



Refugee Council
of Australia

SELECT COMMITTEE ON STRENGTHENING MULTICULTURALISM

SUBMISSION ON STRENGTHENING MULTICULTURALISM

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national umbrella body for refugees, people seeking asylum and the organisations and individuals who work with them, representing over 190 organisations and around 1,000 individual members. RCOA promotes the adoption of humane, lawful and constructive policies by governments and communities in Australia and internationally towards refugees, people seeking asylum and humanitarian entrants. RCOA consults regularly with its members, community leaders and people from refugee backgrounds and this submission is informed by their views.

RCOA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism's Inquiry into Multiculturalism and social inclusion in Australia. The issues in the Inquiry's terms of reference are relevant to much of our recent research and policy, which we draw upon in this submission.

Australia has had a long and successful history of multiculturalism. However, in recent years an increasingly divisive political and public discourse, coupled with harsh and inhumane asylum policies, have undermined the national commitment to multiculturalism and social inclusion.

This inquiry is therefore timely and much needed. Concerns about multiculturalism, social inclusion, equality and respect for all have been raised increasingly frequently during our annual community consultations. Experiences of social exclusion, racism and discrimination make it very difficult for refugee and humanitarian entrants to fully participate and rebuild their lives in Australia.

RCOA would strongly encourage the Committee to hear from former refugees and people seeking asylum directly, and would be happy to coordinate community members to attend hearings around Australia.

1. Supporting a multicultural Australia

1.1 Australia has maintained bipartisan support for multiculturalism since the 1970s. However, unfortunately, our strong policies on multiculturalism are being undermined by increasingly divisive political rhetoric, the inhumane treatment of people seeking asylum, and a suite of policy changes that undermine our successful multicultural society.

1.2 In recent years, there has been a decline in the visibility of multiculturalism within the policy priorities of the Federal Government, marked for example by the disappearance of the term 'multiculturalism' or even 'citizenship' within the federal bureaucracy. Likewise, policy priorities have focused on 'social cohesion', 'national security' and 'Australian values, as seen in the recent Federal Multicultural Policy Statement.¹

1.3 Another example is the lack of consultation with refugee communities or peak bodies such as RCOA in the recent development of the Multicultural Policy Statement, *United, Strong,*

¹ Australian Government, *Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful* (2017)
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/03_2017/multicultural_policy_2017.pdf

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

Successful. The Statement's references to terrorism and focus on 'shared values' are, in our view, divisive rather than inclusive.

1.4 Another example of this change in policy can be seen in the proposed changes to citizenship requirements, including introducing an English language test and a stronger emphasis on 'Australian values'. These proposed changes clearly represent a shift away from the commitment to multiculturalism, and will undermine one of our greatest tools for social inclusion.

1.5 Likewise, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's current Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes also emphasises concerns about the 'anti-social behaviour' of young migrants.² This inquiry comes at a time when media and politicians are demonising people of refugee and migrant background, based on the misrepresentation of criminal activity.³

1.6 Finally, as discussed below, the inhumane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia represents the largest failure of our multicultural society. The success of multiculturalism depends on how we treat the most vulnerable in our community. Unfortunately, while simultaneously claiming to support multiculturalism, successive Governments have enacted policies designed to further exclude, punish and harm those who seek asylum.

1.7 As such, RCOA believes that we have a long way to go in strengthening multiculturalism in Australia. As discussed below, this involves welcoming the contributions of refugees and people seeking asylum, building on our successful settlement programs, ending our cruel treatment of people seeking asylum and combating racism in all its forms. To achieve this, strong political leadership from all sides of Parliament is needed.

2. The contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia

2.1 Since Federation, Australia has settled 870,000 refugees and humanitarian entrants.⁴ They have had a profound impact on the nation's social, cultural and economic life. National and international research shows that people from refugee backgrounds contribute substantially (socially, culturally and economically) to their new countries.⁵ The benefits of humanitarian migration can only be truly appreciated by taking a longer-term perspective, going beyond the initial period of settlement to the contributions of later generations.

2.2 The late Professor Graeme Hugo's extensive study found that former refugees are more entrepreneurial than other migrant groups, and also play an important role in facilitating the development of trade and other links with their countries of origin.⁶ The study also found that former refugees value the education of their children very highly, with more young people from a refugee background attending an educational institution proportionally than those born in Australia. They make substantial social contributions through volunteering, promoting community development and engaging in neighbourhood activities and events.

2.3 The positive impacts of humanitarian migration are evident in regional and rural Australia. In recent times, large numbers of people have left many rural areas, resulting in the loss of skills, businesses, services and social capital. Successful regional and rural refugee resettlement programs have helped reverse this decline. More generally, the relative youth of humanitarian entrants makes a very positive contribution to an ageing labour market. For example, a recent report by AMES and Deloitte Access Economics found that the resettlement of 160 Karen refugees from

² See its Terms of Reference, http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/settlementoutcomes/Terms_of_Reference

³ See RCOA's submission to the *Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/submissions/migrant-settlement-outcomes/>

⁴ Figure as at June 2016. Calculated by RCOA using Immigration Department figures. See <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Refugee-stats-snapshot-1505.pdf>

⁵ See RCOA's literature review on the economic, civic and social contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2010-Contributions.pdf>

⁶ Graeme Hugo, *Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants* (May 2011)

Burma in the small town of Nhill in regional Victoria had contributed \$41.49 million to the local economy.⁷

2.4 Overseas research confirms that, after overcoming early barriers, the income of refugee and humanitarian entrants rapidly begins to converge with the incomes of others in the country. International studies also conclude that because refugees lack the option to return to their homelands, they are more likely than other migrants to invest in country-specific human capital (such as education, training and citizenship).

2.5 On a broader level, Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program has played a crucial role in international efforts to provide protection to persons whose life, liberty, safety and other fundamental rights are at risk. It is also a demonstration of Australia's solidarity with the many developing countries hosting large numbers of refugees, bolstering our international reputation as a country which respects and upholds human rights and international law.

3. Overview of Australia's settlement services

3.1 Under Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program, the Australian Government annually sets a number of places for refugees and humanitarian entrants.⁸ While numbers have fluctuated, the Refugee and Humanitarian Program is currently set at 13,750 places, with a projected increase to 16,250 places in 2017-18 and then to 18,750 places in 2018-19.⁹ The Australian Government has also recently resettled 12,000 people from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq as a one-off in addition to the annual humanitarian intake.

3.2 There are two main ways in which people come to Australia through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program: through resettlement from overseas (the 'offshore' component), and by claiming asylum in Australia (the 'onshore' component). There are two main categories within the offshore component. First, there are those who are generally identified by UNHCR as in need of resettlement, who are granted a refugee visa (subclass 200).¹⁰ Second, there are those proposed for entry by people or organisations in Australia under the global special humanitarian program (SHP, subclass 202), because they are subject to substantial discrimination and human rights abuses in their home country. There is another smaller group admitted as women at risk (subclass 204), and two largely unused visa classes for special cases.¹¹ In 2015-2016, the Department granted:

- 6,730 Refugee visas
- 5,032 Special Humanitarian Program visas, and
- 1,277 Women at Risk visas.¹²

3.3 Australia's settlement services framework is internationally renowned as an example of best practice in supporting the successful settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants. The Australian Government funds the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program to provide on-arrival settlement support and orientation to most people in the offshore program and some people in the onshore program who arrived with a valid visa. The HSS program is provided to people to assist them in the first 6 months of arrival. In addition, the Complex Case Support (CCS) program is also available to humanitarian entrants who experience additional barriers to settling and require additional casework support.

3.4 The initial months of settlement in Australia are some of the most challenging periods in a refugee's settlement journey. Refugee and humanitarian entrants typically arrive in Australia with

⁷ AMES and Deloitte Access Economics, *Small Towns: Big Returns: Economic and social impact of the Karen resettlement in Nhill* (2015) <https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/Research/19933%20AMES%20Nhill%20Report%20LR.pdf>

⁸ This phrase is used because, as explained below, only one of the visas requires a person to be a refugee.

⁹ The Australian Government has committed to continue the allocation at 18,750 after 2018-19. Prime Minister of Australia et al, *Leaders' Summit on Refugees* (Media Release, 21 September 2016) <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2016-09-21/leaders-summit-refugees-0>.

¹⁰ The Refugee visa does not require that the person be identified by UNHCR, but this is the usual practice.

¹¹ These are the In-country Special Humanitarian Program (subclass 201) for people being persecuted and unable to leave their home country and the emergency rescue visa (subclass 203) for refugees who need urgent resettlement.

