



Refugee Council
of Australia

A PLACE TO CALL HOME? THE IMPACT OF AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER POLICIES ON COMMUNITY COHESION

Since Federation, Australia has provided protection to over 800,000 refugee and humanitarian entrants. Australians from refugee backgrounds have made important social, economic and civic contributions to Australia, finding success in every field of endeavour and numbering amongst our best and brightest. The success of refugee settlement in Australia is in large part due to policies which have encouraged the inclusion and participation of people from refugee backgrounds in Australian society.

In recent years, however numerous concerns have been raised with the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) about policies and practices which undermine the successful settlement of people from refugee backgrounds, in turn posing significant obstacles to community cohesion. This paper focuses on three such issues: the treatment of asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat, including the denial of permanent residency to those found to be refugees; the limited opportunities for family reunion available to refugee and humanitarian entrants; and the negative public and political debate on refugee and asylum seeker policy. It presents feedback gathered through RCOA's community consultations about the impacts of these issues on settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants and puts forward ideas for positive reforms to promote the inclusion and participation of people from refugee backgrounds in Australian society.

Introduction

In February 2011, the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen delivered a speech on multiculturalism to the Sydney Institute (Bowen, 2011). In the preceding months, several prominent European leaders had spoken out publicly against the policy of multiculturalism, beginning with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's declaration that her country's attempt to build a multicultural society where people from different cultures lived side-by-side had "failed, utterly failed" (Merkel, quoted in Weaver, 2010). French President Nicolas Sarkozy later echoed Ms Merkel's words, denouncing multiculturalism as a failure and asserting that "we do not want a society where communities coexist side by side". He warned that migrants who did not agree to "melt into a single community, which is the national community" could not be welcome in France (Sarkozy, quoted in Le Point, 2011). UK Prime Minister David Cameron claimed that the "doctrine of state multiculturalism" had "encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream" and led to the toleration of "segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values", drawing a link between the policy of multiculturalism and the radicalisation of some young Muslims (Cameron, 2011).

Mr Bowen, however, proudly proclaimed multiculturalism a success, arguing that "multiculturalism has, without a doubt, strengthened Australian society." He identified three elements which comprised, in his words, "genius of Australian multiculturalism": an underpinning of respect for traditional Australian values, such as the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion and equality of the sexes; a citizenship-based model of multiculturalism which encourages "people who share respect for our democratic beliefs, laws and rights...to join us as full partners with equal rights"; and political bipartisanship, which Mr Bowen argued could allow multiculturalism to remain "above the fray of the daily political football match".

Sydney office:

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Phone: (02) 9211 9333 • Fax: (02) 9211 9288
admin@refugeecouncil.org.au

Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au • Twitter: @OzRefugeeCounc

Melbourne office:

Level 2, 313-315 Flinders Lane
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
Phone: (03) 9600 3302

melbourne@refugeecouncil.org.au
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

Mr Bowen contended that these three elements had resulted in multiculturalism operating very differently in Australia compared to other parts of the world, particularly Europe. He pointed out, for example, that Germany in fact never adopted a formal policy of multiculturalism and argued the apparent failure of some migrant groups to “integrate” was due to the failure of successive German Governments to adopt an inclusive multicultural agenda. In Mr Bowen’s words, “one could argue that the large Turkish guest worker populations have not properly integrated into German society because, frankly, they have not been invited to.” Multiculturalism, he asserted, should be about “inviting every individual member of society to be everything they can be and supporting each new arrival in overcoming whatever obstacles they face as they adjust to a new country and society and allowing them to flourish as individuals”.

Australia has indeed been remarkably successful in bringing together people from a variety of countries, backgrounds and cultures to form a united, cohesive and largely harmonious nation. Over 800,000 of these people have come to Australia as refugee and humanitarian entrants, fleeing persecution and other forms of ill-treatment in their homelands. Since the end of the Second World War, and particularly since the end to the Vietnam War, Australia’s policies towards refugees and asylum seekers have focused on providing the “invitation to inclusion” of which Mr Bowen spoke, aiming to promote equal participation in their new communities and assist them in rebuilding their homes and lives in Australia. In more recent times, however, Australia has adopted policies which undermine the successful settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants and in some cases actively foster exclusion, in turn posing significant obstacles to community cohesion.

This paper focuses on three of these policy issues: the treatment of asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat, including the denial of permanent residency to those found to be refugees; the limited opportunities for family reunion available to refugee and humanitarian entrants; and the negative public and political debate on refugee and asylum seeker policy. It presents feedback gathered through community consultations conducted by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA) about the impacts of these issues on settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants and puts forward ideas for positive reforms to promote the inclusion and participation of people from refugee backgrounds in Australian society.

Refugee settlement in Australia

Australia has been settling refugees for at least 170 years, with the first easily identifiable group of refugees being Lutherans who began settling in South Australia from 1839 to escape restrictions on their right to worship in the state of Prussia. It was not until the end of the Second World War, however, that Australia began to adopt a more coordinated approach to settling refugee and humanitarian entrants in Australia. In July 1947, the Australian Government entered into an agreement with the new International Refugee Organisation (the precursor to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR) to settle displaced people from camps in Europe. In the next seven years, Australia welcomed more than 170,000 refugees, primarily from countries in eastern Europe. To meet the needs of the refugees and other migrants, ship-board English classes were established, army camps were converted to migrant hostels for on-arrival accommodation and the Good Neighbour Council was established to foster and coordinate volunteer settlement support.

The fall of the South Vietnamese Government in Saigon in April 1975 began a chain of events which prompted a rethinking and reorganisation of Australia’s refugee program. As the scale of the Indochinese refugee crisis became apparent, Australian Senate’s Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to begin an investigation of how Australia should respond. The Committee’s report, released in 1976, identified an urgent need for a new approach to refugee settlement. The report cited the Department of Immigration’s failure to offer any additional assistance to newly arrived Vietnamese refugees as “irrefutable evidence of the complete lack of policy for the acceptance of people into Australia as refugees rather than as normal migrants”. The Senate committee made 44 recommendations about the development of a new refugee resettlement policy. This report marked the beginning of new thinking which transformed the national refugee program from the humanitarian element of a general migration program to a dedicated and planned humanitarian program supported by a sophisticated system of settlement support.

