and disengagement as HSS contractors have not retained or sought their ongoing involvement.
- *Household goods package* – Many people spoke with frustration about changes to the household goods package, particularly the variation in the quality of goods and the fact that households instead of individuals receive the package. One community member in Shepparton who was still receiving HSS services spoke about wishing to move out of the house he was originally placed in with seven single men so that he can pursue his studies. However, the start-up goods package was provided to the household as a whole and, if he moves, he will be unable to afford any furniture of his own. In another case, a mother who had received her Protection Visa one month ago and was expecting a baby in two months' time was not provided with any furniture for the baby. Others recommended the inclusion of clocks, calendars and wrist watches as important items to facilitate meeting appointments in early stages of settlement.

- *Case managers* – Refugee and humanitarian entrants spoke about the importance of having case managers who spoke their language and felt that communication and service quality would be enhanced by having staff who understood where they came from and did not require interpreters every time an appointment was made.

2.2 Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

The increased focus on careers pathway counselling and settlement orientation in the AMEP was welcomed as a positive step. Many of the concerns raised by community members and service providers about the AMEP regarding insufficient hours, inflexibility and childcare were similar to those of previous years, with some new issues raised regarding enrolment eligibility, payment for attendance and home tutoring:

- *Insufficient time* – As in previous years, many community members and service providers spoke about the insufficient hours provided under the AMEP. After finishing the AMEP, many participants are still not confident using English in everyday situations including looking for work. Some service providers suggested that hours not used by some clients could be reallocated to those requiring more time.
- *Flexibility* – Many people spoke of the need for more flexible class times such as in the evening and on weekends to meet the needs of AMEP students, particularly in rural areas.
- *Childcare* – The issue of insufficient childcare provision for women to attend AMEP classes and to continue learning English over a longer time period was raised at a number of consultation locations, including Wollongong, Geelong, Perth, Newcastle and Melbourne. Some services spoke about a three month waiting list for childcare places. While the Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance¹ was seen as beneficial for women who had not attained a sufficient level of English during the AMEP and continue on into the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), two years was not considered an adequate eligibility timeframe for women who learn English over a much longer time period while they are raising children.
- *Enrolment policy* – Some services spoke about the new rules in the AMEP with respect to enrolment only in the first two weeks needing to be tested to see whether students found these arrangements workable. While some felt there were advantages in not having continuous enrolment in classes, there were also disadvantages in reduced flexibility for students and some people having to wait long periods of time after arriving before being able to start learning English. In addition, concern was raised that people had to enrol in AMEP classes within six months of arrival or they became ineligible. However, some new arrivals in regional areas see employment as a priority and undertake seasonal work. It was felt that there should be some flexibility for these people to be able to go back to AMEP in the off season or attend evening classes within the first year.
- *Payment for attendance* – Some AMEP providers spoke about the challenges of working within a DIAC contract which pays based on attendance when a larger number of students are mobile or have a higher incidence of trauma and mental health issues. Similarly, mothers with small children often struggle to attend AMEP classes regularly if children are unwell. Newly arrived children are often unwell, because of unresolved health issues or exposure to new germs in Australia (an even greater problem for children regularly in child care). Parents often cannot come to English classes because their child is not well enough to go to child care. If a parent is unable to attend class for two weeks, DIAC contract conditions require that he/she has to wait until next term to re-enrol.
- *Home tutoring* - Current restrictions on the AMEP Home Tutor Program mean that funding is not available to cover the cost of those using this program if students are also in classes of more than six hours a week. A number of people felt it would be beneficial to remove this restriction for those students who are identified by counsellors as needing additional social support.

¹ <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/jet.htm>

2.3 Settlement Grants Program (SGP)

In 2011-12, \$53,276,074 in SGP grant money was announced for 179 projects to be delivered by 146 organisations.² This year saw a significant increase in the overall funding announced; however, this was due to a welcome increase in the proportion of two or three year grants. In terms of community comments about the SGP, the Department's responsiveness to the call for longer term project funding was welcomed by many people, although others still felt it did not go far enough and could be extended to five year contracts for well-established services. Services that have been funded for consecutive one-year grants continue to raise concerns about the great burden and insecurity of single year project grants on service planning and staff retainment.

In areas where there has been a significant increase in refugee settlement, service providers felt that SGP funding had not kept pace. This is particularly problematic in regional areas where there is a lack of alternative and responsive services that refugee and humanitarian entrants can be referred to. In contrast, settlement workers and community members in larger metropolitan centres spoke about the frequent turnover in SGP funded agencies and projects. When changes occur, local services and organisations generally are not informed about the new SGP contractors and what they are being funded to provide. This sense of confusion is exacerbated by the short timeframe between the funding announcements and the closing of old services and commencement of new ones. This means that individual settlement workers need to search independently for this information in order to know where to make referrals.