¹² Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Annual Report* (2015) <https://www.border.gov.au/about/reports-publications/reports/annual/annual-report-2015-16>.

limited or no financial resources (with some new arrivals bringing literally nothing more than the clothes on their backs), limited or no English language skills or knowledge of Australian culture, laws and systems. On arrival, they are confronted with myriad and often competing settlement challenges: finding appropriate accommodation, learning English, completing education, obtaining or upgrading qualifications, seeking employment, supporting family members still living in refugee situations overseas, learning about life in Australia and recovering from experiences of torture and trauma.

3.4. In this context, effective on-arrival support plays a critical role in assisting new arrivals to find a foothold in Australia and begin their settlement journey in a positive way. HSS providers are the first point of contact in Australia for many new arrivals in Australia and the support they offer can have a significant influence on future settlement outcomes.

3.5 Once they leave the HSS program (usually six to 12 months after arrival), humanitarian entrants can access services under the Settlement Grants Program (SGP), which is designed to assist with longer-term settlement needs. SGP services vary between locations but most focus on casework, referrals, provision of settlement-related information, advocacy services and community development activities.

4. RCOA's research on settlement issues

4.1 While Australia's refugee settlement programs remain world renowned, there are still areas for improvement. RCOA has contributed significantly to the evidence base on settlement issues. We highlight here some of our key recent work in this field. To assist the Committee in considering areas of improvement, RCOA has collated our previous recommendations on addressing the settlement needs of refugees and people seeking asylum.

Employment

4.2 In June 2010, RCOA published *What Works?*, a research report on best practices in employment of refugees. Five key elements were identified as improving employment outcomes:

- Specialist employment services targeting refugee and humanitarian entrants
- Employers who value and are committed to workforce diversity
- Coordination and collaboration among refugee entrants and their communities, education and training providers, employment services and employers
- Initiatives tapping into the entrepreneurial spirit of former refugees through social enterprise and small business development, and
- Building awareness within refugee background communities about career pathways in Australia.

4.3 Our research found that there was a need for targeted approaches to supporting the employment transitions of refugee and humanitarian entrants. In particular, targeted approaches meant service providers recognising the barriers that refugee entrants face in entering the Australian labour market and that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be successful in meeting the needs of such a diverse group of jobseekers.

4.4 Overall, effective approaches provided by targeted employment services that were identified in interviews included:

- Individual casework and referral to other services
- Work experience placement
- Support with applying for work: job search, applications and interview skills
- Advocacy and liaison with employers
- Orientation to Australian work culture and systems
- Career advice, guidance and planning
- Mentoring
- Post-employment support
- Services for people seeking asylum
- Employing bicultural/bilingual workers, and

- Addressing racism and discrimination in employment and the wider community.

4.5 While specialist services were important in facilitating supported employment transitions for refugee and humanitarian entrants, there was a consensus among those consulted that employment services can only do so much. For refugee entrants to be able to find meaningful, sustainable employment in Australia, employers also need to see the value of workforce diversity and be willing to give someone a chance to apply their strengths, skills and experience in an Australian workplace.

4.6 For recently arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants, navigating complex and unfamiliar service systems can be extraordinarily challenging. A strong theme that emerged in our report was the benefits of strong coordination and collaboration between service providers, industry and communities. Many interviewees talked about the positive flow-on effects of developing strong links between settlement and employment services, education and training providers, industry or employer groups, and refugee entrants and their communities.

4.7 Research suggests that assisting former refugees to establish their own businesses can contribute to creating employment opportunities for refugee and humanitarian entrants who are more recently arrived, although the benefits of such initiatives are only likely to be seen in the longer term.

4.8 The final theme that emerged was the need to foster realistic expectations and awareness within refugee background communities about career pathways in Australia. While this may be part of the role of specialist employment services, interviewees talked about community awareness-building needing to happen through a variety of different avenues and at different stages of settlement.

Family reunion

4.9 Family separation in situations of displacement and flight are particularly common, decreasing the possibility of all family members being resettled together in a country such as Australia. Family reunion and the devastating psychological, economic and social impacts of family separation are some of the most pressing issues for refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia. RCOA has reported for years on these issues, most recently in November 2016.¹³

4.10 People from refugee backgrounds often tell us that the physical security offered by Australia is offset by the ongoing mental anguish of family separation. People commonly refer to their serious concerns for the safety and welfare of family members left behind. A former refugee living in Melbourne, for example, reported that her brother had been kidnapped and killed in Iraq after having twice had a visa application refused by Australia. The effects of family separation include significant psychological, social, and financial costs, and effects on social cohesion.

4.11 The main avenue for family reunion for people from a refugee background is through the SHP program, but waiting periods and costs for this program are significant, eligibility is restricted, and requirements are often unrealistic. Similar problems exist with the family stream of the Migration Program. This compels many to try and apply for a very small program, the Community Proposal Pilot (now known as the Community Support Program), which requires families to raise even higher costs to bring families over.

4.12 More recently, there have been newer restrictions affecting refugees who arrived by boat. Those who came after 13 August 2012 will be allowed the opportunity to reunite with their families and can only travel to visit them with permission. For those who arrived before this time, their visa applications are given the lowest priority for processing, effectively denying them any possibility of family reunion.

Housing

4.13 The challenges faced by refugees and people seeking asylum in finding affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing is consistently raised as one of the primary issues affecting

¹³ Refugee Council of Australia, *Addressing the Pain of Separation for Refugee Families* (November 2016). <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/reports/family-separation/>

humanitarian entrants in Australia. Communities and service providers across Australia have adopted various strategies to assist humanitarian entrants to overcome barriers, including practical support, acting as an intermediary, drawing on community connections and exploring non-traditional settlement options. In a report we published in 2014, RCOA examined these challenges and profiled local projects to enhance access to suitable housing for refugees and people seeking asylum.¹⁴

Barriers to education for people seeking asylum and on temporary protection visas

4.14 Refugees on temporary visas and up to 30,000 people in Australia awaiting processing of their refugee status applications are being denied an opportunity to study in the tertiary sector. These people do not have access to Commonwealth Supported Places and federal loan schemes, meaning they must pay international student rates which they cannot afford. This effectively denies them access to further education.¹⁵

Citizenship delays

4.15 Citizenship provides refugees with a sense of meaningful security and protection, and better enables them to sponsor family members for Australian visas and travel to visit family. However, in 2015 we heard that many people from refugee communities, especially those who came by boat, were experiencing significant delays in obtaining citizenship. RCOA reported on interviews or surveys with 188 people in this situation.¹⁶

Young people

4.16 In 2016, RCOA published with MYAN a report following a series of consultations held in Australia with young people from a refugee background, culminating in advocacy in Geneva with UNHCR.¹⁷ The report identified key issues raised and solutions identified by young people before and after their arrival in Australia, including in relation to education, employment, health, racism, family reunion and relations.

Recommendation 1

The Australian Government should continue to strengthen and build upon the successful settlement services for people of refugee backgrounds, including through the consideration of previous recommendations which the Refugee Council of Australia has made (see Appendix 1).

5. Australia's asylum policies

5.1 While Australia's suite of settlement services and framework for resettling refugees is world-class, Australia's asylum policies and practices contradict everything we know about what makes good resettlement. These asylum policies have meant that thousands of people suffer needlessly from prolonged and indefinite immigration detention, years of limbo while claims are processed, and inconsistent and ever-changing policies designed to impede their ability to settle.

5.2 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. For several years, participants in RCOA's regular consultations with people from refugee backgrounds, people seeking asylum, 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

¹⁴ Refugee Council of Australia, *The Home Stretch: Challenges and Alternatives in Sustainable Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers* (July 2014) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/spn/SPN-HomeStretch-draft.pdf>.

¹⁵ Refugee Council of Australia, *Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas* (December 2015) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/1512-Education.pdf>.

¹⁶ Refugee Council of Australia, *Delays in Citizenship Applications* (October 2015) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/1510-Citizenship-Delays-for-Permanent-Refugees.pdf>.

¹⁷ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) and Refugee Council of Australia, *Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee & Asylum Seeking Backgrounds* (30 November 2016) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/reports/speaking-voices-young-people-refugee-asylum-seeking-backgrounds/>.

