



Refugee Council
of Australia



AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM 2015-16

Community views on current challenges and future directions

March 2015

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Cover photo: 11-year-old Ibrahim was separated from his mother and most of his siblings when militia attacked his village in the Central African Republic. Here he sits aboard a UNHCR minibus which will take him to Mbile Refugee Camp in Cameroon, where his mother and seven other siblings are waiting for him.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE NEEDS

The latest statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) show that the number of people forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations is now at the highest level seen since the end of World War II. As at 31 December 2013, more than 51 million people were forcibly displaced, of whom 16.7 million were refugees and 1.2 million were asylum seekers. More than half of the world's UNHCR-mandated refugees came from just three countries: Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia. In addition, UNHCR estimates that at least 10 million people were affected by statelessness in 2013.

Three key protection challenges emerged or were the focus of international discussions and action this year: (1) protection concerns relating to people making dangerous journeys by sea; (2) addressing statelessness, and (3) responding to the Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian crises. In addition, many of the protection challenges that were highlighted in RCOA's annual submissions in previous years remain equally relevant today. These include: the need for wealthy nations not to turn away from protecting refugees at a time of increasing global displacement; access to prompt refugee status determination procedures; the ongoing need to find solutions for those in protracted refugee situations; ensuring the physical security of vulnerable refugees; preventing further instability in countries at greatest risk; developing alternatives to detention; making refugee resettlement more effective as a strategic tool; and creating more avenues for refugees to support themselves.

During RCOA's consultations, refugee community members highlighted difficult conditions, hardship and dangers faced by people fleeing persecution, describing in detail the serious risks and insecurity in countries of refugee origin and barriers to securing effective protection and accessing durable solutions in countries of asylum. In addition to offering resettlement places, consultation participants identified a range of other strategies which Australia could adopt to address key protection issues or enhance existing responses, including aid initiatives, international advocacy and regional cooperation.

During 2013, 71,411 refugees from 69 countries of origin were resettled from 80 countries of asylum to 25 countries of resettlement through UNHCR's referral processes. Another 27,015 refugees were resettled through processes not involving UNHCR. For many refugees, resettlement is a highly appropriate solution to the protracted displacement of many refugees but there are far too few resettlement places available for the millions of refugees who need them. Fewer than 1% of the refugees under UNHCR's mandate get access to resettlement each year. Of those identified conservatively by UNHCR as being in need of resettlement, more than 85% are not resettled.

With global resettlement needs now outstripping available places by a factor of more than ten to one, there has been considerable ongoing discussion about ways to make the most effective use of the 80,000 resettlement places pledged by governments for the coming year. In RCOA's consultations and international discussions on resettlement this year, participants have highlighted the importance of resettling refugees who are the most vulnerable or in the gravest danger; exploring options for opening up additional resettlement opportunities wherever possible; maintaining a balance between current emergencies and protracted situations; using resettlement as a means of sharing the responsibility for refugee protection more equitably; and exploring ways to use resettlement as a strategic tool to achieve protection dividends for refugees who will not have the opportunity to resettle.

In our annual submission over the past three years, RCOA has outlined six principles for the Australian Government's response, based on feedback from community consultations. Responding to community views that the scale of the Syrian crisis requires an additional response, we offer seven principles relevant for the planning of the 2015-16 Refugee and Humanitarian Program:

1. The need for resettlement to be made widely available as a durable solution.
2. A focus on resettling the most vulnerable.

3. An emphasis on maintaining family unity.
4. The strategic use of resettlement to promote broader refugee protection.
5. The need to balance resettlement needs in different regions.
6. An additional response to protection needs in large-scale emergency situations.
7. A coherent overarching government strategy for refugee protection.

1.2. AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM

As in previous years, there were strong calls across the country for a significant increase in the size of Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Many participants again expressed disappointment that the program had been reduced in size despite an escalation in global needs. Several participants called for intake to be restored to 20,000 places annually, with some calling for further increases to up to 30,000 places annually given the scale of current global needs. A number of participants also highlighted the fact that the settlement sector had increased its capacity to support the increased intake in 2012-13 and the sudden contraction in the size of the program has resulted in a substantial loss on the taxpayer-funded investment in the settlement services sector.

One of the most significant changes to the composition of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program over the past year has been the dramatic increase in the number of Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) visa grants. While the increase in SHP visas was generally welcomed by consultation participants (particularly as a means of expanding family reunion opportunities), some expressed concerns about the impacts of this change on settlement patterns. The feedback gathered suggests that the increased emphasis on SHP visa grants has resulted in a larger proportion of refugee and humanitarian entrants arriving in more established settlement areas at the expense of smaller or emerging settlement areas, resulting in significant fluctuations and inconsistency in settlement patterns. Concern was expressed that these fluctuations were hampering advance planning and could result in significant loss of skills, expertise and human resources from the sector as providers are compelled to reduce staff numbers in order to survive financially.

As in previous years, consultation participants raised a number of concerns relating to the Community Proposal Pilot (CPP). These included the high fees, the inclusion of the CPP quota within the existing Refugee and Humanitarian Program intake, the lack of a settlement support from services in cases of family breakdown and prioritised processing. Many also commented that the high costs of the program and significant responsibilities of proposers placed newer communities at a disadvantage and hampered the involvement of the wider community, religious groups and refugee community organisations in the CPP. While there has been significant criticism of the program, a large number of community members stressed their desire to be more involved in the sponsoring and settlement of new arrivals. Many established communities have indicated they have the capacity, networks and resources to provide support to new arrivals, yet felt the high fees and strict requirements of the CPP are prohibitive. Those consulted recommended that in the up-front costs of the CPP be significantly reduced and the fees associated with social security be replaced with an assurance of support model.

Issues relating to family reunion were raised in almost every consultation. Community members and service providers across Australia continued to highlight the devastating psychological, economic and social impacts of family separation, with a number expressing the view that successful settlement was not possible without family reunion. While the increase in SHP visas was generally welcomed by consultation participants as a means of facilitating greater access to family reunion, many also drew attention to the challenges associated with this increase (such as the varying quality of on-arrival support provided by proposers). It was also evident from the feedback received that not all communities had benefited from the increase in the SHP quota, with some (particularly people from African countries) reporting ongoing difficulties in accessing SHP visas.

Participants in many consultations raised a range of ongoing concerns relating to the processing of applications for family reunion and unreasonably restrictive eligibility requirements. Many

expressed confusion and frustration about prolonged delays in processing and the limited or lack of information communicated to applicants about the reasons for these delays or the progress of their applications. Concerns were also raised about the restrictive definition of family used to assess and prioritise family reunion; difficulties in sourcing documentation or evidence to substantiate family relationships; denial of family reunion opportunities to people who had not been formally registered as refugees; and the high cost of family reunion, particularly for people sponsoring family members under the family stream of the Migration Program. A number of consultation participants who had been resettled in Australia reported receiving unrealistic or incorrect information before their arrival about their likely prospects of family reunion. This appeared to be a particularly significant issue for Afghan Locally Engaged Employees resettled on subclass 201 visas.

A significant number of consultation participants expressed serious concerns about restrictions on eligibility for family reunion for people who arrived in Australia as asylum seekers by boat. It was felt that the change to processing priorities, whereby applications lodged by people who arrived by boat would be afforded the lowest priority, was an unnecessarily punitive measure likely to have serious negative consequences for people settling in Australia (and their family members living in precarious situations overseas). Some participants also reported delays in family reunion resulting from the suspension of visa grants to people living in countries affected by Ebola.

1.3. POST-ARRIVAL SUPPORT

Refugee community members and service organisations were keen to reflect on the changes in post-arrival settlement support that have occurred over the past 12 months and provided rich, thoughtful and useful ideas and recommendations about how to improve settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants and how to maintain the high standard of Australia's internationally-recognised settlement programs.

Key settlement challenges highlighted in this year's consultations included:

- **Employment**, with participants again highlighting the inadequacy of the Job Services Australia program in supporting refugee and humanitarian entrants to secure sustainable employment and expressing concern about the possible withdrawal of specialised employment services, which were seen to be far more effective for these groups.
- **Education and training**, with participants raising ongoing concerns about the experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds in the secondary education system (particularly those of post-compulsory school age) and a range of issues relating to tertiary education.
- **English language tuition**, with concerns including the limited flexibility within the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to respond to the diverse needs of students, the inadequacy of the eligibility period of 510 hours and the implications of moving the AMEP to the Department of Industry, which participants feared may undermine the program's settlement focus and its links with other settlement programs administered by the Department of Social Services.
- **Health**, with participants again reporting limited use of interpreters by medical professionals, as well as citing concerns about potential increases to the cost of health care and noting the negative mental health impacts of Australian policies (such as prolonged indefinite detention, denial of work rights and restrictions on family reunion).
- **Housing**, with participants raising concerns about the competitiveness of the housing market, lack of affordable rental accommodation and discrimination from real estate agents. Community members also reported being forced to move further away from metropolitan areas in order to find affordable housing, to areas with limited employment opportunities and settlement services.
- **Income and cost of living**, with participants noting that Centrelink payments were insufficient for families to live off (while also commenting that they did not want to rely on social welfare benefits) and expressing concerns about budget measures such as changes to unemployment benefits, the Medicare co-payment and changes to university funding

which were seen to have a potentially disproportionate impact on refugee and humanitarian entrants.

- **Family conflict**, with participants expressing concern about intergenerational conflict and calling for more culturally appropriate responses to this issue (including from state-based child protection services); and raising issues regarding domestic abuse within newly arrived refugee communities and the lack of cultural awareness among mainstream services that support women in these situations.
- **Racism, prejudice and discrimination**, with recent events (such as the Ebola crises, acts of terrorism and international conflicts) seen as having led to an increase in racist acts directed towards people from refugee backgrounds, with negative consequences for the positive settlement of affected individuals and communities.
- **Regional settlement**, with service providers highlighting the significant impacts of fluctuations in settlement patterns on regional areas, the untapped potential of some regional areas and the need to ensure adequate support for new arrivals and the local community.
- **Citizenship**, with community members noting that limited literacy skills and the significant cost of citizenship applications can present barriers for people from refugee backgrounds.
- A range of issues and challenges affecting specific groups of refugee and humanitarian entrants, including **people with disabilities**, **women** and **young people**.

The transfer of responsibility for settlement services from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to other portfolios was generally seen as a positive move by service providers. Many commented that the changes have separated settlement issues from the immigration and asylum debate, resulting in a more positive environment for service providers and refugee and humanitarian entrants. It was also anticipated that moving settlement programs to other portfolios would create a more people-centred approach to settlement. However, others were concerned that other departments are less likely to be experienced in dealing with refugee issues and thus may take some time to develop an understanding of the complex needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants. Service providers also expressed concern that communication from a number government departments had decreased significantly since the machinery of government changes, which has in turn impacted on the delivery and planning of settlement services. In addition, service providers raised concerns about the increasing focus of settlement programs on employment to the potential detriment of other settlement needs.

In the last year, there have been substantial changes to a number of funding arrangements for settlement services, including the wide-ranging Department of Social Services grants process and changes to reporting requirements. Many service providers welcomed the latter, believing that it will reduce red tape and enhance efficiency. However, others were concerned about changes in the approach to funding which may result in smaller or more specialised services missing out on funding. A large number of service providers and community organisations expressed their concern with the new approach to the funding of settlement services, especially the competitive tendering process, the complexities of the application, the need for multiple applications and the short timeframes in which to make the applications. Many service providers also called for longer and more secure funding for settlement services. The importance of involving refugee community organisations in the delivery of settlement services has been highlighted over a number of years and was also raised in this year's consultations, with participants calling for additional funding and support for refugee community organisations (including support to apply for Settlement Grants funding) to continue providing vital support to their communities.

As in previous years, community members and service providers highlighted the inflexibility in the eligibility periods for settlement services, with a number of participants recommending that the current eligibility model be replaced with a needs-based assessment process. Specific concerns were expressed about the withdrawal of migration advice from Settlement Grants funding, particularly in regards to its impact on access to family reunion. Some concerns were also raised in

relation to the information provided to resettled refugees prior to their arrival in Australia and the impact that this information had on their settlement experience.

There was considerable concern among consultation participants about the reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), with many expressing confusion and uncertainty about the implications of the proposed visa regime and the entitlements of TPV holders. There was consensus about the need for TPV holders to have greater access to settlement services, with many participants suggesting that it was counter-productive to restrict access to settlement support services given that this would inhibit successful settlement and create additional difficulties over the longer term. There was also great concern that the denial of access to funded settlement services would shift the burden of supporting often vulnerable people onto refugee communities and unfunded community organisations.

The temporary nature of TPVs and the proposed Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) and the denial of access to family reunion were both highlighted as having a particularly negative impact on health, wellbeing and settlement outcomes. Several services reminded RCOA of the comprehensive research and evidence available on the negative impacts of the previous TPV regime. Other consultation participants indicated that these findings concurred with their own experiences, either as former TPV holders themselves or as support workers.

Participants also highlighted specific concerns about the proposed SHEV regime, describing it as unfair, unreasonable and unlikely to work. The primary concern was that the protection element of the visa was surrendered in favour of a focus on productivity, in that eligibility for the visa related primarily to participation in education or paid employment rather than the strength of their protection claims. Community members were also disturbed that people who had faced great trauma, prolonged periods in closed detention and years of uncertainty would be expected to fulfil onerous and perhaps insurmountable requirements as the only way to receive permanent residency and alleviate their fears of being returned to places of persecution. There was considerable concern that regional communities often do not have the infrastructure and services to deal with the impact of refugee trauma or with other settlement issues that many SHEV holders may face, such as learning English, securing employment and finding suitable housing. Community members were also extremely worried that that the SHEV would lead to labour exploitation for the visa holders and were deeply disturbed by the lack of assurance that SHEV holders would be able to access a permanent visa even if they fulfil all of the requirements of their initial five-year SHEV.

1.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *RCOA recommends that the Australian Government develop, publish and implement a framework for Australia's refugee resettlement program based on:*
 - a) *priority resettlement to the most vulnerable refugees, including women at risk, culturally isolated groups of refugees (e.g. small groups of African refugees in South and South-East Asia), LGBTI refugees and other minorities at risk;*
 - b) *the promotion of family unity;*
 - c) *the strategic use of resettlement; and*
 - d) *the consideration of global resettlement needs in the development of regional allocations.*
2. *In view of pressing needs across the African continent, RCOA recommends that the Australian Government ensure that the 2015-16 regional target for resettlement from Africa be set at no lower than 25% of the offshore program.*
3. *RCOA recommends that the Australian Government and other resettlement states work with the Governments of Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand to develop a regional strategy for facilitating resettlement and brokering other durable solutions for Rohingya refugees, including through reinstating resettlement from Bangladesh.*
4. *RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review the definition used to assess eligibility for the Woman at Risk program to bring it into line with the definition used by UNHCR (which does not exclude women who have the support of a male relative).*

5. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government:
 - a) in light of the crucial role of aid in assisting forcibly displaced people, restore Australia's overseas aid program to its former level and develop a plan to increase overseas aid to 0.7% of Gross National Income;
 - b) reinstate the Displaced Persons Program;
 - c) work with diaspora communities in Australia and people living in refugee communities overseas to identify urgent protection needs in countries of origin and asylum and develop and implement strategies to respond to these needs; and
 - d) provide additional funding to UNHCR, given the increasing numbers of displaced people worldwide and UNHCR's critical role in coordinating humanitarian responses to displacement.
6. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with affected communities, review recent changes to banking regulations to ensure that communities in Australia are able to continue to provide critical financial support to families and communities living overseas.
7. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in its capacity as a member of the UN Security Council, provide positive leadership in international action to:
 - a) address the drivers of forced displacement and respond to protection needs in countries of asylum, with a particular focus on refugees living in protracted situations and/or facing serious risks to their lives and freedom; and
 - b) develop a comprehensive response to the growing Syrian refugee crisis.
8. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with UNHCR and non-government organisations working with refugees, develop a strategy for how its diplomatic and aid efforts can be targeted to support incremental improvements in the protection and support of refugees and asylum seekers in South-East Asia and South Asia, as part of a long-term vision for an Asia-Pacific regional agreement on refugee protection.
9. RCOA recommends that, in its capacity as co-chair of the Bali Process, revive efforts to operationalise the Regional Cooperation Framework agreed to by Bali Process members in March 2011.
10. RCOA recommends that the Refugee and Humanitarian Program be immediately restored to 20,000 places annually, delinked from onshore permanent Protection Visa grants.
11. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in light of escalating global protection needs, consider further expanding the Refugee and Humanitarian Program to between 25,000 and 30,000 places annually.
12. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government consider establishing an Emergency Response contingency quota over and above the annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program intake to provide additional capacity to respond to urgent protection needs during emergency situations, such as the current crisis in Syria.
13. RCOA recommends that the upfront cost of the Community Proposal Pilot be significantly reduced and the associated 'safety net' costs replaced with an 'assurance of support' model.
14. RCOA recommends that the annual quota for the Community Proposal Pilot or any replacement program be delinked from the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.
15. RCOA recommends that funding be made available for support services for people proposed under the Community Proposal Pilot in cases of emergency or relationship breakdown, to be taken out of the assurance of support if required.

16. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government work with refugee community organisations in Australia to clarify the role of Supporting Community Organisations in the Community Proposal Pilot and facilitate greater involvement of these organisations in the Pilot.
17. RCOA recommends the Department of Immigration and Border Protection conduct a public review of and consultation on the Community Proposal Pilot.
18. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government overhaul the family reunion options for refugee and humanitarian entrants to Australia by developing a “Humanitarian Family Reunion Program” that is separate from the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and the family stream of the Migration Program. RCOA recommends that this Humanitarian Family Reunion Program be developed in consultation with former refugee community members and organisations, peak bodies and relevant service providers.
19. In the absence of a separate Humanitarian Family Reunion Program, RCOA recommends that the Australian Government enhance refugee and humanitarian entrants’ access to family reunion by:
 - waiving application fees or at least introducing application fee concessions for refugee and humanitarian entrants sponsoring family members under the family stream of the Migration Program;
 - expanding the availability of no-interest loans to assist proposers in meeting the costs of airfares and/or application fees;
 - introducing greater flexibility in documentation and evidence requirements under both the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and the family stream of the Migration Program;
 - reviewing eligibility requirements under the family stream of the Migration Program which effectively exclude applicants from refugee backgrounds; and
 - considering applications lodged by people who are not formally registered as refugees with UNHCR or host governments but otherwise meet the eligibility criteria.
20. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government enter into dialogue with UNHCR about establishing a process for identifying refugee families that are seeking reunification, facilitating assessment and registration in countries of asylum and prioritising them for referral for resettlement under Australia’s offshore program.
21. RCOA recommends that all Special Humanitarian Program visa holders receive routine needs assessments during the initial period of settlement to ensure that they are receiving adequate on-arrival support.
22. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review its practice of encouraging refugees who are eligible for resettlement in Australia to apply for Special Humanitarian Program visas rather than Refugee visas, so as to avoid undermining the successful settlement of new arrivals.
23. RCOA recommends that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection review its procedures for communicating with visa proposers and applicants to ensure that clear information and updates are regularly provided on progress with the processing of applications.
24. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government respond to the significant community concern about the lack of access to the Special Humanitarian Program for refugees outside of the Middle East by separating Syrian resettlement from the SHP (in line with Recommendation 12) or by increasing the size of the SHP as part of a larger overall Refugee and Humanitarian Program.
25. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review the definition of “family” used to assess and prioritise family reunion applications to bring it into line with the definition used in UNHCR’s Resettlement Handbook.

26. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review the information on family reunion opportunities provided to refugees prior to resettlement in Australia (including through the Australian Cultural Orientation program) to ensure its accuracy and enable refugees to make informed decisions about resettlement.
27. RCOA recommends that:
- current restrictions on access to family reunion opportunities for Protection Visa holders who arrived by boat (including changes to processing priorities) be immediately removed.
 - if the above recommendation is not implemented, people whose applications have been affected by the introduction of retrospective changes to processing priorities be given the opportunity to withdraw their applications and receive a full refund of application fees.
28. RCOA recommends that the current suspension of visa grants to people living in countries affected by Ebola be lifted and replaced with an individualised risk assessment process.
29. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government restore funding for professional migration advice services under the Settlement Grants program to support refugee and humanitarian entrants in lodging family reunion applications.
30. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government seek to ensure greater consistency in settlement patterns so as to support the maintenance of quality settlement support services across Australia, including in smaller settlement areas.
31. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government develop a new regional settlement strategy, assessing potential and established regional areas as settlement locations, working with regional providers to plan and prepare for new humanitarian settlers, and ensuring sufficient numbers of referrals are made within each intake year to retain capacity and momentum in regional settlement locations.
32. RCOA recommends that the current time-limited eligibility period for settlement services be replaced with an individualised needs assessment process.
33. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government abolish Temporary Protection Visas and grant permanent visas to all people who currently hold Temporary Protection, Temporary Humanitarian Concern or Temporary Safe Haven visas.
34. If Recommendation 33 is not implemented, RCOA recommends that:
- All Temporary Protection Visa and Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa holders be granted access to settlement services on the same basis as permanent refugee and humanitarian visa holders.
 - The transitional support provided under the Status Resolution Support Services program following the grant of a Temporary Protection Visa be extended to at least six weeks, with extensions available on a needs basis.
 - Overseas travel restrictions on Temporary Protection Visa and Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa holders be lifted.
 - Family reunion options be considered for Temporary Protection Visa and Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa holders, to facilitate successful settlement and provide safe pathways to protection for people living in precarious or dangerous situations overseas.
 - The Department of Immigration and Border Protection develop a comprehensive communications strategy to explain the implications of Temporary Protection Visas to both visa holders and service providers.
35. RCOA recommends that the Australian Government consider options for designating certain industries in any location as fulfilling the eligibility criteria for the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) welcomes the opportunity to present this submission to the Australian Government, providing community views on current and future challenges for Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program in 2015-16. This submission is informed by the ideas and expertise of individuals and organisations from across Australia – people who have settled here having survived the refugee journey, those who have applied for protection and representatives from many organisations and community groups involved in supporting asylum seekers, people from refugee backgrounds and other humanitarian entrants.

From October to December 2014, RCOA conducted 47 face-to-face consultations with service providers and refugee community representatives across all states of Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. Thirteen consultations were held in regional areas of Australia. Three of the consultations focused specifically on women and two focused on young people. A call for contributions to a discussion paper and consultation questions was also circulated through RCOA's networks and website inviting written submissions, of which 11 were received.

In total, over 860 people, including representatives from more than 120 organisations, participated in the process. This list includes only official organisations and does not represent the fact that people from at least 29 different national and ethnic groups participated in the consultations, including the Ahmadiyya, Ahwazi, Assyrian, Bhutanese, Burmese, Burundian, Chaldean, Chin, Congolese, Darfuri, Eritrean, Hakha, Hazara, Iranian, Iraqi, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Liberian, Mandaean, Mon, Oromo, Pashtun, Rwandan, Somali, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Tamil and Zomi communities. A list of consultation locations and participants can be found in Sections 6.1 and 6.2 of this report.

This year's consultations were guided by three key themes, agreed on by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) and RCOA:

- Australia's response to international refugee needs;
- Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program; and
- implications of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program for other portfolios, focusing primarily on the provision of post-arrival settlement support.

The consultations were conducted and the submission compiled principally by eight RCOA staff – Rebecca Eckard, Asher Hirsch, Rebecca Langton, Lucy Morgan, Louise Olliff, Paul Power, Eileen Wahab and Andrew Williams. However, this submission is the result of the collective efforts of many people. Twenty-eight agencies hosted consultations, inviting community members and service providers from their areas to participate. The help of key staff in these organisations was invaluable and their generosity and hospitality were much appreciated. The principal researchers were also supported by volunteers Georgia-Rae Cobon and Lucinda Donaldson.

The consultation process and preparation for this submission was funded by DIBP. RCOA appreciates DIBP's support and its openness to receiving honest feedback from the community about the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and government policies and practices which impact on refugee and humanitarian entrants. This openness contributes significantly to building public confidence in the Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Program. We particularly appreciate the ongoing support given by DIBP's Humanitarian Branch throughout the process of developing the submission.

3. INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE NEEDS

3.1. GLOBAL REFUGEE TRENDS

“In Greece, more than two thousand years ago, Euripides famously said ‘there is no greater sorrow on earth than the loss of one’s native land.’ Today, more people are living this sorrow than at any other time since most of us in this room were born.”

— Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, at the
65th Session of UNHCR’s Executive Committee, 30 September 2014

The latest statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) show that the number of people forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations is now at the highest level seen since the end of World War II. As at 31 December 2013, more than 51 million people were forcibly displaced, of whom 16.7 million were refugees and 1.2 million were asylum seekers. More than half of the world’s UNHCR-mandated refugees came from just three countries: Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia. In addition, UNHCR estimates that at least 10 million people were affected by statelessness in 2013.