In May 1977, the then Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Michael Mackellar, announced a new national refugee policy, including procedures for responding to designated refugee situations, a series of strategies to involve voluntary agencies in resettlement programs and plans to allow the settlement of people in humanitarian need who did not fall within the UNHCR mandate or Refugee Convention definitions. In the following year, Mr Mackellar tabled the landmark Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants (commonly known as the Galbally Report), committing \$49.7 million over three years for the implementation of the report's recommendations on language teaching, settlement services and other migrant services.

The late 1970s also saw the establishment of the first Migrant Resource Centre in Melbourne, a new loan scheme to assist refugees into home ownership and further expansion of the then Adult Migrant and Refugee Education Program. In December 1979, the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme commenced, involving community groups in providing newly-arrived refugees with on-arrival accommodation, social support and assistance with finding employment. The 1980s and 1990s brought further significant changes to the delivery of settlement services, including the shift from migrant hostels to the On Arrival Accommodation program, the transition from the old Grant-in-Aid Program to the Community Settlement Services Scheme and the replacement of the Community Resettlement Settlement Scheme in 1997 with the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy.

Today, Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program provides 13,750 permanent visas each year. The majority of these are devoted to people resettled from overseas, generally after being referred to Australia by UNHCR or sponsored by a person or organisation in Australia. The remaining permanent visas are granted to asylum seekers who arrive in Australia on some form of temporary visa (such as a student or visitor visa) and are subsequently found to be in need of Australia's protection. A comprehensive suite of settlement services are provided to people arriving under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, with the key services including:

- **Humanitarian Settlement Services**, the successor of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, which provides initial support and orientation to refugee and humanitarian entrants during their first six to 12 months in Australia (including meeting new arrivals at the airport, provision of short-term accommodation, assistance to find long-term accommodation and assistance to register Centrelink, Medicare, health services, banks and schools).
- **Complex Case Support**, which provides intensive case management for people with multiple and complex needs.
- **Settlement Grants services**, which provide a range of services (including casework, referrals, information, advocacy, community development) to assist with longer-term settlement needs up to five years after arrival.
- **Adult Migrant English Program**, which offers free English classes for all new migrants, with refugee and humanitarian entrants entitled to additional tuition hours.
- **Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma**, which provides rehabilitation and support to people who have experienced torture and trauma.

In addition, refugee and humanitarian entrants on permanent visas are immediately eligible for a range of mainstream services available to other permanent residents, including income support through Centrelink (with the two-year Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period waived for humanitarian visa holders), Medicare and jobactive services.

Australia's settlement services are highly regarded internationally and widely seen as a key factor in the success of refugee settlement in Australia. At UNHCR's 2014 Executive Committee meeting, for example, High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres praised Australia's resettlement program as "exemplary", stating that "the cooperation between central government, local government, civil society, the role of civil society is an absolutely remarkable one" (Guterres, quoted in RCOA, 2014). Through providing the support that people from refugee backgrounds need to re-establish their lives, and encouraging their inclusion and participation in Australian society on an equal basis, the Australian model

has helped to ensure that our country is a place that refugee and humanitarian entrants can truly call home, where they can settle successfully and go on to make important contributions to their new country.

Indeed, Australians from refugee backgrounds profound impact on the nation's social, cultural and economic life. National and international research (see RCOA, 2010) shows that people from refugee backgrounds make substantial contributions to their new countries – expanding consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets, bringing in new skills, creating employment and filling empty employment niches. There are short-term costs during the initial period of settlement as people adjust to their new surroundings but once successful integration has occurred, refugee and humanitarian entrants are able to quickly make permanent cultural, social and economic contributions and infuse vitality, humanitarian values and multiculturalism into the communities into which they are resettled.

Graeme Hugo's (2011) extensive study on the Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants noted that former refugees are very entrepreneurial, being more likely to set up their own businesses than other migrant groups. They can also play an important role in facilitating the development of trade and other links with their countries of origin. In addition, the study also found that former refugees value the education of their children very highly (with the proportion of refugee young people attending an educational institution being higher than other migrants and even than people born in Australia) and make substantial social contributions through volunteering, promoting community development and engaging in neighbourhood activities and events.

The positive impacts of humanitarian migration refugees have been especially felt in regional and rural Australia. In recent times, many rural areas have experienced large-scale departures in population resulting in skills losses, lack of local entrepreneurship, business closures and the loss of social capital and services. Successful regional and rural refugee resettlement programs have helped to plug some population gaps, supply much-needed labour and stimulate economic growth and services delivery. More generally, the young age profile of humanitarian entrants makes a very positive contribution to a labour market in which new retirees now exceed new labour force entrants. For example, a recent report by AMES and Deloitte Access Economics (2015) found that the resettlement of 160 Karen refugees from Burma in the small town of Nhill in regional Victoria had contributed \$41.49 million to the local economy.

While existing information about the educational and labour force outcomes of the children of refugee and humanitarian entrants is limited, available sources point to above average rates of success in education and employment, consistent with the successes achieved by children of non-humanitarian migrants from similar non-English speaking countries. For example, an analysis of information on the children of migrants from Poland and Hungary (two major source countries for post-war refugees) shows that they are significantly more likely than third generation Australians to continue their education, to achieve a university degree or diploma, to work in a professional or managerial position and to have purchased or be purchasing their own home. Similarly, information on second generation Australians of Vietnamese background under 20 years of age show much higher than average rates of involvement in education, consistent with the commitment to education demonstrated by the first generation from Vietnam. This contributes to higher social mobility for people of Vietnamese background (both first and second generation) who live in lower income suburbs (RCOA 2010).