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.¹⁸

5.3 The Australian Government has developed a suite of asylum policies that is expressly designed to prevent integration. These include policies:

- to transfer people to offshore processing centres and prevent them from entering Australia
- that mandate prolonged and indefinite detention
- that keep people in fear of returning to detention, including through the cancellation of visas and the Code of Behaviour
- that keep people in limbo waiting for their claims to be assessed
- that keep people from working legally
- that keep people from being able to study
- that prevent access to settlement services available to other refugees, including limited access to AMEP and to much-needed mental health services
- that limit their ability to access appropriate employment assistance
- that ensure that, for those who arrive by boat, protection is only temporary and citizenship is never possible, and
- that prevent people from reuniting with families overseas or even visiting them.

5.4 This is a perfect recipe for alienation and marginalisation, even though most people who come by boat have been recognised as refugees, and will go on to live in Australia for their foreseeable future. Instead of protecting and seeking to integrate them, Australia continues to demonise them as 'illegal' and deliberately frustrate their ability ever to find safety and hope in Australia.

5.5 RCOA examined these issues in detail two publications in 2015, drawing on the voices of those affected by these policies.¹⁹ Here we briefly focus on the waste of human potential and the effect of temporary protection.

Wasted human potential

5.6 Over the past decade, RCOA and our members have continually expressed concern about the waste of human potential resulting from detention, denying people seeking asylum the chance to work or study, and keeping them in limbo without access to a fair process for claiming protection.

5.7 It defies logic to deny people already in Australia the right to work, the right to study, and access to an efficient and robust system to determine their protection claims. Instead, the Australian Government has forced them to rely on income support or locked them up in closed detention, at great cost to both their mental health and to the Australian people. Many people seeking asylum in Australia are highly skilled and can contribute significantly to our economy and society. As one community member told us:

the Government is paying to detain asylum seekers and to implement offshore processing and is paying Centrelink when they could save money by allowing people to work and release people into the community. Refugees have skills and talents that are being wasted.

5.8 Even though many people seeking asylum have been released from detention and granted work rights, they still do not have access to supports like intensive case work, English language tuition, and targeted employment support. The lack of English and further education opportunities for people seeking asylum is particularly counterproductive: most people seeking asylum have been

¹⁸Refugee Council of Australia *A Place to Call Home? The impact of Australia's refugee and asylum seeker policies on community cohesion* (July 2015) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/1507-RCOA-paper-for-Advancing-Community-Cohesion-Conference.pdf>.

¹⁹Refugee Council of Australia, 'A Place to Call Home'; Refugee Council of Australia, *Eroding our identity as a generous nation: Community views on Australia's treatment of people seeking asylum* (December 2015) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/eroding-identity-generous-nation-community-views-australias-treatment-people-seeking-asylum/>.

in Australia for over four years, many much longer, and they have not had access to the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

5.9 Many people seeking asylum have told us about their keen desire to improve their English and to undertake further education so they can contribute to the Australian community. However, the denial of subsidies for people seeking asylum and refugees who arrived by boat effectively prevents them from undertaking further education.²⁰ As one person told us:

I want to be a psychologist. I self-studied this. I've been sitting here for 18 months. I can hardly pay the rent and eat. We have no right to education. I can't study English, I feel isolated from the community.

5.10 The loss to the Australian community through the denial of these basic rights is highlighted by the comments of one young person:

I lost my dad, I lost my brother and I couldn't stay anymore. I came to be safe here. I came here in 2012, I'm not allowed to work, there are no funds for me to study. It's not just me, it's all asylum seekers. I am involved in many organisations to raise awareness about what is happening. When I arrived, I was 17. Imagine if you are 17 and you are not allowed to go to school. Now I'm almost 20. The best years of my life are gone. When can I go to school? When can I go to college? When can I have my education?

In the circumstances in which I'm living, do you think I will be safe? You can't be sustained, you just stay home all day and do nothing, just keep worrying. Your family is not safe at all ... There are 30,000 people in my circumstances, staying home all day and doing nothing. I escaped from my country because I couldn't go to school. The only thing I wished to have was a better life, a safe life, to be educated and I can't have that. 18.

Temporary protection and settlement

5.11 The reinstatement of temporary visas for people fleeing persecution has meant that even when people are found to need protection, they are not afforded the security that permanent safety offers. People on these visas will never be able to truly call Australia home. The temporary protection regime means not only that a person must re-apply every few years and fear being returned to danger but also that the settlement supports available to other refugees who arrived via the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and other permanent residents are not available to them. People may live here for decades or even their entire lives but will not have access to the same supports and opportunities as other residents and citizens.

5.12 The chances of success are made even smaller by the extremely short time in which service providers must transition people once they get a visa. When that happens, service providers must exit them (most often within mere days) from the service that has been supporting them, while helping them to fill out the extensive paperwork and giving them a lot of new information.

5.13 There is considerable evidence that temporary protection for refugees is harmful and has a compounding negative impact on people lives and ability to settle. A study in 2006 comparing the mental health of refugees with temporary versus permanent protection visas found that while the levels of pre-migration trauma of both groups were not significantly different, the proportion of people holding TPVs who experienced difficulties exceeded that of permanent Protection visa holders on all items assessed.²¹

²⁰ Refugee Council of Australia, *Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas*. (December 2015) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/barriers-education-seeking-asylum/>.

²¹ Shakeh Momartin et al, 'A Comparison of the Mental Health of Refugees with Temporary versus Permanent Protection Visas' (2006) 185(7) *Medical Journal of Australia* <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2006/185/7/comparison-mental-health-refugees-temporary-versus-permanent-protection-visas?inline=true>.

5.14 Unemployment, insufficient money for living, and poor working conditions were experienced by over 90% of those on temporary protection visas compared to 10% to 13% of those holding permanent visas. Communication difficulties were reported by 100% of TPV holders compared to 54% of those with permanent visas and over 90% of TPV holders reported loneliness and boredom, and isolation, compared to 3% (loneliness and boredom) and 15% (isolation) for those on permanent visas. Moreover, 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:

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.²²

5.15 As one counsellor with firsthand experience of supporting people on temporary visas told RCOA:

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

5.16 Temporary protection deliberately limits the potential that we and many of our members have seen in people seeking asylum. As one support worker told us:

If people are allowed to stay, I can see great potential. The unaccompanied children are an impressive group of young people – young and as keen as mustard to settle and contribute. If they are allowed to stay, it will be a very positive story for Australia.

5.17 The waste of potential is especially counterproductive for ensuring the integration of young people seeking asylum, as is illustrated by the following two case studies.

Case study: Hamid, a child separated from his parents

Hamid arrived in Australia at the age of 16 and was placed in immigration detention. Before fleeing his native Afghanistan, Hamid had been tortured. The trauma of his experience and the separation from his parents contributed to Hamid's deteriorating mental health. After spending close to two years in detention, Hamid was released into the community, receiving intensive casework support and living in a share house with other unaccompanied minors under the responsibility of a full-time carer. On turning 18, Hamid was informed he would be placed on a Bridging Visa that would allow him to stay in the community with work rights. Hamid was exited from the share house he had lived in since his release from detention and the intensive casework and support provided to him over a six-week period. During this time Hamid was referred to services that would assist him in finding employment and housing. Now, at age 20, Hamid struggles with the torture he endured, the impact of his detention and ongoing separation from his family. Hamid has not been able to secure ongoing work and is at risk of homeless. Hamid faces more uncertainty as he awaits the decision of his protection claim.

Case study: Joe, unable to finish school and his potential stolen from him

Joe was living in closed detention for months before he was released into community detention for unaccompanied children and was then completing his VCE. At the end of August, Joe turned 18, at

²² Momartin et al, 360.

which point funding for his education ceased. Although Joe was able to complete Term 3, he was unable to continue without funding support into Term 4. This change significantly impacted on Joe's day to day wellbeing. The option of transitioning into the few hours per week of English support at the local community group did not appeal to him as he was previously completing advanced subjects at school, and reported that his English is too advanced to return to English as Another Language classes. Joe reported feeling disconnected, isolated and that his motivation to maintain a daily routine was minimal, often sleeping for significant hours during the day, and keeping to himself.

Inadequate income support

5.18 In addition, RCOA has heard regularly about the significant hardship faced by people seeking asylum 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 people seeking asylum 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. Reports were received of people seeking asylum living in substandard and/or precarious accommodation, skipping meals and missing out on medication due their limited financial resources.

5.19 Both service providers and people seeking asylum shared concerns that people would be forced to work illegally or to steal food so they could survive. As one Iraqi person seeking asylum 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.

5.20 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 people seeking asylum 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 Code of Behaviour for people on Bridging Visas

5.21 The introduction of the Code of Behaviour was also seen to contribute to social isolation. Organisations supporting people seeking asylum 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.