Table 1: Forcibly displaced people, 2013

Forcibly displaced people	Number displaced
Refugees	16.7 million
<i>Refugees under UNHCR’s mandate</i>	11.7 million
<i>Palestinian refugees under UNRWA’s mandate</i>	5 million
Asylum seekers	1.2 million
Internally displaced people	33.3 million
TOTAL	51.2 million

Of the 10.7 million people newly displaced in 2013, 2.5 million were refugees – the highest number of new refugee arrivals since 1994. On average, 32,200 people per day were forced to flee their homes due to conflict and persecution during 2013. Developing countries continue to host the vast majority of the world’s refugees, with 86% residing in developing countries in 2013 (compared to 70% a decade ago).

Table 2: Top ten countries of origin and asylum, 2013

Rank	Country of origin	Total	Rank	Country of asylum	Total
1	Afghanistan	2,556,556	1	Pakistan	1,616,507
2	Syria	2,468,369	2	Iran	857,354
3	Somalia	1,121,738	3	Lebanon	856,546
4	Sudan	649,331	4	Jordan	641,915
5	Dem. Rep. of Congo	499,541	5	Turkey	609,938
6	Burma	479,608	6	Kenya	534,938
7	Iraq	401,417	7	Chad	434,479
8	Colombia	396,635	8	Ethiopia	433,936
9	Vietnam	314,105	9	China	301,047
10	Eritrea	308,022	10	United States	263,662

Securing durable solutions for refugees remains an ongoing challenge. Around 414,600 refugees returned home voluntarily during 2013, a significant decrease compared to the 532,000 who returned in 2012; and around 98,400 were resettled, an increase on the 88,600 refugees who were resettled in 2012 but still a fraction of the 958,429 refugees estimated by UNHCR to be in need of resettlement. The majority of the refugees under UNHCR’s mandate – 6.3 million people – are living in protracted situations with little prospect of a solution in the near future.

The major displacement crises in the Middle East and Africa worsened considerably during 2014:

- Around one million refugees were newly displaced from Syria into neighbouring countries. The number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and North Africa grew from 2,301,668 on 31 December 2013 to 3,214,466 on 21 December 2014, with another 118,411 awaiting registration.¹
- More than 500,000 refugees fled South Sudan to Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. The South Sudanese refugee population in the region grew from 110,632 on 31 December 2013 to 619,375 on 18 December 2014.²
- The number of refugees from the Central African Republic in neighbouring countries (Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo and Republic of Congo) grew by 188,339 to 424,070 between December 2013 and 5 December 2014.³

3.2. REFUGEE PROTECTION CHALLENGES

"This year has seen a seemingly continuous stream of outflows, crises and, inevitably, a myriad of protection challenges...The needs are tremendous and growing."

— Volker Turk, UNHCR Director of International Protection, at the 65th Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee, 2 October 2014

Three key protection challenges emerged or were the focus of international discussions and action this year: (1) protection concerns relating to people making dangerous journeys by sea; (2) addressing statelessness, and (3) responding to the Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian crises. In addition, many of the protection challenges that were highlighted in RCOA's annual submissions in previous years remain equally relevant today. These include: the need for wealthy nations not to turn away from protecting refugees at a time of increasing global displacement; access to prompt refugee status determination (RSD) procedures; the ongoing need to find solutions for those in protracted refugee situations; ensuring the physical security of vulnerable refugees; preventing further instability in countries at greatest risk; developing alternatives to detention; making refugee resettlement more effective as a strategic tool; and creating more avenues for refugees to support themselves.⁴

3.2.1. Protection at sea

The desperate need for more effective protection strategies for refugees prior to embarking on boat journeys was a key theme of the global dialogue on protection at sea hosted by UNHCR in Geneva on 10-11 December 2014. The dialogue was the seventh annual High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges hosted by Antonio Guterres and brought together 300 representatives of governments, inter-governmental bodies, NGOs and expert advisers. The dialogue was held in response to a dramatic increase in the numbers of refugees and migrants dying in recent years while taking to the seas in an effort to escape persecution or deep poverty.

Mr Guterres reported prior to the dialogue that, in less than 11½ months since the beginning of 2014, more than 348,000 refugees and migrants had undertaken dangerous sea journeys in an effort to get to places of safety or to escape deep poverty. More than 207,000 had crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe (three times the previous known high in 2011); 82,680 people crossed the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states; 54,000 people had crossed the Bay of Bengal from Bangladesh or Burma to Thailand, Malaysia, or Indonesia; and 4,775 people had crossed the Caribbean Sea. UNHCR said it knew of 4,272 reported deaths over this period – 3,419 on the Mediterranean, 540 people on the Bay of Bengal, 242 on the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and 71 on the Caribbean.⁵

¹ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#_ga=1.77547287.320270483.1383248675 (accessed 22/12/14)

² UNHCR, South Sudan Situation, http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/regional.php#_ga=1.137334578.320270483.1383248675 (accessed 22/12/14)

³ UNHCR, Central African Republic Situation regional update 42, 29 November to 5 December 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/52fa46209.html> (accessed 22/12/14)

⁴ Refer to Section 3.2 in RCOA (2014) Intake Submission, pp.17-19, http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2014-15_Intake%20sub.pdf

⁵ UNHCR, *focus on saving lives*, says UNHCR, as numbers of people taking to the seas in search of asylum or migration passes 348,000 globally, 10 December 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/5481bf796.html>

In calling the meeting, UNHCR said determining who within the mixed migratory movements at sea was in need of international protection was just one of several challenges that needed to be addressed collectively in order to save lives. Others included:

- improving search-and-rescue capacity and procedures;
- easing disembarkation for those rescued;
- ensuring that refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, victims of trafficking and others are identified and get the help they need;
- addressing the root causes of movements and providing alternative pathways;
- improving data collection and analysis; and
- limiting harmful, inhumane or prohibited measures, such as routine detention and ‘pushbacks’ at sea, and expanding alternatives to them.

In his opening remarks to the dialogue, Mr Guterres said that, for the first time in several decades, he believed that:

A majority of the people on those boats are not economic migrants, but fleeing conflict and persecution, desperately looking for a place to live in peace. The growing number of women, children and elderly people being rescued is testimony to this fact. If entire families are risking their lives at sea today, it is because they have already lost everything else, and see no other option to find safety.

Mr Guterres called for a comprehensive approach which must include safe alternative means of entry: “At a time when an unprecedented number of people are forced to flee conflict and persecution across the world, barring them from accessing protection further afield is the opposite of what is needed.”

Mr Guterres was supported in his remarks by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, who said many countries appeared to view people moving by boat as somehow undeserving of human rights:

The lack of concern that we see in many countries for the suffering and exploitation of such desperate people is deeply shocking. Indeed perhaps we can even say there is a mean-spiritedness that marks the general attitude in some countries. When migrants are left to drift for weeks without access to food and water; when ships deliberately refuse to rescue migrants in distress; when children in search of family reunification are detained indefinitely, denied education and care, or returned to perilous situations – these are grave human rights violations. Rich countries must not become gated communities, their people averting their eyes from the bloodstains in the driveway. Regardless of status, no-one should be subjected to prolonged or arbitrary detention, discriminatory decision-making, unlawful profiling or disproportionate interference with the right to privacy. The absolute prohibition on refoulement must be upheld.

The UN Special Rapporteur for Migrant Rights, François Crépeau, said that, without regular migration channels, continued repression of irregular migration was counterproductive:

Indeed, it drives migrants further underground, thereby empowering and entrenching smuggling operations and underground labour markets where criminal rings and unscrupulous employers exploit them. While it is important to bring smugglers to trial for the suffering they inflict on migrants, destination countries will not succeed at fighting resourceful and adaptable criminal rings unless they reduce their underground markets for travel services and destroy their successful business model, which were created when barriers to migration were erected and which thrive at evading repressive policies. Destination States are in effect responsible for creating conditions that induce smuggling.

Summarising the points discussed in two days of dialogue, Mr Guterres said that, in responding to the growing movement by seas, nations must recognise that desperate people will move regardless of the obstacles placed before them: “When a door is closed a window will open. When

a window closes, a tunnel is dug.” Protection at sea, he said, must start with protection on the land, calling for greater international action to address the root causes of displacement, investment in reception conditions and protection capacity in countries of transit and destination, use of detention only as a last resort (and never for children) and respect for the principle of non-refoulement. Mr Guterres called for increased capacity for search and rescue, support for the shipping industry’s role in rescue and clear rules for disembarkation of rescued passengers. The best way to address irregular movements, he said, was to promote regular movement, including resettlement, humanitarian admissions programs, family reunion options, new visa policies and expanded labour arrangements.⁶

3.2.2. Statelessness

A stateless person is defined by Article 1(1) of the *1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* as “a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law”. UNHCR estimates at least 10 million people around the world were affected by statelessness at the end of 2013. The countries hosting the largest number of stateless people were: Burma (810,000), Thailand (506,197), Dominican Republic (210,000), Syrian Arab Republic (160,000), Iraq (120,000) and Kuwait (93,000). The 60th anniversary of the 1954 Statelessness Convention in 2014 provided an opportunity to reassess both the causes of statelessness and the strategies to eliminate it. To this end, UNHCR launched a 10-year campaign to eliminate statelessness.⁷

3.2.3. Response to Syrian and Iraqi conflict and displacement

Building on the appeal for resettlement places initially issued in September 2013, UNHCR held a pledging conference in Geneva on 9 December 2014 in an attempt to secure more resettlement places for Syrian refugees now living in neighbouring countries in the Middle East region. With more than 3.2 million Syrian refugees living in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and North Africa, the pressure on Syria’s neighbours – Lebanon in particular – is immense.⁸ UNHCR’s goal is to resettle 130,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2016.

At the recent pledging conference, UNHCR received pledges covering 5,663 new resettlement places. It has since received pledges covering just over half of its target, with 67,638 places offered as at 11 December 2014 – 47,528 places pledged, 11,101 visas granted under other forms of admission and 9,009 submissions to the USA’s open-ended resettlement program.⁹ Australia, which has so far pledged 5,600 resettlement and Special Humanitarian Program places, has been joined by 25 other nations, including Poland, which is planning to embark on resettlement for the first time with a pilot program for 100 Syrian refugees in 2015-16.¹⁰ The places pledged to date include not only traditional resettlement programs but many other visa arrangements, including humanitarian admissions, private and individual sponsorship, the UK’s Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme and Portugal’s emergency scholarships for higher education. Germany has led the response with by far the most generous pledge – 20,000 humanitarian admissions places and 10,000 individual sponsorships. This is despite Germany receiving the largest number of asylum applications of any European country while also being one of UNHCR’s most generous donors. Brazil, which traditionally has had a very small resettlement program, has passed Australia’s pledge by increasing its allocation of visas for Syrian refugees to 5,700.

UNHCR has specifically called for countries to pledge places additional to regular resettlement programs. Unfortunately, Australia is one of a number of countries to reallocate places only from

⁶ RCOA participated in the UN High Commissioner’s dialogue on protection at sea, represented by chief executive officer Paul Power. For RCOA’s report of the dialogue, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/urpt/1412-HCDialogue.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/53174c306.html>

⁸ Lebanon, a nation of just 4.4 million people living in an area one-ninth the size of Tasmania, was hosting 1.15 million Syrian refugees as at 18 December 2014.

⁹ See pledges recorded as at 11 December 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/52b2febafc5.pdf>

¹⁰ To date, places for Syrian refugees have been pledged by Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA and Uruguay.

within existing programs. This ultimately will result in a contraction in resettlement options for refugees in protracted situations around the globe.

3.2.4. Protection concerns discussed in global resettlement dialogue

When government and NGO representatives from 27 resettlement countries gathered in Geneva in June 2014 for the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR), the protection of refugees moving by boat, the desperate need for substantial resettlement of Syrian refugees from the Middle East and the need to continue addressing protracted refugee situations were significant topics for discussion.¹¹ UNHCR's Director of International Protection, Volker Turk, summarised many of UNHCR's concerns when he spoke to the ATCR gathering about the large number of complex crises happening simultaneously, saying that the crises should not be viewed as "old" and "new" crises. "If we don't give old crises attention, they can easily become new ones," he said. Mr Turk spoke about protection at sea and the needs of stateless people but also outlined other UNHCR concerns and priorities about refugee protection:

- The increasingly complex nature of conflicts, many of which no longer have two, three or four sides but many armed actors – 1,400 in the case of Syria. As a result, conflicts become protracted and almost impossible to resolve, something also being seen in the Central African Republic and South Sudan.
- Increasing use of detention for asylum seekers. UNHCR is working on a five-year strategy to promote alternatives to detention and has developed a detention monitoring manual with the International Detention Coalition.
- Continuing reliance on UNHCR to conduct RSD in many countries, when that is not meant to be UNHCR's role. In 2013, UNHCR received 203,000 applications for asylum, 19% of all applications in the developing world, a number larger than any single country.
- Mass movements of unaccompanied minors, particularly to the USA and Europe, some of whom are going into the asylum process and some not. Mr Turk linked much of this movement to the concept of "desperation migration", a term used by the Director General of the International Organization for Migration, William Lacy Swing.

The 51 NGO delegates at the ATCR, representing civil society in 21 countries, put forward a joint statement in which they:

- Called for more nations to join those which had made significant commitments to resettlement or Humanitarian Admission Programs for Syrian refugees, noting that this should not diminish the continued efforts to resettle refugees from other parts of the world.
- Expressed disappointment that Australia had reversed the very positive step taken in 2012 to expand its program for UNHCR-referred refugees by 6,000 places.
- Raised the urgent need for a coordinated effort to respond to the resettlement needs of vulnerable children, including unaccompanied minors.
- Emphasised the need for more effective responses to protracted refugee situations, highlighting the situation of Somali and Rohingya refugees as being among the groups in need of greater international attention and support through resettlement.

Since 2010, the Working Group on Resettlement, which brings together UNHCR, states and some NGOs between annual ATCR gatherings, has been working to progress international action on a number of designated priority refugee situations where increased cooperation could improve resettlement and other protection outcomes. In most cases, UNHCR and resettlement states have formed core groups to lead the development of responses to each situation. Each core group is chaired by one resettlement state and brings the key countries of asylum into the discussion to look at the potential roles of resettlement, humanitarian aid and diplomatic action. With this approach, UNHCR and resettlement states look at how resettlement can be used strategically, given how few resettlement places are available in comparison to the global need for increased protection for refugees. At the ATCR, UNHCR and resettlement states reported in detail on progress with each of the identified priority situations: Somali refugees in Kenya; Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan; refugees of different backgrounds in Turkey; Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan

¹¹ RCOA's report on the 2014 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement is at http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/urpt/ATCR_2014.pdf

and Lebanon; Colombian refugees in Ecuador; and Congolese refugees in Africa (particularly Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda). The following table outlines the progress made through resettlement between January 2011 and December 2013. It illustrates that, of the identified populations, resettlement was best addressing the needs of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and refugees from Burma in South-East Asia but to date had had minimal impact in addressing the resettlement needs of priority populations in the Africa region and among Afghans in Pakistan and Iran.

Table 3: Comparing resettlement from ATCR's priority refugee situations with population

Group identified as being in priority need of resettlement	Remaining population, December 2013	Resettlement submissions, 2011 to 2013	Refugees resettled 2011 to 2013		
			Total resettled	As proportion of submissions	As proportion of remaining population
Bhutanese refugees in Nepal	40,971	30,084	45,407	150.9%	110.8%
Burmese refugees in Thailand and Malaysia	167,988	65,849	50,921	77.3%	30.3%
Iraqi refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan	96,857	25,860	24,367	94.2%	25.2%
Mixed population of refugees in Turkey	257,944	24,641	17,540	71.2%	6.8%
Colombian refugees in Ecuador	54,620	4,209	1,598	38.0%	2.9%
Eritrean refugees in Sudan	81,136	2,853	1,759	61.7%	2.2%
Congolese refugees in Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda	289,557	14,130	5,495	38.9%	1.9%
Somali refugees in Kenya	512,069	14,605	6,156	42.1%	1.2%
Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran	840,234	8,321	5,234	62.9%	0.6%

3.2.5. The desperate need for more resettlement places

During 2013, 71,411 refugees from 69 countries of origin were resettled from 80 countries of asylum to 25 countries of resettlement through UNHCR's referral processes. In addition, another 27,015 refugees were resettled during the year by states without UNHCR making the initial referral. UNHCR's 2013 Global Trends document records 98,426 refugee arrivals in resettlement states, based on statistics provided by those states. UNHCR's 2013 Global Trends document records that the 98,426 refugee resettlement arrivals through UNHCR and non-UNHCR processes were to: United States 66,249, Australia 13,169, Canada 12,173, Sweden 1,902, United Kingdom 966, Norway 948, New Zealand 840, Finland 674, Denmark 515, Netherlands 311, Germany 293, Belgium 100, France 89, Ireland 76, Brazil 62, Philippines 19, Japan 18, Uruguay 14, Portugal 6, Hungary 1 and Czech Republic 1.¹²

For many refugees, resettlement is a highly appropriate solution to protracted displacement for many refugees but there are far too few resettlement places available for the millions of refugees who need them. As the following table illustrates, fewer than 1% of the refugees under UNHCR's mandate get access to resettlement annually. Each year, UNHCR produces an estimate of global resettlement needs in a report prepared for each ATCR. Of those identified in UNHCR's conservative estimates as being in need of resettlement, more than 85% are not resettled.

¹² Statistics from Table 21 of the data table annexes published with UNHCR 2013 Global Trends.

Table 4: Availability of resettlement places compared to resettlement need

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Refugees under UNHCR's mandate at year end	10,396,540	10,549,686	10,404,806	10,500,241	11,703,179
Identified by UNHCR as being in need of resettlement in that year	561,137	747,468	805,535	781,299	859,305
Resettled under UNHCR and other programs	112,442	98,761	79,784	88,578	98,426
Resettlement as proportion of total refugee population	1.1%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Resettlement as proportion of identified resettlement need	20.0%	13.2%	9.9%	11.3%	11.5%

The lack of access to durable solutions for refugees – particularly the lack of access to effective and long-term integration in the countries where refugees are first recognised – results in UNHCR seeing the need to refer refugees for resettlement from a multiplicity of countries.

Table 5: Summary of resettlement statistics (through UNHCR referral only)¹³

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
UNHCR resettlement submissions ¹⁴	128,558	108,042	91,843	74,835	93,226
Resettlement departures	84,657	72,914	61,649	69,252	71,411
Countries of asylum	94	86	79	80	80
Countries of origin	77	71	77	79	69
Countries of resettlement	24	28	22	26	25

In 2013, the largest resettlement programs were from Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia and Turkey with the main beneficiaries of resettlement being refugees from Burma, Bhutan, Iraq and Somalia. As in previous years, the key resettlement states for UNHCR referrals were USA, Australia, Canada and Sweden. The majority of the 25 countries to which refugees were referred by UNHCR received fewer than 500 resettled refugees.

Table 6: Top 10: UNHCR-referred resettlement departures 2013

Rank	Country of origin	Refugees resettled	Country of asylum	Refugees resettled	Country of resettlement	Refugees resettled
1	Burma	16,701	Nepal	10,828	USA	47,870
2	Iraq	13,979	Thailand	8,806	Australia	11,117
3	Bhutan	10,665	Malaysia	8,537	Canada	5,140
4	Somalia	8,483	Turkey	7,223	Sweden	1,832
5	DR Congo	4,746	Syria	4,195	Germany	1,092
6	Afghanistan	4,377	Kenya	3,604	Norway	941
7	Iran	2,544	Jordan	3,440	UK	749
8	Sudan	2,036	Lebanon	3,331	Finland	682
9	Eritrea	1,907	Ethiopia	2,640	New Zealand	665
10	Syria	1,217	Uganda	2,200	Denmark	475
	All others	4,756	All others	16,607	All others	848
TOTAL		71,411		71,411		71,411

In 2014, the number of states involved in refugee resettlement grew to 27, with 21 having regular annual programs, the latest being Switzerland. Japan has announced that in 2015 its pilot resettlement program will become a fully-fledged program. UNHCR noted at the ATCR meeting

¹³ The statistics in Tables 5 to 7 are taken from the public version of UNHCR's *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2015*.

¹⁴ The number of resettlement submissions from UNHCR to states, and the number of refugees departed reflect the number of persons involved rather than cases or families.

that some of the resettlement-related pledges made at the December 2011 Ministerial Intergovernmental Event on Refugees and Stateless Persons have yet to be fulfilled. During 2014, UNHCR was expecting to have up to 80,000 resettlement places available for referral. The 21 national pledges for UNHCR-referred resettlement places in 2014 came from Australia 6,500, Belgium 100, Brazil 60, Canada 7,575, Czech Republic 55, Denmark 500, Finland 1,050, France 100, Germany 300, Iceland 22, Ireland 90, Japan 30, Netherlands 500, New Zealand 750, Norway 1,620, Portugal 45, Sweden 1,900, Switzerland 170, United Kingdom 750, USA 58,000 and Uruguay 30. In addition, three countries expected to resettle additional refugees through non-UNHCR programs: Australia 4,500, Canada 7,100 and USA 12,000. If all available resettlement places were filled, the maximum resettlement capacity in these 21 countries in 2014 would have been 103,747. The resettlement quotas in a number of countries are maximum figures and, as a result, each year not all available places are filled.

3.2.6. Global resettlement needs in 2015

The crisis in Syria led to a substantial increase in the number of refugees UNHCR has identified as being in priority need of resettlement in 2015. In its *Projected Global Resettlement Needs* document for 2015, UNHCR estimates that 958,429 refugees under its mandate are in need of resettlement – a 39% increase on the estimate of 690,915 a year earlier. As global resettlement capacity is likely to remain close to 80,000, more than 90% of the pressing need for resettlement is expected to remain unmet in 2015. In its planning, UNHCR is expecting to be able to refer 126,677 refugees to resettlement states, as the following table illustrates.

Table 7: UNHCR projected global resettlement needs, 2015

Region or sub-region of asylum	Total 2015 projected resettlement needs	UNHCR submissions planned for 2015
Central Africa and Great Lakes	75,925	13,710
East and Horn of Africa	173,961	24,847
Southern Africa	21,235	5,415
West Africa	7,635	1,315
Africa total	278,756	45,287
Americas total	15,470	1,413
Central Asia	400	400
East Asia and the Pacific	67,015	15,622
South Asia	16,940	3,160
Southwest Asia	114,110	4,700
Asia total	198,465	23,882
Eastern Europe	1,009	550
South-Eastern Europe	148,690	25,475
Europe total	149,699	26,025
Middle East	295,764	26,020
North Africa	20,275	4,050
Middle East and North Africa total	316,039	30,070
TOTAL	958,429	126,677

3.3. FEEDBACK ON CONDITIONS IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND ASYLUM

“Imagine you are a mother with three kids, you escape your country and you went to UNHCR and they never gave you any money to survive, what do you do? You are not in your own country. You can’t speak the language, you can’t work. Where do you get money from? How do you survive?”

– Afghan asylum seeker, Sydney

During RCOA's consultations, refugee community members provided feedback on conditions faced by people fleeing persecution. This section summarises feedback gathered during the consultation process and at other consultations, meetings and discussions over the past 12 months.

3.3.1. Countries of origin

Afghanistan

Community members from Afghanistan raised a range of concerns about the deteriorating security, political and economic situation in Afghanistan and the prospect of instability increasing once foreign troops finally withdraw from the country in 2015. A number of consultation participants held grave fears that the withdrawal of foreign forces would see increased targeting of Hazaras in particular within Afghanistan. Reports were received of schools being targeted by the Taliban and people facing harsh winters living in makeshift camps. One Hazara community member said that a street in Kabul was recently re-named because it had been named after a historian who was Hazara and that the Minister for Culture in the current government had publicly stated that Hazara people were not from Afghanistan. As one community member in New South Wales predicted, “Everyone who can afford to leave would leave”. Community members also commented on the challenges for people wishing to return to Afghanistan, citing the meagre amount being offered to refugees wishing to repatriate, and also the lack of trust between returnees (or potential returnees) and those who remained in Afghanistan.

Bhutan

Bhutanese community members in Australia raised concerns about ongoing discrimination and denial of citizenship for people of Nepali origin in Bhutan, including the targeting of individuals with family members in Australia. As one person in NSW commented, “We can’t even talk to them in case the authorities find out.” Some raised concerns about the arrest, imprisonment, torture and disappearance of people who are accused of being “anti-government”. A particular concern was that international bodies that are meant to monitor the situation for detainees have been denied access to political prisoners, who are regularly moved to different prisons within the country. As one community member with personal experience of political persecution said, “Political prisoners are not being seen. The international community is not seeing what the Bhutanese government is doing.”

