



Refugee Council
of Australia

March 9, 2010

RESPONSE TO OUTLANDISH CLAIMS ABOUT BENEFITS TO REFUGEES: UPDATE

The Refugee Council of Australia has called on Australians to ignore hoax emails which continue to be circulated nationally and which claim that refugees receive higher social security payments than pensioners. The emails are blatantly inaccurate and intended to create resentment towards refugees and fuel disharmony.

A refugee who has permanent residency in Australia receives exactly the same social security benefit as any Australian-born person in the same circumstances. Refugees apply for social security through Centrelink like everyone else and are assessed for the different payment options in the same way as everyone else. There are no separate Centrelink allowances that one can receive simply by virtue of being a refugee, nor do refugees receive cash payments under either the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) or the Settlement Grants Program (SGP). The IHSS provides settlement support to eligible refugees and assists them in securing basic necessities such as accommodation, utilities, clothing and medical care. The SGP provides funding to organisations to help new arrivals settle in Australia.

One hoax email claims that a single refugee receives \$1458 more per month than an age pensioner. In fact, a single person applying for Special Benefit or the Newstart Allowance (whether or not he or she is a refugee) will receive \$456 per fortnight, whereas a single person on an Age Pension payment will receive a fortnightly payment of \$671.90. A single age pensioner therefore receives over \$200 *more* per fortnight more than a single refugee (or a single Australian-born person) who qualifies for Special Benefit or Newstart – not \$1458 per month *less*, as claimed in the email. Australian citizens and permanent residents with dependent children on lower to middle incomes (including refugees) may also be eligible to receive Family Tax Benefits or Parenting Payments, however none of these allowances are paid at a higher rate than the single age pension.

Another hoax email claims that illegal immigrants and refugees receive higher rates of payment than age pensioners under a number of Centrelink programs, including the Partner Allowance and the Hardship Allowance. Again, the figures are grossly inaccurate – a single person on an Age Pension payment receives a fortnightly payment of \$671.90, not \$253 as claimed in the email; the maximum payment for the Partner Allowance is \$411.50, not \$472.50; pensioners are entitled to receive Hardship payments if they meet the eligibility criteria; and Centrelink payments are calculated at exactly the same rate for both refugees and non-refugees (for instance, a single Australian-born person and a single refugee on the Newstart allowance would both receive exactly the same fortnightly payment of \$456).

The abovementioned claim that illegal immigrants can receive Centrelink payments is also false. In general, only Australian citizens and permanent residents can receive social security

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The Refugee Council of Australia represents
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payments from Centrelink and illegal immigrants would certainly not be entitled to such support. It is also factually incorrect to refer to either refugees or asylum seekers as “illegal immigrants”. Recognised refugees in Australia by definition hold either a Refugee Visa or a Protection Visa, both of which entitle the holder to permanent residency. Asylum seekers – regardless of how they arrive in Australia – are permitted under Australian and international law to enter Australia for the purpose of seeking asylum, therefore asylum seekers have not broken any law and should not be referred to as illegal immigrants.

Moreover, it is misleading to imply that asylum seekers can receive Centrelink payments, as they are not entitled to the same forms of financial support as citizens or permanent residents. The Asylum Seeker Assistance (ASA) Scheme provides assistance to eligible asylum seekers who are in the process of having their refugee status determined. The ASA Scheme offers income support to cover basic living expenses, paid at 89 per cent of the Centrelink Special Benefit. This would equal approximately \$405.84 per fortnight for a single asylum seeker – over \$260 less than the single age pension.

Refugees have fled persecution in their own country and sought safety and peace in Australia. The authors of these emails are intentionally trying to create ill feeling towards refugees by spreading false information.

The Refugee Council recommends that anyone receiving these hoax emails should delete them and inform the person who forwarded the email that the information it contains is false.

Further reading

Statements about the hoax emails have been issued by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Minister for Human Services. These statements can be viewed at the following URLs:

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/letters/letters09/le090507.htm>

<http://www.alp.org.au/media/0608/mshs180.php>

Payment rates for the Age Pension can be viewed here:

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/age_rates.htm

Payment rates for the Newstart Allowance can be viewed here (note that Special Benefit is usually calculated at the same rate as Newstart):

<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/newstart.htm>

Payment rates for Family Tax Benefits and Parenting Payments can be viewed at the following URLs:

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ftb_a_rates.htm

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ftb_b_rates.htm

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/parenting_rates.htm

Payment rates for the Partner Allowance can be viewed here:

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/partner_rates.htm

Information on Hardship payments can be viewed here:

<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/publications/fis013.htm>

Information on the IHSS, the SGP and the ASA Scheme can be found at the following URLs:

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/66ihss.htm>

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/92funding.htm>

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/62assistance.htm>

http://www.redcross.org.au/ourservices_aroundtheworld_tracingrefugeeservices_ASAS.htm