2.4 Torture and trauma services

In 2011, a new Torture and Trauma Counselling (TTC) Grants Program administered by the Department of Health and Ageing replaced short-term torture and trauma counselling services previously funded through the IHSS program (now HSS). These changes have received a mixed response. While some consultation participants felt that it was positive that other federal departments were taking responsibility for meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants, others felt that the transition and funding parameters of the new program had serious limitations. The main concerns raised include:

- Generally, consultation participants felt that torture and trauma (TT) services were more stretched and the services being offered were more limited than under the previous IHSS. For example, TT services are being asked to do more with less funding, including outreach to regional areas, and to focus on individual trauma counselling to the exclusion of other more holistic approaches such as community development, group therapy and family relationship counselling.
- Many services in non-metropolitan areas, including Wagga Wagga, Albury-Wodonga, Coffs Harbour, Shepparton, Rockhampton, Cairns and Townsville, felt there was a lack of resources and/or responsiveness by TT services to servicing communities in regional areas.
- A number of HSS providers spoke about the increasing challenges of having to undertake mental health assessments of refugee and humanitarian entrants without adequate support from TT services, and the lack of funding for developing training support and referral protocols under both HSS and the TTC grants program. Where torture and trauma services are not compulsory now, it was felt that it is more likely people will fail to get the help they need.
- In some locations, there was confusion about what services under the new TTC model torture and trauma services are able to provide. For example, some service providers said that refugees who did not have direct experience of torture were ineligible for TT counselling support, that only pre-arrival settlement experiences were able to be included in the consideration of referrals (i.e. trauma related to detention was not considered), and that many referrals were being rejected by TT services.

² RCOA (2011). *The Settlement Grants Program 2010-2011*, www.refugeecouncil.org.au/settlement/services/SGP_2011-12.pdf

2.5 Support for Woman at Risk visa entrants

During consultations, community members and service providers were asked to comment on how women and children coming through the Woman at Risk (sub-class 204) program can be better supported in terms of settlement services. Some participants felt that women and children arriving under visa subclass 204 were particularly vulnerable, often isolated within their own communities and faced risk of further violence in Australia. The “one size fits all” response within the HSS program, they believe, does not address the needs of these people. Some service providers reported a lack of clarity about what women and children on 204 visas have experienced and this affected their ability to plan a sensitive response. Others argued that there was a need for additional funding and intensive settlement support within HSS and SGP in order to sensitively address the needs of vulnerable women and children, for example, ensuring there are female counsellors, securing safe housing options, providing opportunities for isolated women to connect with services and communities, and ensuring there are consistent referral protocols between HSS and SGP services to ensure ongoing case management support.

2.6 People with a disability

For refugee and humanitarian entrants who arrive with a disability or who acquire a disability in Australia, there are a number of issues to confront. The difficulties faced by families supporting a relative with a disability are great. Add to the equation disability services that often do not understand issues for people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background or with a refugee experience, and inexperience or inability to use interpreters, and the situation is even worse for families.

Consultation participants spoke about the need for better awareness within disability services of issues for people with a refugee experience, as well as for the agencies that would make referrals (schools, health departments, etc). The stigma attached to disability in some communities also means that support may not be sought, leaving the person with a disability isolated and neglected. Linking people quickly to support services was identified as key to helping them to settle. It was suggested that community leaders receive training about disability so that they can provide information and advice to their communities. Already there are several local programs building the capacity of communities to provide this advocacy and support, so an expansion of this work is vital.

3. THE SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE OF REFUGEES WHO ARRIVE ONSHORE

A range of issues concerning the impact of immigration detention on the settlement experiences and outcomes of Protection Visa holders was raised by both former detainees and by settlement service providers across the country. Feedback from consultations homed in on key issues that require consideration and policy responses. These issues included the communication between DIAC and HSS providers; access to appropriate mental health services for people coming out of detention; the erosion of trust between Protection Visa holders and service providers; the mobility and transitory nature of onshore arrivals; the provision of orientation services and the expectations of Protection Visa holders; and issues relating to family reunion.

3.1 Communication issues

The very short timeframe between someone being granted a Protection Visa and being released from detention and the referral from the detention to the settlement service has meant that some contractors are struggling to ensure that adequate provisions are made to receive these clients. Services advised that they sometimes did not know the ethnicity of people arriving at the airport so, while they had bicultural workers available, they did not know who to send. Most services advised that they received 24 to 48 hours’ notice of people arriving from any given immigration detention centre, and some receive notification just hours before the arrival of a new group (even large groups).