Burma

A considerable amount of feedback was received regarding the situation in Burma, with many community members expressing concerns about the conditions for return in the context of discussions about repatriation planning for refugees in Thailand. Many community members expressed reservations about or were highly critical of the peace negotiations taking place in Burma, arguing that no peace agreement had been signed to date and that those involved in the negotiations were not necessarily representative or acting in the interests of the civilian population. As one Karen man said of the peace process, “This is for the high Karen people and Burmese military; nothing to do with ordinary people.” One community member from Victoria said that the Burmese government was “making use of the cease fire” to send troops and reinforcements to areas where opposition groups exist: “They are taking advantage of the peace process.” Many others spoke of the lack of trust between refugee populations and the Burmese Government. Community members from Karen state in Burma reported that violence was escalating and opposition groups were re-forming and re-arming. In addition, a number of people stated that there were considerable obstacles for those who did want to return, including lack of access to productive land and livelihoods. Concerns were also raised that the Burmese Government had built police stations and army barracks close to the areas where returnees were being asked to resettle, with participants expressing fears that this would lead to future repression and control of civilian populations in these areas. People displaced by the conflict remain concerned that their land has been seized by the Government or armed groups and as a result of conflict been destroyed, polluted and planted with landmines. The persecution of Rohingya people in Rakhine state and their treatment by Bangladesh was also raised with attention drawn to the high number of Rohingya people having no other option but to travel by boat to find protection. Given their stateless status and high level of persecution, Rohingya people were seen as having limited options.

Iraq

Concerns relating to the escalation of sectarian conflict in Iraq and the success of Islamic State (IS) in conquering sections of the country were raised during the consultations. Participants reported rape and violence against women in northern Iraq and massacres and torture in cities like Mosul. There was particular concern for Christians targeted by IS and other terrorist groups, with participants noting that Iraqi Christians have lost their homes, villages, money, positions, families and relatives. As one community member reported, "For the first time ever, Mosul has been emptied of its Christian population with 120,000 people fleeing in the last three months." The Chaldean community expressed grave fears for the estimated 120,000 Christians forced to escape to Kurdistan, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. They also expressed doubts about community members returning to Iraq given they had lost faith in the Iraqi army and Peshmerga and the effectiveness of international responses to the rise of IS. Mandaean community members expressed fears that members could be exterminated by IS in Iraq, reporting executions in Baghdad and ultimatums to convert to Islam or be killed.

Liberia

A number of concerns were raised about conditions in Liberia for refugees wishing to return from neighbouring countries. One community member spoke about the challenges of repatriation, saying those that voluntarily return find that "people are occupying the house you owned and the whole community has changed. You can't reclaim your lost property and you have nothing to return to. The UN offers a small amount of money for you to return but you don't even get all of that amount because of corruption." Another consultation participant spoke about the fears associated with return: "UNHCR is telling them 'there is no more war in your country, we have no time for you'. Our people have a saying: if a snake bites you, even if you see a lizard coming, you will run. You'll be afraid. The people in the camp don't know what they will experience if they will go back home. They are still afraid to go back there." It was noted that some people who had returned to Liberia subsequently retreated to Ghana, citing police harassment and dispossession of businesses.

Sri Lanka

Reports of persecution of Tamil people in Sri Lanka were raised during consultations with claims of kidnappings, land confiscation, persecution and imprisonment of people forcibly returned to Sri Lanka. One participant stated that "People are still being kidnapped and having their throats slit. People who have been returned are being given hard time. Their land has been confiscated. A Tamil man in the north had his land burnt because he was becoming successful. The authorities are making sure Tamils don't succeed. People are constantly being questioned about where they are and why. Returned asylum seekers are being persecuted, as are their families. They are being harassed and left with nowhere to go. Access to the north of Sri Lanka is blocked to many organisations because the authorities don't want foreigners to see what is happening there. I have a colleague who visits Sri Lankan jails and he sees a lot of people returned from Australia."

Other countries of origin

- **Central African Republic:** Fears were expressed that the conflict in Central African Republic was not attracting the same level of attention as other crises.
- **Democratic Republic of Congo:** Concerns were raised about the protracted nature of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the extreme levels of violence against women.
- **Ethiopia:** Consultation participants raised concerns about the arrest and imprisonment of people accused of being in opposition in Ethiopia, the lack of access to timely and fair judicial processes, the confiscation of property and discrimination towards family members of political prisoners. The long-term detention and torture of political prisoners, as well as the pressure being put on neighbouring countries to hand over Ethiopian nationals accused of being involved in opposition groups, were mentioned as grave concerns by Oromo community members.
- **Eritrea:** Concerns were raised about indefinite conscription for all people in Eritrea and the use of conscripts as forced labour by the Eritrean military. People have been denied

employment or education and there has been an increase in human trafficking for people who leave Eritrea and enter Sudan.

- **Iran:** Concerns were raised about the lack of freedom of speech and association in Iran. Ahwazis also reported widespread persecution, including being prevented from speaking Arabic.
- **Pakistan:** Members of the Ahmadiyya community raised concerns about the targeting of Ahmadiyya, Christians and other minorities within Pakistan, saying “The Taliban is in the north-west of Pakistan, they send their mujahedeen there and target the Ahmadiyya and drive us out of our country.”
- **South Sudan:** A number of community members spoke about the deteriorating situation in South Sudan since civil conflict began in 2010. One community member noted that “There are people back in camps there who thought they were finished with camps.”
- **Sudan:** Some participants urged the international community to remember that persecution in the Darfur region and Nuba Mountains in Sudan continues. There were fears that militia were recruiting children who have fled to Chad.
- **Syria:** Concerns were raised about minority groups like Chaldeans, Assyrians, Yazidis and Kurds being persecuted by IS.

3.3.2. Countries of asylum

General feedback

Community members from a range of backgrounds spoke about general conditions for refugees in countries of asylum, with a number of recurring themes illustrating the lack of safety and access to durable solutions faced by a large proportion of refugees around the world. Some key themes included:

- lack of access to timely and fair RSD processes in many places;
- lack of access to timely solutions (“People stay in camps for 20 years. There are not enough resources to live with. People are living in tents for their whole lives and their one hope is that they will be resettled in the country one day”; “We need to do resettlement quicker. It takes too long for UNHCR to process people. People spend too long in refugee camps. It’s not just Australia that needs to do something about it; the world needs to do something about it.”);
- lack of or uncertain legal status in many countries of asylum, which places people at risk of arbitrary detention, exploitation, corruption and abuse;
- lack of physical safety in camps and urban areas (“There is no security. Anyone can come in and do anything. All refugee camps are the same. People who are in power receive the better assistance, the poor people don’t.”);
- the precariousness of refugee livelihoods, including the inability in many countries for refugees to legally work, the vulnerability to exploitation and abuse due to the lack of work rights and inadequate sources of alternative income;
- health issues and lack of access to needed health services. A number of consultation participants spoke generally of the need for better psychosocial support for refugees in countries of asylum (for example, one Chin community member said “People are physically and mentally exhausted. I would like to recommend that UNHCR provide a psychologist or counselling support. We are thankful for UNHCR, but they turn people off. They should at least give them hope. They could say: ‘It’s going to be fine’. Instead they just say: ‘Come back tomorrow’. People have difficulties. There is not hope. We try to say to people: ‘We were there before you. Don’t give up. It’s not the right time’. When we say those kind of things, they feel safer”);
- lack of access to education for children; and
- difficulties in engaging with staff at some Australian embassies and overseas posts, with one consultation expressing fears that locally-recruited interpreters may be biased against refugees from neighbouring countries.

India

A number of community members in Victoria and Queensland spoke about concerns for the safety of refugees in India. One participant said that women in Australia who were resettled from India relay horrible stories of multiple rapes, harassment and mistreatment in local communities: "Even once they are in Australia, they are traumatised by their time in their 'country of asylum'. The children are especially traumatised. They were spat on and abused in New Delhi." A Chin community member said that many women in New Delhi "fear for their lives". Another asked that Australia play a role in ensuring food aid is increased for refugees in India who do not have enough to eat and cannot legally work.

Indonesia

A number of consultation participants spoke about the long delays in processing refugee claims, risk of arrest and detention and lack of safety, basic rights (such as access to education, employment and health care) and durable solutions for refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia. As one Afghan man related: "I was trying to apply for UNHCR just to have some sort of documents to rent a house. It was taking two to three months to get a token. The token means that your name is on the queue but with that token, you're not allowed to rent a house. You have to wait for two to three years to get your UN registration card. You are not a refugee, just registered with the UN to be interviewed after two or three years. Once you get your card, then it will take another two or three years that you are in the queue to be interviewed. Then, you've been accepted as a refugee with UNHCR. After that, they put your file to other countries to see if they'll accept you as a refugee." This participant noted that the lack of access to a timely solution was coupled with the difficulties of surviving in Indonesia, which meant that travelling by boat was often seen as the best or only option. Understanding the significant risks of these boat journeys, he said: "The people coming see little hope that they will reach Australia and have a better life, just to survive and bring your family and be safe. That is the reason people are coming by boat, because they don't have any other options. I don't believe as a human being you can wait for 30 years."

Iran

A considerable amount of feedback from community members at consultations in New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria was gathered concerning conditions facing refugees in Iran. Recurring themes included:

- *Discriminatory attitudes of local staff in the UNHCR office in Tehran* – some participants felt that they could not raise concerns with UNHCR because the staff members were Iranian ("The issue there is that we cannot explain the problems we are having in Iran, because they are Iranian. We are afraid. We want a process outcome, so we don't say anything about what we are experiencing in Iran."); "At UNHCR, they had an Iranian interpreter. I could not express my problems because I was going to tell them about the way Iran had treated us."). A number of people felt that the locally recruited staff also showed discriminatory attitudes to refugees and recommended that UNHCR recruit Afghan or other expatriate staff.
- *Inaccessibility of UNHCR office* – for example: "When we go to the Iranian office, they don't allow you to go inside. They give you a phone number and say you have to call. But you can't call easily. In Tehran, you may need to camp outside the telephone box for 2-3 hours of redialling"; "They don't even let us go inside. They are not welcoming"; and "The UNHCR offices are under the influence of local staff. It is very hard to apply or submit a request to UNHCR. If you do apply, it is very hard to get in contact with the UNHCR office to follow up your application."
- *Issues with ID cards* – a range of issues were mentioned with regard to ID cards that are issued to refugees in Iran, including:
 - concerns about the cessation of registering new arrivals for ID cards and the vulnerability of people without ID cards. One participant said that a family member who did not have an ID card was unable to go to hospital to give birth;
 - costs of applying for and renewing ID cards ("If you want an ID card in Iran, you have to pay money to the Iranian Government. Most families just pay for the man...Every year, you have to get a new ID card and pay the money again, so it's very hard for us.");

- termination of ID cards being applied to all family members. One woman reported that when refugees are resettled in Australia, they have to notify the Iranian Government in order to have their ID card terminated. This termination would apply to the whole family even if not all family members are being resettled. In this case, the woman's adult daughter was left behind and although she went to UNHCR and informed them that because her daughter was not coming to Australia they should not terminate her ID card, they "wouldn't accept the argument";
 - problems faced by individual family members without ID cards. Consultation participants reported that if one parent has an ID card and the other doesn't, children may not be able to get an ID card. A case was also provided by an Afghan woman whose granddaughter did not have an ID card and who was reportedly told by UNHCR that she could take her daughter to Australia but not her granddaughter; and
 - arrest, detention and forced return of people without ID cards ("Nowadays if we don't have ID cards in Iran, they just sentence us to six months' imprisonment.").
- *Resettlement process* – community members who had been resettled from Iran identified a number of concerns relating to the resettlement process. One participant said that the worker who took them to the airport to travel to Australia dropped them off without complete information and they did not know where to go. The person gave them a phone number but when they called, he didn't pick up. Others mentioned issues with the documentation requested during the resettlement process, including immunisation cards ("We don't have it"), proof of where a person lives in Iran ("In Iran, it's part of law that Afghans cannot have any premises under their name. The Iranian Government asks for documents showing where you live but you can't provide this"), and written consent for children to be resettled with their mother ("If you are a single mother, you have to get a letter from the father saying that he gives permission for the children to go to Australia. In Afghanistan, the father may have two or three wives. If one wife has all girls and another wife has boys, and the father has disappeared, you have to get permission from sons of the other wife for your children to come to Australia. The sons won't give permission. They don't want their sisters from another mother to have a good life in Australia."). Finally, one participant raised the concern that a person who goes to prison in Iran is not eligible for resettlement, regardless of whether the person was convicted or not ("It doesn't matter to the Iranian government whether they are guilty or not. They can go to prison for six months.").
- *Refoulement* – a number of people reported refugees being forcibly returned to Afghanistan by the Iranian authorities.
- *Livelihoods and safety* – consultation participants spoke generally about the precariousness of life in Iran for refugees. A number spoke about exploitation, harassment and abuse at the hands of both employers ("Refugees do not have the right to work and so are being exploited. Workers die on the job but no action is taken.") and police ("When Afghan people are arrested in Iran, they take you to the police office, they hit you and in the worst cases, they tell you to take off your [underwear].").
- *Access to education* – One participant said that if a refugee wants to go to university in Iran, they have to give up their ID card, go back to Afghanistan to get a passport, then come back to Iran and apply. She stated: "Then when you finish your education, you can't stay in Iran, you have to leave, even though your family is there. A girl returning [to Afghanistan] from Iran who is educated is at risk of being targeted by the Taliban. Most families don't allow children to continue education because they know there is no future for them."

Lebanon

Concerns were voiced about lack of safety, the timeliness of RSD, insufficient resettlement places and humanitarian assistance generally ("Lebanon is so expensive for people to live in. They are running out of everything.").

Malaysia

Community members with links to Malaysia spoke about general insecurity experienced by refugees there, with a number of cases put forward of refugees from Burma being assaulted and even killed. As one Chin community member said, "If you are from Burma, you are in danger.

Refugees are being targeted. Because refugees are not financially supported by UNHCR, they are forced to do dangerous work." A number of other people also spoke about the dangerous situations that refugees were forced into due to their lack of work rights and uncertain legal status. One man reported that his 18-year-old relative was abducted from a town outside of Kuala Lumpur by a Malaysian man who promised the young man work. The young man was taken into the jungle and overheard the man talking on the phone about transferring him to another person. The young man was not permitted to contact anyone he knew to let them know where he was but did manage to escape and return to his home. A number of other people also reported experiencing exploitation or knowing of people who had been exploited by employers, either by not being paid or by being forced to work in dangerous situations under poor conditions with the threat that they will be reported to authorities if they complain.

Pakistan

Across Australia, community members from Afghanistan provided details about their experiences in Pakistan and the concerns they had for refugees still in the country. Key issues raised were:

- *Discrimination by local staff in the UNHCR offices* – a number of Hazara community members voiced concerns about the discrimination they perceived or experienced when dealing with locally employed UNHCR staff. One Hazara man described this in detail: "There are many different discriminations in UNHCR in Pakistan. Not in Quetta, because UNHCR staff there are Hazara. But in Karachi, Islamabad, Peshawar, most of the staff are Pashtun. In Pakistan, if Pashtun are doing the interview they show their discrimination. Their view is so important. They are very powerful. They can report wrongly or rightly, it can affect the decision. They want to confuse people. They want to find a reason to reject you." In a similar vein, a participant at a different consultation said "UNHCR is not giving any jobs to Hazara. If it is possible for Western people to do interviews, it would be better. They wouldn't have any idea about religion and ethnicity. In Pakistan, all of the UNHCR offices are full of Pashtun and they know us from our face. In Afghanistan and in Pakistan, it is the Pashtun that are attacking Hazara. They are given all the power; they can mean the difference between being accepted or rejected."
- *Access to UNHCR offices* – as in previous years, consultation participants expressed concern about the lack of accessibility to UNHCR offices due to both the location of the office in Quetta, the dangers people face travelling to a UNHCR office and the difficulty of "getting inside" to speak to a staff member. One person said that many people had lost their lives on the way to UNHCR offices.
- *General security situation in Pakistan* – the lack of safety for refugees from the Hazara community in Pakistan was reiterated by a number of people, with many saying that the situation in Quetta continues to deteriorate. One man spoke about a six-year-old Hazara girl being assaulted in the area where his family are living: "We are scared that it will happen to my child as well if they go out to shopping or school. I have five children and I am worried they don't have a future". Another participant said that terrorists had blown up his home in Quetta and that he has received a letter at a shop he owns that said "If we get hold of you, we will kill you." Targeted killings were also reported to have taken place in Lahore and Karachi.

Thailand

Former refugees from Burma raised a number of concerns about the situation in Thailand for refugees, particularly as international attention is turning to repatriation:

- *UNHCR registration in camps* – many community participants called for a renewal of UNHCR registration in Thai refugee camps, citing the impact of lack of registration on access to durable solutions. Some provided examples of families being unable to reunite or facing the prospect of splitting up due to some members of the family being unregistered and therefore ineligible for resettlement. This lack of access to resettlement was seen to be particularly pressing in the context of the increased pressure on Burmese refugees in Thailand to repatriate (described below), with one participant stating "There is a lot of anxiety. People want to get out and resettle."
- *Pressure to repatriate* – a substantial amount of feedback was received about the fears that refugees may be forcibly returned to Burma by Thai authorities. One participant stated that

many Burmese refugees living on the Thai-Burma border “are worried 24 hours a day” about the prospect of coerced repatriation. A number of people said that the increased presence of the Thai military in camps was causing greater restrictions and fuelling fears about forced repatriation (“The Thai military is making it harder for people in the camp, so a lot of people want to get out.”). In addition, some reported that new arrivals continued to enter the camps, highlighting the lack of stability in Burma.

- *Aid and assistance in the Thai-Burma border camps* – a number of people identified the reduction in food aid as a serious concern: “The problem in Thailand is that refugees are getting less and less each year to eat. They can’t go out of camps and get jobs.” Others noted that the withdrawal of funding for basic services is causing many problems, as needs remain the same or are increasing. With regards to education, a Karen community member suggested that there should be better teacher training opportunities in the camps in Thailand, as many of the teachers are student graduates with no training on how to teach. Another community member said that if a person wants to continue their education beyond Grade 10, they have to sign a contract saying that they will teach for two years, to maintain education for younger students. However, there were also reports of Grade 5 graduates teaching Grade 2 students.
- *Employment* – employment remains an ongoing issue with a number of consultation participants saying that lack of opportunities and resources in the camps on the Thai-Burma border mean that some refugees continue to go outside the camps to work. One woman said that if the Thai authorities catch them working, they are made to wear the Thai authorities’ uniform and then work for the whole day or beaten. Corruption and exploitation were common stories, including within resettlement process (“In the refugee camp we didn’t have money and that’s why we had to wait for a long time. The people who have money go first.”).
- *PAB status* – One issue that came out in this year’s consultations concerned people with Provincial Admissions Board (PAB) status, which was granted to people who have been registered by the Thai Government and can stay in the camp. This status was given to children who came from the villages in Burma to study in the camp. Many originally agreed to return to Burma but some later changed their minds due to the fear of political persecution. With ongoing insecurity in Burma, many camp residents with PAB status reportedly want to resettle but are unable to do so because of their original decision to apply for PAB status. Some have married and had children and are now stuck with PAB status. Consultation participants recommended that those with PAB status be reassessed.

Turkey

With the refugee population in Turkey rapidly increasing in size, community members in Australia spoke about their concerns regarding lack of access to RSD and adequate protection. One community member said that Assyrian Christians displaced from Iraq and in Turkey were told by UNHCR that their cases would not be considered until 2022 to 2025 (for an initial interview). One person’s family members were told to travel to Istanbul to register with UNHCR, a journey that was both difficult and expensive. In terms of key protection concerns, the lack of work rights and education, difficulties securing accommodation and fears of discrimination and forcible return to Iraq were discussed at different consultations. Corruption at different levels was also mentioned at several consultations, with examples given of local authorities insisting on the payment of \$2,000 for refugees to live in an area, in addition to rent and regular costs. There were also allegations that some IOM staff were telling refugees they would not be registered unless they paid large sums of money. Other participants reported that different people were extorting money from refugees (“My brother is in Turkey and has been told by people that, if he pays large sums of money, then his case will be prioritised in the embassy to get resettlement to Australia or the United States.”). Physical security was also seen as an issue in Turkey, with Iraqis and Syrians reportedly being assaulted. One Iraqi woman stated “When they try to report assaults to the police, the police say: ‘Solve amongst yourselves, Arabs’.”

Other countries of asylum

- **Guinea:** It was reported that refugees from Liberia who are unable to repatriate and are living in camps in Guinea are often without food and are at risk of imprisonment.
- **Israel:** Concerns were raised about the Israeli government detaining refugees and asylum seekers in camps with no certainty about their future. Many people who were working in Israel have since been detained.
- **Malawi:** One consultation participant raised concerns about the lack of access to timely RSD in refugee camps in Malawi, reporting that three of his adult children in a camp in Malawi have been waiting to register and have few options open to them until their status is resolved. The man has been financially supporting his children for four years.
- **Nepal:** Community members raised concerns about Bhutanese refugees in Nepal who have not been registered in camps, have limited means of survival and will not be able to access resettlement. It was recommended that UNHCR identify non-registered refugees and register them in the camps, ensuring they are able to receive humanitarian support. Another person spoke about the 10,000 refugees in camps who wish to repatriate to Bhutan but have been unable to return due to the intransigence of the Bhutanese Government.
- **Sudan:** Conditions for those in refugee camps in Sudan were discussed, with consultation participants highlighting the limited education, lack of work and corruption of camp officials: “Some people with additional needs will be left out, because they don’t have money to bribe UNHCR to be considered for resettlement.” Serious security concerns were also raised, with a number of people reporting the abduction and trafficking of refugees by organised crime groups (*Rashaida*), including people being randomly abducted from within or just outside Shegarab refugee camp in eastern Sudan.
- **Syria:** A concern was raised in one consultation that Australian citizens are not able to sponsor relatives in Iraq and Syria because there is no Australian presence. Under the current process, Iraqi and Syrian citizens must travel to another country and then register with UNHCR. Another participant said that there was distrust and frustration with embassy staff in Syria: “UN staff will change dates and say, ‘come back next week’. When we do, they say, ‘come back next week’.”

3.4. RESPONDING TO PROTECTION CHALLENGES

“We can’t resettle all the refugees in the world, so we need a multi-pronged approach, where resettlement is almost the least preferred option.”

– Refugee community representative, Sydney

In addition to resettlement, consultation participants identified a range of other strategies which Australia could adopt to address key protection issues in countries of origin and asylum or enhance existing responses. These included aid initiatives, international advocacy and regional cooperation.

3.4.1. Aid initiatives

Australia’s total overseas development aid (ODA) budget for 2014-15 is \$5.0 billion. Over forward estimates, the aid budget will remain static for 2014-15 and 2015-16 then increase in line with the Consumer Price Index from 2016-17 onwards. This will result in a reduction of \$7.6 billion in aid spending over five years, starting from 2013-14. In its analysis of the 2014-15 Federal budget, the Australian Council for International Development noted that reductions in ODA is the single largest savings area in all four years of the budget and accounts for 20% of all savings across the forward estimates.¹⁵ However, ODA accounts for only 1.3% of the total budget. A further cut of \$3.7 billion to the aid budget was announced in December 2014 and will result in Australia’s ODA falling from 0.32 percent to 0.21 percent of our gross national income (GNI) – the lowest level since records began in 1954.¹⁶ The United Nations’ recommended aid allocation is 0.7% of GNI.

¹⁵ <http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources-publications/files/acfid-budget-analysis-2014-15>

¹⁶ <http://www.acfid.asn.au/media/media-releases/government-promises-on-australian-aid-are-worthless>

In 2013-14, \$10.1 million was available through the Displaced Persons Program administered by DIBP for projects to improve the lives of internally and externally displaced persons across the globe. Program objectives included support to countries of first asylum and transit to host refugee populations where return is not practicable, including through increasing asylum seeker registrations, supporting resettlement and local reintegration and enhancing the protection role of relevant agencies. It was announced in the 2014-15 Federal Budget that this program would cease from June 2014.

Consultation participants recognised the importance of Australia's overseas aid program in supporting development initiatives which address the causes of displacement. They expressed concern about policies which have wound back levels of aid both to countries of origin and asylum, noting that the withdrawal of aid could have negative impacts on peace and development in source countries and on refugee protection in countries of asylum. Some participants articulated specific concerns about the withdrawal of the Displaced Persons Program and recommended that it be restored. One service provider in Brisbane expressed concern about the use of aid funds to support asylum seekers in Australia¹⁷ and, more broadly, the lack of transparency as to how aid funding is being used.