5.22 A consultation participant from Tasmania shared his sadness that the fear over participating in positive community gatherings meant that many people seeking asylum did not get to join the people that supported them and feel a sense of belonging. He advised that some had 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.

Effects of marginalisation and uncertainty on mental health

5.23 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

[people seeking asylum] 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 people seeking asylum 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”.

5.24 The challenges faced by people seeking asylum living in the community are further compounded by the uncertainty resulting from prolonged delays in processing their claims. 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. As one person from Iraq stated:

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...

5.25 Concern has been expressed that, in the face of these myriad challenges, some people seeking asylum have turned to negative coping strategies, such as drug use and excessive alcohol consumption. The anxiety and depression that so many people seeking asylum 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.

4.6.6. If people live in Australia, it is of benefit to them and to Australian society to ensure they are supported and included as they adjust to a new life. Even if the Australian Government does not approve of their method of entry, it is fundamentally counterproductive to deliberately exclude and marginalise people within our society. Our asylum policies are doing just that, punishing people who need protection. The political support for these policies also sends a broader message to refugee and migrant communities that our presence here is conditional, and that those born elsewhere are guests to be tolerated, rather than embraced.

Recommendation 2

The Australian Government should repeal the laws and reverse the policies that effectively exclude people seeking asylum from settling in Australia, including temporary protection visas.

6. The impacts of discrimination, vilification and exclusion on refugees

6.1 Racism is a serious and widespread issue in the Australian community. The ninth survey by the Scanlon Foundation, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, released in November 2016, found:

- the highest level of reported experience of discrimination (20%) since the surveys began, with 27% of people from non-English speaking backgrounds reporting an experience of discrimination in the past year
- 31% of those experiencing discrimination reporting experiencing it about once a month or most weeks in the year
- 55% of those experiencing discrimination were verbally abused, 17% were not offered work or were not treated fairly at work; 10% had their property damaged; and 8% were physically attacked, and 22-25% of people consistently report a personal negative opinion of Muslims.²³

6.2 Another report by the Scanlon Foundation released in August 2016 also found:

²³ Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion* (Scanlon Foundation, 2016), pp. 25-26, 43.

- 77% of the South Sudanese participating in the survey reported discrimination, and 43% of these reported experiencing property damage and physical attack
- those born in African countries reported the highest level of discrimination, averaging 54% with several groups reporting averages of more than 50%
- 25% of people from South Sudan reported experiencing discrimination at least once a month
- 51% of Muslims born in Australia reported discrimination, while 46% of those born in Iraq and 27% of those born in Iran also reported experiencing discrimination.²⁴

6.3 Another report by the Scanlon Foundation in 2013, focusing on recent arrivals, found that 41% of newly arrived communities from non-English speaking backgrounds had been discriminated against in the previous year because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religious beliefs.²⁵

6.4 Racism and racial vilification has a significant impact on people from refugee backgrounds and their communities. Racial hatred and vilification can cause emotional and psychological harm, as well as reinforce other forms of discrimination and exclusion. Further, by tolerating offensive, humiliating and intimidating language we may open the door to more severe acts of harassment, intimidation or violence.

The effects of racism

6.5 Racist behaviour has significant impacts on a person's engagement in the community. People from refugee backgrounds consulted by RCOA have shared many experiences of racism at work, in public places, on public transport and in social activities such as sporting clubs. These experiences of racism cause people to disengage with community life. Many people have told us how they no longer go out in public because of experiences of racially motivated verbal and physical abuse. This had led to isolation, exclusion and mental health issues. People from refugee backgrounds have also reported experiences of verbal abuse when participating in sport, which has led many to leave the sporting clubs.

6.6 Racism also has a significant impact on a person's physical and mental health. Many people have talked of experiences of depression, anxiety and physical complaints due to racial abuse and vilification. There has been significant academic research into the impacts of racism on mental health, which has found an 'association between self-reported racism and ill health for oppressed racial groups.'²⁶ A VicHealth report in 2012 has also demonstrated that experiences of racism are associated with poor mental health.²⁷

6.7 Racism is also a significant issue for refugee communities in the workplace. Racism can have significant effects on a person's work, productivity and rapport with employees. Some people have spoken of their fear going to work because of the racist abuse they encounter.

6.8 Refugee communities' experience of education is also significantly affected by racism. Some have discussed being verbally abused by classmates and teachers, as well as being treated unfairly because of their race. Teachers have verbally attacked students because of the colour of their skin or because of their cultural background. These abuses can also hinder people from attending education, significantly affecting a person's engagement in education and later employment. Many people have also raised concerns about people assuming that their limited English language means they are poorly educated or not intelligent.

6.9 Racism also affects the settlement of newly arrived communities. For those who are new to Australia, finding housing, employment and participating in public life is vital to ensure successful

²⁴ Andrew Markus, *Australians Today* (Scanlon Foundation, 2016), pp. 60-63, 67, 82.

²⁵ Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: Recent Arrivals Report* (Scanlon Foundation, 2013), p. 1.

²⁶ Y Paradies, 'A Systematic Review of Empirical Research on Self-Reported Racism and Health,' (2006) 35(4) *International Journal of Epidemiology*: p. 888.

²⁷ Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, *Mental Health Impacts of Racial Discrimination in Victorian Aboriginal Communities: Experiences of Racism Survey: A Summary*. (Carlton South, Vic.: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2012), http://visions-download.unimelb.edu.au/Mental%20health%20impacts_racial%20discrim_Indigenous-4.pdf, p.2

settlement into life in Australia. As discussed above, racism affects a person's participation in community life, education and employment, thus hindering vital aspects of the settlement process.

6.10 Racism also alters people's perceptions of the Australian community, as people fear that most Australians are racist, thus impairing social cohesion. Many people have expressed concern that, because of the negative stereotypes and racist comments directed to them, they would not be 'accepted' into the Australian community. Such experiences have ongoing negative consequences for communities' settlement and their health and wellbeing, especially for young people.²⁸

Racism and the current political debate on refugees and people seeking asylum

6.11 For several years, the tenor of the public and political debate on refugees has been one of the most consistent concerns raised in our annual consultations. Refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia have been demonised as 'illegal', as potential terrorists, and as criminals. The Minister for Immigration and Border Protection has called refugees 'illiterate and innumerate' and accused them both of taking jobs and of languishing in unemployment queues.²⁹ More recently, the Australian Government has refused to condemn Donald Trump's policies to suspend resettlement of refugees and to ban the entry of people from several Muslim majority countries.³⁰

6.12 In 2015, RCOA published two reports highlighting the enormous impact of this negative and inflammatory rhetoric on people settling in Australia.³¹ Racism and negative stereotypes mean that people feel they will not be accepted, with long-term impacts on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. For those who have survived torture and trauma, the feeling that they are not safe in their new communities limits their capacity to heal and contribute to Australian society.

6.13 In our annual submissions to the Australian Government on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program,³² former refugees have expressed significant concern at the racist and derogatory comments directed towards people seeking asylum. This negative portrayal by some politicians and public figures has encouraged racial abuse towards refugee and asylum seeker communities.

6.14 While the impact is greatest on those who arrive by boat, many former refugees who were resettled in Australia also told us that they felt unsafe and unwelcome by parts of the Australian community. African community members in Brisbane, for example, reported shops being defaced with graffiti urging Africans to 'go back to your country'. Some former refugees have told us that media stereotypes make it difficult for them to engage with the wider community, especially when looking for jobs, and that Australians miss the chance to see what they can do and how they can contribute.

6.15 RCOA has and continues to express concern about the increasingly divisive tone of public debate, by the media, public figures and politicians. Such comments effectively serve to condone and even encourage racist behaviour. For the past four decades, Australia has transformed itself successfully and peacefully from an almost exclusively white society to one of the world's most diverse nations. It has done so in part through strong political leadership and a commitment to an inclusive multicultural agenda. As a former Minister for Immigration said not too many years ago, multiculturalism should be about:

²⁸ See VicHealth, 'Racism and its links to the health of young people' (2012) <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom-from-discrimination/Racism-and-young-people-research.aspx>.

²⁹ Latika Bourke, 'Peter Dutton Says "Illiterate and Innumerate" Refugees Would Take Australian Jobs' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 2016 <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2016/peter-dutton-says-illiterate-and-innumerate-refugees-would-take-australian-jobs-20160517-goxhj1.html>.