Accessing appropriate short-term accommodation is just one of the challenges faced by settlement services in this context. Services also have to ensure that staff are available on very short notice. This approach has meant a change in the way services are delivered, with a “crisis management” style more in line with the environment. This chaotic system is stressful not only for the staff of support services but also for the Protection Visa holders. It is difficult for settlement providers to create a calm, welcoming atmosphere in this crisis setting.

Current communication channels and referral processes between DIAC and HSS providers have meant that settlement services do not receive adequate information on a person’s medical history and background (including mental health needs). A number of service providers revealed that people were coming out of detention with severe disabilities and medical needs but that services were not advised of these issues, including little or no information about current medications. A number of people felt that medical practitioners required more information in order to be able to appropriately treat people coming out of detention and that there were significant risks to health care and management because of the lack of effective communication channels.

3.2 Mental health issues

The higher incidence of trauma and mental health issues in this group make the provision of settlement services more challenging. The experiences of people while in detention, as well as inadequate mental health care, has left many former detainees believing that seeking help from a counsellor or psychologist is useless. This has meant that people will often not engage with settlement services. Their engagement, however, is vital, as many people coming out of detention demonstrate high anxiety and stress levels after their extended time incarcerated. Many people have witnessed repeated suicide attempts and acts of self-harm from friends and fellow detainees.

A number of mental health experts noted that a lack of early intervention or sharing of information between services exacerbated the problems experienced by Protection Visa holders. The lack of information about people’s time in detention or whether they have harmed themselves means that service providers are not adequately informed or able to design effective and timely responses. Given the high number of cases presenting at one time, services may find it difficult to complete the intensive assessments required and home in on complex mental health issues without additional information or history. Many case managers at the consultations called for additional training to be able to better identify mental health issues and make appropriate referrals. There was also a need identified for more referrals to torture and trauma services for all people granted a Refugee, SHP or Protection Visa.

There was a call at consultations for more diversity in services addressing mental health issues. People leaving detention are presenting with myriad conditions, and mental health services need to address this variety. There is also a need for all mental health services to have an understanding of specific refugee and asylum seeker needs. As with other settlement services, the move towards assisting refugees to access mainstream services requires capacity-building for mental health services. That is, a lack of understanding and fear of how to work with former asylum seekers and refugees drives the reluctance of some healthcare providers, so a strengthening of their understanding is vital, with the training of mental health service providers in understanding the mental health impact of detention a recommendation coming out of several consultations. There is a pressing need to up-skill and educate counsellors in mainstream health services so that they can work with this group. An effective model suggested for expansion to the mental health sector exists in the Refugee Health Nurse Program in Victoria.

While the investment in mainstream youth mental health services was welcomed by many participants, it was acknowledged that these services often did not have the capacity to meet the needs of refugee young people. There needs to be capacity building and development within these agencies so that they are able to respond to needs of young people coming out of detention. It was also suggested that mentoring programs and programs to foster community connection could be expanded.

3.3 Erosion of trust

Feedback from settlement services highlighted that long-term detention often engendered a lack of trust in authority and in the services that are designed to assist people. There were reports that former detainees were often angry, not trusting of case workers and felt that there has been a miscarriage of justice because they had been in detention for so long. The lack of trust towards Australian services and bureaucracies of former detainees as a consequence of their detention experience means settlement service providers must invest greater time and resources establishing trust in order to provide services.

These feelings of distrust and unease were exacerbated when DIAC visited former detainees' homes to complete audit services within the first few months of their settlement. The former detainees were shocked by this visit and felt that their "jailer" had invaded their home (a place where they were supposed to be free). This trauma response should have been foreshadowed and appropriate alternative options explored for the audit.

3.4 Mobility

The highly mobile nature of this group means that people are relocating sometimes multiple times during their first six to 12 months. Relocations can take place in the first few weeks after being released from detention, and the "no duplication of services" policy of DIAC means that people who have received some services in one contract region are no longer entitled to these services in another contract region. For example, if a service provider has completed essential registrations for a person in one contract region, they are not eligible for this support in a subsequent contract region, even though the person must, for example, still re-register with Centrelink and enrol children in school in their new location and may require support to be able to do this.

It was also reported that some Protection Visa holders were being referred to places where they had no links and did not have a desire to go. This meant that the people would quickly fund their own transfers to regions where they have community links.

This mobility also places settlement services in difficult positions. English language provision was noted as challenging, as whole classes were sometimes disappearing due to self-relocation, leaving the agencies unable to accurately record services which have been delivered.