As in previous years, participants suggested that Australia's aid be directed towards sustainable activities to improve conditions in countries of origin and enhance protection of refugees in countries of asylum. Some drew a link between the funding of such programs and the prevention of dangerous onward journeys. As one service provider in Perth said, "There are development and other programs through which Australia could make a difference, to keep people in their own place where they are happy and they won't need to face the challenges of coming here."

Service providers and community members considered that Australia should increase aid levels and redirect aid resources to help protect refugees in countries hosting large numbers of refugees such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. In particular, participants identified the need to earmark Australian funds to improve access of vulnerable communities to basic health care and education in countries of origin and asylum. Some expressed concern about the limited capacity of countries like Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon to continue to respond to the increasing flow of arrivals from Syria and Iraq and saw a role for Australia in supporting these countries to provide adequate protection and assistance.

Education was seen as a key priority for overseas aid. A representative from the Chin community, for example, highlighted the need for more resources to support an English language school run by the Chin refugee community in Malaysia. At a consultation in Sydney, members of the Karen community raised concerns about declining standards of education in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border (which have deteriorated to the point that "a lot of kids don't want to continue school") and called for greater support for education programs. They also suggested that local communities in the country where aid is to be delivered and former refugees in Australia originally from those countries should be involved in the planning and delivery of aid projects due to their intimate knowledge of local conditions. One participant, for example, noted that some aid workers in Thailand "weren't able to do as much as the local people can do".

Australian aid to Burma increased from \$81.4 million to \$90 million this financial year. Several community members expressed concern about the use of aid funds to support the peace and reconciliation process in Burma, which they claim benefits leaders not civilians. One participant asserted that if "the Australian Government is paying money for the peace process, they should find out how it is being spent". They reported that the Burmese Government is offering resettlement for ethnic minority groups from the Thai-Burma border to areas near the Salween Dam hydropower construction project in Burma where settlers are likely to be used as a source of cheap labour.

¹⁷ \$375 million of ODA was diverted from the 2013-14 aid budget for costs associated with onshore processing of asylum seekers. ACFID notes that this has since been almost entirely restored to overseas aid expenditure: "Only \$4.6million will continue to be applied to the domestic asylum seeker costs through July 2014 at which point those will cease." <http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources-publications/files/acfid-budget-analysis-2014-15>

Australian core contributions to UNHCR increased from \$19 million in 2013-14 to \$21.0 million in the 2014-15 budget – a record level of funding for Australia. The importance of Australia's financial support for UNHCR was acknowledged by a number of consultation participants who noted the need for increased funding to enhance UNHCR's capacity to provide timely RSD, process applications for resettlement and provide protection and support to refugees and asylum seekers. Some proposed a further increase to help build UNHCR's global capacity to process asylum applications. Participants recognised that UNHCR would determine the allocation of its resources but suggested that the Australian Government could highlight geographical priorities where we would like to see the establishment of a UNHCR office and/or an increase in UNHCR resources.

Some participants were keen to see remittances from Australia acknowledged as a significant contribution to the basic survival and protection of people living in precarious circumstances overseas. A service provider in Canberra noted that remittances from people in Australia to their families overseas "contribute a huge amount to development in countries of origin. It is not necessarily just back to families but also to family members who are starting businesses and having a wider economic impact." Given the importance of remittances to the survival of family members, some community members expressed alarm at the potential impact of recently-announced restrictions on banks in Australia to issue remittances. In the words of a participant from South Sudan, "This is like our lifeline. We are working hard here to support our families. If you stop me sending money home, I would not have a reason for working. I want you to say that. This is a very serious issue...This is nothing to do with politics, it's just humanitarian. It's just survival."

In relation to broader protection issues, a community representative in Brisbane proposed that Australia provide resources and personnel to assist West African nations to fight Ebola, due to the risk that the epidemic could lead to further instability (and thus displacement) in the region. One service provider in Sydney suggested that Australia take international action to address human trafficking in light of the vulnerability of displaced people (particularly women and children) to trafficking: "Given our policing and intelligence capabilities, Australia could provide leadership in activities to protect these groups in countries in the region experiencing these problems."

3.4.2. International advocacy

Consultation participants encouraged the Australian Government to make better use of diplomatic channels to address the root causes of conflicts and forced migration. Making the distribution of foreign aid conditional on improvements in human rights in recipient countries was also recommended as one way to increase refugee protection. One consultation participant said the provision of foreign aid to the Burmese Government should be conditional on its adherence to human rights principles, overseen by international NGOs. Other participants said Australia should do more to address the impact of free trade and globalisation as a cause of conflict in African countries.

Extradition treaties in place in East Africa were cited as a barrier for asylum seekers being able to provide evidence of persecution. Representatives from the Liberian community in Sydney requested that the Australian Government establish an Australian embassy in Liberia, and a Liberian embassy in Australia, to provide support to Australians from Liberian backgrounds travelling between the two countries. Participants also called upon the Government to use diplomacy to encourage Pakistan to repeal blasphemy laws and to allow former refugees from Bhutan to visit families and to provide remittances directly to relatives living there. Finally, participants in two separate consultations suggested that Australian Government representatives should conduct visits to countries of refugee origin and asylum to gain a greater understanding of the conditions faced by people who are at risk of persecution or forcibly displaced.

3.4.3. Regional cooperation

At this year's community consultations, ideas and concerns about the direction of regional cooperation on refugee protection in the Asia-Pacific region, and Australia's role or potential role in this process, were discussed by a number of participants. One written submission stated that "A

collaborative approach working in close cooperation with Australia's neighbours, particularly those with high numbers of asylum seekers such as Indonesia and Malaysia, would be the most productive strategy both for dealing with asylum seekers flows and for Australia's relationship with its neighbours". This submission also suggested a collaborative rather than a deterrence approach is warranted in the context of the change of leadership in Indonesia and the potential for increased tension between Australia and Indonesia over this issue. Indeed, a number of participants felt that Australia's pursuit of a regional deterrence approach could not easily or effectively be pursued alongside genuine regional cooperation and may undermine Australia's ability to develop strong and respectful relationships with neighbouring countries.

Some participants suggested that Australia should consider offering an increased number of resettlement places to refugees in our region, in particular from Indonesia and Malaysia. This feedback coincided with the Australian Government's announcement in November 2014 that it would cease resettling newly registered refugees from Indonesia, a move that was considered by some as undermining the basis for regional cooperation and, more significantly, further restricting the already limited solutions open to refugees in Indonesia. With regard to the unilateral announcement about cutting the refugee intake from Indonesia, one participant expressed concerns that this was done without any discussion with key stakeholders, including UNHCR, the Indonesian and Malaysian Governments (referring to the likelihood that more people will remain in Malaysia as a result of the decision to cease resettlement from Indonesia), and with the people most directly affected. It was recommended that the Australian Government take "a far more consultative approach to how it works in the region".

One consultation participant felt that the Australian Government and general population should be reminded that resettling refugees is "not problem sharing, it is also sharing of opportunity". Another suggested that if Australia is serious about a regional solution, it should be supporting its neighbours: "It is hypocritical to be blocking resettlement from countries in our region on the basis of secondary movement while arranging the secondary movement of refugees to Cambodia. Australia's policy leaves many refugees in our region with no resolution in sight." A number of consultation participants highlighted the potential for Australia to play a role in setting up or supporting regional processing centres in key transit countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia in order to support enhanced access to timely and fair RSD systems with resettlement pathways negotiated with various resettlement countries (including the USA, Canada and Europe countries).

A number of consultation participants expressed concern that regional cooperation was being implemented in a way that undermined safety and human rights. In particular, the Australian Government's offshore processing centres in Papua New Guinea and Nauru and its resettlement arrangement with Cambodia were seen as policies that shifted responsibility to states with limited capacity and "well-documented domestic difficulties in securing civilian safety" (as noted in a written submission).

Some consultation participants felt that Australia should pursue a leadership role in reviving the consideration of refugee protection issues through the Bali Process and seek to further cooperation as one of the few signatories to the Refugee Convention in the Asia-Pacific region. As one participant suggested:

The Australian program should provide a benchmark for how other countries in the region should treat refugees. In rejecting the notion that, for example, Rohingya people can come here by boat, we provide a very strong precedent for countries in the rest of the region to reject those people as well. The end result is that Rohingya people have nowhere to go at all. By our actions, Australia is pushing other countries in the region down a path which is destructive for refugees.

Feedback from consultations suggested that the Australian Government should adopt, in the words of one participant, "a more integrated regional approach to dealing with asylum seeker flows that encourages greater cooperation between countries and between government and non-government agencies".

3.5. POSSIBLE PRIORITIES FOR AUSTRALIA'S RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM

"Despite the growth in the number of resettlement States, and the generous commitment of places for the humanitarian admission of Syrian refugees, resettlement needs continue to vastly outnumber the number of places made available by States."

– UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2015

With global resettlement needs currently outstripping available places by a factor of more than ten to one, there has been considerable ongoing discussion about ways to make the most effective use of the 80,000 resettlement places pledged by governments for the coming year. In RCOA's consultations and international discussions on resettlement this year, participants have highlighted the importance of: resettling refugees who are the most vulnerable or in the gravest danger; exploring options for opening up additional resettlement opportunities wherever possible; maintaining a balance between current emergencies and protracted situations; using resettlement as a means of sharing the responsibility for refugee protection more equitably; and exploring ways to use resettlement as a strategic tool to achieve protection dividends for refugees who will not have the opportunity to resettle.

3.5.1. Feedback from consultation participants

Many nominated refugees living in protracted situations as being key priority groups for Australia's resettlement program. Specific groups mentioned by consultation participants included: Bhutanese refugees in Nepal; refugees of various ethnicities from Burma living in India, Malaysia and on the Thai-Burma border; Congolese refugees living in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, with a particular focus on survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and at-risk ethnic groups such as the Banyamulenge; Hazara refugees in Iran and Pakistan; Rohingya refugees from Burma, with one participant suggesting that Australia should also seek to "put pressure on Bangladesh to reopen resettlement to Rohingya"; refugees from Somalia; Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka; Sudanese refugees from Darfur and the Nuba Mountains; and refugees from Tibet.

Others highlighted the needs of refugees from countries currently affected by conflict, such as Iraq, South Sudan and Syria. A number of participants drew specific attention to the needs of minority ethnic and religious groups facing persecution in the Middle East and southwest Asia, including Ahwazis, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Kurds, Mandaeans, Shi'a Muslims and Yazidis. Some participants drew attention to the needs of specific groups of refugees living in particularly precarious situations or facing significant risks to their lives and freedom in countries of asylum, such as Hazara refugees living in Quetta and refugees residing in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. People displaced by conflicts in which Australia had some form of military involvement were also nominated as a priority. Some participants suggested that consideration be given to providing resettlement pathways for people who were unable to leave their country of origin in order to seek protection elsewhere.

A service provider in regional New South Wales also called attention to the situation of refugees from countries where the conflict which initially led to their displacement is deemed to be resolved (such as Burundi, Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Togo). He noted that some of these refugees are unable to repatriate due to fears of ongoing persecution or because they have been displaced for decades and have nothing to return to in their country of origin.

Some consultation participants nominated specific population groups as being priorities for resettlement. These included: children (particularly unaccompanied children, with one participant suggesting that Australia should create a "Children at Risk" visa); women, including through an increase in the Woman at Risk program (although a former Afghan refugee asserted that women should not be de-prioritised for resettlement simply because they had the support of a male relative, citing the serious protection issues faced by Afghan refugees in Iran and the risk that couples may choose to divorce so as to gain access to resettlement opportunities and "make life better for their children"); and stateless people.

A number of participants suggested that Australia should offer resettlement places to refugees residing in our immediate region as a means of offering a viable alternative to dangerous boat journeys. In the words of a service provider in Perth, “Seeing as we’ve done everything we can to stop people seeking asylum through Indonesia and Malaysia, we should be giving people an alternative because currently there isn’t an alternative.” A participant in Canberra noted that increased resettlement from Indonesia in 2012 was “a way of building credibility in the region and addressing the source of people coming by boat. It was the most constructive policy I have seen from the government in recent years.”

Finally, some participants requested more information from the Australian Government about the strategy underlying the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. In the words of a service provider in Perth, “It would be nice to have a bit more insight into why the decisions are made about which populations are being targeted. What’s the logic that’s going on?” A service provider in Adelaide commented that “The Government has a very rational approach to setting the number for the migration intake but there is no logic to the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.”

3.5.2. Priority needs identified through international dialogue

As noted in Section 3.3, the need for more resettlement places is desperate, with millions of refugees living endlessly in insecure situations with no durable solution in sight. In addition, the scale of the need in the Middle East requires an additional response above and beyond the existing resettlement quotas of Australia and other states.

If Australia’s resettlement program is to be as effective as possible as a refugee protection program, it must give priority to the most vulnerable refugees among highly vulnerable refugee populations. The question of vulnerability was highlighted in December 2014 by the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS) which launched a study of refugees who have suffered sexual and gender-based violence in Chad, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda.¹⁸ The study drew attention not only to the needs of women and girls who have suffered sexual and gender based violence but also older people, people with disabilities, male survivors and members of sexual minorities. HIAS referred to the “triple jeopardy” suffered by refugees in these situations – as survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, as refugees and asylum seekers in foreign lands and as members of groups that face stigmatisation, stereotyping and marginalisation.

3.5.3. Principles for Australia’s response

In our annual submission over the past three years, RCOA has outlined six principles for the Australian Government’s response, based on feedback from community consultations.¹⁹ Responding to community views that the scale of the Syrian crisis requires an additional response, we offer seven principles relevant for the planning of the 2015-16 Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

- 1. The need for resettlement to be made widely available as a durable solution** – by expanding, not reducing, the Australian refugee resettlement program and advocating for other nations to follow suit.
- 2. A focus on resettling the most vulnerable** – particularly those with disabilities, at risk of sexual and gender-based violence, unaccompanied minors, those at risk of detention, LGBTI refugees at risk in countries of asylum and refugees isolated from community support (such as refugees well outside their region of origin).

¹⁸ HIAS (2014), *Triple Jeopardy: Protecting At-Risk Refugee Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*, <http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/hias - triple jeopardy - full report.pdf>

¹⁹ These principles were outlined in a little more detail in the submissions on the 2011-12 Refugee and Humanitarian Program (see <http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2012-13-IntakeSub.pdf>, pp 21-22) and the 2012-13 Refugee and Humanitarian Program (<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2013-14-IntakeSub.pdf>, pp 29-30)

3. **An emphasis on family unity** – taking into account the issues raised in Section 4.5 of this submission.
4. **The strategic use of resettlement to promote broader refugee protection** – encouraging the countries of asylum which benefit most from resettlement (such as Thailand, Nepal and Malaysia) to improve the protection of refugees who will not be resettled, by providing them some form of legal status, the right to work and freedom from detention.
5. **The need to balance resettlement needs in different regions** – taking particular note of the extent of resettlement needs in the Africa region, while also responding to pressing needs in Asia and the Middle East.
6. **An additional response to protection needs in large-scale emergency situations** – developing a contingency quota over and above the annual refugee intake to respond to crisis situations such as the current one in countries neighbouring Syria.
7. **A coherent overarching government strategy for refugee protection** – articulating how the Australian Government's commitment to the protection of refugees is put into action in its refugee resettlement strategy, its official aid and development program, its involvement in multilateral forums and its diplomatic action on human rights in refugees' countries of origin and asylum.

3.6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government develop, publish and implement a framework for Australia's refugee resettlement program based on:

- a) *priority resettlement to the most vulnerable refugees, including women at risk, culturally isolated groups of refugees (e.g. small groups of African refugees in South and South-East Asia), LGBTI refugees and other minorities at risk;*
- b) *the promotion of family unity;*
- c) *the strategic use of resettlement; and*
- d) *the consideration of global resettlement needs in the development of regional allocations.*

Recommendation 2

In view of pressing needs across the African continent, RCOA recommends that the Australian Government ensure that the 2015-16 regional target for resettlement from Africa be set at no lower than 25% of the offshore program.

Recommendation 3

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government and other resettlement states work with the Governments of Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand to develop a regional strategy for facilitating resettlement and brokering other durable solutions for Rohingya refugees, including through reinstating resettlement from Bangladesh.

Recommendation 4

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review the definition used to assess eligibility for the Woman at Risk program to bring it into line with the definition used by UNHCR (which does not exclude women who have the support of a male relative).

Recommendation 5

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government:

- a) *in light of the crucial role of aid in assisting forcibly displaced people, restore Australia's overseas aid program to its former level and develop a plan to increase overseas aid to 0.7% of Gross National Income;*
- b) *reinstate the Displaced Persons Program;*

- c) work with diaspora communities in Australia and people living in refugee communities overseas to identify urgent protection needs in countries of origin and asylum and develop and implement strategies to respond to these needs; and
- d) provide additional funding to UNHCR, given the increasing numbers of displaced people worldwide and UNHCR's critical role in coordinating humanitarian responses to displacement.

Recommendation 6

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with affected communities, review recent changes to banking regulations to ensure that communities in Australia are able to continue to provide critical financial support to families and communities living overseas.

Recommendation 7

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in its capacity as a member of the UN Security Council, provide positive leadership in international action to:

- a) address the drivers of forced displacement and respond to protection needs in countries of asylum, with a particular focus on refugees living in protracted situations and/or facing serious risks to their lives and freedom; and
- b) develop a comprehensive response to the growing Syrian refugee crisis.

Recommendation 8

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with UNHCR and non-government organisations working with refugees, develop a strategy for how its diplomatic and aid efforts can be targeted to support incremental improvements in the protection and support of refugees and asylum seekers in South-East Asia and South Asia, as part of a long-term vision for an Asia-Pacific regional agreement on refugee protection.

Recommendation 9

RCOA recommends that, in its capacity as co-chair of the Bali Process, revive efforts to operationalise the Regional Cooperation Framework agreed to by Bali Process members in March 2011.

4. AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM

4.1. OVERVIEW OF THE 2013-14 PROGRAM

"We want to appeal to the Australian government to take as many as possible for resettlement. For when I arrived in Australia, I was so grateful for coming here. Whenever I eat, I thank the Australian Government."

– Former refugee from Burma, Melbourne

In 2013-14, the size of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program was reduced from 20,000 places to 13,750 places and will remain at this level during 2014-15. The composition of the program changed significantly in 2013-14, with a substantial increase in the offshore Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) but large reductions in the numbers of visas issued through the offshore Refugee Program and the Onshore Protection Program. The regional focus of the program continues to shift towards Asia and the Middle East at the expense of Africa.

In 2013-14, 11,016 visas were granted under the offshore component of the program, a reduction on the 12,515 issued in 2012-13. This included 4,515 Special Humanitarian Program visas (a dramatic increase on the 503 visas granted in this category in 2012-13) and 6,501 visas under the Refugee Program (reduced from 12,012 in 2012-13). The offshore program included 245 visas issued under the Community Proposal Pilot; 1,052 Woman at Risk visas; and more than 500 In-country Special Humanitarian Program visas issued to Afghans who had worked with Australian Defence Force personnel. The number of Woman at Risk visas issued was the second highest since the program was introduced 25 years ago but lower than the 1,673 visas issued in 2012-13.

Table 8: Permanent Refugee and Humanitarian visa grants by subclass, 2008-09 to 2013-14

Visa subclass	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Offshore Refugee visas						
Refugee (visa subclass 200)	5,653	5,173	5,211	5,140	10,238	4,730
In-country Special Humanitarian (201)	54	24	26	43	71	717
Emergency Rescue (203)	4	-	2	-	30	2
Woman at Risk (204)	788	806	759	821	1,673	1,052
Sub-total: Offshore Refugee visas	6,499	6,003	5,998	6,004	12,012	6,501
Offshore Special Humanitarian visas						
Global Special Humanitarian (202)	4,511	3,233	2,973	714	503	4,515
- 202 visas granted by ministerial intervention	75	11	8	2	-	
Sub-total: Offshore Special Humanitarian	4,586	3,244	2,981	716	503	4,515
Total Offshore Refugee and Humanitarian	11,085	9,247	8,979	6,720	12,515	11,016
Permanent Onshore Protection visas						
Onshore Permanent Protection (866)	2,369	4,515	4,818	7,038	7,504	2,752
Resolution of Status (851)	39	8	2	1	4	
Total Permanent Onshore Protection visas	2,408	4,523	4,820	7,039	7,508	2,752
TOTAL	13,493	13,770	13,799	13,759	20,023	13,768

Around 2,750 permanent Protection Visas were granted under the onshore component of the program, a decrease of more than two-thirds compared to 2012-13. Of these, 2,207 were issued to people who sought asylum after entering Australia with a valid visa and 545 were issued to people who arrived by boat without a visa. Following the change of government in September 2013, people who arrived without a valid visa and were subsequently found to be in need of refugee protection were denied access to permanent Protection Visas. In line with this policy, several hundred temporary humanitarian visas (Temporary Protection visas, Temporary Humanitarian Concern visas and Temporary Safe Haven visas) were granted during 2013-14 but these visa grants were not included within the Refugee and Humanitarian Program allocation of 13,750 permanent places.

4.2. SIZE OF THE PROGRAM

“The bottom line is that we’ve got a very small program of humanitarian settlement. I know it’s not insignificant compared to others but it is a small program. There is obviously a huge amount more needed.”

– Service provider, Perth

As in previous years, there were strong calls across the country for a significant increase in the size of Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Many participants again expressed disappointment that the program had been reduced in size and was to remain static at 13,750 places despite an escalation in global needs. In the words of one service provider in Sydney, “the refugee crisis now is at an all-time high since World War II. I think the fact that Australia’s numbers haven’t matched that need; it needs to be addressed. If there is such a huge need in the world, we do need to meet that, especially now that it’s on such a huge scale.”

There was a general view that Australia, due to its comparative wealth and the size of its annual migration program, had ample capacity to increase its refugee and humanitarian intake. Several participants called for intake to be restored to 20,000 places annually, with some calling for further increases to up to 30,000 places annually given the scale of current global needs. A number of participants highlighted the fact that the settlement sector had increased its capacity to support the increased intake in 2012-13 and the sudden contraction in the size of the program has resulted in a substantial loss on the taxpayer-funded investment in the settlement services sector. Some participants also highlighted the disconnect between the Government’s stated preference for the use of “regular” migration pathways and its decision to reduce the size of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, noting that it was paradoxical to encourage the use of “regular” pathways while simultaneously reducing opportunities for regular entry.

RCOA’s consultations took place before the announcement in December 2014 that the Refugee and Humanitarian Program would be progressively increased to 18,750 places over the next four years. While we believe that this decision would be generally welcomed, the feedback received at this year’s consultations suggests that this gradual increase which will not restore the Refugee and Humanitarian Program to its former size would nonetheless be viewed as an insufficient response in light of current global needs.

4.3. COMPOSITION OF THE PROGRAM

“If the SHP isn’t allocated in a way that recognises the sustainability of the program you’ll find that services will drift off... The risk is that by not recognising the need to create sustainable regions for settlement, they will gradually disappear and the services will drop off.”

– Service provider, Tasmania

As noted above, one of the most significant changes to the composition of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program over the past year has been the dramatic increase in the number of SHP visa grants, with a further increase expected this financial year. While the increase in SHP visas was generally welcomed by consultation participants (particularly as a means of expanding family reunion opportunities), some expressed concerns about the impacts of this change on settlement patterns.

Feedback gathered during this year’s consultations suggests that the increased emphasis on SHP visa grants has resulted in a larger proportion of refugee and humanitarian entrants arriving in more established settlement areas (namely Sydney and Melbourne) at the expense of smaller or emerging settlement areas, as well as delaying the arrival of people resettled through the Refugee component who are more likely to settle outside established areas due to a lack of existing links in Australia. Service providers in some regional areas reported that they had been informed at the beginning of the financial year that they would receive a specific number of resettled refugees but none had yet arrived.

Fluctuations in settlement patterns have been a significant source of frustration for many service providers in recent years, particularly in smaller settlement areas where services face greater challenges in adapting to large increases and decreases in arrival numbers. In this year's consultations, concern was again expressed that these fluctuations were hampering advance planning and could result in significant loss of skills, expertise and human resources from the sector as providers are compelled to reduce staff numbers in order to survive financially. One service provider from Tasmania highlighted the particularly acute impact of the loss of skilled staff in smaller settlement areas, noting that staff who lose their jobs may leave the area entirely to seek employment elsewhere and thus cannot be re-recruited if arrival numbers later increase. Another service provider in Adelaide noted that fluctuating numbers also affected their ability to maintain a volunteer program, as "volunteers cannot hang around if they have nothing to do".