³⁰ 'Turnbull's "no Comment" on Trump's Muslim Ban Fury' *The West Australian*, 30 January 2017 <https://thewest.com.au/news/world/tumbulls-no-comment-on-trumps-muslim-ban-fury-ng-b88370622z>.

³¹ Refugee Council of Australia, *A Place to Call Home? The Impact of Australia's Refugee and Asylum Seeker Policies on Community Cohesion* (July 2015) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/place-call-home/>; Refugee Council of Australia, *Eroding Our Identity as a Generous Nation* (December 2015) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/1512-Asylum.pdf>.

³² RCOA's submissions on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/our-work/annual-consultations/>.

*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.*³³

6.16 We strongly affirm this approach. If people are made to feel unwelcome, if racism is not only tolerated but implicitly encouraged, and if the focus of government policies shifts to exclusion from inclusion, we are setting people up to fail. At the same time, we risk undermining the cohesive and largely harmonious nation we have fought so hard to build.

Recommendation 3

This Committee should clearly reject the political discourse that demonises refugees and people seeking asylum.

Recommendation 4

This Committee should publicly recognise the need to support and invest in the inclusion of people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds, and reject the harmful media stereotyping that fosters their exclusion from our community.

7. Priority areas for addressing exclusion

7.1 Among the priority areas in which racism is known to have a significant effect on refugees, people seeking asylum and other humanitarian entrants are: employment, education, the media and settlement in regional and rural areas.³⁴

Employment

7.2 Getting a stable, properly paid and fulfilling job is a significant factor in feeling included in Australia. Employment assists new arrivals to Australia to build community connections, hone their language skills, recover from past trauma and develop a sense of belonging.³⁵ Racism and discrimination has been identified in research and consistently through RCOA's community consultations as a profound barrier to refugee and humanitarian entrants finding and sustaining employment.

7.3 This is evidenced by research such as that conducted by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury in Western Australia.³⁶ Colic-Peisker and Tilbury's compelling study concluded that, despite similar levels of human capital (English proficiency and qualification level) and similar length of residence, the differing employment outcomes could only be explained due to structural and interpersonal racism.

7.4 Berman et al's comprehensive research on racial and religious discrimination in employment found evidence of: discrimination in recruitment; underemployment and lack of recognition of qualifications; discrimination and disadvantage in accessing and utilising job search agencies; over-representation of migrants in low skilled, low paid employment; under-representation of migrants in the public sector; bias against migrants in promotion; intimidation in the workplace; religious discrimination; additional discrimination related to gender; discrimination in small and medium enterprises; racism in the media and stereotyping of communities; and difficulties accessing the complaints process.³⁷

7.5 Refugee and humanitarian entrants are often highly motivated to work and many have ample capacity to participate in the Australian workforce (either having arrived with the requisite skills and

³³ Chris Bowen, 'Multiculturalism in the Australian Context' (Sydney Institute, 17 February 2011) <http://thesydneyinstitute.com.au>.

³⁴ Refugee Council of Australia *Response to National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy Discussion Paper* (May 2015), <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1205-Anti-racism.pdf>, pp. 2-4.

³⁵ Refugee Council of Australia, *Review of Australia's Welfare System* (August 2014) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1408-Welfare.pdf>, p. 2.

³⁶ Val Colic-Peisker and Farida Tilbury, F, *Refugees and Employment: The Effect of Visible Difference on Discrimination: Final Report* (2007), Murdoch University, Western Australia, <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/10991/>, p. 25.

³⁷ Gabrielle Berman and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Harnessing Diversity: Addressing racial and religious discrimination in employment* (June 2008) <http://www.humanrightscscommission.vic.gov.au/component/k2/item/174-harnessing-diversity-addressing-racial-and-religious-discrimination-in-employment-jun-2008?Itemid=671/>

experience or having developed them after arrival) but are frequently prevented from doing so by these systemic barriers. Participants in RCOA's consultations with refugee communities regularly speak of their frustration and disappointment at not being able to gain access to the Australian labour market or fully apply their skills, experience and determination in the workplace. RCOA therefore encourages the Select Committee to consider a broader range of measures to support access to employment, moving beyond individual capacity-building alone to address broader systemic issues which present barriers to employment.³⁸

Education

7.6 It is in our schools that anti-racism strategies will be most effective for strengthening the future of multiculturalism, as many community members and settlement service providers have noted. There is an opportunity to examine the presentation of refugee issues and the human cost of conflict and persecution in the national curriculum.

7.7 The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority has published its framework for the national curriculum.³⁹ The framework reflects changes in our world, including the reality of global integration and increased international mobility. As a consequence, it is recognised that Australian students need to “nurture an appreciation of, and respect for, social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship”.

7.8 The educational goals set out for young Australians also include: an appreciation of social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity; the ability to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia; to be responsible global and local citizens; and to commit to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life. Developing excellent educational resources to fulfil these goals is essential.

The media

7.9 Through RCOA's community consultations, concerns have been consistently raised about the media's portrayal of issues relating to refugees and people seeking asylum and how this perpetuates racist attitudes and negative stereotypes. It has been widely noted that misinformation and negative coverage far outweigh facts and positive stories of people seeking asylum and former refugees.

7.4.2. Media coverage concerning people seeking asylum in Australia who arrive by boat is particularly problematic. For example, every single boat arrival during 2010 received some media coverage, many times backed up by commentary aimed at building a sense of a worsening crisis. The publication of this material in the most popular forms of public media has a significant impact on the daily lives of those trying to settle and develop a sense of belonging here in Australia. These effects extend well beyond the community of people seeking asylum and humanitarian entrants, and impacts on refugee communities more broadly and on public support for Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program in general.

Tailoring anti-racism strategies to different geographical locations

7.10 Tailoring responses to racism should not only focus on specific areas such as education, employment and the media, but also on different geographical locations. As many community members and service providers have noted, there are differences in the way in which racism and discrimination manifest themselves across rural and urban locations this diversity should be reflected in a National Anti-Racism Strategy.

7.11 Some rural and regional areas have a strong and well-established history of supporting migrants and refugees and other newcomers, whereas other communities may feel more threatened and respond differently to change and the diversifying of their local community. Ensuring that any

³⁸ Refugee Council of Australia, *Review of Australia's Welfare System* (August 2014) <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1408-Welfare.pdf>, p. 2.

³⁹ See <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum>.

anti-racism strategy includes local place-based initiatives as well as a broad national campaign will strengthen its impact overall.

Racism is a big problem in regional areas; we experience it on trains, in our car, from our neighbours. They call us 'chocolate' and 'black dogs' and tell us to go back to where we came from. It is happening more. Everywhere is a bad word."

- South Sudanese community member, Morwell (Vic)

Political leadership

7.12 Finally, it is essential to address the increasingly divisive political rhetoric, especially from Parliamentarians. Over the last few years we have seen political leaders use racism and anti-refugee rhetoric to divide our community. These attacks serve to undermine the success of over 40 years of successful multicultural policy that has been supported by all sides of Government.

7.13 This is seen particularly in our asylum policies, where successive Governments have implemented increasingly inhumane policies towards people who seek safety on our shores. As recent history shows, such as through the leadership of Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, inclusive refugee policies can be implemented with the support of the community, through strong and positive leadership. We need such political leadership now.

8. Strengthening our multicultural framework

Multiculturalism legislation

8.1 RCOA supports moves to enshrine principles of multiculturalism into federal legislation as a declaration of the importance of diversity, inclusion and equality. Combined with more practical initiatives, such legislation will work towards a stronger and more inclusive multicultural Australia. Any introduction of such legislation, however, would need to be accompanied by community-based efforts to address racism.

Strengthening multiculturalism policy

8.2 Each State and Territory government has its own multicultural advisory body, which provides reports and recommendations to support social inclusion for people of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds within its jurisdiction.⁴⁰ The Joint Standing Committee on Migration noted in 2013 however that the interests of multiculturalism are relevant to a broad range of portfolios, both at the State and federal level, and called for intergovernmental engagement in order to secure the best outcomes for people from migrant or refugee backgrounds.⁴¹

8.3 The Joint Standing Committee on Migration's 2012 Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia recommended that the Government should clearly articulate what is meant by multiculturalism, and promote a nationwide anti-racism message.⁴²

8.4 As noted above, responsibility for multiculturalism with the Federal Government has been dispersed. Legislation to ensure the independence and continuation of the Federal Multicultural Advisory Council can work towards addressing the lack of a coherent multicultural policy, and develop a stronger and more coherent policy approach to multiculturalism. However, it is important that such a body is given greater powers to represent multicultural communities.