A number of settlement agencies made recommendations in order to respond to interstate transfers. These recommendations include the need for DIAC to allow part payments for some services and some duplication of services (with associated payment) to provide capacity in the HSS service delivery model to manage the implications of interstate transfers. Areas of the contract that are involved include:

- essential service registration, where a provider can only claim once all services registrations have been completed but, in most transfers, refugees leave the state before all registrations are completed;
- health services, where a referral must be made to a GP and follow up referrals undertaken; and
- supporting refugees who have moved to re-establish long-term accommodation.

3.5 Orientation and expectations

The lack of pre-arrival orientation and the absence of links in Australia for many Protection Visa holders mean there can be a significant disjuncture between their expectations of what settlement and other services can provide and the realities. For people who have spent time in community detention, the different quality and types of services provided can give rise to unrealistic expectations of settlement services. For example, people in community detention do not cover the full cost of their rental accommodation and can be housed in areas where they are unlikely to be able to afford similar style accommodation once they are granted a visa. Some service providers noted that the lack of pre-arrival orientation also means that Protection Visa holders start at a very

different point to their offshore stream counterparts in that they have very little idea about Australian service systems, expectations and acculturation processes. For example, many have survived by being assertive and this can be interpreted as aggressive by some (particularly mainstream) service providers.

Many of the young people on Protection Visas have limited experience of formal education and training (although considerable survival skills) and their trusted information sources are more predominantly through their peers and community leaders rather than from service providers or more formal orientation programs delivered through settlement support. This suggests the need to work with community leaders and ethno-specific organisations and think about models of peer information provision.

In order to ensure that the needs of onshore Protection Visa holders are met, consultation participants suggested that settlement agencies and DIAC work collaboratively and flexibly to respond to emerging needs and trends as they arise. This includes allowing 866 visa holders some choice in original settlement location in order to reduce the instability and costs associated with subsequent relocations, and the consideration of DIAC developing and funding a transition step for people being released from detention. This could involve housing Protection Visa holders in short-term accommodation sourced for the purpose and developing a targeted transitional orientation program to be delivered at this site. It was also suggested that agencies involved in community detention should draw on the resources of community support groups in order to ease the transition of people in community detention following the granting of their Protection Visa.

3.6 Family reunion

People coming out of detention have the same priorities as refugees resettling from outside Australia: to find a job in order to send money back to family and to reunite with family as soon as possible. Family is a priority, and the process of settlement and effective participation in society cannot begin until people know that their family is safe. As one consultation participant put it: “The journey of fleeing persecution, then enduring detention then experiencing release into the community is a journey through anticipation, euphoria, disappointment and hope. To then find out the low possibility of sponsoring family members is devastating. There needs to be greater potential to sponsor families for people to begin their lives in Australia”. Many participants in the consultations also said that people on Protection Visas were not thinking about settlement and were focused on reuniting with their families. This has an impact on settlement services, as people are unable to fully participate in the development of their settlement plan.

4. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

A significant numbers of minors have sought asylum in Australia and been granted Protection Visas in recent years. In 2010-11, for example, 1,082 minors arrived by boat to seek asylum³, a significant proportion of whom were unaccompanied. In this context, RCOA asked consultation participants what issues or concerns they had about current care arrangements for unaccompanied minors – both asylum seekers and those who are on permanent Protection Visas – and what sort of guardianship arrangements or delegation they thought was needed to ensure the needs and rights of unaccompanied minors were upheld.

Representatives of a number of services which support unaccompanied minors acknowledged that DIAC was undertaking work in this area, and particularly welcomed the national pilot in three states to provide targeted settlement support to 16- and 17-year-old UHMs who arrive without identified carers and who have been assessed as capable of living independently. However, many issues will not be addressed by this pilot and require urgent consideration by DIAC and the Minister in order to ensure young people are appropriately cared for. Concerns include:

- *Conflict of interest* – Under existing Australian law, the Minister for Immigration is the guardian for both unaccompanied humanitarian minors (UHMs) and unaccompanied minors seeking

³ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2011). *Asylum Trends Australia: 2010-11 Annual Publication*, p.30

asylum (UAMs). In both cases, this system allows for the appointment or delegation of guardianship to DIAC officers or non-government agencies. These arrangements are problematic, both in terms of a potential conflict of interest for the Minister and, where the Minister delegates guardianship to relevant state and territory agencies, the lack of a nationally consistent model of care for UHMs and UAMs.⁴ Concern regarding guardianship conflict of interest was raised at many of the consultations, with one suggestion being that it would be better if the guardianship was held at a ministerial level by the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, so that the guardian was equal in seniority to the Immigration Minister. It was felt that the guardian needs to be at a Federal level to avoid complications which may occur if a State Minister has guardianship and the minor moved interstate.