Feedback relating to other visa subclasses was limited. Some participants called for an increase in the Woman at Risk quota due to the particular vulnerability of this group. Another participant suggested that visa grants to individuals who are at risk due to their work with the Australian Defence Force should not be deducted from the Refugee and Humanitarian Program (through the In-Country Special Humanitarian Program) but should instead be additional to the existing intake.

Several participants put forward suggestions for adjusting the composition of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program so as to maximise resettlement opportunities, particularly people in protracted situations. For example, some called for onshore visa grants (whether they be permanent or temporary) to be entirely delinked from the offshore resettlement program – that is, onshore visa grants should not be included within the overall intake but should instead be a stand-alone uncapped program. Others suggested that resettlement which forms part of a response to a current emergency situation (such as Iraq and Syria) should not be subsumed within the existing refugee and humanitarian intake but instead should be an additional quota over and above the existing intake. Some participants similarly suggested that the increase in SHP visas should be additional to the existing intake.

Finally, some participants called for greater clarity from the Government regarding its priorities and strategy in planning the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. A service provider in Melbourne, for example, noted that "we are always second-guessing" how many people would arrive, from where and when, while a service provider in Adelaide commented that the Refugee and Humanitarian Program lacked the same level of strategic planning as the migration program. Participants requested more information from the Government about the strategy underlying the Refugee and Humanitarian Program both in terms of resettlement priorities (as noted in Section 3) and the management of the settlement process in Australia (where and when people would be initially settled in Australia after arrival).

4.4. COMMUNITY PROPOSAL PILOT

"It is a good idea but it costs too much. It would be \$60,000 for my family. I would need to take out a mortgage to pay for it."

– Former refugee from Iraq, Melbourne

The Community Proposal Pilot (CPP),²⁰ now in its second year, provided 500 visa places within Australia's existing Humanitarian Program for community members and organisations to sponsor and support people from overseas through the Humanitarian Program. Five Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs) – AMES and Brotherhood of St Laurence (Victoria), Illawarra Multicultural Services and Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre (New South Wales) and the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia – worked with Supporting Community Organisations (SCOs) and individual proposers to identify people in need of resettlement, support their visa application and help them to settle in Australia.

²⁰ For more information about the Community Proposal Pilot, see <http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/community-proposal-pilot.htm>

Visas issued under the Community Proposal Pilot are drawn from the offshore Refugee and Special Humanitarian programs. DIBP applies a series of visa application charges: \$2,680 for an initial application and, if successful, \$16,444 for the main applicant and \$2,680 for each subsequent family member. The APOs chosen to assist in the management of the pilot charge a fee of \$6,710. Total charges for a family of five, for instance, would total \$36,554. Those lodging the application are also responsible for the costs of medical checks, airfares, accommodation and initial household costs, as well as for providing on-arrival settlement assistance.

In consultations over the last few years, community members and service providers have raised concerns regarding the introduction of the CPP. These concerns include the high cost of the application and visas, the inclusion of the program within the existing Refugee and Humanitarian Program intake, the lack of settlement support in cases of family breakdown and the prioritised processing, which was seen to benefit those who could afford the associated costs.

Almost all community members and service providers consulted viewed the costs of the program as excessive, commenting that it would only benefit those who are well off and able to afford the fees. Many commented that the high costs involved conflict with the humanitarian aspects of the program, as the program does not help those most in need. As one service provider commented, "It's not humanitarian if you pay for it." A number of people also viewed the high costs as a revenue raising scheme for the Government. Another concern was the additional costs for each family member, which contributed significantly to the high cost of the program. As one community member in NSW commented, "It's extremely, extremely expensive. I don't know who can afford that amount of money. I know people who want to have their families here but it's so expensive, especially if you have many [family] members. It's not only one person, you have to pay for each member."

Another concern was the perceived unfairness of the program, in that applications lodged under the CPP are prioritised for processing regardless of the urgency of their protection needs. Those consulted believed that the program provided a specialised pathway for those who are able to afford the fees, while others who had been proposed through the SHP and other visa streams may have to wait for years even if their protection needs are more pressing. As one service provider in Perth commented:

In my opinion, I don't think that's right. Technically, you're giving away visas to people who can afford it when there are thousands of people who have been in a refugee camp for years who don't get that opportunity to go the UN [for registration]...Australia is saying 'you give us money, we'll give you a visa'.

Many also commented that the high costs of the program create inequality as newer communities will not have the capacity to propose their family, while more settled and well off community members are able to bypass the significant wait times associated with other visa applications. Newer communities also have less capacity to support new arrivals through the CPP and thus were less likely to be accepted as proposers. Community members also believed that the program was directed towards people from the Middle East who had more capacity to afford the fees, whereas people from African communities have been discouraged from applying.

RCOA also heard a number of concerns regarding the eligibility requirements for the CPP, with a number of people from Africa and Burma being rejected. One participant reported that some people who have travelled to other countries on short-term visas (e.g. as temporary workers) had been excluded from the program, even if they have no prospect of being able to remain in that country long-term and would be at risk of persecution if they returned. This had resulted in some applicants feeling compelled to return to their country of origin and flee again to apply for refugee status elsewhere. In the words of this participant, "they are having to flee twice."

The placement of the CPP within the existing Humanitarian Program was also raised as a significant concern. Many felt that by placing the CPP within the existing quota of 13,750, places have been taken from those most in need and given to those who are willing and able to pay the

high fees. Many commented that because of the high cost to communities and low cost to the Government, the CPP should be in addition to the Humanitarian Program. As one service provider in Perth commented, "The biggest issue we have is that it is taken out of the visa cap. If they're going to ask the community to pay for everything and more for people to come, it should be above the cap. Why are we paying for positions that the Government has already said it would pay for?"

Lack of involvement from SCOs was also highlighted as a concern. Many participants indicated that the CPP has been seen as a more expensive version of the SHP, rather than an attempt to increase the involvement of the community in the settlement process. Indeed, most of the applications seem to have come from individuals directly to the APO, rather than working through an SCO. This meant that individuals have used the Pilot as an alternative family reunion visa, contrary to the original intention of the program.

Those consulted identified the need to increase the involvement of SCOs in the CPP. Participants highlighted that, while community organisations are very keen to be involved in the program, the expectation, responsibilities and role of SCOs are unclear. Furthermore, many participants pointed out that the high cost of the program is the main barrier to greater involvement from the wider community, religious groups and refugee community organisations.

Concerns were also raised about the lack of support for families and individuals granted visas under the CPP. While the proposer and SCOs are responsible for providing settlement support, there is no safety net in cases of breakdown between the proposer and proposed family. Many have commented on the very limited support available from the APOs to address settlement needs. Service providers and APOs have indicated that they are not funded or supported to provide assistance to those granted visas under the CPP in cases of breakdown between the proposer and new arrivals. There is also confusion between services providers about the level of support that those who have come through the CPP receive and what they are eligible for.

While there was widespread criticism of the CPP, many said that the program was still in demand, as people are desperate to find any way to help their family and other community members escape danger. Indeed, RCOA heard that a number of community members were taking out excessive loans to be able to propose their family through the CPP. There was concern among community members and service providers that these loans were well above the family's means, creating further social and financial problems for the family. The 500 places available in the pilot phase were filled up very quickly and some community members and service providers called for an increase in the size of the CPP, however specifying that the program should be in addition to Australia's Humanitarian Program. Those consulted also called for the program to be expanded to other states beyond New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

While there has been significant criticism of the program, a large number of community members stressed their desire to be more involved in the sponsoring and settlement of new arrivals. Many established communities have indicated they have the capacity, networks and resources to provide support to new arrivals, yet felt the high fees and strict requirements of the CPP are prohibitive. As research by RCOA shows,²¹ refugee community organisations play a significant role in the settlement of new arrivals, and more should be done to acknowledge and build upon these existing capabilities.

Those consulted recommended that the up-front costs should be significantly reduced and the fees associated with social security should be replaced with an 'assurance of support' model. In this model, if a proposed individual needs to access Centrelink or additional settlement support, money will then be taken from the proposer. However, if the proposed person does not need additional support, there will not be any additional money required from the proposer. Such a model encourages SCOs and individuals to provide effective settlement support and is an incentive for

²¹ The Refugee Council of Australia, *The Strength Within: The role of refugee community organisations in settlement*, 2014, available at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/ppt/1405_StrengthWithin.pdf

community groups to increase their role in providing settlement support and helping new arrivals with transitions to independence.

Finally, service providers and community members expressed concern regarding the lack of a transparency in the implementation of the CPP and many community members felt that there wasn't sufficient community consultation before the commencement of the Pilot. Participants called for a community consultation to be conducted and for further information, such as statistics, to be made publicly available.

4.5. FAMILY REUNION

"It's like being in an eternal prison – safety but no peace."

– Service provider, Tasmania

As in previous years, issues relating to family reunion were raised in almost every consultation across the country. As well as emphasising the consequences of family separation, participants highlighted a range of challenges affecting people in Australia who are seeking to propose family members for resettlement. While some of these challenges are pre-existing and have been raised over a number of years (such as prolonged delays in processing of applications, the restrictive definition of family and the limited availability of affordable migration advice), others have resulted from policy changes and decisions made during 2013-14 (such as the increase in the size of the Special Humanitarian Program and the introduction of new restrictions affecting people who arrived in Australia by boat).

4.5.1. Impacts of family separation

Community members and service providers across Australia continued to highlight the devastating psychological, economic and social impacts of family separation. A common refrain from people from refugee backgrounds who have participated in RCOA's consultations in previous years, which was again repeated in this year's consultations, is that the physical security offered by Australia is offset by the ongoing mental anguish of family separation. A community member in Sydney, for example, stated that "we love this country. This country gave us peace. But we can't find the peace inside our heads, because we are split". An Afghan asylum seeker who had arrived as an unaccompanied minor similarly commented that "while your family is back in a not safe place and almost you are losing them, what is the point of you being safe? You will be physically safe [but] you will not be mentally safe."

The emotional distress caused by family separation was painfully evident in a number of consultations, with some participants becoming visibly distressed or breaking down as they spoke of their fruitless efforts to reunite with their families. Service providers also expressed concern about the impacts of family separation on the mental health of refugee and humanitarian entrants, with some citing instances of self-harm and suicidal ideation triggered by family separation.

Consultation participants also highlighted the impacts of family separation on settlement outcomes more broadly, with a number of service providers expressing the view that successful settlement was not possible without family reunion. In the words of a service provider in Brisbane, "settlement cannot be complete until people have their family with them". The capacity of refugee and humanitarian entrants to recover from pre-arrival trauma, move on with their lives and fully engage with the settlement process (such as through learning English and securing sustainable employment) was seen to be significantly hampered by family separation. As noted by a former refugee living in Sydney, "we love this country, but we can't get on with our lives in this situation". A representative from the Sudanese community in Perth similarly stated that "you bring us here for settlement but there cannot be any settlement, it is suffering".

Some participants noted that the pressure to financially support family members living overseas could compel some people to forego study in favour of paid work, with one service provider also expressing concern that this imperative could place people at risk of workplace exploitation. The

need to support family members overseas was also highlighted as one of the significant financial costs of family separation, in that money which would otherwise be injected into the Australian economy is instead sent overseas. In terms of longer-term financial impacts, participants highlighted the added mental health costs associated with family separation, with a service provider in Perth asserting that “you either pay mental health costs or you reunite a family”. Others pointed to the lost opportunity whereby people who would otherwise be able to settle successfully and contribute to Australia are held back due to the impacts of family separation. In the words of another service provider in Perth, “it’s not just the cost, it’s the value that we’re missing”.

One former refugee from Afghanistan who had arrived in Australia as a single parent with three children provided a practical example of a lost opportunity stemming from family separation. He wished to apply to bring his mother to Australia to assist him in caring for his children but had received advice from a migration agent that “99% of the time, the Department of Immigration rejects these applications”. He lamented that his caring responsibilities and lack of family support in Australia were hampering his capacity to participate in the paid workforce:

When I lived in Pakistan, I had a small business... It was a good business but because we were in a bad situation and our life was not safe, we had to move to Australia. If I was not busy with my children, I could start my business again. When I had my business in Pakistan, many people worked with me, sometimes 25 people. If I could start my business here, I could give jobs to other people. At the moment I can't see any hope.

A former refugee from Sudan who had six children similarly noted that she was unable to work due to her caring responsibilities, whereas in her home country these responsibilities would have been shared with extended family and other support networks from whom she is now separated. A former refugee from Liberia also spoke of her struggles as a sole parent with no other relatives in Australia: “I had no relatives, I had no friends, I had no other person that I could turn to. If not for the grace of God, I could be in a mental home. It was very tough for me. Can you imagine?” She went on to highlight what she saw as the injustice of being denied the opportunity to reunite with her family members despite her efforts to contribute to her new country:

I never committed any crime, I work hard, I did a six-month course, I started working, earning on my own, not depending on the Government, to make myself look like a good citizen to them, and they have done this to me. I feel that maybe Australia brought me to become a slave for them. That's how I classify it.

The story of this consultation participant also highlighted the potential for family separation to lead to relationship breakdown. After three unsuccessful attempts, she had abandoned her efforts to reunite with her family so that she and her children would be able to move forward with their lives in Australia. A service provider in Tasmania recounted that some refugee entrants using their service had been through a similar experience, deciding to cease contact with family members due to the emotional toll of separation: “The only way of moving forward is to in many ways divorce yourself from them.”

Other participants noted that relationship breakdown may occur after reunification but as a direct consequence of prolonged separation, highlighting the challenges associated with rebuilding relationships under stressful circumstances after spending years apart. Some also expressed concern that the tensions stemming from prolonged separation could escalate into serious conflict and family violence. In the words of a service provider in Sydney:

For them it seems that time stops for the family member overseas. It might be six or eight years since they have last seen their family members. In the first week, everybody is happy and they want everybody in the house. The next week, the plan has been thrown out. There is some big family issue and the relationship is gone within one week. They are still believing that that person is the same... We have seen lots of violence and conflicts happening afterwards. That's a long-term issue because they have broken that relationship.

While most of the feedback on the consequences of separation focused on people living in Australia, some participants also highlighted the impacts on the family members left behind. Concerns were expressed that a lack of access to family reunion pathways could trap people in precarious or dangerous situations overseas. Participants cited a number of cases where separated family members had faced significant hardship and serious threats to their safety or had even been killed following delays in family reunion. In the words of one participant from the Hazara community, “It is not only destroying our lives here but it is destroying the lives of our families back home.”

4.5.2. Increase in the Special Humanitarian Program

As noted above, the increase in SHP visas was generally welcomed by consultation participants. In recent years, the dramatic decline in the availability of SHP visas has been highlighted as a major issue of concern and a number of participants were pleased to see that the SHP quota had significantly increased during 2013-14.

At the same time, however, participants drew attention to a number of challenges relating to the SHP. Among service providers, there was significant concern that some SHP visa holders may not be receiving adequate on-arrival settlement support. While SHP visa holders can access the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program if their proposer is unable to provide support, it was noted that SHP visa holders and their proposers may be reluctant to approach HSS providers for fear of being penalised for accessing these services. A service provider in Sydney, for example, reported that proposers had been told when applying for SHP visas that failure to provide adequate support to their relatives on arrival could jeopardise their ability to propose other family members in the future. The provider noted that this “message has got through so strongly that proposers are refusing to work with us but at the same time they are not supporting their families” and despite the efforts of DIBP to address the situation, there was still reluctance among proposers to approach settlement services for help.

There was also concern that some proposers (whether they be individuals, organisations or community groups) may lack the necessary knowledge and expertise to provide orientation assistance commensurate with professional settlement services. It was noted that in some cases, proposers may offer incorrect or misleading advice which can negatively impact on the settlement process and experience of those they have proposed. A service provider in Brisbane, for instance, voiced concerns that proposers may not be fully aware of the health needs of their family members and may not have the capacity to understand and navigate the health system in Australia, with potentially serious implications (such as children missing out on vaccinations).

A number of participants reported instances where people in Australia or their relatives overseas had been encouraged by DIBP or embassy staff to apply under the SHP, even if those relatives would be eligible for a Refugee visa in their own right. There was concern that this practice was placing pressure on families and communities in Australia which did not have capacity to provide adequate support to relatives arriving on SHP visas but nonetheless felt compelled to apply for fear of their family members missing out on the opportunity to resettle in Australia. This was noted to be a particularly significant issues for newer arrivals and smaller communities who are still at the early stages of settlement themselves and have limited financial capacity to provide support to others. In the words of a service provider in Brisbane, “It is undermining the successful settlement of new arrivals by placing a financial and other burden on the sponsoring family.”

It was also evident from the feedback received that not all communities had benefited from the increase in the SHP quota, with some (particularly people from African countries) reporting ongoing difficulties in accessing SHP visas. In the words of a service provider in Perth:

We concentrate on the Syria crisis but there are so many people here from South Sudan whose families have had to flee from South Sudan into Uganda. They're just forgotten about. You can see on a global level [why there is such a strong focus on Syria] but not on a personal level when so many people are desperate for something to be done to help their relatives. When someone comes and says 'I want to sponsor my

'brother from Uganda', we think 'you haven't got a hope in hell'. That's really the truth. It's very difficult to say that to people. You can fill out as many forms as you like but it's very unlikely that they'll ever come.

Another service provider from Melbourne noted that the practice of setting regional or country targets for Refugee and SHP visas could be problematic, in that it may result in people being arbitrarily denied the opportunity to reunite: "If a particular cultural group wants to reunite but the quota for their region is already reached, then what will they do?"

A number of consultation participants raised concerns relating to the implications of the increasing focus on the SHP for the overall character of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Several participants expressed the view that the increase in the SHP quota was largely a cost-cutting measure. A service provider in Sydney noted that the increased focus on promoting the SHP was sending a message that people "have to pay to get protection". Some also expressed concern that the increase in the SHP quota had shifted the focus of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program towards people who had family links in Australia at the expense of people who lacked family links but were nonetheless in need of resettlement. A service provider in Sydney, for example, noted that some people affected by conflicts which have arisen relatively recently (as opposed to protracted refugee situations) may not have family links in Australia.

4.5.3. Processing of family reunion applications

Participants in many consultations raised a range of ongoing concerns relating to the processing of applications for family reunion and unreasonably restrictive eligibility requirements. Both community members and service providers assisting with the preparation of family reunion applications expressed confusion and frustration about prolonged delays in processing and the limited or lack of information communicated to applicants about the reasons for these delays or the progress of their applications. In the words of a service provider in regional New South Wales:

Something should be done with that. We've complained so many times. We had a couple of families who proposed small children, even babies. It took us four years. Four years! For what? Why did that happen? Everything was legal, everything was fine, but it took the family four years to get those children here. It's ridiculous. We spent so much time writing emails, getting in contact with migration agents, trying to help them but nothing was happening. It's ridiculous.

Concerns were also expressed about the restrictive definition of family used to assess and prioritise family reunion applications, noting that it failed to adequately consider the circumstances of adult children, siblings, parents (where the proposer is an adult), other extended family members and people with whom the proposer has a close family-like bond but no blood relationship. A former refugee in Sydney, for example, spoke of their fears for the safety of their adult children living in dangerous situations overseas and emphasised that the family relationship was more important than the age of their children: "Are they are no longer our children and are we no longer their mums and dads [once they are adults]?" Another former refugee in Brisbane similarly highlighted the importance of focusing on the nature of the relationship rather than the strength of blood ties, noting that "those friends who I have very strong connections in the refugee camp are equivalent to my family members". A participant from the Karen community voiced concerns that reunification was far more difficult with some family members than others, contrasting the relative ease of proposing wives and children with the difficulties of reuniting with siblings.

A number of participants cited difficulties in sourcing documentation or evidence to substantiate family relationships. In some cases, this documentation never existed or had been lost or destroyed during flight. A representative from the Liberian community noted that many people from his community marry through traditional ceremonies and do not have formal marriage certificates, while another participant cited the case of a Rohingya man whose family's documents had been destroyed when their house burnt down. It was also noted that evidence of ongoing relationships (such as phone or email records) may be very difficult to provide due to a lack of access to communication technologies in displacement situations. One service provider in Perth raised

concerns about the rejection of cases on the basis that the person had presented fraudulent documents, noting that this may have been done unintentionally: “The way the Department is running it, if there’s a false document, that’s it, regardless of whether it was done accidentally or unknowingly.”

A number of participants cited instances where family members overseas had been barred from family reunion opportunities because they had not been formally registered as refugees. A participant from the Karen community reported that their son, who lives in a camp on the Thai-Burma border, was working outside the camp when officials arrived to conduct formal registration and, as a result, cannot be resettled. A participant from the Afghan community who was attempting to sponsor her brother related being told by Australian officials that he should register with UNHCR. When she explained that her brother had been unable to access the UNHCR office in his country of asylum, she was reportedly told that he should “go ten or more times and he’ll get inside”.

Others reported difficulties in engaging with officials involved in the processing of family reunion applications. One former refugee described the family reunion interview as “an interrogation” and claimed that Australian officials had acted in an aggressive and intimidating manner. Another former refugee reported that she had been asked highly inappropriate questions by an Australian official when attempting to reunite with her husband (such as questioning whether she was “too old” to have married her younger husband). One service provider highlighted inconsistencies between different overseas posts in terms of their efficiency in processing applications.

A number of consultation participants who had been resettled in Australia reported receiving unrealistic or incorrect information before their arrival about their likely prospects of family reunion. Some had left family members behind after being assured by officials that they would be able to sponsor their relatives for resettlement once they arrived in Australia. They were greatly distressed to discover after arrival that family reunion was not possible or would be a very prolonged process. There was a clear sense of betrayal among some participants – a former refugee from Sudan, for example, asserted that “the Government should be trusted. If you promise something, you have to do it”. A service provider in Perth noted that this had been a particularly significant issue for Afghan Locally Engaged Employees resettled on subclass 201 visas, who appeared to have received very poor information about family reunion opportunities before their arrival in Australia:

Almost all of them have come into us almost immediately after arriving. They had put their entire family on the application form and only they have been given a visa and haven’t been told why their family didn’t have it. They rock up and have been told absolutely nothing at all, expecting that maybe they have to fill out another form before their family could arrive. We tell them that no, they’re not going to be able to bring any of them. The whole way it’s been done has been really, really poor. If we are giving visas to these people because we have an obligation towards them, we didn’t treat them very well.

4.5.4. Financial cost

The high cost of family reunion was again raised as an issue of concern in this year’s consultations. This was seen as a particularly significant issue for people sponsoring family members under the family stream of the migration program due to the (increasing) cost of visa application fees but was also noted as an issue for people proposing relatives under the SHP. A participant from the Karen community, for example, noted that the cost of airfares could be considerable for large families, citing a figure of \$10,000 for a family of seven. Some service providers noted that the increasing pressure on people in Australia to propose relatives for SHP visas (as opposed to waiting for a Refugee visa) was placing a considerable financial strain on some families, with a service provider in Brisbane asserting that this practice was “condemning people to poverty”. Another participant from the Liberian community highlighted the high cost of DNA tests as a barrier to reunification.

Some participants raised concerns that people affected by the introduction of new restrictions on family reunion (discussed below in 4.5.5) may lose considerable sums of money in migration agent and application fees. A service provider in Tasmania related the story of a refugee who had spent between \$3,000 and \$4,000 attempting to sponsor his wife for resettlement before the changes to processing priorities were introduced – “and he doesn’t get that money back”.

A number of participants reported that their applications for family reunion were rejected because they did not have sufficient funds in their bank accounts. A participant from South Sudan stated that his wife is now stranded in Uganda as a result and expressed frustration that decision-makers had not taken into account the considerable capacity of the Sudanese community in Australia to provide support to new arrivals. Another participant from the Liberian community who was attempting to reunite with her adopted daughter voiced similar frustrations, arguing that her bank balance was not reflective of her capacity to care for her daughter:

Before, they told me that I did not have enough money in my account. I know that when she comes, I will be capable enough. If I can take care of my own child who I brought here who has a disability, I think I can take care of her!...They are only looking at accounts here. I am spending more [to support my daughter] over there than I have been here. If she was here, what I am spending there I could use to support her.

4.5.5. Restrictions on family reunion

A significant number of consultation participants expressed serious concerns about restrictions on eligibility for family reunion for people who arrived in Australia as asylum seekers by boat. It was felt that the change to processing priorities, whereby applications lodged by people who arrived by boat would be afforded the lowest priority, was an unnecessarily punitive measure likely to have serious negative consequences for people settling in Australia (and their family members living in precarious situations overseas).