Australians from refugee backgrounds have found success in every field of endeavour and number amongst our best and brightest. Just some of the many Australian high achievers who once were refugees are scientists Sir Gustav Nossal and Dr Karl Kruszelnicki, 2009 Victorian of the Year Dr Berhan Ahmed, painter Judy Cassab, comedian Anh Do, filmmaker Khoa Do, author Nam Le, academic Associate Professor My-Van Tran, academic Dr Anita Donaldson, poet Juan Garrido-Salgado, painter and restaurateur Mirka Mora, actor Henri Szeps, broadcasters Les Murray and Caroline Tran, Australian Rules footballer Alex Jesaulenko, footballer Atti Abonyi, swimmers John and Ilsa Konrads, newspaper editor Michael Gawenda, architect Harry Seidler, business people Sir Peter Abeles, Larry Adler, Ouma Sananikone, Judit Korner and Frank Lowy, public servant Tuong Quang Luu and politicians Jennie George and Nick Greiner.

In recent years, however numerous concerns have been raised through RCOA's community consultations about policies and practices which undermine the successful settlement of people from refugee

backgrounds. Fears have been raised that these policies are having serious negative impacts not only at an individual level but also in terms of their broader long-term implications, particularly in relation to social inclusion and community cohesion.

“I feel imprisoned here for my whole life”: Asylum seekers who arrived by boat

Since August 2012, successive Australian Governments have introduced a litany of policy changes which have progressively removed access to a range of entitlements and imposed discriminatory measures on people who arrived in Australia by boat to seek asylum. These changes include the following:

- There have been several prolonged **suspensions in the processing of visa applications** lodged by asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat, which have resulted in many of these asylum seekers spending long periods of time in immigration detention and/or living in the Australian community without adequate support. Some asylum seekers have now been in Australia for close to three years but have not yet been able to apply for a visa.
- Since 1992, asylum seekers who arrive without visas have been subject to mandatory immigration detention. In recent years, however, asylum seekers (including children) have been **held in detention for exceptionally long periods of time**. In August 2012, the average length of detention was 79 days and the vast majority of people in detention (88%) had been detained for less than a year (DIAC 2012). By January 2015, the average length of detention had skyrocketed to 442 days and just 40% of people had been detained for less than a year (DIBP, 2015a). While the situation has since improved slightly, the average length of detention is still well over a year (DIBP, 2015b).
- From November 2012 to December 2014, asylum seekers who arrived by boat and were subsequently released from detention onto Bridging Visas were **not permitted to work**, instead subsisting in minimal income support paid at 89% of equivalent rates for Australian citizens and permanent residents. Many asylum seekers have been forced to subsist on this modest income for very long periods of time (years in some cases).
- Asylum seekers released from detention onto Bridging Visas must sign a **Code of Behaviour** which contains a list of expectations about how they are expected to behave while in Australia. Asylum seekers who arrive with valid visas do not have to sign the Code, nor do any other temporary or permanent entrants to Australia.
- Asylum seekers who arrived by boat after 19 July 2013 may be sent to **offshore processing centres** in Nauru and Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island for processing of their claims, where they are typically detained for long periods under very harsh conditions. Those found to be refugees will not have the opportunity to settle in Australia.
- Asylum seekers who arrived by boat between 13 August 2012 and 1 January 2014 and have not been transferred offshore will have their claims assessed through a **“fast-track” process**. Asylum seekers whose claims are rejected at the first stage of processing will no longer be able to appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal but instead will have their claims reviewed under a faster and less thorough process. Some asylum seekers will be denied access to review altogether.
- Asylum seekers who arrived by boat (other than those deemed by the Department of Immigration to be vulnerable) are **not entitled to receive free Government-funded legal advice** to assist them in applying for refugee status.
- Refugees who arrived by boat on or after 13 August 2012 are **not eligible to propose relatives under the Special Humanitarian Program**, a subclass of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program which allows individuals and organisations in Australia to propose people overseas need for resettlement in Australia and which is one of the primary means through which refugee and humanitarian entrants seek to reunite with their families.
- Visa applications lodged under the family stream of the Migration Program by refugees who arrived by boat (regardless of when they arrived but excluding those who have become Australian citizens) are **afforded the lowest processing priority**, meaning that they have very little chance of success.

- Asylum seekers who arrived by boat and have lived in the Australian community on a short-term Bridging Visa or in community detention (excluding unaccompanied children) are **not eligible for Humanitarian Settlement Services**.
- Asylum seekers who arrive without valid visas and are found to be refugees are **no longer eligible for permanent residency**. Instead, they will be granted either a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). They are not eligible for Humanitarian Settlement Services, Settlement Grants services and Federal Government higher education assistance programs (meaning that they will be expected to pay for tertiary education at international student rates), nor can they receive the full range of income support payments through Centrelink. In addition, TPV and SHEV holders cannot sponsor their family members to join them in Australia and cannot travel overseas unless there are compassionate or compelling circumstances necessitating travel and only with written approval from Minister for Immigration.

For several years, participants in RCOA's regular consultations with people from refugee backgrounds, asylum seekers, service providers and community groups have raised serious concern about the impacts of these policies on the settlement outcomes of people who arrived by boat. Many have highlighted the impacts of prolonged detention and uncertainty on mental health, noting that this could hinder successful settlement and engender a need for more intensive settlement support. In the words of a service provider in Darwin:

Having worked with BVE [Bridging Visa E] clients who have been long-term detained and going through the experience at the beginning of 2012 of helping those guys to integrate and to settle...the experience that we had was that people who had been detained for a long time were very, very institutionalised. It was difficult for them to initiate any sort of independence from the program.

Others drew attention to the long-term consequences of policies which place asylum seekers and refugees in situations of enforced dependence or which hamper engagement with and participation in the community, such as the denial of work rights and restrictions on access to educational opportunities (including English language tuition). There was concern that such policies could lead to serious marginalisation and social exclusion over the long term or create intergenerational disadvantage. A service provider in Melbourne, for example, highlighted the limited opportunities available to young people graduating from high school:

Young people in CD [community detention] participate in schooling but are not eligible to receive a VCE [Victorian Certificate of Education] if they are over 18. Lay over that the lack of work rights and lack of income if you are on a Centrelink payment and the long-term ramifications of this in terms of entrenched poverty. What is the cost of this in the long term?

Limited access to English languages classes (with asylum seekers on Bridging Visas entitled on just 45 hours of tuition) was also highlighted as a serious concern by consultation participants. One service provider in Victoria asserted that "the hours of English for asylum seekers both in CD [community detention] but particularly on Bridging Visas is not even close to enough. It needs to be increased to help people become independent. They cannot make appointments for themselves or move safely in the community without English." Other consultation participants agreed, noting that English classes were vital to people being able to communicate effectively – including to abide by all Australian rules and laws – to live independently, to engage with other people and to live safely in Australia. One regional service provider observed that the lack of meaningful English language training could create long-term dependency on welfare payments: "If it's left too long and people aren't able to start any English or education, it becomes harder to engage." Another provider noted that "there will be serious and compounding consequences, not just for this cohort but also for the wider community, of not addressing this need. Access to established English conversation classes will create a sense of belonging and build self-reliance and confidence and assist in bridging inter-cultural divides in the local community."

In addition, RCOA has heard regularly about the significant hardship faced by asylum seekers who are forced to subsist on an inadequate level of income. Consultation participants across the country have emphasised that the basic income support available to asylum seekers on Bridging Visas is insufficient for people to live in the Australian community, as the costs associated with leasing a property in the

private market and paying for utilities, transport, food, medication, clothing and household goods were significantly higher than the modest payments. Even with budgeting training, most people were struggling to live. Reports were received of asylum seekers living in substandard and/or precarious accommodation, skipping meals and missing out on medication due their limited financial resources. Both service providers and asylum seekers shared concerns that people would be forced to work illegally or to steal food in order to be able to survive. As one Iraqi asylum seeker put it: “[The Government] has to find a solution for this situation because people on Bridging Visas are in a very hard situation. You have to treat everyone equally or it could increase crime in the streets. People will steal or do whatever just to survive.”

Low income was also seen to be a major contributor to social isolation, in that the costs of transport or social activities could be too high for asylum seekers to meet. In the words of one service provider from Western Australia:

People who have been living in the community for a long period of time with all that uncertainty need to get engaged in something. They are keen to do volunteering but when it comes down to it, we don't get them there, even if opportunities are there. There's a disconnect. Some of it is about the space people are in but some of it is also about the affordability of travel. A lot of not-for-profits can't pay for travel and clients can't afford to spend excess dollars on travel. In this state there are no transport concessions so it hits in a wide range of areas, including people's ability to get out and about and integrate and form some meaningful connections and keep themselves busy.

The introduction of the Code of Behaviour was also seen to contribute to social isolation. Organisations supporting asylum seekers were concerned that the Code contains ambiguous terms like “anti-social behaviour”, which could be interpreted as applying to a wide range of benign activities, such as speaking to the media, taking part in a peaceful protest or becoming involved in a minor dispute on the football field. A consultation participant from Tasmania shared his sadness that the fear over participating in positive community gatherings meant that many asylum seekers did not get to join the people that supported them and feel a sense of belonging. He advised that a number of asylum seekers refused to go to a local Walk Together gathering because they feared that their photo may be taken and this could adversely impact their cases in some way.

The combination of destitution and marginalisation was seen to have serious negative impacts on mental health. A service provider in Tasmania described the “absolute hopelessness [asylum seekers] feel from their lack of money”, noting that some were “utterly despondent – not getting out of bed, not leaving the house”. Participants in two separate consultations referred to the situation of asylum seekers living in the community without adequate support as a “ticking bomb”, while a service provider in regional New South Wales described Australia's asylum policies as “a recipe for disaster”.

The challenges faced by asylum seekers living in the community are further compounded by the uncertainty resulting from prolonged delays in processing their claims. Many asylum seekers who arrived by boat have not been permitted to make an application for protection for close to three years, while others are at various points along the process of having their refugee claim determined but have still been waiting on a final outcome for many months and often years. Consultation participants shared how this uncertainty impacted on people in different ways – young people in school who had difficulty concentrating and remembering information and adults who often had difficulty engaging in activities or understanding where they were in the asylum process. In the words of one Afghan asylum seeker, “We don't know what is going to be our future. Do you think there is any way we can get the process quicker so we can know what is going on in the future?” Another asylum seeker from Iraqi asserted “They call it a ‘Bridging Visa’ but when you translate it to Arabic, it is ‘passing visa’. But no, I will call it a ‘grave visa’...I hate whenever I ask and they say: ‘You have to wait’...In Australia I am waiting, waiting, waiting...”

As many asylum seekers' uncertainty continues and can be measured in years, there is concern that irreparable damage is being done to thousands of people. Concern has been expressed that, in the face of these myriad challenges, some asylum seekers have turned to negative coping strategies, such as drug use and excessive alcohol consumption. The impact of current policies on asylum seekers' mental health and well-being was articulated by an Iranian asylum seeker in Victoria: “The morale of people in the

community is so low. They are free from detention but still not free.” The anxiety and depression that so many asylum seekers endure was described by an Afghan man in Victoria:

I think these policies that they are applying on us is just like to poison somebody, slowly and gradually so that the people should not know that [the government of Australia] are the killer. It is to kill someone by part. If we had remained in our country, we would have been killed one time, fast. Here, we are being killed slowly and gradually... I feel imprisoned here for my whole life...because of the 'crime' that I have committed, to come here because of persecution.

His views were echoed by others, with many asylum seekers wishing to explain to RCOA that they fled persecution in both home countries and countries of asylum and that living in Australia, while safe, was causing them harm and pain. An Afghan asylum seeker said: “We have been suffering a lot from where we have been living, in Afghanistan and Pakistan but we find in Australia, we are suffering here.” Another asylum seeker from Iran explained: “I came here from political persecution. I expected a peaceful life in Australia but now I live in poverty. I have seen [a counselling service] for support for six months but it is getting worse.” A Tamil man agreed, saying: “We are living here, our breath is here but our life is gone. I will become a mad person.”

Until recently, asylum seekers who were found to be refugees in Australia were granted permanent residency, regardless of their mode of arrival. As a result of legislative changes introduced in December 2014, however, any person granted protection in Australia who arrived without a valid visa will no longer be eligible for permanent residency in Australia. While this policy will apply to people who arrived by boat or plane without valid visas, the overwhelming majority of people affected arrived by boat. Instead of a being granted a permanent visa, they will be granted a TPV or SHEV which last for three and five years respectively. While some SHEV may eventually become eligible for a permanent visa (although these opportunities are likely to be limited), there is no pathway to permanent residency for TPV holders. With most asylum seekers living in the community now ineligible for permanent residency even if they are found to be refugees, there is serious concern that the hardships faced by this group are likely to continue for years to come.

“Invisible barbed wire”: Denial of permanent residency

TPVs were previously in place in Australia between 1999 and 2007. Numerous studies conducted during this time found that TPV holders generally experienced poorer settlement outcomes than people on permanent visas. A 2006 study by Momartin et al, for example, found that while the levels of pre-migration trauma amongst refugees on permanent and temporary visas were not significantly different, the proportion of TPV holders experiencing difficulties with settlement exceeded that of permanent visa holders on all items assessed. For example, 90% of TPV holders had faced unemployment, insufficient money to buy food, pay rent and buy basic necessities and bad working conditions, compared to 10% to 13% of permanent Protection Visa holders. Over 90% of TPV holders reported loneliness and boredom, and isolation, compared to 3% (loneliness and boredom) and 15% (isolation) for permanent Protection Visa holders and TPV status was by far the greatest predictor of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, accounting for 68% of the variance. 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” (Momartin et al, 2006, p. 360).

Feedback received from participants in RCOA’s consultations indicates that these findings concur with their own experiences, either as former TPV holders themselves or as support workers who previously assisted TPV holders. Many participants have expressed concern that the conditions imposed on TPV holders will hamper their ability to settle successfully in Australia, citing the outcomes of Australia’s original TPV policy. The impact of these conditions on mental health and wellbeing was viewed as a particularly critical factor in this regard. Temporary status, uncertainty about the future, worry about being sent home, separation from family members and limited access to support services were all cited as factors which would undermine the mental health of TPV holders. A service provider in regional New South Wales who had worked with TPV holders under the Howard Government commented “They’re almost like

no person... The psyche of a person who is here but really not here. It's a terrible form of mental torture." Another service provider in regional Victoria stated:

For people here in our community, the mental health impact of family separation, not being able to see hope in the future, or develop any plans, has had a profound impact on services and the mental and physical health of our clients. It's going to be long-term. Asylum seekers are incredibly depressed and this is just the start. We're going to see a significant increase in mental health issues and an incredible burden will be paid in the future for this policy.

Participants noted that these negative mental health impacts were related not only to the conditions of the TPV itself but also from the impact of these conditions on recovery from pre-existing trauma. As described by a service provider in Darwin:

One of the basics of dealing with someone from a trauma background is that, to get any form of healing, they need to have a baseline of safety and security. [This is not possible] if they are constantly under threat because every three years they have to worry about going back and reapplying for a TPV...It's one of the things that sort of holds them in place in terms of being able to address their trauma...They are always going to be in this state.

A counsellor reported that:

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...We are creating more problems with mental health in the long term.

In addition, many consultation participants have suggested that it is counter-productive to restrict access to settlement and other support services for TPV holders, as this would significantly hamper their capacity to establish themselves in Australia. Concerns have been expressed that TPV holders would struggle to secure employment and otherwise navigate life in Australia without access to settlement services and educational opportunities. Health has also been highlighted as an area of concern, with a service provider in Sydney advising that:

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. In the words of a former refugee from Afghanistan living in Melbourne, "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."

Some consultation participants predicted that the negative impacts of TPVs (particularly on mental health) would be even more acute under the current policy than they were under the previous TPV regime, due to opportunities for permanent residency being far more limited. One consultation participant went so far as to assert that "the rolling temporary status of TPVs...will make successful settlement almost impossible for TPV holders". A service provider in Adelaide noted:

I think these new TPVs are going to be worse than old TPVs because it doesn't appear as though there is going to be a future to it. At least before...there were three years of anxiety and then a new opportunity to go for permanent [residency] and, as we know, so many people got it. But as far as this Government goes, that's not [available].

Others argued that the settlement process will be even more challenging for the current group of refugees receiving TPVs given their traumatic post-arrival experiences in Australia. A service provider in Darwin, for example, expressed fears that many asylum seekers who are now liable to be granted TPVs would struggle to cope on yet another temporary visa due to having lived in precarious circumstances for such a long period of time:

There is a group of people who were long-term detained, then were released on to Bridging Visas and now it looks like they will be subject to receiving a TPV, if they receive anything at all. I would be very concerned that those people, after that long-term detention experience and all of the uncertainty of a BVE, wouldn't have the mental fortitude left to deal with the uncertainty of a TPV. And that's probably a large number of people Australia-wide.

This comment from a service provider in Adelaide, referring to Australia's previous TPV policy, reflected the views of many consultation participants on the reintroduction of TPVs: "It was traumatic. It accomplished nothing good. Just about everyone got a permanently visa after a long, unnecessary bad period... [It] interferes with good settlement outcomes and agencies have to pick up the pieces."

"We can't get on with our lives in this situation": The impacts of family separation

While most people who arrived by boat now have little if any access to family reunion opportunities, they are by no means the only refugee and humanitarian entrants to face difficulties in reuniting with family members. Indeed, family separation has been consistently nominated over many years in RCOA's community consultations as one of the greatest challenges facing people from refugee backgrounds. Aside from the specific restrictions imposed on people who arrived by boat, barriers to family reunion faced by refugee and humanitarian entrants include:

- Limited availability of places under the Special Humanitarian Program;
- The costs associated with family reunion (such as medical tests and airfares), particularly for those seeking to sponsor relatives under the family stream of the Migration Program who must also pay visa application charges;
- Documentation and other evidentiary requirements which are very difficult, if not impossible, for many refugee and humanitarian entrants to meet (such as obtaining police clearances from countries where a person has been subject to persecution or had no formal legal status);
- Limited visa options for relatives who are not part of the sponsor's immediate family (such as adult children, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents);
- Prolonged waiting periods even if relatives are at immediate risk;
- Limited access to settlement and other support services after arrival; and
- Limited availability of affordable migration advice for people lodging family reunion applications.

Participants in RCOA's community consultations have consistently highlighted 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 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 suffering caused by family separation has been painfully evident in RCOA's consultations over the years, 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. One support worker stated "I believe they are hopeless now. They say: 'I want to pass away with my family, instead of staying here'." Another support worker said: "Separation from family is horrendous. It is heart-breaking to see fathers

trying to maintain contact with their family only by Skype, their children touching the screen to try to touch their father.” A service provider in regional Victoria stated that:

The impacts of family separation are just devastating. I have this man whose family is in Pakistan. His children aren't safe; they can't go to school; they are scared to go outside. I asked him if he talks to the other men [with whom he shares a house] and he said: 'No, we just go to our rooms and cry'.

Family separation also has a significant negative impact on the settlement outcomes more broadly, with consultation participants expressing the view that successful settlement is 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”. Another community member in Sydney spoke of their inability to make plans and feel settled due to concerns for their family overseas: “I have been here now five years but I'm the same as someone who came here yesterday.”

Some participants have noted that the pressure to financially support family members living overseas could compel some people to forego study in favour of paid work, in turn limiting their future employment prospects. Participants also highlighted the added mental health costs associated with family separation, with one service provider 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, “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.

Some participants have also highlighted the broader social implications of protracted or indefinite family separation. As noted by one service provider in Geelong said: “That’s my concern, that there are thousands of men here waiting endlessly, frustrated and angry. What kind of position does that put the rest of the community? It really worries me, about the social implications.” Another service provider in Brisbane warned “My concern is that the changes to family reunion could affect social harmony, if you have hundreds of men who can’t reunite with families. That would raise a flag to me.”

The failure of Australia to offer adequate, responsive and timely family reunion opportunities to refugee and humanitarian entrants is seriously compromising their ability to settle successfully in Australia, with negative consequences not only at an individual level but also at a broader community level. This situation raises significant questions about the ongoing sustainability of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

“We live a fugitive existence”: Public and political debate

For several years, the tenor of the public and political debate on refugee and particularly asylum seeker issues has been one of the most consistently-raised concerns in RCOA’s community consultations. The widespread and often active perpetuation of myths and misinformation; the conflation of humanitarian issues with concerns about border security, overpopulation and criminality; the prominence of highly politicised negative portrayals of asylum seekers over more positive stories about refugees, asylum seekers and their contributions to Australia; and the lack of positive political leadership, all play a role in fuelling a highly distorted and largely negative debate which reflects a level of concern well out of proportion with the actual scale of the challenges confronting Australia.

In recent times, there has been broad agreement among consultation participants that the public and political debate on asylum seekers had reached an all-time low. As one Victorian community member put it, “the Government’s strategy to create fear is working really well.” Several network members and consultation participants reflected on their concern about the continued politicisation of asylum seeker and refugee issues. A participant involved in law enforcement noted that the politicisation of issues “means that the people who didn’t have an opinion now have an opinion, and it causes people to shift to more extreme views. People are furious about the way asylum seekers are being treated and others feel that asylum seekers shouldn’t be here. There is increasing polarisation of these issues.”

One of the most significant issues of concern raised by consultation participants is the Government’s use of the term “illegal” to describe asylum seekers arriving by boat and its directive to government staff and contractors to do likewise. There was general consensus among consultation participants that the use of this term was misleading, unfairly demonised asylum seekers and represented an attempt to reinforce negative attitudes. In the words of one consultation participant, “asylum seeking is not against the law and the use of the term illegal unfairly vilifies innocent people and deflects public attention from the important humanitarian issues at stake”. A Rwandan community representative asserted that the use of the term illegal “is the worse type of persecution because it is by the Government of Australia. It is insulting and adds to the persecution already suffered by them. The directive is inhuman.”

Many refugee community representatives have expressed the view that the negative and inflammatory rhetoric perpetuated by some politicians and public figures had an enormous impact on people settling in Australia. 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, with consultation participants raising concerns about social inclusion and lower health and wellbeing indicators for individuals and communities. As noted by a service provider in regional Western Australia,

It’s going to be harder for them with all these new thought patterns that are going on out there. People are going to become more wary and more fearful of these newer people who are arriving. The ones that are in and the ones that are coming might find it difficult because of the perceptions that are out there which are fuelled by media and political views.

A service provider in regional New South Wales highlighted impact of negative public attitudes on recovery from trauma:

A lot of the trauma literature talks about the role of acknowledgement of people’s experiences and how likely they are to recover if people not just in their immediate environment but in the wider environment, acknowledge what they’ve been through. If that’s not occurring, especially with that dialogue that’s going on about ‘unwelcome’ asylum seekers and refugees, it limits people’s capacity to actually heal and contribute.