- *Lack of a national framework* – In the absence of a national framework and commensurate resourcing for the care of UHMs and UAMs, many service providers felt that young people’s needs were not being met and many young people were put at risk. There was a general call for a more consolidated national approach for how children are cared for in the community, including ensuring there were guidelines for carers, and ensuring young people had access to appropriate counselling, education, social, community and transitional support. As one service provider in Adelaide argued: “We need consistent standards in states and territories, whether the minor is cared for through a government or non-government agency.”
- *Lack of clarity regarding delegation of guardianship* – Many consultation participants, including community detention providers, were unclear about how guardianship was delegated and who was responsible in practical terms for both UAMs and UHMs. Community-based asylum seeker minors were identified as a particularly vulnerable group in the absence of a guardian or delegation and because of their ineligibility for specialist support.
- *Young people relocating between states* – Current inconsistencies across the country and a lack of a national framework mean that some young people who do not have a nominated carer are being moved to other states after being granted a Protection Visa. These young people are relocating back to places where they have built connections while in community detention, leaving them very vulnerable and without support. For example, young people aged 17 are unable to sign some legal contracts such as housing leases and are vulnerable to homelessness or likely to move to overcrowded and insecure accommodation. While the Immigration Minister is still technically their guardian, the delegation to a state or territory agency is not easily transferred to another state or territory agency.
- *Inappropriate carers* – Linked closely to the above point, many consultation participants report UHMs are finding their own carers in order to avoid being relocated after being granted a Protection Visa, and that sometimes young people are placed in care arrangements that are inappropriate and where even well-intentioned carers lack support. One service provider in Queensland, for example, reported seeing a lot of young men starting to experience problems of clashing with, and being threatened by, their carers.
- *Lack of carer options and support* – In response to the situation of either young people being relocated interstate or being placed in inappropriate care relationships, services called on DIAC to invest in a program to recruit, train and support carers, including seeking carers from within communities. The development of carer guidelines and support would help caregivers who want to help but are not stable or settled themselves to provide the kind of support these young people need. It would assist in developing new options, such as responding to the request from some young people to be placed with Australian families.
- *Family reunion* – The issues concerning UHMs being unable to reunite with family under split family reunion provisions in the SHP because of processing delays and the “time of decision” requirement was again raised as a serious concern this year. This year, services spoke of children as young as 14 being told their application under Split Family provisions were unlikely to be processed before they turned 18. Many service providers talked about the devastating impact on young people of being indefinitely separated from their parents. Some young people have been told they will not be able to reunite with their parents under Split Family provisions,

⁴ See RCOA (2011). *Australian Human Rights Commission and Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network submissions’ to Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill 2010 Inquiry*, www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/commissioner_for_childrenandyoungpeople/submissions.htm

but they also cannot travel back to countries of asylum to visit or reunite with family members, as they are unable to leave the country while under the guardianship of the Immigration Minister. As one service provider put it: “The indefinite separation of children from their families must be a contravention of Australia’s responsibilities as a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child”.

- *Transitions out of care* – A number of people raised concerns about the lack of transition support for young people who turn 18 and called for Federal wards to be entitled to the same leaving care programs as offered under State child protection. This would also assist young people who are non-wards who turn 18 and where the relationship with their carer often ends at that point. These young people often lack independent living skills and have been identified as particularly vulnerable, including to homelessness if their carer moves to another area or asks them to leave.
- *Determining age of minors* – Concerns have been raised about a number of young people claiming to be minors who are most likely much older. Schools, for example, are very concerned about this as young people are required to attend school until they are 17 in some states; however, on visual presentation some of these young people seem much older than 18. This is causing tensions within some communities. At the same time, if a person wants to declare that they are an adult despite their original declaration of being a minor, the current system punishes them and makes the declaration less likely.

5. EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS, INCOME MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

Questions 4.5, 4.6 and 4.8 in the consultation discussion paper focused on the impacts on refugee and humanitarian entrants of issues relating to Job Services Australia, income management and the National Education Agreement. Detailed feedback was received in each of these three areas and will be developed by RCOA into supplementary documents directed to the Federal and State departments responsible for these areas of policy. The following provides only a brief summary of some of the key consultation findings.