A service provider in Tasmania commented in relation to one refugee they support that “lowest processing priority in effect means he won’t be considered so he’s got to wait. His mathematics is if I can be a citizen in so many years I can do it. It sounds like a punitive process rather than a rational one. How many more times do people get punished for coming by boat?” A consultation participant stated in a written submission that “refugees who arrive by boat now cannot sponsor their family at all. Why is that? A refugee is a refugee. Their treatment should not depend on the way they arrived here”. In another written submission, a participant from regional New South Wales highlighted the case of a former Afghan refugee whose orphaned sister and cousins were “destined to remain in life-threatening conditions” in Pakistan due to restrictions on family reunion. A service provider in Brisbane described policies which restrict access to family reunion as “anti-family”.

A number of participants highlighted specific concerns about groups on whom the restrictions were likely to have particularly negative impacts. An Afghan asylum seeker noted that some groups of refugee and humanitarian entrants may struggle to gain access to citizenship which in turn will limit their access to family reunion opportunities: “Refugees are not all educated. They didn’t have an opportunity to go to school. Many spent their whole life in a refugee camp. There is no school in the refugee camp. How can they pass the citizenship test without an education?” Some participants expressed particular concern about the impacts of these restrictions on unaccompanied minors, with one participant in Canberra stating that “to cut off all options for family reunion for unaccompanied minors is the opposite of humanitarian”. A service provider in Perth highlighted examples where the individual affected could not afford to wait for years to reunite with their families:

There should be some exceptional criteria for clients who are not able to bring their family unless they have citizenship. We have a client who has liver and kidney failure. He needs to do a transplant for both his kidney and liver. The doctors have said that he can live for five years...He was about to submit his [family reunion] application and then this policy came in... He maybe has less than five years’ life, his children are very

young... Another client had a very serious road accident and he is now paralysed, totally paralysed. He cannot even talk easily. He submitted his application for his family but he doesn't even remember his file number... There should be exceptional things for these kinds of clients.

A service provider in Melbourne noted that advice and information provided about family reunion options did not always keep pace with policy changes, to the point that some services have become reluctant to offer any information about family reunion options and refugee and humanitarian entrants are at risk of being “ripped off”. Confusion about these policy changes was evident in one consultation in Tasmania, where a number of former Afghan refugees who had been resettled in Australia mistakenly believed that the restrictions on family reunion also applied to them.

While the majority of feedback relating to restrictions on family reunion related to policies affecting people who arrived by boat, some feedback was also received about the impacts of the suspension of visa grants to people living in countries affected by Ebola. A number of participants reported that applications for family reunion had been delayed due to these restrictions. A representative from the Liberian community commented that “the statement that was issued by the Immigration Minister, it did not go down well with us. It was intimidating us and being racist to us... For the Minister to say they will not take any applications from refugees from the countries affected by Ebola, we felt so downhearted; we felt so bad about that.”

4.5.6. Migration advice

As in previous years, the lack of affordable migration advice was again raised in a number of consultations. Several service providers expressed serious concerns that access to migration advice was becoming increasingly limited due to changes in funding arrangements, whereby provision of migration advice is no longer funded under the Settlement Grants program administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS). It was noted that a lack of access to migration advice could have a number of significant implications for people attempting to reunite with family members: applications may be rejected because they have not filled out the form correctly or failed to provide relevant information (even if their case for reunification is compelling); they may instead seek advice from members of their community or organisations who do not have sufficient expertise to provide accurate advice and assistance with visa applications; and they may be compelled to seek advice from private migration agents charging high fees which new arrivals can ill afford.

4.5.7. Family reunion under the Migration Program

A range of Migration Program issues were raised during the national consultations including disincentives for people returning home to visit family, the relationship between service providers and proposers, the need for flexibility around fiancé visas, creation of an additional program for skilled migrants from refugee background, better settlement services support for women arriving on spouse visas, reunification of families of refugees resettled after assisting Australian forces in Afghanistan, families separated through resettlement and the suspension of visas from West African countries affected by the Ebola outbreak.

Consultation participants said people arriving on spousal visas lacked knowledge about their rights or how to access basic settlement services like using an ATM or making use of additional English language tuition hours. There was discussion about young people being financially exploited or given a false amount to repay proposers and being unaware of how to exercise their consumer rights and some felt service providers could play a positive intervention role to mediate problems between proposers and sponsors.

The issue of fiancé visas was raised with reports of young men and women planning to return to countries of origin to marry their fiancés. Some have had to apply for spousal visas on return.

Other community members were alarmed to learn their entitlements would end if they returned to visit family members overseas.

4.6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 10

RCOA recommends that the Refugee and Humanitarian Program be immediately restored to 20,000 places annually, delinked from onshore permanent Protection Visa grants.

Recommendation 11

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, in light of escalating global protection needs, consider further expanding the Refugee and Humanitarian Program to between 25,000 and 30,000 places annually.

Recommendation 12

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government consider establishing an Emergency Response contingency quota over and above the annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program intake to provide additional capacity to respond to urgent protection needs during emergency situations, such as the current crisis in Syria.

Recommendation 13

RCOA recommends that the upfront cost of the Community Proposal Pilot be significantly reduced and the associated ‘safety net’ costs replaced with an ‘assurance of support’ model.

Recommendation 14

RCOA recommends that the annual quota for the Community Proposal Pilot or any replacement program be delinked from the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

Recommendation 15

RCOA recommends that funding be made available for support services for people proposed under the Community Proposal Pilot in cases of emergency or relationship breakdown, to be taken out of the assurance of support if required.

Recommendation 16

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government work with refugee community organisations in Australia to clarify the role of Supporting Community Organisations in the Community Proposal Pilot and facilitate greater involvement of these organisations in the Pilot.

Recommendation 17

RCOA recommends the Department of Immigration and Border Protection conduct a public review of and consultation on the Community Proposal Pilot.

Recommendation 18

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government overhaul the family reunion options for refugee and humanitarian entrants to Australia by developing a “Humanitarian Family Reunion Program” that is separate from the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and the family stream of the Migration Program. RCOA recommends that this Humanitarian Family Reunion Program be developed in consultation with former refugee community members and organisations, peak bodies and relevant service providers.

Recommendation 19

In the absence of a separate Humanitarian Family Reunion Program, RCOA recommends that the Australian Government enhance refugee and humanitarian entrants’ access to family reunion by:

- *waving application fees or at least introducing application fee concessions for refugee and humanitarian entrants sponsoring family members under the family stream of the Migration Program;*

- expanding the availability of no-interest loans to assist proposers in meeting the costs of airfares and/or application fees;
- introducing greater flexibility in documentation and evidence requirements under both the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and the family stream of the Migration Program;
- reviewing eligibility requirements under the family stream of the Migration Program which effectively exclude applicants from refugee backgrounds; and
- considering applications lodged by people who are not formally registered as refugees with UNHCR or host governments but otherwise meet the eligibility criteria.

Recommendation 20

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government enter into dialogue with UNHCR about establishing a process for identifying refugee families that are seeking reunification, facilitating assessment and registration in countries of asylum and prioritising them for referral for resettlement under Australia's offshore program.

Recommendation 21

RCOA recommends that all Special Humanitarian Program visa holders receive routine needs assessments during the initial period of settlement to ensure that they are receiving adequate on-arrival support.

Recommendation 22

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review its practice of encouraging refugees who are eligible for resettlement in Australia to apply for Special Humanitarian Program visas rather than Refugee visas, so as to avoid undermining the successful settlement of new arrivals.

Recommendation 23

RCOA recommends that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection review its procedures for communicating with visa proposers and applicants to ensure that clear information and updates are regularly provided on progress with the processing of applications.

Recommendation 24

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government respond to the significant community concern about the lack of access to the Special Humanitarian Program for refugees outside of the Middle East by separating Syrian resettlement from the SHP (in line with Recommendation 12) or by increasing the size of the SHP as part of a larger overall Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

Recommendation 25

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review the definition of "family" used to assess and prioritise family reunion applications to bring it into line with the definition used in UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook.

Recommendation 26

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review the information on family reunion opportunities provided to refugees prior to resettlement in Australia (including through the Australian Cultural Orientation program) to ensure its accuracy and enable refugees to make informed decisions about resettlement.

Recommendation 27

RCOA recommends that:

- a) current restrictions on access to family reunion opportunities for Protection Visa holders who arrived by boat (including changes to processing priorities) be immediately removed.
- b) if the above recommendation is not implemented, people whose applications have been affected by the introduction of retrospective changes to processing priorities be given the opportunity to withdraw their applications and receive a full refund of application fees.

Recommendation 28

RCOA recommends that the current suspension of visa grants to people living in countries affected by Ebola be lifted and replaced with an individualised risk assessment process.

Recommendation 29

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government restore funding for professional migration advice services under the Settlement Grants program to support refugee and humanitarian entrants in lodging family reunion applications.

5. POST-ARRIVAL SUPPORT

Refugee community members and service organisations were keen to reflect on the changes in post-arrival settlement support that have occurred over the past 12 months. As in years past, consultation participants highlighted both emerging issues and ongoing challenges which still require attention and considerable responses. Participants provided rich, thoughtful and useful ideas and recommendations about how to improve settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants and how to maintain the high standard of Australia's internationally-recognised settlement programs.

5.1. KEY SETTLEMENT CHALLENGES

"It's quite difficult to learn the language and get it right. At the same time, you have to find a job. Trying to learn, find a job, juggling all of these things, you sometimes become depressed as well. Housing prices are also increasing. We are grateful for what the Government is providing but it's not enough...It's still a struggle."

– Former refugee from Burma, Sydney

5.1.1. Employment

Employment was raised this year yet again as a vital issue for settlement and an area which still requires significant action by Government, the private sector and communities alike. Community members overwhelmingly expressed their desire to find work and not rely on welfare support and social services. As one participant from South Sudan commented, "In the refugee camp, we only relied on charity. When we come to Australia, we don't want any more charity. We want to work and help ourselves and our community." Many community members challenged the stereotype that refugees rely on welfare and emphasised that refugee communities are eager to find employment and contribute to the Australian economy.

Many community members highlighted the issue of new arrivals being forced into unskilled work, which was often underpaid, insecure and unsafe. However, many felt that these types of employment were the only options available to them because of their level of English or because of discrimination they encountered in other industries. A service provider in Victoria highlighted that exploitation is a very significant issue for new arrivals, as people do not know their rights, are often desperate to find work and do not know relevant occupational health and safety regulations. As a result, many people are suffering from workplace injuries and are not receiving compensation. Many community members also expressed concerns about discrimination, unfair dismissals and workplace bullying.

Participants noted that recognition of previous skills and qualifications was still a major issue. Many humanitarian entrants arrive in Australia with significant skills and professional qualifications. However, many are unable to have their qualifications accredited with the relevant industry body and are thus forced to complete their studies again or gain employment in an area unrelated to their field of expertise or well below their skill level.

The inadequacy of the Job Services Australia (JSA) program was again highlighted as another significant issue affecting humanitarian entrants. Many refugee communities and organisations providing settlement services have expressed frustration about the lack of targeted support offered by JSA providers and the poor outcomes experienced by refugee and humanitarian entrants. RCOA has received consistent negative feedback about how JSA services are responding to the needs of this group, with many participants expressing the view that JSA providers were ineffective in helping refugee and humanitarian entrants to find employment. This feedback has suggested that JSA providers are often inept in cross-cultural communication and that interpreters are not used in meetings with job seekers who have limited English proficiency. Miscommunication occurs frequently and can lead to job seekers being interviewed for positions that are not suited to them or being enrolled in training courses that are not relevant or suited to their aspirations and

capabilities. Furthermore, new arrivals are still being streamed into the lowest support category despite needing significant help in accessing employment.

Many service providers expressed significant concerns about the lack of specialised services under the new Employment Services 2015-2020 Purchasing Arrangements Exposure Draft. Currently, there are a limited number of specialist JSA providers that offer services specifically tailored to the needs of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. These specialist providers offer much-needed additional support to address the specific and individual needs of people from refugee backgrounds. Those consulted believe that the loss of specialist JSA providers will have a significant detrimental impact on refugee communities and further entrench communities' dissatisfaction with the JSA model. Many participants felt that the move towards mainstreaming services will create further issues for humanitarian entrants and ultimately be ineffective and more costly.

Service providers also expressed concern that the lack of specialist JSA providers will also put significant pressure on non-JSA funded services, such as settlement services and refugee community organisations. Some service providers expressed frustration that the work they were undertaking should be the responsibility of JSA providers, especially in cases where they were not funded to provide employment support. As one community member from Bhutan stated, "The MRC helps with resumes but JSAs need to do this. [The JSAs] need to have personal relationships to link jobseekers and employers. They don't get in-depth information about the client. Even people who came here without education have skills but you need to draw it out." Another service provider in Perth outlined their approach to establishing an internally-funded employment service because of the inadequacy of the JSA model:

We recently out of absolute desperation started running our own in-house pre-employment service because it was really apparent that mainstream employment agencies simply cannot work with many clients from refugee backgrounds, particularly when they are facing a range of barriers. People who have got good English and recognised qualifications, they're relatively easy to deal with from an employment agency's point of view. But when you're dealing with someone who may have some effects of trauma, who doesn't speak good English, who doesn't necessarily have recognised qualifications, what we're finding is that they get a 30 minute interview and then they are just completely forgotten about. The employment agencies will not work with them. We've even had clients who don't speak a word of English being given a Stream 1. They'll get streamed ridiculously because they don't want to stream them as Stream 4, because Stream 4 means effort. The employment agencies are so overwhelmed, the workers just don't have the time to spend with people who need a lot of intensive input. We have started to do that work ourselves, with our own clients.

Service providers and community members both highlighted the important role of work experience and volunteer work in facilitating access to employment. Lack of Australian work experience was identified by community members as a major barrier to accessing employment. Many expressed frustration that every job requires applicants to have Australian work experience but this experience is very difficult to gain. Programs which provided short-term work experience were seen as an effective way to address this issue.

Employment-related measures proposed in the 2014-15 Federal Budget, such as changes to unemployment benefits and policy changes designed to create incentives for participation in the workforce, were also discussed by community members and service providers. Many believed that these measures are unlikely to be successful in encouraging refugee and humanitarian entrants to secure employment. Participants noted that refugee and humanitarian entrants need little encouragement and few incentives to work, as many are desperate to find stable employment. However, they find that their efforts are stymied by barriers and challenges such as those outlined above. Participants felt that punitive financial incentives would cause significant financial hardship for people from refugee backgrounds without enhancing employment outcomes.

5.1.2. Education and training

Education was highlighted as an important issue for ensuring successful settlement. One issue which service providers and community members consistently raised was the eligibility requirements for young people to access high school. Many young people who are 18 are being told they are no longer eligible to access high school and that they need to complete their secondary education through a TAFE provider. However, many young people are keen to attend a high school, as this provides them an opportunity to be like other young people their age: to have a school uniform, socialise with other young people and experience what other Australians experience.

Another issue consistently emphasised was that young people are placed in classes based on their age rather than their educational experience. This means that those who have experienced disrupted education are not at the same level as their classmates and thus fall behind in school. Many community members and service providers highlighted the need to have classes based on educational level rather than age. As one community member from Perth stated, “The Australian education system puts you in a class based on your age. But because of war, we are late in education. When they try to catch up, they can't. The only option is to quit school and they end up on the street. There should be different classes for different levels.” Many community members and young people called for an increase in tutoring and mentor programs to support people through the educational system. While many community groups, including refugee community organisations, provide tutoring programs, these are often limited and underfunded.

Teachers and service providers also indicated their need for more information about the cultural backgrounds of students who are attending their schools and more funding for bi-cultural education aides, who provide vital support for teachers and students. Many also commented on the struggle to find appropriate interpreters, especially for events such as parent-teacher information sessions.

Many community members expressed a keen desire to see their language, such as Karen or Bhutanese, become accepted as an option for students to undertake as part of their language studies. While languages spoken by some of the more established communities (such as Arabic or Persian) are provided as an option for students learning an additional language, some newly arrived communities to Australia are missing out.

RCOA heard from community members and service providers across a number of states that people are being taken out of Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) classes to attend other TAFE courses, often under instructions from a JSA provider. Students are then entering TAFE without adequate English and are not able to complete the course. Concerns have also been raised in a number of states that changes to TAFE subsidies may impact significantly on people from refugee backgrounds. Some states have introduced policies that allow students to access subsidised tuition fee rates only once, after which people must pay the full fee for these courses – often 10 times as much as the subsidised rate. As such, people who are attending TAFE without an adequate level of English are not adequately completing the course and then becoming ineligible for funding once they have obtained sufficient English at a later time. This results in people being forced to pay a significant amount of money at a later date in order to continue with their education. Furthermore, it had been reported that those who arrive in Australia with a Certificate IV equivalent qualification are ineligible to receive subsidised funding, even if their previous qualification is not recognised in Australia.

A number of community members and service providers also raised concerns about proposed changes to university funding, which may result in students paying significantly higher fees. As one service provider commented:

Proposed fee increases in higher education and increases in loan repayment rates will also have a negative impact on refugee and humanitarian entrants, who may be trying to catch up on education that they have missed owing to the circumstances they have come from, needing to retrain as their qualifications are not recognised in Australia or trying to support their children to undertake higher education. Access to education is an

important facilitator of successful settlement and capacity to engage with and contribute to the Australian society and economy.

5.1.3. English language tuition

Refugee community members raised concerns about the current model of the AMEP, especially what they saw as the inflexibility of the program and the classroom-based approach to learning. Community members consulted stated that some members of their communities have not meaningfully improved their English through the AMEP, despite attending for several years. Many highlighted the significant challenges that people who had not had any formal education face in learning English through the AMEP. As expressed by one community member in regional New South Wales, “Since my Mum was born, she hasn’t been in a classroom and so she found it very difficult to do 510 hours of English. They won’t get anything that the teacher is telling them because they haven’t been to school before.”

In addition, some new arrivals are not used to the style of teaching in the AMEP, which contrasts with educational experiences in other countries. This is especially an issue for mature age students. As one community member stated, “The teaching system here doesn’t work for us at this age. If they could provide us with some classes that focus on speaking rather than just writing, it would be useful.” One AMEP provider highlighted the difficulties faced by people from refugee backgrounds in learning English through the AMEP:

There are a number of refugees with very little literacy and education in their own language and country. They come in with zero literacy in their language and zero learning skills. Their AMEP hours are spent ‘learning to learn’ and they achieve only very basic English and very basic literacy. This includes a very large group of people coming through from Afghanistan and Iraq. They’re coming from generations of not having had education.

Community members, service providers and AMEP teachers emphasised that the AMEP needs to be flexible to address the various needs and skills of humanitarian entrants, both in terms of teaching and learning styles and in terms of the eligibility period of AMEP tuition. RCOA has heard constant feedback from community members and service providers indicating that the 510 hours is not enough time for someone to develop an adequate level of English. As one service provider in Perth stated, “[510 hours is] not feasible, speaking for those refugees who come from non-English speaking backgrounds. It’s not enough time. It’s not realistic. It can’t enable you to get a job if you have never studied before.”

Service providers consulted unanimously agreed that the AMEP should remain a settlement-focused program. It was noted that the goal of the AMEP is to give people the English language skills that they need to settle well in Australia, not simply the skills they need to secure employment. A number of service providers and AMEP providers expressed fears that the AMEP may become more employment-focused and its settlement component could be undermined. It was felt that undermining the settlement focus of the AMEP could in turn undermine the development of language skills essential for successful settlement and, consequently, the capacity of new arrivals to navigate life in Australia. Those consulted highlighted their concern that moving the AMEP to the Department of Industry could skew the focus of the program towards employment outcomes and compromise the strong links between the AMEP and other settlement programs administered by the DSS. Programs such as the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Settlement Grants have often worked closely with AMEP providers to address various settlement issues new arrivals face. Service providers were concerned that, as a result of these programs being split between two different departments, that these strong links will be lost.

Many community members consulted noted that a number of other obligations and duties impacted on their access to English language classes. These included caring for children, caring for older relatives, supporting parents (for example, interpreting for parents at various appointments) and attending appointments with Centrelink, doctors and job service providers. As new arrivals often do not have strong support networks in Australia, they may have no choice but to miss AMEP classes

in order to tend to other responsibilities. This means that English language students miss out on vital English lessons and also lose their valuable hours. Specific concerns were raised regarding the availability and time restrictions on childcare for those attending English classes. In the words of one community member, "The childcare for English classes is in a different area to the classes, so we have to leave the class early (sometimes 30-60 minutes early) to go pick up the children because childcare is far away or closes before the class finishes. Childcare needs to be at the same place as the English class."

Refugee community organisations expressed a desire to be more involved in the design and delivery of the AMEP. Many refugee community organisations already run English classes (mostly for free and on a voluntary basis) for new arrivals and community members stressed the importance of recognising the valuable work of these organisations.

5.1.4. Health

A number of consultation participants expressed unease about access to interpreters within the health system. Participants reported that doctors, medical centres and hospitals are still failing to provide interpreters to patients, resulting in poor health treatment, delays in receiving care and significant risks associated with misdiagnosis. It was also noted that the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) is not provided for free of charge to allied health professionals, such as dentists, psychologists, optometrists, audiologists and a range of other vital health service providers.

Concerns were also raised about the costs of health care, especially in relation to the proposed changes to Medicare. Participants emphasised that any additional costs for General Practitioner (GP) services would place a significant strain on refugee community members who are already under financial pressure. Many believed that an increase in costs for GP visits would result in individuals delaying visits to the doctor, in turn causing a delay in treatment which may create additional problems due to late diagnosis. As one community member commented:

From my refugee background and the little money that I have, health is not a priority. The little I have will go to food... I don't have \$7 to go to the GP. I must put food on the table for my child... If people don't address health issues early, they will get worse and will cost more later down the track... Health will deteriorate.

RCOA also heard concerns about the significant mental health issues resulting from prolonged immigration detention, with some participants speaking from their personal experience of having been detained for extended periods. These people have additional health needs as a result of their detention in combination with their pre-arrival trauma. Many commented that Australia's asylum policies, including indefinite mandatory detention and the denial of work rights, had created an additional burden upon health services once people are released.

The mental health consequences of denying family reunion and delays in processing of visa applications were also highlighted by consultation participants. Service providers shared stories of former refugees whose family reunion applications are now accorded the lowest processing priority engaging in self-harm (including suicide attempts) and other harmful activities because they are unable to reunite with their families.

5.1.5. Housing

The challenges faced by people from refugee backgrounds in finding affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing was consistently raised as one of the primary issues affecting humanitarian entrants in Australia. Many participants reported that these challenges have become even more significant in recent times due to the increasing competitiveness of the housing market in many metropolitan and regional areas across Australia.

RCOA's recent research report, *The Home Stretch: Challenges and alternatives in sustainable housing for refugees and asylum seekers*,²² highlights the many barriers humanitarian entrants face and also documents the successful initiatives adopted by settlement services, community groups and individuals to respond to these challenges. Barriers to appropriate housing raised by participants in this research project included: reliance on income support during the early stages of settlement or due to difficulties in finding employment; lack of understanding of Australian rental processes; language barriers; lack of rental history and documentation; lack of understanding of tenancy rights and responsibilities; negative attitudes among real estate agents, landlords and other housing providers; and the risks associated with shared accommodation arrangements.

Community members in this year's consultations still reported discrimination and limited use of interpreters when dealing with real estate agents. As one community member from South Sudan reported, "Even if you are working, it's very hard to get a house simply because they assume that we refugees don't look after the house properly. I'm sorry to say there is a kind of discrimination with some agencies, especially when you are a big family and looking for a house."

Some people from refugee backgrounds reported living in unregistered housing that lacked did not have adequate facilities such as water and heating. Many commented on the lack of affordable rental properties and the very long wait lists for public housing. Mainstream homelessness services were also reported to be ineffective and unskilled in working with people from refugee backgrounds. Community members also reported being forced to move further away from metropolitan areas in order to find affordable housing. However, this could cause other problems if people were unable to find secure employment and there were also no settlement services available in these areas to provide support. Centrelink payments were also reported to be insufficient to meet the high costs of rent, with some people from refugee backgrounds reportedly spending between 50% and 90% of their income on rent.

Participants emphasised that housing is vital for successful settlement and housing challenges cannot be overlooked or ignored. It was noted that, without adequate and safe housing, people are not able to attend English classes, education or find employment. To this end, service providers stressed the need for settlement programs to focus on this issue as an enabler for other settlement outcomes.

5.1.6. Income and cost of living

Many community members commented on the increasing cost of living and felt that Centrelink payments were insufficient for families to live off. This was seen to be especially significant for larger families, who often have higher rents and daily expenses. Community members reported needing to borrow money from friends in order to afford food each week. However, community members were also keen to emphasise their eagerness to find work and many commented that they did not want to rely on social welfare benefits. As one community member from Pakistan commented:

After I got a job, I told them I wanted to cancel the Centrelink payments. They told me I didn't have to. I got three calls in two months telling me I was eligible for these payments. In the end I had to send an email saying that I didn't need the money. We don't like to take from the Government, we like to give back.

A number of service providers and community members also commented on the difficulties which arise when a Centrelink payment is been cut off prematurely. This could occur when Centrelink is not aware that the person is studying English or when JSAs incorrectly report that a person did not fulfil a certain requirement.

Participants also expressed concerns regarding a range of measures announced in the 2014-15 Federal Budget such as changes to unemployment benefits, the Medicare co-payment and changes to university funding. Many commented that these changes are likely to have a

²² Available at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/HomeStretch.pdf>

disproportionate impact on people from refugee backgrounds, who already face significant cost of living pressures and difficulties in accessing employment and education. One service provider commented that “The proposed income support waiting periods and exclusion periods are likely to hit refugee and humanitarian entrants struggling to establish themselves in a new country very hard.” A participant from the Sudanese community asserted that “The effects on the refugee community are going to be massive. They will slowly become disenfranchised.” Others noted that the settlement process for new arrivals will be harder if these budget measures are introduced, creating further barriers for people and delaying their successful settlement. As one service provider said, “The Government policies are very regressive. They are not positive contributions to helping the already difficult situation of the refugees.”

5.1.7. Family conflict

Intergenerational conflict was identified as an issue for new communities in Australia. Community members expressed concerns relating to the differences between young people and their parents in how they deal with and adjust to Australian life and culture. As one young person stated, “[Parents] have to understand that Australia is changing a lot of young people. Culture is fading away in young peoples’ lives...There should be programs in place for parents, not to lecture them on how to look after their kids but to support them to understand how to treat a child in a fair way.”

Another issue creating intergenerational conflict within newly arrived families is the amplified role of young people within the family structure. As young people are more likely to be more fluent in English, parents often rely on their children to assist them in attending appointments, translating and interpreting and providing information. This role reversal can create tension within the family, as parents are no longer able to provide support for their children as they once did. Further tension can result if parents are not able to find employment, particularly if they were once the providers for their children. As one service provider in regional New South Wales noted:

Kids say to their dads, ‘Why are you pushing me to do all of this work? You’re the same as me. You’re on Centrelink, I’m on Centrelink. You’ve got the uni degree but you’re still unemployed. So what’s the achievement?’ It’s very frustrating for them. Employment is difficult here for everybody... The aspiration and the expectation is that I’ve done what’s asked of me, I’ve applied myself, I’ve taken advantage of the system but in the end, nothing.’

Community members and service providers called for greater understanding of intergenerational conflict within newly arrived communities and for culturally-appropriate responses to these issues. Suggested ways of addressing this issue constructively included awareness-raising programs focusing on rights and responsibilities in Australia and culturally-sensitive family support and mediation programs.

Concerns were raised regarding the lack of cultural competency among state-based child protection services. Participants shared their worries over the lack of understanding of cultural practices and what were perceived as inappropriate responses of children’s services. One community member in Perth highlighted the issue of different approaches towards disciplining children, citing a case when child protection authorities had removed a child from the care of their parents rather than first investigating the problem and developing culturally-appropriate responses. The child was placed under the care of child protection services and was subsequently raped by intruders while under state care. Service providers recommended a more culturally-sensitive approach to dealing with family conflicts.

A number of service providers also raised concerns regarding domestic abuse within newly arrived refugee communities. It was noted that these issues were exacerbated by strict visa conditions which could prevent survivors of abuse from working or receiving income support if they chose to leave their partners. While provisions exist to protect women in these circumstances, it was reported that the women themselves may not be aware of this. Service providers also highlighted a lack of cultural awareness from mainstream services that support women in these situations and the limited availability crises accommodation for women who are seeking to leave their partners.

The issue of forced marriage was also highlighted as a concern, with service providers emphasising the need to provide information sessions for newly arrived people about their rights in Australia.

5.1.8. Racism, prejudice and discrimination

Racism, prejudice and discrimination was again highlighted as a significant issue faced by refugee and humanitarian entrants. Community members reported that experiences of racial hatred and vilification can cause emotional and psychological harm, as well as reinforce other forms of discrimination and exclusion. They advised that racism can affect a person's participation in community life, education and employment, and hinder vital aspects of the settlement process. People from refugee backgrounds consulted by RCOA have shared many experiences of racism at work, in public places, on public transport and in social activities such as sporting clubs. Concern has also been expressed that tolerance of lower-level expressions of racism (such as abusive language or racial vilification) could result in people being subjected to more severe acts of harassment, intimidation or violence.

Because of the negative stereotypes and racist comments directed towards them, some former refugees felt that they would not be "accepted" into the Australian community. Such experiences produced ongoing negative consequences for communities' positive settlement and people were concerned about reduced social inclusion and lower health and wellbeing indicators for individuals and communities, especially young people. Many community members noted that the negative and inflammatory rhetoric perpetuated by some politicians and public figures had an enormous impact on people settling in Australia, as well as refugees living around the world. Many also indicated that they had to constantly fight misinformation, such as the myth that refugees receive additional income support beyond what is available to other Australians.

It was noted that recent events, such as the Ebola crisis, acts of terrorism and international conflicts, have triggered an increase in racist acts directed towards people from refugee backgrounds. These have included verbal abuse, physical violence, discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment and an increase in social stigmatisation. Many spoke of the increase of Islamophobia, with women sharing their experiences of physical abuse where members of the Australian public have forcibly removed their headscarves. Others reported being fired due to their racial background. Participants from West Africa (even those who have been in Australia for many years) reported experiences of social stigmatisation resulting from the Ebola crisis.

Community members welcomed the scrapping of proposed changes to Section 18C the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, which they believed would have weakened protections against racist abuse. However, many people consulted expressed fears regarding the new anti-terror legislation, which they felt disproportionately targets people from certain countries. Concerns were expressed that the introduction of laws which prohibited travel to certain areas would prevent people from being able to visit family members overseas, especially those still residing in refugee situations. In the words of one community member in Queensland, "The new anti-terror laws are a big concern to communities. How can we go and visit family? It labels everyone as a terrorist. It makes the community see every refugee as a terrorist. It is targeting the Muslim community." Community members also raised concerns about racial profiling by police, including the labelling of all African groups as gangs and the intimidating behaviour by police towards some people from refugee backgrounds.

Many participants felt that allowing racial vilification and stereotypes to propagate would fuel public hostility towards Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program and create a more hostile environment for refugees settling in Australia. Many also feared that hostile attitudes towards asylum seekers had a knock-on effect on refugee and humanitarian entrants who had been resettled from overseas.

5.1.9. Regional settlement

As noted in Section 4.3, service providers in regional areas tend to be among those most significantly affected by fluctuations in settlement patterns. As well as presenting a challenge for these providers, it also represents a lost opportunity. Many service providers in regional areas indicated they had capacity and willingness to receive many more arrivals and expressed concern that regional settlement had recently decreased due to the increased focus on the SHP. Many regions which were previously involved in the Regional Humanitarian Settlement Pilots have been successfully set up to receive new arrivals yet have had to close their services due to the low number of new arrivals in those regions.

At the same time, however, service providers in regional areas consistently emphasised the importance of ensuring that there is adequate support available both to ensure that new arrivals receive the assistance they need and to ensure that the local community is adequately equipped to meet these needs. Service providers highlighted the need for more work on building place-based models of regional settlement. Good collaborative planning between Federal, State and local governments was seen as essential to identify potential regional settlement locations and to ensure communities are prepared and adequate settlement, employment, education and health services are provided. It was also suggested that regional settlement is more successful when consideration is given to settling a critical mass of families from a particular cultural background to create viable local community support.

Service providers also commented on the lack of data to capture secondary movements of refugee and humanitarian entrants, especially for those moving from metropolitan areas to regional areas. This information is vital for services to be able to plan for the future and assist local councils in providing appropriate services.

5.1.10. Citizenship

A number of community members felt that the Australian citizenship test was not appropriate for people who are unable to read or write. It was noted that many older people from refugee backgrounds were illiterate in their own language or had not been able to learn to read and write in English, despite having lived in Australia for many years. Community members believed that there should be alternative options for gaining citizenship for those who are unable to read or write.

The cost of citizenship was also seen as a major barrier for former refugees. One community member commented that the costs were unaffordable, forcing families to skip meals in order to afford the citizenship fees.

5.2. CHALLENGES FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

“The level of complexity of refugee needs is increasing and settlement support is increasingly under-resourced. We see more refugees with disabilities and more Woman at Risk visa holders but support is thin on the ground beyond basic settlement support.”

– Service provider, Adelaide

“Youth are very, very complex. Some are educated in their own country, some aren’t. The ones that are have very high expectations of themselves to get into university. There’s family conflict and separation. And underneath it, they’re just youth! They want to goof around and have a good time, too... I don’t think there’s enough support for youth settling in [this area] at the moment.”

– Service provider, regional New South Wales

5.2.1. People with disabilities

As a result of changes to the health requirement for refugee and humanitarian entrants resettled from overseas, there has been an increase in the number of people with disabilities arriving in

Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. While this policy change has been welcomed as a means of ensuring that people with disabilities (who are often at greater risk in refugee situations) have access to resettlement opportunities, it has also created new challenges for on-arrival service providers.

Service providers have reported that waiting periods for disability support services can be very long. For example, the waiting period for occupational therapist assessments (necessary to obtain certain types of aides and equipment) can extend to 14 months. While this issue affects all Australian residents with disabilities, it presents a particular challenge for people from refugee backgrounds because they generally arrive with very little and may have had to leave their aides and equipment overseas.

In addition, unlike people who are born with or acquire a disability in Australia, people from refugee backgrounds who arrive with pre-existing disabilities have no service history in Australia. A person who is hospitalised after acquiring a disability in Australia, for example, would not be discharged until they had been provided with rehabilitation, seen an occupational therapist and been referred to relevant disability support services. This does not occur for people who acquired disabilities before arriving in Australia. As a result, they may have to wait for long periods before obtaining even basic equipment such as mobility aides.

Service providers also reported that mainstream disability support services tend to be unfamiliar with the needs of people from refugee backgrounds and their entitlements to support. At the same time, some people from refugee backgrounds may not be familiar with services and equipment that in Australia are seen as basic necessities for people with disabilities and, as such, may not seek out support independently.

On-arrival settlement services, through offering referrals, brokerage and advocacy, advised that they can play a crucial role in ensuring that refugee and humanitarian entrants with disabilities receive the support that they need and that mainstream disability support services are equipped to meet these needs. However, settlement services and community members reported that the current model of on-arrival service provision does not adequately take into account the additional support needed to ensure positive settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants with disabilities.

5.2.2. Women

Women were identified as a group which faces unique and significant issues in addition to issues faced by refugee and humanitarian entrants more generally. Service providers shared specific concerns about the challenges faced by women arriving on Woman at Risk visas, noting that these women often lack community and family support structures to assist them in the settlement process and that services were unable to provide the specialised support that these women need. Women resettled on Woman at Risk visas also face a number of issues relating to family conflict and domestic violence. A number of service providers suggested that Woman at Risk visas holders should be automatically referred to Complex Case Support (CCS) in order to receive additional support which other settlement programs are unable to offer.

5.2.3. Young people

Young people from refugee backgrounds also face a range of unique challenges. Specific issues that young people raised in the consultations included disrupted education, multiple family responsibilities (with young people often being the family member most fluent in English and therefore often called upon to assist in situations where English skills are needed), financial responsibilities (including supporting family overseas) and transitioning from Intensive English programs to a wide range of education and employment pathways. In addition, young people also identified a wide range of issues associated with adolescence which are amplified for someone coming into a new culture from a refugee background.

Young people expressed dissatisfaction with a range of settlement services which did not adequately cater for their specific needs. They identified that programs were not specifically funded to support young people and service providers were often not trained to provide specialised support to address the needs of these people. They were concerned that this may result in service providers not referring refugee young people to youth-specific programs or opportunities in which they may have an interest. Young people who arrived as part of a family unit have also expressed concerns that while their parents receive support from a settlement caseworker, the specific needs of the young person are ignored.

Service providers and community members raised a number of concerns relating to unaccompanied humanitarian minors, especially the lack of support for people who turn 18 and are subsequently transitioned from more intensive support to general adult support under the HSS program. It was felt that these services do not adequately address the complex issues that these young people face, especially as they are without other family and support structures to assist them in settlement. Service providers felt that young people exiting the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minor program should be referred CCS, at least in the initial stages of transitioning.

The need for more specific youth support in the areas of employment, education and recreational activities was also identified by community members and service providers. Many participants shared their concern that mainstream providers which deliver youth programs were not adequately trained to work with young people from refugee backgrounds. Participants identified the need for further work and research into the issue of youth unemployment and noted the need to provide specialised services to address the unique barriers that young people from refugee backgrounds face.

The need for driving lessons for young people was also identified, especially for young people who do not have a parent or guardian who holds an Australian licence. Many felt that the driving licence requirements prevent new arrivals from accessing licences, as young people are often required to complete a set number of practice hours driving with a fully licensed adult. Without a driver's licence, young people face difficulties in accessing employment, education and services. This is especially an issue for young people who live in outer suburbs or regional areas, as public transport options are limited. Many participants recommended additional free driving lessons for newly arrived young people.

Many participants expressed concern about the proposed changes to unemployment benefits for young people under 30. Service providers commented that, for those who are unable to rely on family or other social support networks, limits on income support available are likely to result in significant financial hardship, destitution and a high risk of homelessness. Participants noted that young people from refugee backgrounds are highly motivated to find employment and that policy measures should endeavour to support young people while they seek employment; whereas the proposed changes could create more challenges for young people from refugee backgrounds. It was also noted that measures to limit eligibility for income support would do nothing to support young people to find employment, it would not address the root causes of unemployment for this particular group.

5.3. SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND PLANNING

"There are often changes within this field and this can make it difficult for services to deliver the highest standard of assistance for new arrivals. Building relationships, trust and getting to know case workers and clients is very important for CALD people and the frequent changes make it hard for staff to build this trust necessary for effective service delivery."

– Service provider, Melbourne

5.3.1. Changes to Machinery of Government

Significant changes to the machinery of Government followed the Federal election in September 2013. While DIBP retains responsibility for determining the size and composition of the Refugee

and Humanitarian Program, responsibility for post-arrival settlement services now falls across several government departments, including DSS, Department of Industry, Department of Health and the Department of Employment. New grant arrangements were implemented for a number of community services funded under DSS, including services previously funded under the Settlement Grants Program (now known as Settlement Grants).

The transfer of responsibility for settlement services from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to other portfolios was generally seen as a positive move by service providers. Many commented that the changes have separated settlement issues from the immigration and asylum debate, resulting in a more positive environment for service providers and the refugee and humanitarian entrants they assist. It was also anticipated that moving settlement programs to other portfolios would create a more people-centred approach to settlement (although it was noted that these changes are yet to be seen). However, others were concerned that other departments are less likely to be experienced in dealing with refugee issues and thus may take some time to develop an understanding of the complex needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants.

Throughout the national consultations, RCOA heard concerns from service providers that communication from a number government departments had decreased significantly since the machinery of government changes. Importantly, many reported that information which was previously provided by DIBP, such as arrival numbers, settlement quotas, factsheets and statistics, was no longer provided by departments which had taken over responsibility for settlement programs. This has significantly impacted on the delivery and planning of settlement services, especially for HSS and AMEP providers, who rely on regular settlement information to be able to plan for forthcoming arrivals. RCOA also heard that information-sharing between departments had decreased, which resulted in service providers not receiving information from their relevant department. Service providers were forced to rely on second-hand information they receive from other providers, which may be out of date or incorrect. Without adequate communication and information sharing, service providers advised that they are not able to plan their service delivery for new arrivals, resulting in inefficient and delayed services. As one service provider in Victoria commented, “I think everyone is working in a blurry fog.”

RCOA also heard concerns from service providers relating to the increasing focus on employment in the approach to settlement services. Many services commented that they noticed an increase in employment-focused outcomes in settlement programs, to the detriment of other settlement needs. The recent reviews of the HSS program and AMEP, for example, have included a specific focus on enhancing employment outcomes, which was never the original intention of these programs. While employment is a vital element of successful settlement, participants emphasises that it cannot be singled out at the expense of other key settlement issues. Service providers advised that successful settlement requires support in a number of key areas, including English language tuition, housing, education, health and social inclusion. As discussed in Section 5.1.3, many participants also highlighted concerns with AMEP being placed under the Department of Industry and called for the program to be relocated to DSS.

5.3.2. New funding arrangements for settlement services

In the last year, there have been substantial changes to a number of funding arrangements for settlement services, including the wide-ranging DSS grants process and changes to reporting requirements. Many service providers welcomed the latter, believing that it will reduce red tape and enhance efficiency. However, others were concerned about changes in the approach to funding which may result in smaller or more specialised services missing out on funding.

Service providers reported that there was a great need to improve data collection and reporting systems in order to reduce duplication across departmental and internal systems and increase efficiency. They noted that these reporting requirements were time- and resource-intensive and therefore increased costs. In this regard, service providers welcomed the Government's approach to “cutting red tape” and its commitment to improving reporting facilities. However, others claimed that HSS reporting requirements had increased. Some services also anticipated that the new

reporting facilities would create better data systems, which would enable better research and planning for the development of settlement services. Overall, there is still uncertainty regarding the reporting requirements under the new arrangements and many participants stated that it was still too early to comment, with more clarity anticipated once the DSS grants process has been completed.

In reflecting on the operation of settlement services, a number of providers commented on the need for settlement services to be outcome-focused rather than output-focused, whereby outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants are prioritised over more quantitative measurements. Some service providers felt that their funding agreements have become more outcome-focused, while others commented that they are still yet to see significant changes.

Many service providers called for longer and more secure funding for settlement services. Without more reliable funding agreements, service providers said that they were unable to offer their staff ongoing or more reliable employment contracts. This means that highly skilled and experienced staff are forced to remain on short-term contracts and providers risk losing some of their most valued and experienced staff members. Service providers also commented on contractual arrangements whereby programs are funded for each person using the service rather than through a lump sum or base payment. These arrangements create uncertainty and unreliability, especially when there is a delay in the number of new arrivals in certain regions (as discussed in Section 4.3). Rather than provide funding on a fee-for-service model, service providers suggested that the Government consider alternative and flexible options to create more reliability and stability for service providers when there may be a delay in the arrival of new refugee and humanitarian entrants.

A number of service providers expressed disappointment about the delay in the release of the outcomes for the DSS grant funding rounds earlier this year. Many commented that the delayed outcomes have caused instability, confusion and insecurity both for staff and people using the service. The delay has also halted planning for future settlement services and has resulted in organisations not being able to retain experienced staff due to job insecurity.

Community members and service providers voiced concerns about what they saw as general funding cutbacks across a number of social services. Many were worried that service providers will be placed under additional pressure to support more refugee entrants for less funding, thereby forcing services to reduce the quality and effectiveness of their work. As one service provider commented, "Funding cutbacks are already having the effect of clients losing their access to individual counsellors and having to join a queue for support services." Participants felt that cutting vital settlement services would not result in saving money for the Government; rather, it would create further costs down the track, as more people would be forced to rely on social welfare for longer periods.

A large number of service providers and community organisations expressed their concern with the new approach to the funding of settlement services, especially the competitive tendering process, the complexities of the application, the need for multiple applications and the short timeframes in which to make the applications. There was a significant concern among those consulted that the new funding approach would benefit larger national or state-wide services over more local and community-run services, resulting in a loss of local expertise and undermining the valuable specialised support that many smaller services provide. Participants were especially concerned that the new funding arrangements would disadvantage smaller, more specialised services, as well as community organisations set up by new and emerging refugee communities.

The importance of involving refugee community organisations in the delivery of settlement services has been highlighted over a number of years and was also raised in this year's consultations. As noted in RCOA's report, *The Strength Within: The role of refugee community organisations in*

settlement,²³ refugee community organisations play a vital role in the settlement of new arrivals. This message was emphasised in a written submission by a service provider in New South Wales:

It is very important to fund small and emerging refugee communities, as through the wide range of activities they carry out and the functions they serve in their own communities, refugee community organisations are major contributors to the extension of social inclusion and the growth and maintenance of social capital. In helping new communities to identify, express and build on community assets, and through bridging gaps in understanding between new and established Australian communities, they aid government initiatives that promote a socially inclusive society. Refugee community organisations are well placed to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate support in a safe and trusting environment for their newly arrived community members.

However, as these organisations are often small, local and run by community members, there is a concern that they may not be able to compete against larger service providers in funding rounds such as the DSS grants process:

This short time period disadvantages small and emerging communities in particular, as they often do not have the resources, expertise and experience to be able to prepare competitive applications in appropriate English in such a short timeframe, and often rely largely on volunteers within the community to prepare proposals. Small and emerging communities may find it difficult to obtain funding in a large government department such as DSS, which may have reservations about funding small, relatively new organisations, particularly in the face of competition from large, experienced agencies.

Service providers and community groups called for additional funding and support for refugee community organisations to continue providing vital support to their communities. Participants also said that new and emerging communities need additional support to help them in applying for relevant Settlement Grants.

In relation to the increasingly competitive approach to funding settlement services, consulted services commented that competitive tendering, through which service providers are forced to compete against each other, risks undermining the quality of services by forcing service providers to cut costs and skilled staff in order to win contracts. Such competitive approaches also discourage partnerships and information-sharing, both of which are crucial to effective service provision. Participants argued that the quality of service provision, assessed on the basis of the skills, experience and expertise of service providers, should be the primary consideration when awarding contracts. As one service provider in Tasmania commented, “The competitive funding environment doesn’t always provide the best outcomes for clients.” Many also commented that while quality, tailored services may have a higher initial cost, they are also more effective and, therefore, more efficient over the long-term. Many feared that the skills and experience developed over a number of years would be lost due to less experienced services winning contracts by simply cutting costs. There was also a concern among participants that for-profit service providers may win vital contracts traditionally held by non-profit NGOs. Such a move was seen as a significant change to the settlement sector that had the potential to undermine the valuable work and experience that settlement services have provided for decades.

A number of service providers also expressed concern about funding arrangements which prohibit them from speaking out or engaging in advocacy, reporting that there was significant anxiety within the settlement sector about advocacy being viewed negatively by the Government and potentially resulting in loss of funding or some agencies being overlooked during funding rounds. Other expressed concern that their contracts contain provisions which expressly prohibit advocacy. Participants stressed that settlement services and community groups are uniquely placed to understand and articulate the issues that refugee and humanitarian entrants face and many often use this experience in advocating for better services to address the settlement needs of the

²³ Refugee Council of Australia 2014, *The Strength Within: The role of refugee community organisations in settlement*, available at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/rpt/1405_StrengthWithin.pdf

refugee and humanitarian entrants using their services. Participants felt that restricting the advocacy role of settlement services would result in the Government missing out on valuable information which could be used to enhance the effectiveness of service provision.

Finally, participants expressed general concern about recent trends towards the mainstreaming of settlement services, in which traditionally specialised services are being rolled into more general programs run by providers who have limited skills and experience in working with people from refugee backgrounds. An example of this is the aforementioned Employment Services 2015-2020 Purchasing Arrangements Exposure Draft, which has no provisions for specialist JSA services for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Service providers and community members have stressed the need to retain specialised services that have the requisite skills to work effectively with people from refugee backgrounds. Many argued that mainstream services often fail to provide adequate support to people from refugee backgrounds and do not provide appropriate training in cross-cultural communication and the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants. Service providers cited instances where they had referred refugee and humanitarian entrants to mainstream services but found that they returned to their settlement service provider because the mainstream service was not able to offer appropriate support. As one service provider in Perth noted:

One of the things I've seen for quite a long time is that people go to mainstream services, they'll get referred to the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) to then refer them back. Mainstream services think "It's much easier for you guys who deal with this all the time to figure out what the problem is and then tell me." SGP is a benefit but also a crutch to mainstream services.

This in turn creates further inefficiencies and requires the specialised settlement service provider to provide support for areas which they receive no additional funded. Participants highlighted the important and specialised work that settlement organisations provide and stressed the need to retain specialised settlement services. Those consulted stressed that a move towards mainstream services would create further costs for the Government, as inadequate service provision is likely to hamper the successful settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants.

5.3.3. Eligibility for settlement services

As in previous years, community members and service providers expressed concern about the lack of flexibility in eligibility periods for settlement services. In regards to HSS, concerns were raised about the strict 12-month time limit in which people could receive support and the lack of alternative services to provide additional support after these initial 12 months. A number of community members and service providers indicated that 12 months was not sufficient for some refugee entrants to be supported through all stages of initial settlement and that HSS support may still be required after the first year in Australia. There was also a concern that Settlement Grants providers are being required to fill the gaps created by HSS time restrictions, even though Settlement Grants providers are not funded to offer the same level of support as HSS providers. Participants suggested that the 12-month eligibility period for HSS be replaced with a more flexible needs-based assessment model.

RCOA also continues to hear recommendations from community members and service providers to remove the five-year eligibility limit for Settlement Grants services and Complex Case Support. It was noted that five years is an insufficient time period for successful settlement and many people continue to need support beyond this limit. As one service provider in Perth commented, "[Settlement Grants] needs to be open-ended. For some people, it might be sufficient and for others it's nowhere near. It needs to be more flexible." Another service provider affirmed this message: "I agree with flexibility. Some people are very capable, others are slower."

5.4. TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISAS

“The TPV is not just a visa but a disturbing tool that will confine the thinking and intelligence of human beings, asylum seekers in this case, by acting as invisible barbed wire preventing them by every means possible from moving forward and merely living a dignified life.”

– Former refugee from Afghanistan, Melbourne

“The original TPV scheme was horrible and the new one is even worse. We are going backwards. The Government is taking us backwards.”

– Service provider, Melbourne

RCOA's consultations took place prior to the passing of the *Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendments (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Act 2014* and consequent reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs). The Bill had, however, been tabled and debated prior to the consultations and service providers and community members were able to reflect on and outline their concerns about the possible re-introduction of TPVs.

Feedback relating to the reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas focused primarily on access to services and support, the impact of TPVs on settlement outcomes, the impact of family reunion prohibitions and the implications of the new Safe Haven Enterprise Visa.

5.4.1. Access to services and support

Many consultation participants remarked that there was confusion and uncertainty about the implications of the reintroduction of TPVs among people who have received a temporary substantive visa, those likely to receive a TPV and the services and communities supporting these people. RCOA heard troubling reports that the lack of communication from DIBP or the lack of clarity in communication had led to many asylum seekers and refugees to think that they were facing removal. Unfortunately, this confusion and anxiety led to reports of self-harm among asylum seekers. For those that are found to be owed protection, there is also very little information available about the rights and entitlements of TPV holders and which services they will and will not be able to access.

While participants were sometimes confused and uncertain about the entitlements of TPV holders, there was consensus about the need for access to services such as English language tuition, assistance to secure and maintain accommodation, support to understand and navigate education and training systems, access to household goods and material aid needs and support to navigate other complex Australian systems. As one community member stated, “If a refugee is going to be deemed that they can stay in Australia, they should be able to access services.”

One example of insufficient access to services for TPV holders related to the transition from closed or community detention to a TPV for young people. Consultation participants in Tasmania recounted the difficulties faced by young people who were previously held in the Pontville Immigration Detention when trying to enrol in school. One school in Hobart agreed to take an older student but reportedly stated that “We can't accept too many students like this, because there is no money for this.” Limited access for funded education was highlighted as a major issue for young TPV holders.

Health was also highlighted as an area of concern. As one service provider in Sydney advised:

The services TPV holders can access are limited. For example, they can't receive full dental services and ambulance services. If people have dental work they need done, they won't be able to get it done on a TPV. If you can only get a TPV, you will never have access to these services. This means that people could live the remainder of their lives here but not be able to be cared for properly.

This limited access to basic services was seen to impact not only the individuals and communities directly affected by TPVs but also on the broader Australian community, as people will not be able to be healthy, fully participatory residents of Australia.

There was great concern that the burden of supporting often vulnerable people (many of whom had experienced a significant deterioration in health and wellbeing as a result of Australia's policies towards asylum seekers) would fall onto the community, including refugee community members and (unfunded) community organisations. As one agency put it, "For those of us serving asylum seekers, even though it's not within our operations, we have a moral duty to do so." Another service provider in Victoria advised, "People on temporary [substantive] visas often come into our service and ask for help. We try to give them some information, but we cannot offer the kind of support that they need."

There was overwhelming agreement that the consequence of a lack of settlement services for TPV holders would place considerable pressure on refugee communities. As one agency predicted in a written submission:

This will place pressure on communities and community members who may be relatively newly arrived themselves to provide support and assistance to those on Temporary Protection Visas. It will also place increased pressure on the few services those on temporary humanitarian visas will have access to, such as torture and trauma survivor rehabilitation services. Lack of access to English language classes for Temporary Protection Visa holders will also impact on communities and service providers, and make it more difficult and expensive (through needing to use interpreters) to provide services.

The lack of access to AMEP or another comprehensive, funded English language program was seen as one of the most illogical and bizarre aspects of the service limitations. The focus on TPV holders securing employment and living as law-abiding residents in the community conflicts with the lack of English-language provision. Service providers and community members alike called for TPV holders to have access to the full AMEP tuition entitlement available to other refugee and humanitarian entrants.

Service providers also noted that for those who had already been issued a TPVs, Temporary Humanitarian Concern Visa or Temporary Humanitarian Stay Visa, there had been only a seven-day transition from the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme to the temporary substantive visa. One agency called for this timeframe to be revoked, noting that people were left stranded to deal with housing, healthcare and education issues on their own. It was also noted that people on temporary substantive visas had no settlement support agency to turn to when they were in crisis. The expectation that they would be able to navigate Australia's mainstream service sector after such a short period of minimal support – and after such traumatic and uncertain experiences leading up to the visa grant – was seen as unreasonable.

A number of consultation participants felt that there needed for resources to be made available for referral services for TPV holders, to direct them towards services for which they are eligible. As one Victorian agency suggested, "There is no resource for TPV holders. The Government should be providing this. For example, they should provide a list of ten Neighbourhood Houses where there is free English language tuition."

Another community member observed that, even if people live in the community for a long period of time, they may require support if they relocate to another area or another state: "Just because they are in the community doesn't mean they know everything about every place in Australia." Other service providers and refugee community members agreed, with one settlement worker noting "We work with clients up to five years after arriving in Australia [through Settlement Grants]. We know that often five years isn't enough. But then we leave TPV holders on their own. This is ridiculous."

Most consultation participants suggested that it was counter-productive to restrict access to settlement support services for TPV holders, as this would significantly inhibit the settlement of these visa holders and create additional difficulties for them and for services working with them over the longer term. Service providers and support staff were also worried that the lack of settlement provisions for TPV holders would be likely to place increased pressure on the few services for which TPV holders are eligible, such as torture and trauma rehabilitation services. There was also concern that services may need to expand their activities beyond what they are funded to provide in order to try and fill the gaps in service provision. In addition, a service provider in Victoria advised that it would be difficult for community groups to plan long-term when providing support to TPV holders, noting that “Being able to plan for the future is imperative for successful settlement.”

5.4.2. Impact on settlement outcomes

The temporary nature of TPVs and the proposed Safe Haven Enterprise Visa was highlighted as one of their most damaging features. As one participant from Perth noted, “We already know from previous experience that Temporary Protection Visas do not give asylum seekers any peace of mind, any security, any safety. It leaves them in limbo with the fear of being deported.” Another consultation participant said that the TPV left people in “limbo land” which would impact on their employment and educational opportunities and outcomes.

Several services reminded RCOA of the comprehensive research and evidence available on the negative impacts of the previous TPV regime between 1999 and 2007. A number of consultation participants highlighted the 2006 research study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* that compared the mental health of refugees with temporary (TPV) versus permanent Protection visas (PPV).²⁴ This study found that while the levels of pre-migration trauma of both groups were not significantly different, the proportion of TPV holders experiencing difficulties exceeded that of PPV holders on all items assessed. The checklist items of unemployment, insufficient money to buy food, pay rent and buy basic necessities and bad working conditions were endorsed by over 90% of TPV holders compared to 10% to 13% of PPV holders. Communication difficulties were reported by 100% of TPV holders compared to 54% of PPV holders and over 90% of TPV holders reported loneliness and boredom, and isolation, compared to 3% (loneliness and boredom) and 15% (isolation) for PPV holders.²⁵ Moreover, TPV status was by far the greatest predictor of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, accounting for 68% of the variance.²⁶ The authors of the study concluded that “Our study provides consistent evidence that the migration trajectory experienced by TPV holders...is accompanied by persisting and wide-ranging mental health problems and associated disability.”²⁷

Other consultation participants indicated that these findings concurred with their own experiences, either as former TPV holders themselves or as support workers. As one counsellor shared:

I have seen the first-hand impacts of TPVs on people and people being left in limbo. I am really concerned about what we are doing to a whole population of people. We are creating a long-term negative legacy. I can't work effectively in an environment where people are uncertain and where they are threatened every day. The main premise for trauma treatment is safety, security, attachment, belonging and connection but that is not available. People are suffering. We are creating secondary trauma which will not be possible to treat. Economically, we are setting ourselves back. If we are detaining people and confining people to TPVs, we are creating more problems with mental health in the long term.

A health provider in Canberra also advised that “Of the clients I see who are most damaged, many of them are people who were in detention for a long time and then put on TPVs. Ten years later,

²⁴ Momartin, S, Steel, Z & Coello, M et. al. October 2006, 'A comparison of the mental health of refugees with temporary versus permanent protection visas', *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol 185, no 7, pp 357-361.

²⁵ Momartin, Steel & Coello et al, "A comparison of the mental health of refugees", p.359.

²⁶ Momartin, Steel & Coello et al, "A comparison of the mental health of refugees", p.360.

²⁷ Momartin, Steel & Coello et al, "A comparison of the mental health of refugees", p.360.

the damage can still be seen.” Other service providers and support workers echoed this view, with many concerned that the refugees would be so focused on settlement challenges that it would be too difficult for them to start healing from their past trauma. This can have flow-on effects for positive settlement, not only for their own community but also for the wider Australian community. One New South Wales service provider was concerned that the exacerbation of trauma for people on TPVs would lead to not only poor outcomes for the individuals and communities but also increase the strain on already overwhelmed services.

The deleterious effect of the TPV was in stark contrast to the potential that many participants saw in the people with whom they were working with on a regular basis. As one support worker remarked, “If people are allowed to stay, I can see great potential. The unaccompanied minors are an impressive group of young people – young and as keen as mustard to settle and contribute. If they are allowed to stay, it will be a very positive story for Australia.”

5.4.3. Family reunion

The lack of family reunion under the TPV regime was highlighted as one of the cruellest aspects of the policy. As one community member stated, “TPVs create an environment where immediate families are cut off from each other for so long that there is no possibility for the family to ever be fully reunited. We are creating a long-term problem which cannot be measured just in terms of dollars. It makes no sense at an economic or a human level.”

There is considerable research and evidence pointing to the importance of family links in the successful settlement of refugees. The lack of family reunion for TPV holders makes settlement much harder: one agency in New South Wales advising that refugees had told them “my body is here but my mind is there” because although they themselves are safe, their other family members are not. Without family safe and reunited, anxiety and depression increase and the process of healing from trauma is thwarted. In a written submission, one agency described the challenges of working with TPV holders under the previous regime:

Our experience working with TPV holders when they were introduced previously demonstrated not being able to be reunited with their families had a very deleterious effect on the mental health of many TPV holders, most of whom had already been separated from their families for some time. Apart from the grief and anxiety experienced as a result of not being able to be reunited with their families, TPV holders also experienced significant guilt about the danger their families were in and a sense of helplessness and despair. Typical comments were “We will never be able to see our families again. They will be killed by the Taliban or die of starvation.” Intrusive thoughts about their families also interfered with concentration in learning English and other settlement tasks and caused sleeping difficulties. As one client stated, “I cannot sleep till 4 a.m. because of my anxiety. Thoughts of my children are driving me insane.”

RCOA notes that as part of the negotiations to pass the legislation re-introducing TPVs, the Government made a concession that TPV holders may seek travel and re-entry rights based on “compassionate grounds”, with the Minister for Immigration using the example of a funeral being held in a country other than the refugee’s country of origin. While the compassionate grounds option is more favourable than a complete absence of re-entry rights, it is still not clear how this discretionary policy will be implemented. It is not clear, for instance, if visiting family members will fulfil the yet unpublished criteria for “compassionate grounds”.

5.4.4. The Safe Haven Enterprise Visa

The newly proposed Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) was just an idea when RCOA’s community consultations were conducted. Nevertheless, consultation participants were keen to provide their expertise, knowledge and insights on the proposed visa. Most participants found the SHEV proposal to be problematic. The primary concern of participants was that the protection element of the visa was surrendered in favour of a focus on productivity. While RCOA has consistently heard from refugee and humanitarian entrants about their desire to participate and

contribute to Australia, including through securing paid employment, (see Section 5.1.1) the lack of permanency for people on SHEVs and the removal of protection as the primary consideration of visa eligibility were seen as troubling. Community members were also disturbed that people who had faced great trauma, prolonged periods in closed detention and years of uncertainty – in some cases as a direct result of Australian Government policy – would be expected to fulfil onerous and perhaps insurmountable requirements as the only way to receive permanent residency and alleviate their fears of being returned to places of persecution. Participants described the SHEV as unfair, unreasonable and unlikely to work.

There was considerable concern that there had not been adequate research or consultation (or perhaps none at all) on what would be needed to make the SHEV scheme successful. Participants were worried that there had not been an analysis about what skills were needed and in what locations. The requirement that people work in regional and rural locations, for example, stands in contrast to the lived experience of many former rural Australians. As one participant who grew up in a regional town remarked, “People leave rural areas because there is no work.” Other consultation participants in regional areas advised that there are not necessarily job opportunities in these areas, with the result that some people already living in these areas cannot sustain themselves. It was also noted that the seasonal work which dominates the job market in many regional and rural areas is not sustainable. As one support worker in regional New South Wales remarked, “Seasonal work is difficult for families. People may live in poverty when work is not available.” This hardship that many rural Australians already face is likely to be compounded for people on SHEVs, who may be reluctant to access the safety net of income support when there are no job prospects in regional areas. As one service provider noted, “Even if [SHEV holders] are facing hardship, they might not go to the government for help for fear of losing the opportunity to stay permanently.”

Several consultation participants noted the need for more employment opportunities, culturally-appropriate services, supportive councils and a welcoming community in regional areas. There was considerable concern that regional communities often do not have the infrastructure and services to deal with the impact of refugee trauma or with other settlement issues that many SHEV holders may face, such as learning English, securing employment and finding suitable housing. A community member in regional Queensland advised that there were already issues of insufficient support staff and infrastructure to meet the needs of asylum seekers on bridging visas, with 85 people living in the area but only two permanent settlement employees working there. There was concern that without careful planning and resourcing, refugees on SHEVs will not be able to live safely and sustainably in regional areas.

Several participants also noted that if employment was the driving force for the SHEV, then there needed to be consideration of labour or skills shortages in metropolitan and outer urban areas as possible “designated areas” under the SHEV regime. In addition to the expansion of the designated areas, consultation participants also called for a mechanism to facilitate the recognition of overseas qualifications and access to low-cost loans or scholarships to undertake additional training.

Community members were extremely worried that that the SHEV was going to lead to labour exploitation for the visa holders. As stated by one participant in regional New South Wales, “SHEVs are a way for the Government to legitimise cheap labour.” There were also calls for monitoring of the scheme to ensure that refugees are not abused or exploited by employers. One community member noted that “This abuse of vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees is already rife in the cities, with people being charged extortionate rents and having to work long hours in poorly paid jobs.”

Consultation participants were also deeply disturbed by the lack of assurance that SHEV holders would be able to access a permanent visa even if they fulfil all of the requirements of their initial five-year SHEV. Community members were concerned that people would do “everything right” by working and living in a regional area and still find that they were not eligible for any permanent visa.

5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the following recommendations, RCOA wishes to highlight the recommendations put forward in a number of recent submissions which are relevant to the many of the issues raised by participants in this year's consultations. These include our submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into income inequality in Australia (which outlines concerns relating to the likely impacts on refugee and humanitarian entrants of changes to income support and Medicare proposed in the 2014-15 Federal Budget);²⁸ our response to the Employment Services 2015-2020 Purchasing Arrangements Exposure Draft;²⁹ our submission to the review of the HSS and CCS programs;³⁰ and our submission to the AMEP Evaluation.³¹

Recommendation 30

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government seek to ensure greater consistency in settlement patterns so as to support the maintenance of quality settlement support services across Australia, including in smaller settlement areas.

Recommendation 31

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government develop a new regional settlement strategy, assessing potential and established regional areas as settlement locations, working with regional providers to plan and prepare for new humanitarian settlers, and ensuring sufficient numbers of referrals are made within each intake year to retain capacity and momentum in regional settlement locations.

Recommendation 32

RCOA recommends that the current time-limited eligibility period for settlement services be replaced with an individualised needs assessment process.

Recommendation 33

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government abolish Temporary Protection Visas and grant permanent visas to all people who currently hold Temporary Protection, Temporary Humanitarian Concern or Temporary Safe Haven visas.

Recommendation 34

If Recommendation 33 is not implemented, RCOA recommends that:

- a) All Temporary Protection Visa and Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa holders be granted access to settlement services on the same basis as permanent refugee and humanitarian visa holders.
- b) The transitional support provided under the Status Resolution Support Services program following the grant of a Temporary Protection Visa be extended to at least six weeks, with extensions available on a needs basis.
- c) Overseas travel restrictions on Temporary Protection Visa and Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa holders be lifted.
- d) Family reunion options be considered for Temporary Protection Visa and Special Humanitarian Enterprise Visa holders, to facilitate successful settlement and provide safe pathways to protection for people living in precarious or dangerous situations overseas.
- e) The Department of Immigration and Border Protection develop a comprehensive communications strategy to explain the implications of Temporary Protection Visas to both visa holders and service providers.

Recommendation 35

RCOA recommends that the Australian Government consider options for designating certain industries in any location as fulfilling the eligibility criteria for the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa.

²⁸ <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1408-Welfare-Inequality.pdf>

²⁹ http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1409_EmploymentServices.pdf

³⁰ <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1411-HSS-CCS.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1412%20AMEP%20submission.pdf>

6. APPENDICES

6.1. CONSULTATION LOCATIONS

	CAPITAL CITY	REGIONAL
ACT	Canberra (2)	
NSW	Auburn (2), Blacktown, Carramar, Fairfield (3), Mount Druitt (2), Parramatta	Coffs Harbour (2), Newcastle (2), Wollongong (3)
QLD	Brisbane (2), Logan (2)	Toowoomba (2)
SA	Adelaide (2)	
TAS	Hobart (2)	Launceston (3)
VIC	Broadmeadows, Croydon, Dallas, Dandenong (2), Ringwood (2), Roxburgh Park, Werribee (3)	Geelong
WA	Gosnells, Mirrabooka (2)	

6.2. ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

The following is a list of the organisations and community groups which participated in RCOA's national consultations or contributed ideas directly. The organisations which hosted consultation gatherings or teleconference hubs are *italicised*.

- Access Community Services (*Qld*)
- African Communities Council of South Australia
- Agape Church (*NSW*)
- Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (*NSW*)
- AMES (Vic)*
- Amnesty International Australia, Coffs Harbour (*NSW*)
- Amnesty International Australia, Tasmania
- Anglicare (*NSW, SA*)
- Anglicare North Coast (NSW)*
- ASeTTS (*WA*)
- Association of the Burundian Community of Queensland
- Assyrian Resource Centre (*NSW*)
- Auburn Diversity Services Inc (NSW)*
- Australian Bhutanese Society of Northern Tasmania
- Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (*Vic*)
- Australian Red Cross (*ACT, WA*)
- Australian Refugee Association (*SA*)
- Bennelong Friends of Refugees (*NSW*)
- Bhutanese Community of Tasmania North Inc
- Bhutanese Kirat/Buddhist Association of Tasmania
- Blackburn English Language School (*Vic*)
- Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group (*NSW*)
- Brotherhood of St Laurence (*Vic*)
- Calvary Refugee Mentoring Program (*ACT*)
- Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (*ACT*)
- Canberra Refugee Support (*ACT*)
- CASE for Refugees (*WA*)
- Catholic Education Office (*Tas*)
- Centacare (*Qld*)
- Centacare (*Tas*)
- Centacare Toowoomba (Qld)*
- Centre Ringwood Community Centre (Vic)*
- Centrecare (*WA*)
- Chaldean Australian Society (*NSW*)
- City of Greater Geelong (*Vic*)
- City of Launceston (*Tas*)
- City of Maroondah (*Vic*)
- City of Stirling (*WA*)
- City West Water (*Vic*)
- Coffs Harbour City Council (*NSW*)
- Communicare (*WA*)
- Community Migrant Resource Centre (NSW)*
- Community Skills Development Council Australia (*NSW*)
- Companion House (ACT)*
- Congolese Community of NSW
- Department of Human Services (*NSW, Qld*)
- Department of Social Services (*Tas*)
- Diversitat (Vic)*
- Edmund Rice Centre Mirrabooka (WA)*
- Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre (NSW)*
- Footscray Community Legal Centre (*Vic*)
- Future of the Children Ministry (*NSW*)
- Great Lakes Rural Australians for Refugees (*NSW*)
- HealthWest (*Vic*)
- Homestead Community and Learning Centre (Vic)*

Human Care Welfare (NSW)
Hume Multicultural Workers Network (Vic)
Hunter Community Legal Centre (NSW)
Hunter New England Local Health District (NSW)
Illawarra Burmese Language School (NSW)
Illawarra Multicultural Services (NSW)
Iraqi Australian Christian Association (NSW)
Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Centre (WA)
Lockyer Valley Regional Council (Qld)
Logan City Council (Qld)
Lutheran Community Care (SA)
Mercy Community Services (Qld)
MercyCare (WA)
Metro Assist (NSW)
Migrant Health Service (SA)
Migrant Information Centre Eastern Melbourne (Vic)
Migrant Resource Centre (Northern Tasmania) Inc
Migrant Resource Centre North West Region (Vic)
Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia
Migrant Resource Centre of Southern Tasmania
Monash Health Community (Vic)
Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency
Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra (NSW)
Multicultural Council of Tasmania
Multicultural Development Association (Qld)
Multilink Community Services (Qld)
Nakango Vision (NSW)
Navitas (NSW)
Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District (NSW)
New Hope Foundation (Vic)
North Coast TAFE (NSW)
Northern Area Migrant Resource Centre (SA)
Northern Settlement Services (NSW)
NSW Department of Family and Community Services
NSW Police

Overseas Services to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (SA)
Penola House (NSW)
Queensland Health
Queensland University of Technology
Rubicon Migration Australia (NSW)
Rural Australians for Refugees Bellingen and Nambucca (NSW)
Salvation Army (NSW)
Settlement Services International (NSW)
Social Justice Commission, Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba (Qld)
South Eastern Melbourne Medicare Local (Vic)
Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre (Vic)
St Thomas' Church Werribee (Vic)
St Vincent de Paul Society (NSW, Qld, Vic, WA)
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council (ACT)
STARTTS (NSW)
Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families (NSW)
Surf Coast Rural Australians for Refugees (Vic)
SydWest Multicultural Services Inc
TAFE (NSW, Qld, Tas)
Tasmania Asylum Seeker Support
Tasmania Catholic Justice and Peace Commission
Toowoomba Regional Council (Qld)
Tristar Medical Group (NSW)
University of Adelaide (SA)
University of Southern Queensland
Victoria Police
Victorian Arabic Social Services
WA Department of Education
WA Department of Health
West Australian Greens Refugee Action Group
Women's Health Service (SA)
Wyndham City Council (Vic)
Wyndham Community and Education Centre (Vic)
Wyndham Legal Service (Vic)

In addition, people from at least 29 different national and ethnic groups participated in the consultations, including the Ahmadiyya, Ahwazi, Assyrian, Bhutanese, Burmese, Burundian, Chaldean, Chin, Congolese, Darfuri, Eritrean, Hakha, Hazara, Iranian, Iraqi, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Liberian, Mandaean, Mon, Oromo, Pashtun, Rwandan, Somali, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Tamil and Zomi communities.

6.3. LIST OF ACRONYMS

The following acronyms have been used in this submission:

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
APO	Approved Proposing Organisation
ATCR	Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement
AUSCO	Australian Cultural Orientation [Program]
CCS	Complex Case Support
CPP	Community Proposal Pilot
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DSS	Department of Social Services
GNI	Gross National Income
GP	General Practitioner
HIAS	Hebrew Immigration Aid Society
HSS	Humanitarian Settlement Services
IS	Islamic State
JSA	Job Services Australia
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PAB	Provincial Admissions Board
PPV	Permanent Protection Visa
RCOA	Refugee Council of Australia
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
SCO	Supporting Community Organisation
SGP	Settlement Grants Program
SHEV	Safe Haven Enterprise Visa
SHP	Special Humanitarian Program
TIS	Translating and Interpreting Service
TPV	Temporary Protection Visa
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees