

AUSTRALIA SAYS WELCOME



Refugee Council
of Australia

REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA BULLETIN

December 2015

Inspired by the imminent arrival of 12,000 additional Syrian and Iraqi refugees and with the assistance of artist Peter Drew, we recently launched our “Australia says Welcome” campaign, aimed at building on the good will in the community for these new Australians and to spread the message that all people seeking asylum and refuge in Australia need our support. You can add your voice by clicking [here](#).

You are likely to have seen one or more of us around the country in recent weeks, with the annual consultations taking place for our submission to the Australian Government on the coming financial year’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program. We have just released a report on Australian asylum policy, based on consultations and information gathered through our networks during 2014 and 2015. Two of our other recent reports have focused on citizenship discrimination for people who arrived seeking asylum by boat, and on improving the access to education for people seeking asylum and others on temporary visas. On both fronts we are pleased to report there has been some progress with a number of people now being able to finally attain their citizenship, and more scholarship places at universities being made available.

Thank you for all your efforts in supporting refugees and people seeking asylum this year, and also for your support of the Refugee Council and our 200 member organisations. We wish you all the very best for a safe and prosperous 2016, where we look forward to building on the improvements in the treatment of people seeking safety and protection we have seen this year, and righting the many wrongs that are prevalent in Australia’s current approach.

Sincerely
Paul Power

RCOA NEWS

Eroding our identity as a generous nation: New report on Australia’s asylum policies

This [new report](#) outlines the issues and concerns about Australia’s asylum policies and practices that RCOA gathered in 2014 and 2015. The title of our report has been drawn from a comment from one of our community consultations, from a RCOA

member who observed that “our national identity as a generous and loving people [has been] eroded and fractured” by the mandatory and prolonged detention of people seeking asylum. The report provides an overview of the issues that people seeking asylum themselves have raised, as well as concerns communicated by individuals and agencies supporting people seeking asylum.

Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas

The Barriers to Education for people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas [report](#) highlights barriers this large group of people face in accessing secondary school and further education. RCOA is calling for access to Commonwealth Supported Places and federal loan schemes to provide access to further education in order for this group to improve their skills, gain qualifications and contribute to Australia.

Citizenship discrimination for refugees who arrive by boat: New research

New research from RCOA raised serious questions about discrimination in access to citizenship for refugees who arrived by boat in Australia seeking permanent protection. The research, [Delays in Citizenship Applications for Permanent Refugee Visa Holders](#), is based on 188 interviews with people of refugee background who are eligible for citizenship after being in Australia for four years on a permanent humanitarian visa but have experienced considerable delays in the citizenship process.

RCOA joins UNHCR dialogue on causes of displacement

RCOA was one of a select group of NGOs from around the world invited to this week’s UNHCR High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges held at the United Nations building in Geneva. The dialogue, the last major event hosted by High Commissioner Antonio Guterres before the end of his 10-year tenure next week, focused on the theme: “Understanding and addressing root causes of displacement”. CEO Paul Power represented RCOA, joining representatives of 86 states, 25 inter-governmental bodies and 64 NGOs and 53 individual experts for two days of dialogue. Delegates discussed the role of conflict, persecution, climate change, urbanisation and food insecurity in creating displacement and examined practical responses to protracted displacement. For more information on the dialogue, see [here](#)

Global refugee population passes 20 million mark

The global number of refugees now exceeds 20 million and the total number of people forcibly displaced is more than 60 million. UNHCR’s Mid-Year Trends 2015 reports estimates that the number of refugees grew by 839,000 in the first six months of this year (an average of 4600 per day) to 20.2 million. Of these, 15.1 million refugees were under UNHCR’s mandate and 5.1 million were Palestinians under UNRWA’s mandate. The number of people seeking asylum as at 30 June 2015 was estimated at 2.34 million, up 993,600 on December 2014. The number of people internally displaced grew by around 2 million in six months to 34 million. UNHCR’s official count of stateless people as at June 2015 was 3.9 million but the agency estimates that statelessness affects well over 10 million people. Durable solutions remain unattainable for most of the world’s refugees. From January to June, just 84,400 refugees returned home voluntarily (the lowest number in 30 years) and just 33,400 refugees were resettled under UNHCR-assisted programs. For more details, see <http://www.unhcr.org/5672c2576.html>

NSW Government makes good on promise to grant transport concessions to people seeking asylum

The NSW Government has this week extended transport concessions to people seeking asylum who are living in NSW, having pledged to do so in June this year. People seeking asylum are now eligible for a Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card, which will allow them to travel on all forms of public transport at a capped rate of \$2.50 per day. Those wishing to apply must supply a copy of their Immicard, a document confirming receipt of an application for asylum or written confirmation from a designated agency that they are seeking asylum in Australia. Further information on applying Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card, including a list of designated agencies, can be found [here](#).

Children languishing in detention

The Australian Parliament missed another opportunity to free children from detention before the end of the parliamentary year. RCOA appealed to the Prime Minister and his Government to follow the example of the Howard Government which acted in 2005 to release all children from immigration detention centres. Whilst the bill was not without concerns, you can see our response [here](#):

More than 60 countries questions Australia's refugee policies: UPR The Refugee Council of Australia worked with many organisations to input into the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, whereby a nation's human rights undergoes a performance appraisal – it was a damning outcome with more than 60 countries, including many of our closest allies, upbraiding Australia about its approach to refugee and people seeking asylum. We have contacted every federal MP and Senator on the matter, and have been surprised at the responses. See our release [here](#)

RCOA welcomes Minister's interest in increasing refugee resettlement We welcomed the willingness of the immigration Minister to consider additional increases to the resettlement intake of refugees from Syria and Iraq in November. The world is facing one of the greatest displacements of people in our history and Australian could do much more in engaging with the international community to promote durable solutions, unfortunately, Australia's current unilateral approach, provides us with very limited political capacity with our international partners.

Refugee Council applauds doctors and health workers leadership on #KidsOut

We welcomed the leadership of doctors and health workers in standing up for children in detention and deprived of a voice, by taking action across the country in the front of hospitals, universities, schools and community organisations.

Refugee Council's annual consultations on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program – extension of deadline for feedback – 24 January

The Refugee Council would like to thank all those who participated in our annual consultations this year on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program around Australia and provided us with a wealth of useful information. A late change to the original timing means that we are now able to extend the opportunity to provide any feedback to those who were not able to attend in person (and in particular from areas that we were unable to visit) through an [online form](#). This form will be available until the end of **Sunday 24 January 2015**.

RCOA REPORTS AND SUBMISSIONS

RCOA responds to latest attempt to water down complementary protection

Australia's complementary protection framework is designed to protect people at risk of torture and serious harm on non-refugee grounds, such as people fleeing family violence, honour crimes, revenge attacks and extortion. The *Migration Amendment (Complementary Protection and Other Measures) Bill 2015* seeks to introduce changes which would significantly weaken this framework and may result in the denial of protection to people who are at genuine risk of serious harm. RCOA has made [submission](#) highlighting the importance of complementary protection and the risks of watering down critical safeguards for people in danger.

RCOA submission on 2016-17 Migration Program

RCOA has provided input to the Department of Immigration on planning for the 2016-17 Migration Program. Our [submission](#) outlined the challenges faced by people from refugee backgrounds in sponsoring relatives under the family stream of the Migration Program and included a range of recommendations for improving access to family and skilled migration options for refugee and humanitarian entrants.

BUY THE RCOA 2016 calendar: It's no laughing matter...



15 of Australia's best cartoonists commenting on 15 years of refugee policy over 15 months from January 2016. Very limited numbers remain, and it goes up until March 2017 - Get yours today [here](#)

OTHER REPORTS AND RESEARCH

New paper on South Sudanese community organisations in Sydney

This [paper](#) by PhD candidate and former refugee Atem Dau Atem analyses the development of South Sudanese community structures in Sydney. It argues that the development of South Sudanese community structures in Sydney cannot be understood without analysing pre-migration experiences of South Sudanese themselves. The paper draws on RCOA's 2014 discussion paper on the [role of refugee community organisations in settlement](#).

SSE and Citi Youth Launch pad

The School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) Australia is excited about the launch of our latest program, [The SSE & Citi Youth Launchpad](#) in Western Sydney. We are currently working hard to identify the right people to bring into this program to make it a success and we're seeking your help in identifying the potential students who may become Western Sydney's social enterprise leaders of the future. We have 2 rounds of applications in order to allow students that can commit now to lock into the program. There are only 18 spots, at no cost, for 18-25 year olds from Western Sydney. The second round, if needed, will close in February.

CONFERENCES

Settlement and Citizenship in Civil Society: 5-7 May, 2016 SCOA's triennial conference will bring together international experts and Australian experience to examine the global domain of communities' societies and active citizenship and build on current settlement knowledge, practice and community participation within a globalised multicultural society to share current thinking, research and good practice within international settlement contexts. Find out [more here](#)

Sustainable Refugee Resettlement 8-9 March, 2016 With the addition of 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees coming in addition to the projected refugee intake, the focus will be on settlements services to drive improved service delivery and connectivity to build sustainable and responsive communities. This conference featuring Melissa Monteiro from NSW community Migrant Resource Centre, Violet Roumeliotis from SSI and Brenda McLennan from Ames Australia, along with many other local experts, including our own Paul Power, will examine the fundamentals of a successful local approach to resettlement. You can find out more [here](#)

NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

The YMCA NSW Youth Parliament is open NSW Youth Parliament is a 6-month program for students in years 10-12, which aims to engage a diverse array of young people from across NSW in youth advocacy, active community leadership and personal development. Youth Parliament is an apolitical program whereby young people can speak up on issues they are passionate about and be given the opportunity to create and debate solutions at NSW Parliament House in front of current Members of Parliament and industry leaders. To find out more about the program and further information on how to apply, check out our website:

<http://www.ymcansw.org.au/centres/youth-government/ymca-nsw-youth-parliament>

NEW ROOTS App An innovative project that includes a [smartphone app](#) that comes in multiple languages has been launched to support men who have recently arrived in Australia on humanitarian visas. The new app becomes available as Australia prepares to welcome an additional 12,000 refugees who have been affected by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The project also aims to support the communities into which refugee men are settling, and people who work in the settlement sector.

I came by boat Is a new campaign designed to highlight the great contributions made by people who travelled to Australia to seek asylum by boat. Australia of people who came to Australia See how you can support this great campaign [here](#)

Australian Refugee Association (ARA) I launch their third annual portrait exhibition In the first week of July, 2016, The Australian Refugee Association (ARA) will launch their third annual portrait exhibition in honour of the thousands of people we walk alongside each year as they face the challenges and joys of building a new life in South Australia. More information [here](#)

REFUGEE WEEK 2016

Don't forget, Refugee week 2016 will run from June 19-25. Lots of exciting activities are underway, and you can find out more on www.refugeeweek.org.au

EVENTS [Refugee Rights Action Network Perth](#)

January 4, 2016 @ 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm Refugee Rights Action Network (RRAN) is a political activist group working on issues that affect refugees and people seeking asylum. 1 5/5 *Aberdeen St Northbridge, WA* [Find out more »](#)

[Freo Refugee Rights Action Network Meetings](#)

January 6, 2016 @ 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm Refugee Rights Action Network (RRAN) is a political activist group working on issues that affect refugees and people seeking asylum 8 *William St Fremantle , WA 6160* [Find out more »](#)

The Integration Conference

February 17, 2016 - February 18, 2016

Organised by Africa media Australia in partnership with the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' council (NEMBC). The overall theme of the conference is "Media representations of ethnic communities and their impacts on integration and social mobility" [Monash University](#), Melbourne, VIC Australia [Find out more »](#)

April 2016

Children & Families Across Borders Conference

April 4, 2016 - April 5, 2016 Examining international surrogacy, kinship care, forced marriage, intercountry adoption, child trafficking, unaccompanied humanitarian minors and child protection across borders. [University of Melbourne](#) <http://www.iss2016melbourne.net/>

MEDIA

Australian and Regional News

[Funding Barriers shut out people seeking asylum and refugees from further education –The Conversation](#)

[Iraqi refugees' wild time at Melbourne Zoo – SBS](#)

[Refugee allowed in but not his family – 9News](#)

[Government pledges \\$22m for young refugees as second family arrives in – ABC News](#)

[MYEFO budget update: \\$1 billion blow out on immigration detention costs – SMH](#)

[Refugee surf program Surfing Without Borders teaches great Australian pastime – SMH](#)

[Hunger strike for 18 Darwin asylum seekers – SBS](#)

[Manus Island: asylum seeker who lost eye in riot has claim against government, G4S settled – SMH](#)

[How Australia's immigration detention regime crushed Fazel Chegeni – The Guardian](#)

[World's refugees and displaced exceed record 60 million, mainly driven by Syrian PNG offers citizenship to 3,000 West Papuan refugees – ABC News](#)

[Dozens of Sri Lankan asylum seekers who made it to WA still in detention two years later – ABC](#)

[Refugee Council launches new calendar - SMH](#)

[Sayed Abdellatif: human rights groups press government to end detention – The Guardian](#)

[Revealed: Thailand's most senior human trafficking investigator to seek political asylum in Australia – The Guardian](#)

[Germany is looking to Australia's success as an immigration nation – SMH](#)

[Former refugee launches 'I came by boat' campaign to highlight migrant contribution – SBS](#)

[Leichhardt Council passes proposal for 'refugee welcome centre' at Callan Park – SMH](#)

[Syrian refugees tipped to start new life in Mirrabooka, one of Perth's most multicultural suburbs – ABC News](#)

[Hamid Khazaei inquest: Asylum seekers 'genetically susceptible' to infection that killed him, inquest hears – ABC News](#)

[University of Canberra offers discounted degrees to five asylum seekers – SMH](#)

[UN called for asylum seeker Sayed Abdellatif's release six months ago – The Guardian](#)

[Controversial border force takes control of detention centres, turns them into 'jails' – SMH](#)

[Darebin Council proposes new housing for refugees – Herald Sun](#)

[Glen Innes welcomes refugees – unanimously -Glen Innes Examiner](#)
[Australia to attend Jakarta refugee talks – 9 News](#)

World News

[Canada's PM Justin Trudeau welcomes first of 25,000 Syrian refugees to the country – ABC](#)

[Germany seeing refugee benefits – The Age](#)

[Denmark wants to seize jewellery and cash from refugees – SMH](#)

[Pope Francis urges review of migration laws to welcome refugees – The Age](#)

[UN refugee agency receives record pledges for 2016 – 7 News](#)

[Canada's "bass-ass" defence minister explains refugee intake – The Northern Star](#)

[Far fewer people entering Germany with fake Syrian passports than thought – The Guardian](#)

[EU's new border force has 'right to intervene' without country's consent – SBS](#)

[Merkel wants to 'drastically reduce' refugee arrivals in Germany – AFR](#)

[Plans to boost EU border force powers face resistance from member states – SMH](#)

[This chart shows the staggering scale of the refugee crisis that has engulfed Europe – Business Insider](#)

[German chancellor Angela Merkel named Time 'Person of the Year 2015' – ABC News](#)

[Why the world failed to notice a tiny little girl washed up on a Turkish beach – News.com.au](#)

[Jordan urged to take in refugees fleeing Syria war – ABC News](#)

[More than 1 million people have sought EU asylum so far in 2015 – The Guardian Australia](#)

Feature

[From conservative hip-hop to white power rock, rightwing politics inspires woeful music – The Guardian](#)

[Refugees and an avalanche of numbers – Asia and the Pacific Policy Society](#)

[Patrick Ness: 'You're 10, a refugee in a foreign country. What the hell do you do?' – The Guardian](#)

[The photographer behind 'Humans of New York' collected these 20 moving stories of Syrian refugees – Business Insider Australia](#)

[Refugees tell their stories in UN's call for humanitarian aid – Global Citizen](#)

[Love Makes a Way to sing carols for asylum seekers in Adelaide's CBD – The Advertiser](#)

[Monika Radulovic: Aussie child of war the favourite to take out the 2015 Miss Universe title – The Daily Telegraph](#)

[Seeking asylum in the US: Syrian refugees concerned about anti-Muslim sentiment – ABC](#)

[Sonny Bill Williams 'humbled' by the attitudes of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon – Fox Sports](#)

Opinion

[Where media fails on the reporting of migrants and refugees – The Guardian](#)

[Merkel is wrong – demanding Syrians assimilate could backfire – The Guardian](#)

[Does it matter who runs our offshore immigration detention centres? – SMH](#)

[National anthem's neglected verse really makes me patriotic – Herald Sun](#)

[Borderforce Act is inhumane in its secrecy - Newcastle Herald](#)

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