5.1 Job Services Australia (JSA)

- *The JSA model* – Community members across the country almost unanimously expressed dissatisfaction with the JSA system. Most consultation participants felt that JSA providers were ineffective in helping refugee and humanitarian entrants find jobs and that those who found work did so through their own networks or with the help of settlement and other community services. The main reason given for the ineffectiveness of the JSA model was that it is based on profit and not social equity, so jobseekers who were put in the “too hard basket” were overlooked by JSA providers (who are paid for particular outcomes). Refugee and humanitarian entrants are often given insufficient support because they face multiple employment barriers that require targeted approaches, and there is no incentive for JSA providers to put resources into the types of targeted responses that are known to work.⁵ As such, refugee and humanitarian entrants are sidelined and are often referred for endless training courses. As one Burmese community member in Melbourne put it: “The JSAs are a problem. They get us to sit in front of a computer for two hours a day, three days a week, and tell you if you don’t come, your payments will be cut. But they don’t help you to get a job. It takes our time and money to come into their office for nothing. They need to find us a proper job, not waste our time.”
- *Career advice* – While the focus on employment transitions within AMEP and HSS was seen as positive, a major gap in culturally-competent career guidance and support was identified for those who have exited from AMEP and HSS (i.e. post 12 months). Many consultation participants spoke about the lack of appropriate career guidance provided to refugee and humanitarian entrants by JSAs, and that this lack of guidance meant that people were following unsuitable career paths (e.g. young people doing bricklaying courses with no interest in, or aptitude for, this trade).

⁵ Olliff, L. (2010). *What Works: Employment strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants*, RCOA: Sydney

- *Cultural competency and discrimination* – Across the country, consultation participants spoke about the lack of cultural competency of many JSA providers. This included inappropriate processes (e.g. forms being given to people who cannot read, interpreters not being used, people being told to apply online for jobs when they have no computer literacy) and many cases of discrimination. A number of people spoke about JSA case managers making judgements about people because of their appearance (e.g. highly qualified people being told to think about abattoir or cleaning work “because of the colour of their skin”). Some service providers felt JSAs should be given star ratings based on their capacity to work with diverse communities.
- *Use of interpreters* – Many JSA providers do not use interpreters, resulting in refugee and humanitarian entrants being unable to communicate with their case managers and reports of people going to appointments but not speaking. Some JSAs are paying for the use of interpreters by drawing on a client’s available training funds. An example given in regional NSW was of more than \$800 being paid from a person’s training budget for interpreter services, leaving little funding for much-needed training.
- *Streaming* – Consultation participants spoke about refugee and humanitarian entrants being assessed as requiring stream 1 or 2 JSA support when in reality they required more intensive services and should be eligible for stream 3 or 4. A number of people felt that the questions that Centrelink ask as part of Job Skills Capacity Index (JSCI) assessment did not adequately identify disadvantage. There were also concerns about the timing of these assessments and whether it is appropriate for them to happen in the first three months of settlement.
- *Training providers* – A range of issues were raised regarding the link between vocational training and the JSA model. Refugee and humanitarian entrants are often referred to training by JSAs (including to a JSA’s own Registered Training Organisation arm) and are frustrated by the lack of connection between these training courses and employment outcomes. As one community member in Gippsland described: “We keep on getting qualifications – aged care, disability, security – but this does not lead to jobs. I don’t mind doing the training if it leads to a job, but it doesn’t.” Of particular concern this year are reports of unscrupulous and unregulated (for-profit) training providers targeting refugee communities, with reports of training providers standing outside Centrelink to recruit, door knocking in public housing estates, offering “incentives” to community leaders, and offering sub-standard courses that are not recognised by industry (e.g. offering a six-day certificate in aged care that normally takes six months). Moreover, once a person has done a certificate at a certain level they become ineligible for fee-free places for subsequent courses at the same level. This makes the need for good career advice and referral to appropriate training courses even more important. One community member reported: “I told the job network agency I need to improve my English but they refuse to support me with funds to further my English. They want me to do a course that I have no interest in at all. I would like to study nursing not hospitality.” Another said: “I want to study nursing but the job network agency has sent me to get my forklift licence”.
- *Work experience* – Linked to the issue of lack of targeted support, many consultation participants identified the lack of support from JSAs for refugee and humanitarian entrants to acquire much-needed Australian work experience. Moreover, the JSA model does not recognise and support volunteering as a participation activity that can also help new arrivals gain experience.
- *Inappropriate work placements* – For refugee and humanitarian entrants who do find employment through JSAs, concerns have been raised about the appropriateness of this work. Some people in metropolitan areas have been told to relocate to regional areas to take up work that is short-term and casual, with the threat of losing their Centrelink payments if they do not cooperate. This is causing great disruption to families who are negotiating their settlement, with reports of children being left at home while parents go and work night shifts, families having to relocate after children have settled in schools, and some people choosing to commute substantial distances (e.g. from Werribee to Bendigo) for evening shifts, leaving children at home to be looked after by older children. Other services raised concerns about people who have post-traumatic stress disorder being referred for work in abattoirs slaughtering animals.

- *Employment and English* – A number of consultation participants felt that JSA providers were pressuring people to stop English classes and take up training, even if their English level was not suitable. Some service providers felt that JSAs should have to liaise with ESL providers regarding whether a person has sufficient English to move into training or work, and that learning English to an adequate level should be a recognised outcome.

5.2 Income management

Following on from the introduction of a compulsory income management scheme in the Northern Territory in 2007, a new Income Management Scheme is being introduced.⁶ The scheme is part of the Australian Government's *Building Australia's Future Workforce* package and is designed to "minimise the conditions that lead to unemployment and child neglect".⁷ For Centrelink recipients who are assessed as vulnerable and placed on income management⁸, a percentage of their income support (ranging from 50% to 70%) will be allocated in a non-cash form to account for priority goods and services. The income managed portion, for example, can be paid directly for rent and utilities or can be allocated to a "Basics Card" to be used in registered stores. Non essential items such as alcohol, pornography and gambling services cannot be purchased with income managed money.⁹

Income management will be piloted in five local government areas across Australia starting in July 2012. These are Bankstown in New South Wales, Logan and Rockhampton in Queensland, Playford in South Australia and Shepparton in Victoria. All of these local government areas have significant refugee and humanitarian settlement. RCOA held face-to-face consultations in Bankstown, Logan, Adelaide, Shepparton and Darwin. Issues regarding income management raised at these consultations included:

- *Voluntary and involuntary income management* – A major concern is how people are determined as vulnerable and how people's independence is compromised by involuntary income management. As one consultation participant said: "There's no problem if people have a choice but they shouldn't make it compulsory." Other people believed that if a person volunteered to be involved in income management, he or she had to stay on it for six months. The voluntary nature of income management needs to be explained clearly to people so they know they can opt in and out. One refugee entrant was stressed because he thought he was locked in and did not know he could opt out.
- *The refugee experience* – Some people felt that income management for people who have no skills whatsoever is possibly justifiable but, for refugee and humanitarian entrants who have managed to keep their family intact and survived on limited resources for many years after fleeing persecution, income management represents a deprivation of liberty that does not duly recognise the experience that these families have had. As one community member in Adelaide said: "It sounds like the ration card I had in Kakuma. It almost turns people back into refugees."
- *Determining vulnerability* – Some people felt that the criteria for determining who is vulnerable and should be subject to income management were not clear. The criteria include being in rental arrears and receiving an early payment from Centrelink. Concern was expressed about a penalty being attached to the early payment system, which was designed to help families when large one-off costs occur, such as paying for school uniforms and supplies, registering a car or handling a series of concurrent household bills. Moreover, concerns were raised that Centrelink social workers would be responsible for determining vulnerability but there was no plan to increase the number of social workers to be able to make sensitive assessments.

⁶ The proposed income management model will differ from that introduced in the Northern Territory in 2007 and subsequently revised in 2010.

⁷ Commonwealth of Australia. *Building Australia's Future Workforce: Targeted locations income management*, www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/publications/articles/

⁸ There will be three groups of Centrelink recipients eligible to be referred for income management: people referred for income management by state or territory child protection authorities where a child is at risk of neglect; people assessed by Centrelink social workers as being vulnerable to financial crisis which income management can help address; and people who volunteer for income management.

⁹ Commonwealth of Australia. *Income Management*. Department of Human Services, www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/income_mgt_customer.htm

- *Basics Card* – Many recently arrived refugee families prefer to shop at markets and specialty shops for their food, for access to particular produce which is preferred for cultural or religious reasons or because the market prices are lower than the commercial supermarket prices. The Basics Card will limit the freedom to shop at retailers that have not registered to accept this card.
- *Paying rent* – Some participants were concerned that people on income management would have trouble paying rent if real estate agents were reluctant to process partial rent through different sources, and that people who paid directly to a landlord would not be able to do so.
- *Remittances* – A number of people spoke about the problems that quarantining of benefits would have on refugee and humanitarian entrants' capacity to send money, or remittances, to relatives still living in perilous situations overseas and to repay debts. As one community member said: "It is important for refugees to be able to send money to families overseas. I am supporting young relatives through high school to university in Kenya." Another felt that any income they get, a bit is sent home and that "even \$50 is a lot in some countries – it can feed a big family for a fortnight". At the same time, some consultation participants felt that income management could be good for some single men who were sending so much money to their families overseas that they were struggling to pay bills but noted that it still needed to be voluntary.
- *Financial literacy* – Some people felt that financial literacy and budgeting initiatives would be more effective than income management for refugee and humanitarian entrants who did have trouble budgeting: "It is important to give people education on budget management, rather than take away their right to manage their own money."
- *Lessons from the Northern Territory (NT)* – Some of the experiences from refugee and humanitarian entrants who have been on income management in NT offer important lessons for other pilot sites:
 - Some people will relocate because they do not want to be on income management. Families moved from Darwin to other states when the policy was introduced. It is likely that people will move from the income management pilot sites to other local government areas for the same reasons.
 - The details of income management need to be communicated effectively to refugee communities. Some community members in NT were left without important information, such how to access both their card and cash amounts.
 - Community members raised concerns about minimum amounts being applied to Basics Card transactions, with \$10 being taken from the card even when a purchase is just \$3.

5.3 National Education Agreement

There are significant variations from state to state in the level of specialised language support provided to students from refugee backgrounds in schools. A concern raised in previous RCOA submissions is that variation in targeted support for students from refugee backgrounds is likely to continue or be exacerbated under the National Education Agreement signed at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in November 2008¹⁰ and in the absence of a national refugee education strategy. Under the National Education Agreement, Federal Government education funding from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is provided as a single Specific Purpose Payment (SPP) to state treasuries, based on a per capita amount for each student enrolment. Accountability is now to broad COAG targets, rather than to specific accountability for funds to support targeted groups as occurred under the previous funding model of SPP payments for a range of programs. One such program was the ESL New Arrivals Program, which provided funding to states for intensive English language provision to school-age new arrivals.

¹⁰ DEEWR (2008). *Building Opportunities for all Australians*, www.deewr.gov.au/Documents/COAG/Council%20of%20Australian%20Governments%20delivers%20an%20education%20revolution.pdf

At this year's consultations, RCOA asked participants to raise any issues or concerns about how state education departments were currently meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian young people in schools. Responses suggested that education for newly arrived refugee and humanitarian entrant children was an issue that needed to be addressed at a national level. There was a perception across the country that education systems were failing to meet the needs of many refugee young people, and particularly older young people with limited education. The consequences of the lack of appropriate education support were raised at a number of consultations, including in Dandenong, Morwell, Logan and Toowoomba. Community members spoke about feeling that their children were "becoming lost" and there were reports of young people turning to alcohol and crime. In Dandenong, a consultation participant pointed to the fact that four young people from refugee backgrounds died from alcohol and crime related incidents in the past two years and felt that this was linked to the failure of the education system.

In terms of feedback from the different states and territories, a service provider in Tasmania felt that the Tasmanian system of new arrivals being immersed in mainstream schooling was a good system that could be explored in other states. In NSW and Victoria, consultation participants raised concern about the resourcing and location of intensive English schools and centres, with centres not being in close proximity to where communities were settling. In the Northern Territory, concerns were raised about the lack of resources for English as an Additional Language (EAL) support in schools and for bilingual workers who were from the same backgrounds as students. Consultation participants in Queensland felt that overall there was a lack of transparency in funding and a lack of knowledge in the sector as to how funding was being spent and which students were entitled to funding and which were not. For example, Education Queensland schools do allocate money for new arrivals but no one knows how much and whether this money goes to children of Temporary Business (subclass 457) visa holders, international students or refugee and humanitarian entrants.

Overall, many consultation participants felt that the National Education Agreement did not provide the necessary reporting, accountability and monitoring mechanisms in relation to outcomes for EAL students and that there should be a directive from the Federal Government so that states and territories were required to develop a specific strategy for supporting refugee young people with intensive English language needs.

December 2011

APPENDIX

Consultation questions

4. POST-ARRIVAL SETTLEMENT SUPPORT

- 4.1 What do you think Australia is doing well in terms of the post-arrival settlement support provided to refugee and humanitarian entrants?
- 4.2 What do you think are the biggest gaps in terms of settlement services and support? What could be done to address these gaps?
- 4.3 What concerns or comments do you have about the recent changes to settlement services (HSS, AMEP, SGP, torture and trauma services)? How do you think these new models are going?
- 4.4 What are your observations about how onshore protection visa holders (sub-class 866) are faring in terms of their settlement experiences and access to services? What recommendations do you have for ensuring the settlement needs of former detainees are met?
- 4.5 What concerns and recommendations do you have about Job Services Australia and how employment services are meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants?
- 4.6 What concerns, if any, do you have about an income management scheme and its potential impacts on refugee and humanitarian entrants?
- 4.7 What issues or concerns would you like to raise about the current care arrangements for unaccompanied minors – both asylum seekers and those who are on permanent protection visas? What sort of guardianship arrangements or delegation do you think is needed to ensure the needs and rights of unaccompanied minors are upheld?
- 4.8 Do you have any issues or concerns about how state education departments are currently meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian young people in schools? Do you think the National Education Agreement has had any impact on how targeted supports are provided to refugee children in your state or territory?
- 4.9 Do you have any concerns or recommendations you would like to raise about how refugee and humanitarian entrants with a disability are faring in terms of settlement services and support?
- 4.10 What other comments, concerns or suggestions do you have with regards post-arrival settlement support?