8.5 Further, RCOA has been advocating for greater representation of refugee communities at the federal level. It is disappointing that the current Council membership does not include a person from a refugee background. More work is needed to ensure that people from refugee backgrounds

⁴⁰ A list of State and Territory advisory bodies is available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1011/11rp06#_Toc275248147

⁴¹ Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2013). *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia*. http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=mig/multiculturalism/report/index.htm, p. 104

⁴² Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2013). *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia*. http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=mig/multiculturalism/report/index.htm, p. 52

are involved in the decisions that impact them, including through involvement in advisory positions within the Federal Government. Too often, refugee voices are not heard in the discussion on federal policies, and it is vital that people affected by the policies are given a platform to represent their communities.

8.6 To this end, RCOA has supported the establishment of the Refugee Communities Advocacy Network, a network of people from refugee backgrounds who are keen to represent the needs of refugee communities at a local, state, federal and international level. RCOA invites this committee to hear directly from representatives of this Network, and can facilitate this.

Recommendation 5

This Committee should ensure it hears from refugee communities themselves as to ways to strengthen multiculturalism, including through the representation of the Refugee Communities Advocacy Network.

Appendix 1 List of RCOA's previous recommendations regarding settlement by policy area, 2009-2016

Citizenship	
The Australian Government should: (a) improve its communication to those affected by delays, including explaining to those affected the reason for the delays; and expedite processing of citizenship applications as a matter of urgency.	Australia's Response to a World in Crisis' (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Minister for Immigration clarify if there has been a policy change in regard to citizenship applications for refugees with a permanent visa, specifically in relation to those who arrive by boat.	Delays in Citizenship Applications for Permanent Refugee Visa Holders (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Minister for Immigration take steps to process the citizenship applications of refugees immediately, or otherwise clarify the specific reasons for the delay to each individual applicant.	Delays in Citizenship Applications for Permanent Refugee Visa Holders (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Minister for Immigration ensure that those who have a permanent physical or mental incapacity which means they are not capable of understanding the nature of their application be exempt from the citizenship test, and that the Department accept professional medical reports attesting to this.	Delays in Citizenship Applications for Permanent Refugee Visa Holders (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Minister for Immigration make every effort to expedite citizenship application and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs for applications by refugees and humanitarian arrivals, as required under Article 34 of the Refugee Convention.	Delays in Citizenship Applications for Permanent Refugee Visa Holders (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government: (a) Consider waiving the requirement to complete the Australian Citizenship Test for refugee and humanitarian entrants and stateless people. (b) Address the difficulties faced by people with limited literacy or English Language skills in completing the citizenship test through providing alternative options such as a spoken or test papers in different languages.	Delays in Citizenship Applications for Permanent Refugee Visa Holders (2015)
English language learning	
RCOA recommends that the Department consider options to employ bi-cultural teachers and teachers' aides, especially for the lower level English classes.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that more work be done with refugee community organisations to better improve the design and delivery of the AMEP, and that refugee community organisations be recognised for the work they already do in this area through grants and other support options.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the 510 hour limit for AMEP be removed and replaced a needs based individual assessment.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that more flexibility be given to teachers to teach according to the needs to of the students, by reducing the number of assessments and providing more flexibility in the curriculum.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that a nationwide system be introduced for people to leave the AMEP program if needed and return at a later date to complete the reminder of their hours.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that people seeking asylum and those granted TPVs and SHEVs be given full access to the AMEP.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the AMEP remain a settlement focused program, in which employment skills is one of several outcomes. Furthermore, AMEP should maintain its strong connections with other settlement programs, including HSS and Settlement Grants.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the AMEP program be managed under the Department of Social Services.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that a special per capita refugee youth loading be available to AMEP providers to be able to offer targeted youth-specific courses based on documented best practice.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends investment in bridging programs to support young people in their transition from AMEP to further education or employment.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)

English language learning	
RCOA recommends that mentor and volunteer activities be incorporated into the AMEP to increase one-on-one support for students.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends the Department consider options for work placement and volunteer opportunities to assist students to undertake experiential education.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that free childcare facilities be provided and these arrangements cover the time it takes for parents to travel to and from classes. Furthermore, RCOA recommends that AMEP classes be flexible in their start and finish times to suit the needs of parents with children in school.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that funding be made available to provide professional carers to those with caring responsibilities in order to provide respite for the family member to attend the AMEP.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that JSA providers be better informed about AMEP and that JSA clients not be instructed to attend other courses until they have completed their 510 hours of AMEP.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that adequate funding be provided to ensure that AMEP counsellors are able to offer sufficient support to every student.	Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program evaluation program (2014)
RCOA recommends that a special per capita refugee youth loading be available to AMEP providers to be able to offer targeted youth-specific courses based on documented best practice, and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship refine criteria for its allocation and use to inform future tender specifications and accountability audits	Finding the Right Time and Place: Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW (2010)
RCOA recommends that the provision of childcare be incorporated into the new AMEP contracts to enable successful tenderers to provide accessible childcare facilities.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)
RCOA recommends that AMEP contractors in regional areas where there are no Intensive English Centres be funded to introduce flexible models of English language provision in school-based settings for young people.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)
RCOA recommends that the NSW Department of Education explore the possibility of establishing an additional senior IEC campus in NSW based on a similar model to that of Bankstown IEC and located in an area of high refugee settlement	Finding the Right Time and Place: Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW (2010)

Employment and employment services	
The Australian Government should: (a) ensure adequate support and funding for the use of interpreters and bilingual caseworkers; review the process for assessing employment streams to ensure the appropriate identification and weighting of disadvantages experienced by refugee and humanitarian entrants; require Jobactive providers to ensure staff are trained in cultural competency, including in the use of interpreters and cross-cultural communication, and ensure that this requirement is independently monitored or audited; review the effectiveness of employment services in meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants with a view to encouraging the improvement of employment outcomes for people seeking asylum and refugees; and restore and increase funding to employment providers with expertise in working with refugee and humanitarian entrants.	Australia's Response to a World in Crisis (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government consider developing a national specialist employment service for people of refugee backgrounds and people seeking asylum, in partnership with existing settlement service providers.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government review the effectiveness of employment services in meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants, including evaluating how Jobactive providers are working with other local employment initiatives targeting these groups.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns (2016)

Employment and employment services	
RCOA recommends that adequate support and funding be allocated for the use of interpreters and bilingual caseworkers to facilitate communication with Jobactive clients from non-English speaking backgrounds.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns (2016)
RCOA recommends that all Jobactive providers, and other officers who come in contact with people from refugee backgrounds, be required to undertake cultural competency training, including training in the use of interpreters and cross-cultural communication.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns (2016)
RCOA recommends that an independent body undertake a cultural competency audit of Jobactive services as part of the Australian Government's commitment to Access and Equity.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns (2016)
RCOA recommends that a comprehensive review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument and the Jobactive steams be undertaken to ensure that employment disadvantages for refugee and humanitarian entrants are appropriately identified and weighted when streaming clients for Jobactive services.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Federal Government investigate ways in which Jobactive providers can be encouraged to improve employment outcomes for people seeking asylum and people from refugee backgrounds, such as through revised incentives and benchmarks.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government consider developing a national specialist employment service for people of refugee backgrounds and people seeking asylum, in partnership with existing settlement service providers	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns. (2016)
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RCOA recommends that a comprehensive review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument and the Jobactive steams be undertaken to ensure that employment disadvantages for refugee and humanitarian entrants are appropriately identified and weighted when streaming clients for Jobactive.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns. (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Federal Government investigate ways in which Jobactive providers can be encouraged to improve employment outcomes for people seeking asylum and people from refugee backgrounds, such as through revised incentives and benchmarks.	Jobactive: Refugee Community and Service Provider Concerns. (2016)
RCOA recommends that DEEWR and DIAC work together to strengthen career guidance and pathways planning to refugee and humanitarian entrants and strengthen the relationship between Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS), the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and JSA providers at both a service provision and policy level.	Job Services Australia: Refugee Community and Service Provider Views (2012)
RCOA recommends that DIAC and DEEWR develop a national refugee employment strategy to map out settlement pathways and supports that will lead to more sustainable and meaningful employment outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)
RCOA recommends that DIAC and DEEWR establish a fund to provide subsidies to assist refugee entrants undertaking bridging courses to have overseas qualifications recognised.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)
RCOA recommends that DEEWR undertake a review of NEIS and its accessibility to people with lower literacy levels and develop targeted programs to assist refugee entrants in setting up small businesses.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)
RCOA recommends that DEEWR fund research into the accessibility of apprenticeships to young people from refugee backgrounds with the view to developing targeted apprenticeship initiatives.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current

Employment and employment services	
	challenges and future directions (2010)
RCOA recommends that the DIAC and DEEWR develop a national refugee employment strategy to map out settlement pathways and supports that will lead to more sustainable employment outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)
RCOA recommends that DEEWR, as part of its ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the new Job Services Australia (JSA) model, review its effectiveness in meeting the needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants, including evaluating how JSA providers are working with local employment initiatives targeting refugee entrants and how to better utilise the expertise of specialist JSA providers.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)
RCOA welcomes the re-introduction of the Innovation Fund as part of Job Services Australia model, and calls on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to ensure that the Innovation Fund Panel includes sufficient representation of organisations with specialist expertise in assisting refugee and humanitarian entrants.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)
RCOA recommends a greater investment by both private and public funding sources of Intermediate Labour Market programs that provide a bridge for refugee and humanitarian entrants into longer term employment.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)
RCOA recommends greater investment in social enterprise initiatives that bring together services and refugee and humanitarian entrants and their communities and have a focus on employment outcomes.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)
RCOA recommends DEEWR establishing an incentive scheme to encourage and support employers to provide traineeships and apprenticeships for refugee and humanitarian entrants, including and particularly through Federal and State public services.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)
RCOA recommends a proactive communications campaign promoting the business benefits of cultural diversity.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)
RCOA recommends the further promotion of national Diversity Awards that help recognise employers who take initiative.	What Works: Employment Strategies for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (2010)

Education and training	
Replace age-based determination for school level entry with a merit or skills-based measure.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Increase provision of English language classes in schools.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Create opportunities for young people from refugee backgrounds to engage in dialogue with teachers, school administrators, and educational forums to present their experiences and challenge the existing negative narratives around young refugees.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Create opportunities for further education for refugee young people by for example, subsidising school fees and increasing the number of scholarships.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Remove restrictions to asylum seeker access to further education beyond the age of 18 years.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Engage interpreters and culturally sensitive teachers' aides to support students and their families during orientation to schools.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Federal Government grant people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas access to Commonwealth Supported Places and high education loan scheme.	Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas (2015)
RCOA recommends that the State Governments grant people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas access concession rates for TAFE and other vocational courses.	Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Federal Government allow TPV and SHEV holders to receive income support under standard programs, to ensure that they are not excluded from higher education.	Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas (2015)

Education and training	
RCOA recommends that the Federal Government provide people seeking asylum access to 510 AMEP English Language hours and the SEE program.	Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Federal and State Governments ensure consistency in enrolment policies so that young people seeking asylum and refugees on TPVs and SHEVs are able to complete secondary school, up to the age of 21.	Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Federal Government allow students in secondary school access to additional financial support for school until they complete their final year.	Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Federal and State Governments ensure complete access to traineeships and apprenticeships for people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas, including access to incentive programs and loan schemes.	Barriers to Education for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees on Temporary Visas (2015)
RCOA recommends that the NSW Department of Education conduct a review of the capacity of schools to work collaboratively with vocational education and training providers and community services	Finding the Right Time and Place: Exploring post compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW (2010)
RCOA recommends that Federal and State education departments work in partnership to investigate education provision for refugee entrants by state, including monitoring and evaluating the impact of the National Education Agreement on refugee and humanitarian students, and develop a National Refugee Education Policy to ensure a consistent level of education provision across all states and territories, including the coordination and resourcing of Homework Support for refugee and migrant students.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions
RCOA recommends that state and territory education departments increase funding and support for Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs targeting students from refugee backgrounds.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions
RCOA recommends that state and territory education departments fund appropriate models based on the River Nile Learning Centre for young mothers from refugee backgrounds to remain engaged in education.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions
RCOA recommends that the Australian Human Rights Commission, state and territory anti-discrimination bodies and Ombudsman services participate in post-arrival settlement education processes, including in regional and rural areas where access to advice on discrimination matters may be limited.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)

Disability and settlement services	
The Australian Government should: (a) ensure settlement agencies are given adequate and timely information about the health and disabilities of people being resettled; fund settlement agencies to provide support to newly arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants with disabilities; ensure that refugee and humanitarian entrants gain access to disability services, occupational therapists, specialist equipment and other required medical services in a timely way; and ensure that refugees with a disability who are resettled to Australia are able to receive access to Complex Case Support, immediate access to relevant medical and disability specialists and adequate accommodation on arrival.	Australia's Response to a World in Crisis (2016)

Health	
Mental health service providers engage across the broader community to break down stigma and shame surrounding mental health.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Engage bicultural youth workers to build awareness and provide support to newly arrived youth accessing mental health services.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
RCOA recommends that the Department of Health increase funding for targeted and culturally sensitive mental health programs for refugee communities.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2014-2015: Community views on current

Health	
	challenges and future directions (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government work with states and healthcare providers, drawing on existing best practice, to develop specialist refugee health services in all states and territories able to deliver consistent and culturally appropriate health assessments soon after arrival, as well as systems to better coordinate ongoing care. Such strategies could include the establishment of more Refugee Health Clinics with interpreters on site in order to address the specific needs of refugee entrants.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)
RCOA recommends that national benchmarks be established for health service provision for newly arrived refugee entrants, including the development of a standardised health screening tool and full immunisation services.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)
RCOA recommends that DIAC work collaboratively with all IHSS service providers to ensure a minimum level of health support for all refugee entrants, including a comprehensive health assessment on arrival and appropriate recording of existing health conditions identified during pre-departure health checks.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)

Housing	
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government work with the state, territory and local governments explore strategies to increase the availability of affordable housing stock, such as direct housing development, financial incentives, community and private sector partnerships and alternative social housing models.	The Home Stretch: Challenges and Alternatives in Sustainable Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2014)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government and state/territory governments establish additional financial support programs (such as rental subsidies and bond loans) for people on low incomes.	The Home Stretch: Challenges and Alternatives in Sustainable Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2014)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services, provide funding to support the delivery of professional development and training opportunities for real estate agents, specialist housing and homelessness services and other housing providers, to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds.	The Home Stretch: Challenges and Alternatives in Sustainable Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2014)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government provide additional funding under the SGP and ASAS/CAS programs for specialist housing workers to provide more intensive support with housing issues.	The Home Stretch: Challenges and Alternatives in Sustainable Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2014)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government and state/territory governments develop partnerships with refugee communities to support their role in addressing settlement issues and challenges, including those related to housing.	The Home Stretch: Challenges and Alternatives in Sustainable Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2014)
RCOA recommends that DIAC, in consultation with FaHCSIA and State agencies, coordinate a comprehensive housing strategy to address the specific needs of refugee entrants.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)
RCOA recommends that DIAC explore options for developing a partnership with FaHCSIA to ensure that some of the new social housing funding announced in 2009 benefits refugee entrants, particularly those with large families.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)
RCOA recommends that greater resources be allocated to IHSS and SGP providers for housing support services to reflect current challenges in accessing affordable housing, and that these services be extended to all clients on a needs basis.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)
RCOA recommends DIAC work with the Real Estate Institute of Australia on improving housing solutions for refugee entrants through awareness-raising and incentives such as national or state/territory awards recognising good practice.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current

Housing	
	challenges and future directions (2011)

Media, community education and public perceptions	
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DIAC, the Australian Government and politicians take on a more proactive role in engaging with the media on asylum and refugees issues, with the development of a Government communications strategy to support the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2012)
The Australian Government examine Amnesty International Australia's Let's Change the Conversation campaign and consider implementing similar training and education opportunities.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2012)
The Government reinstate funding for the Australian Human Rights Commission for the provision of information and educational materials related to people seeking asylum, refugees and human rights.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2012)
Specific refugee-related components be included for consideration in the development of the national curriculum.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2012)
DIAC consider funding (through the Diversity and Social Cohesion Program or similar programs) the development of a NGO-coordinated national training and media strategy to improve the quality of reportage on refugee and asylum seeker issues and enable refugees and the organisations working with them to engage with the media and the Australian public.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2012)
That the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and RCOA develop a strategy to support and promote the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, considering options for improving public information, developing specific campaigns and equipping organisations and individuals to enhance their work in community education.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)
RCOA advocates for the development of local initiatives and programs to increase the opportunities for former refugees and the wider community to have meaningful and regular interaction.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2010)

Orientation and community education	
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RCOA recommends that the information on family reunion opportunities provided to refugees prior to resettlement in Australia be reviewed to ensure its accuracy.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that legal and financial education for newly-arrived refugee entrants be enhanced	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)

Regional and rural settlement	
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RCOA recommends that the Australian Government develop a new regional settlement strategy, assessing potential and established regional areas as settlement locations, working with regional providers to plan and prepare for new humanitarian settlers, and ensuring	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
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Regional and rural settlement	
sufficient numbers of referrals are made within each intake year to retain capacity and momentum in regional settlement locations.	
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government develop a new regional settlement strategy, assessing potential and established regional areas as settlement locations, working with regional providers to plan and prepare for new humanitarian settlers, and ensuring sufficient numbers of referrals are made within each intake year to retain capacity and momentum in regional settlement locations.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government develop a new regional settlement strategy, assessing potential and established regional areas as settlement locations, working with regional providers to plan and prepare for new humanitarian settlers, and ensuring sufficient numbers of referrals are made within each intake year to retain capacity and momentum in regional settlement locations.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2014-2015: Community views on current challenges and future directions. (2013)

The role of refugee communities in settlement	
Funding bodies consider ways to support refugee communities to build viable organisational structures.	The Strength Within: The Role of Refugee Community Organisations in Settlement (2014)
Local, State and federal government policy-makers consider ways of critically engaging refugee community leaders in decision-making forums.	The Strength Within: The Role of Refugee Community Organisations in Settlement (2014)
Capacity building initiatives be considered that focus on refugee community leaders and supporting the development of robust community structures.	The Strength Within: The Role of Refugee Community Organisations in Settlement (2014)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government recognise the important role played by refugee community organisations in the settlement process through providing adequate funding to support their work with new arrivals	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the inclusion of people from refugee backgrounds in the design and delivery of on-arrival services be embedded within the HSS and CCS programs.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that, in partnership with other HSS providers, a model similar to the AMES Community Guides program be implemented in other HSS contract regions.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)

Settlement services	
RCOA recommends an increase in targeted services for refugee young people, including more refugee youth- and culturally specific counselling and support services.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Engage young people in genuine collaboration to assist them to shape and improve programs aimed at refugee youth.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Engage young people in workings towards the elimination of racism, discrimination and prejudice through awareness-raising by youth and their new communities, and information sharing about refugee youth experiences.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Support young people to undertake community education by sharing their stories in order to contribute to public knowledge on refugee matters.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Provide increased support for young refugees arriving alone.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Ensure that changes to biographical data are accommodated, post-settlement.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)

Settlement services	
Develop peer-to-peer educational programs within all detention centres accommodating young people, supported through relevant community organisations.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Ensure that funding social services is contracted in a manner that encourages young people to deliver programs, provide supports and develop skills and capacities in themselves.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Fund settlement services to deliver refugee youth-led programs, for example, post arrival orientation programs.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Engage in dialogue with young people from refugee backgrounds to hear their experiences and create opportunities to challenge the existing negative narratives around refugees.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Provide more platforms for young people to mentor newly arrived young refugees from similar backgrounds to provide advice, information and support.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Support and establish mentoring programs for parents and elders, to assist in understanding how young people are impacted by the challenges of settling into life in Australia.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Train and mentor young people from refugee backgrounds to become involved in community education and awareness building on refugee youth experiences and concerns.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Support young people to engage with social media to raise identified issues in a positive and proactive manner.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
Support young people to take up volunteering opportunities in the broader community and their own ethnic community.	Speaking Out: Voices of Young People from Refugee and Asylum Seeker Backgrounds (2016)
RCOA recommends that funding to the Settlement Grants Program be increased in proportion to projected increases in need resulting from the 2012-13 expansion of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program and the reduced eligibility to Humanitarian Settlement Services for people granted Protection Visas.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2014-2015: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2015)
RCOA recommends that the Federal Government develop a plan for ensuring smooth transitions between services for people seeking asylum funded by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and services for Refugee, SHP and Protection visa holders funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS), as well as transitions between settlement services and mainstream services funded within the DSS portfolio.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2014-2015: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2015)
RCOA recommends that all Special Humanitarian Program visa holders receive routine needs assessments during the initial period of settlement to ensure that they are receiving adequate on-arrival support.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the current time-limited eligibility period for settlement services be replaced with an individualised needs assessment process.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the Australian Government seek to ensure greater consistency in settlement patterns to ensure that quality on-arrival support services can be maintained across Australia.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that all Special Humanitarian Program visa holders receive routine needs assessments during the initial period of settlement to ensure that they are receiving adequate on-arrival support.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the current time-limited eligibility periods for the HSS and CCS program be replaced with an individualised needs-assessment process	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that longer-term contracts be granted for on-arrival settlement services where possible.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the size of HSS caseloads be managed in a manner which ensures that providers have sufficient time and resources to adequately support all clients.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the current competitive tendering approach to funding of on-arrival services be replaced with a grants-based approach, with a focus on encouraging partnerships and collaboration between different agencies.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)

Settlement services	
RCOA recommends that organisations contracted to deliver settlement services be required to demonstrate specific expertise in working with people from refugee backgrounds and an understanding of the needs of communities settling in their local area.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that all Protection Visa and Temporary Protection Visa holders be granted access to the HSS program on a needs basis.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that relatives of refugee and humanitarian visa holders arriving on family visas be granted access the HSS program on a needs basis.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that unaccompanied humanitarian minors who are turning 18 receive a comprehensive needs assessment and appropriate referrals to CCS or other forms of support as required.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that HSS providers consider developing peer community guides programs to provide specialised settlement support to young people.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that the HSS program include provisions for offering tailored support to large families and single clients.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
RCOA recommends that additional support arrangements for refugee and humanitarian entrants with disabilities be embedded in the HSS and CCS programs.	Submission to the review of the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support program (2014)
The Australian Government and all parties represented in the Australian Parliament take up the framework and reforms set out in FECCA's National Multicultural Agenda "Different But Equal".	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2011-2012: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2012)
RCOA recommends that there be uniform eligibility criteria, settlement service standards and measures of successful outcomes applied across the full network of services within the new framework, for all refugee and humanitarian entrants, irrespective of whether their visa was granted onshore or offshore or under a fully-funded or sponsored component of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)
RCOA recommends that the need for a whole-of-government approach to settlement be recognised, and that DIAC exercise leadership in developing the infrastructure to facilitate its implementation, including the establishment of relevant agreements and key relationships across state/territory and local tiers of government, as the foundation for further engagement by contracted service providers.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions(2011)
RCOA recommends that DIAC develop a strategy to enhance the supported engagement of ethnic community organisations in the provision of settlement services.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)

Sport and recreation	
RCOA recommends that agencies tailor sport programs to the specific needs of refugees.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies consult with their target communities when developing sport programs to serve their needs.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies adopt a flexible approach to program delivery.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies implement specific strategies to minimise or break down the barriers to participation faced by refugees.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies establish strong relationships with refugee individuals, their families and communities.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of

Sport and recreation	
	Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that sporting agencies establish partnerships with other agencies, particularly those which work directly with refugee communities.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies implement strategies for introducing refugees participation to sport.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies develop ongoing, sustainable sport programs for refugees.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies ensure all volunteers involved in program delivery are well-supported and understand the needs of refugee participation.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies adopt an organisational approach to the issue of increasing refugees' involvement in sport.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that agencies establish realistic expectations with regards to increasing refugees' involvement in sport and adopt appropriate methods of evaluation which look beyond traditional markers of success.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that the NSW government establish targeted, ongoing funding opportunities for programs which aim to increase the involvement of refugees in sport.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that the NSW government increase coordination between government agencies and the different levels of government, in relation to the issue of refugees' involvement in sport.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that the NSW government develop a targeted policy approach to the issue of refugees' involvement in sport.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that further research be conducted into the issue of refugee participation in physical recreation, as opposed to sport.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)
RCOA recommends that further research be conducted into the issue of adult refugee participation in sport.	A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the Participation of Refugees in Sporting Activities (2010)

Translating and interpreting services	
RCOA welcomes the DIAC initiative to extend access to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) to real estate agents and recommends this be reviewed at the end of the pilot phase with a view to expansion.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)
RCOA recommends that urgent steps be taken to facilitate the greater use of Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) by General Practitioners, specialists and other health professionals through training and awareness-raising, as well as the introduction of financial incentives and appropriate sanctions.	Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2010-11: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2011)