The ramifications of the public and political debate are most keenly felt by asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat, the group towards whom most of the negative attitudes and rhetoric are directed. Service providers have advised that people who arrived by boat are very reluctant to reveal this due to fears about the reaction they may receive, the presumptions that are made about them and even the anger it may cause among their own communities here in Australia. Participants have also voiced concerns that asylum seekers are being portrayed as criminals and people unworthy of support or consideration – as one asylum seeker put it, “we live a fugitive existence”. These negative messages were seriously compromising the prospects of positive settlement outcomes for these individuals and their acceptance by the Australian community.

However, many former refugees who were resettled in Australia (as opposed to having arrived as asylum seekers) have also told RCOA that they felt unsafe and unwelcome by some parts of the Australian community, indicating that they too are feeling the effects of the negative public and political debate. African community members in Brisbane, for example, have reported that African-owned and operated shops have been defaced with graffiti urging Africans to “go back to your country”. Some former refugees have raised concerns that negative stereotypes perpetuated in the media (e.g. refugees and asylum seekers as victims, as “queue jumpers”, as reliant on welfare) present significant barriers to engagement with the broader community, particularly when seeking employment. Former refugees were concerned that potential employers saw them as people without skills. They also noted that there seemed to be a view that refugees and asylum seekers are not economically productive, that they are a cost to Australia and make little contribution to the community. Refugee community members also noted that the negative public discourse led to a missed opportunity: that the Australian community “does not get to see what refugees and asylum seekers do, how we contribute”.

Some former refugees have made the startling assertion that refugees who are selected for resettlement in Australia should be warned about negative public attitudes towards refugees before they arrive. While refugees coming to Australia through the resettlement program learn much about the positives of life in Australia through the offshore cultural orientation process, the community members felt that the reality was quite shocking to new arrivals. A number of former refugees also spoke of the fear and anxiety that they experienced, with particular worries that the continued negative discourse would impact on the likelihood that their families would be accepted into Australia.

Some consultation participants have reported seeing a rise in incidences of discrimination, racism and, alarmingly, violence against asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds which they attributed to the negative political debate, in particular the use of the term “illegal”. A service provider in Perth, for example, stated that their organisation was “noticing an increase in serious assaults on people in the

community based on racial issues, especially since all of this ‘illegal’ political rhetoric has come up”. A service provider in regional Victoria commented: “We know there is a direct link between use of the term ‘illegals’ and increased racism and negativity in the broader community and anger towards asylum seekers (boat arrivals)...The government is not making the link between asylum seeker policy, discourse and general community cohesion.” Another participant in the same consultation expressed frustration at the lack of accountability for the impacts of negative rhetoric:

We reported this [incidents of racism] at a community network meeting and someone from DIAC [the Department of Immigration and Citizenship] was there. They asked: ‘Why is this a problem in [city]?’ which made me so angry. Like the fact that there were issues in the community between asylum seekers and others was a local services problem but we know misinformation is coming directly from the government and politicians.

One community representative summed up the impact of the political debate on refugee and asylum seeker issues thus: “When two elephants fight, it is the grass underneath that suffers.”

The way forward

The feedback received through RCOA’s community consultations clearly indicates that Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers and refugees who arrived by boat, our policies on humanitarian family reunion and the negative public and political debate on refugee and asylum seeker issues all pose a significant threat to community cohesion. The negative impacts of these policies and practices on health and wellbeing, engagement with the settlement process and participation in the community by refugee and humanitarian entrants, combined with their influence on public attitudes towards people from refugee backgrounds, act to prevent refugee and humanitarian entrants from settling successfully, increase their social isolation and undermine the cohesiveness of our communities and society. For many people from refugee backgrounds, Australia is no longer offering an invitation to inclusion; it is no longer a place that they can truly call home.

Participants in our consultations have strongly recommended that the Government abandon its punitive, deterrence-based approach to asylum policy and cease imposing discriminatory measures based on a person’s mode of arrival in Australia. Reforms to Australia’s asylum policies should include: the abolition of offshore processing; reform of Australia’s immigration detention system; improving support for asylum seekers living in the community on Bridging Visas; reinstatement of a robust, non-discriminatory refugee status determination process; and removal of restrictions on access to services and entitlements based on a person’s mode of arrival.

In relation to family reunion, RCOA has suggested that the Government overhaul the family reunion options available to 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. The purpose of this program would be to provide a dedicated family reunion pathway for refugee and humanitarian entrants, under which both humanitarian need and family unity would be considered key priorities. A specific structure and eligibility criteria for this program could be developed in consultation with people from refugee backgrounds, refugee community organisations, peak bodies and relevant service providers.

In addition, the introduction of concessions for refugee and humanitarian entrants sponsoring relatives under the family stream could play a significant role in facilitating access to family migration options, in turn reducing some of the pressure on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. These concessions could include: means-tested fee reductions or waivers; exemption from certain documentation requirements; options for prioritisation if family members are at immediate risk; access to relevant settlement services after arrival; and exemption from Centrelink’s Newly Arrived Resident’s Waiting Period. Consideration could also be given to introducing new visa subclasses to provide migration pathways for relatives in humanitarian need who are outside the sponsor’s immediate family.

Furthermore, many refugee and humanitarian entrants arriving in Australia have considerable skills, expertise and qualifications which, in different circumstances, may have allowed them to qualify for some form of skilled migration. In our community consultations in previous years, some participants have

suggested that the Australian Government explore options for granting skilled migration visas to refugee and humanitarian entrants who have relevant skills and qualifications, so as to maximise the number of places available under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. In any circumstances where people in humanitarian need are granted non-humanitarian visas, it is critical that safeguards are in place to prevent forced return and ensure that these individuals receive adequate support to recover from their pre-arrival experiences and settle successfully in Australia. If handled in a protection-sensitive manner, however, the development of better links between the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and the general Migration Program could achieve significant protection dividends.

In response to the negative public and political debate on refugee and asylum seeker issues, a range of initiatives have been developed by NGOs, media outlets and government departments to enhance public awareness of issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers and break down misconceptions about these groups. Amnesty International's *Let's Change the Conversation* campaign, for example, used multimedia advertising, public education initiatives and training sessions to provide people with facts, anecdotes and personal stories to better equip them in challenging common misconceptions about asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds. SBS' *Go Back to Where You Came From* television series aims to provide an insight into the realities of daily life for and challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers, asking ordinary Australians to put themselves in the shoes of a person fleeing persecution.

Initiatives have also been developed to highlight the personal stories and positive contributions of people from refugee backgrounds to Australian society. The Victorian Multicultural Commission's Victorian Refugee Recognition Record, announced annually each Refugee Week since 2004, is an awards program which recognises individuals from refugee backgrounds for their outstanding work in the community. In NSW, STARTTS and RCOA coordinate the NSW Humanitarian Awards, which are presented at the Sydney launch of Refugee Week and acknowledge people (including former refugees) who have made an exceptional positive contribution towards refugee issues. Both awards programs provide an opportunity to highlight the contributions made by former refugees to Australian society. Arts-based initiatives, such as *The Baulkham Hills African Ladies Troupe*, the Treehouse Theatre's *Tree of Life* program and the Heartlands Refugee Art Prize serve the dual purpose of providing innovative ways for former refugees to engage with the wider public while also empowering the participants by building their skills, capacity and connection to their communities (both "old" and "new").

These initiatives provide useful examples of strategies which can assist in addressing negative public attitudes. Such initiatives, however, can only achieve so much in the absence of political leadership. When myths, stereotypes and negative rhetoric are actively perpetuated by many politicians, including those holding the highest office in the land, the task of turning around the public debate on refugee and asylum seeker issues presents a major challenge.

However, past experience demonstrates that individual politicians who take a strong stance in favour of humane policies for refugees can, in fact, be rewarded by the electorate, regardless of whether the majority of voters support their views. In 2001, Peter Andren, the Independent MP for Calare (NSW), took a very public stance against the Howard Government's response to the Tampa issue, despite being aware that the Government's approach had wide support in his electorate. In the November 2001 election, Mr Andren increased his primary vote by 15.1%, defying a 3.5% national swing to the Coalition. Similarly, in the November 2007 election, the only Liberal Party MPs in Victoria to increase their primary vote were Petro Georgiou (MP for Kooyong) and Russell Broadbent (MP for McMillan), two of the most vocal critics of the Howard Government's asylum seeker policy. On a two-party basis, the swings against Mr Georgiou and Mr Broadbent were just 0.05% and 0.2% respectively, while the statewide swing against the Coalition was 5.3% (AEC, 2007).

What is needed from our political representatives now is the kind of leadership evident in the strong defence of the multiculturalism and the benefits of our diverse, inclusive society, delivered by Mr Bowen in 2011 in response to a wave of negative rhetoric from European leaders. Sadly, the Government of which Mr Bowen was part went on to implement or administer many of the negative policies and practices discussed throughout this paper, undermining the ideals he so spiritedly endorsed in 2011. Our leaders would do well to step back and consider the kind of society they truly wish to build. Do we want the cohesive multicultural society described by Mr Bowen, in which every individual member is invited to be

everything they can be, is supported to overcome whatever obstacles they face as they adjust to a new country and is allowed to flourish as an individual? Or do we want the opposite – a society in which some individuals are denied the opportunity to reach their full potential; have additional obstacles deliberately placed in their way which stymie their attempts to adjust to their new country; and are not only prevented from flourishing but also suffer serious harm as a direct result of our actions?

References

- AEC (2007). *2007 federal election*. Retrieved from http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Federal_Elections
- AMES & Deloitte Access Economics. (2015). *Small towns, big returns: Economic and social impact of the Karen resettlement in Nhill*. Retrieved from <https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/Research/19933%20AMES%20Nhill%20Report%20LR.pdf>
- Bowen, C. (2011). *The genius of Australian multiculturalism*. Address to the Sydney Institute, 16 February. Retrieved from <http://www.chrisbowen.net/media-centre/speeches.do?newsId=4154>
- Cameron, D. (2011). *Radicalisation and Islamic extremism*. Address at the Munich Security Conference, 5 February. Retrieved from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130109092234/http://number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>
- DIAC (2012). *Immigration Detention Statistics Summary 31 August 2012*. Retrieved from <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/115165/20121009-0752/www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/pdf/immigration-detention-statistics-20120831.pdf>
- DIBP (2015a). *Immigration Detention and Community Statistics Summary 31 January 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/immigration-detention-statistics-jan2015.pdf>
- DIBP (2015b). *Immigration Detention and Community Statistics Summary 31 May 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/immigration-detention-may2015.pdf>
- Hugo, G. (2011). *Economic, social and civic contributions of first and second generation humanitarian entrants*. Retrieved from <http://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/research/economic-social-civic-contributions-about-the-research2011.pdf#search=graeme%20hugo>
- Le Point (2011). "Multiculturalism is 'a failure', says Nicolas Sarkozy." *Le Point*, 10 February. Retrieved from http://www.lepoint.fr/societe/le-multiculturalisme-est-un-echec-affirme-nicolas-sarkozy-10-02-2011-1294163_23.php
- Momartin, S., Steel, Z., Coello, M., Aroche, J., Silove, D. M. & Brooks, R. (2006). "A comparison of the mental health of refugees with temporary versus permanent protection visas." *Medical Journal of Australia*, 185(7), 357-361.
- RCOA (2010). *Economic, civic and social contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants: A literature review*. Retrieved from <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2010-Contributions.pdf>
- RCOA (2014). *Australia condemned as nations focus on global refugee crisis*. Retrieved from <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2014-ExCom.pdf>
- Weaver, M. (2010). "Angela Merkel: German multiculturalism has 'utterly failed'." *The Guardian*, 17 October. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed>