SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DECENTRALISATION

SUBMISSION ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DECENTRALISATION

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national peak body for refugees, people seeking asylum and the organisations and individuals who work with them, representing over 190 organisations. 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 provide feedback on regional development and decentralisation to this committee. This submission primarily focuses on part (a) of Terms of Reference, 'best practice approaches to regional development'. RCOA has had a longstanding focus on regional settlement of refugees and is currently undertaking research on regional mobility, including direct refugee settlement and secondary movement of refugees to regional areas. The outcome of the research will be published in 2018.

In this submission, we argue that the movement of refugees to regional areas can sustain and grow the population base, bring about economic opportunities, grow and diversify the regional economy and employment base, and create more vibrant and cohesive communities. In recent years, there has been renewed interest from federal, state and local governments in regional settlement of refugees. One of the most notable examples of this renewed interest was the introduction of the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa.

We welcome this interest, and in this submission we examine the factors that need to be considered to achieve successful settlement. Importantly, we argue that the Australian Government should consider not only the challenges faced by refugees directly resettled in regional areas (primary resettlement),[1] but needs to offer greater and more targeted support to those who move to regional towns after living in metropolitan areas, as well as to the communities that receive and welcome these groups.

1.   Settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants in regional Australia: background and context

1.1.   History and trends

1.1.1.   Traditionally, most migrants and refugees have settled in metropolitan areas where there are more employment opportunities, more suitable infrastructure and established social networks.

1.1.2.   However, the settlement of refugees in non-metropolitan areas has a long history in Australia. In the aftermath of World War II, those arriving in Australia from Eastern Europe under Displaced

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[1] Primary resettlement areas are where refugees are directly placed straight after their arrival to Australia. Currently they are Perth (WA), Darwin (NT), Adelaide (SA), Canberra (ACT), Sydney (NSW), Melbourne (VIC), Brisbane (QLD), Hobart (TAS), Logan (QLD), Gold Coast ((QLD), Cairns (QLD), Townsville (QLD), Toowoomba (QLD), Mildura (VIC), Wodonga (VIC), Shepparton (VIC), Geelong (VIC), Coffs Harbour (NSW), Newcastle (NSW), Wollongong (NSW), Wagga Wagga (NSW), Albury (NSW), Mt Gambier (SA), and Launceston (TAS).

Persons program were required to work in pre-assigned locations for the first two years. Many of the pre-assigned locations were non-metropolitan areas where there was a shortage of labour. In the 1970s and 1980s, when a high number of Vietnamese refugees arrived in Australia, many were directed to regional areas.[2]

1.1.3. More recently, greater emphasis has been placed by the federal government on the settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants in regional areas, especially those without family links in metropolitan areas. That has considerably increased the number of humanitarian entrants resettled directly in regional areas, with the number of people in this group growing from five percent in 2001 to 20 percent in 2011.[3]

1.1.4. Feedback from our member organisations and refugee communities confirm that, on many occasions, after living in metropolitan areas, refugees and humanitarian entrants choose to move to regional areas for work and lifestyle reasons. Unfortunately, the available data on this secondary migration is very limited, providing little information on the number of people who move to regional areas and the areas they choose to move to.

1.2. Current and existing research

1.2.1. There is existing research that highlights the challenges and opportunities of refugee settlement in regional Australia. RCOA compiled this research in an annotated bibliography published in 2011,[4] and is currently updating this document.

1.2.2. In the past two years, the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) and the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) have both published reports on regional settlement. In its policy paper, SCOA explored the challenges of regional settlement and made several recommendations for creating more sustainable settlement.[5] Adding to its 2012 issues paper on regional and rural settlement,[6] FECCA published two reports in 2015. one focused more broadly on migration to regional areas and how it can be successful,[7] and the other assessed the effectiveness of government services in Shepparton in Victoria from the viewpoint of new and emerging refugee communities in that area.[8]

1.2.3. In contrast to the relatively substantial body of literature on primary regional settlement of refugees, research on secondary movement of this group remains limited. RCOA is currently undertaking research on regional mobility. While this research inevitably looks at direct refugee settlement, our research will emphasise the drivers and success of secondary movement of refugees to (and from) regional areas.

1.2.4. RCOA began this research after hearing from member organisations, refugee communities and people seeking asylum about higher rates of secondary migration of refugees and asylum seekers to regional Australia. One of the recent successful examples of this secondary migration is the relocation of a number of Rwandan families to a small town of Mingoola, on the border of New South Wales and Queensland, which reinvigorated the once-dying town.[9]

1.2.5. The introduction of the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) is also likely to increase secondary movement to regional Australia. RCOA aims to assess the impact of this new visa,

[2] Feist, H. Tan, G. McDougall, K. Hugo, Graeme. (2014). *Enabling Rural Migrant Settlement: A Case Study of the Limestone Coast.* Hugo Centre for Migration and Population Research. https://www.adelaide.edu.au/apmrc/research/projects/Enabling_Rural_Migrant_Settlement_Report.pdf . 7.
[3] Feist, H et al, 7.
[4] Refugee Council of Australia (2011). *Regional Settlement Reports and Research.* https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2011-Regional-bib.pdf
[5] Settlement Council of Australia (2016). *Exploring Options for Regional Settlement.* http://www.scoa.org.au/resources/SCoA%20Regional%20Settlement%20Policy%20Paper.pdf
[6] Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) (2012). *Rural and Regional Settlement Issues Paper.* http://www.fecca.org.au/images/stories/documents/Submissions/2012/fecca%20rural%20and%20regional%20settlement%20issues%20paper.pdf
[7] FECCA (2015). *Migration: An Opportunity for Rural and Regional Australia.* http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Migration-and-Regional-Australia.pdf
[8] FECCA (2015). *Community Perspectives on Settlement Issues Affecting New and Emerging Communities in Rural and Regional Australia.* http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/FECCA-Rural-and-Regional-report-June-2015-00000002.pdf
[9] For more, see: Hassall, G. (2016). "African refugees reinvigorating rural Mingoola in social experiment to boost ageing community". *The ABC,* 7 November, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-07/how-african-refugees-are-reinvigorating-mingoola/7970876

especially in NSW where the state opted into this visa scheme earlier than in other states and territories.

1.3. Safe Haven Enterprise Visa

1.3.1.   In late 2014, the Australian Government announced that it would be creating a new temporary protection visa, called SHEV, for those who arrived in Australia by boat and are found to be owed protection. The Government announced that this visa would be valid for five years and was designed to encourage refugees to move to regional areas. To be eligible for a SHEV, a person must declare an intention to work or study in regional Australia.

1.3.2.   NSW was the first state to opt into the SHEV scheme in July 2015. By October 2016, all states and territories announced the postcodes which would be part of the scheme.

State	SHEV areas[10]
Australian Capital Territory	All of the Australian Capital Territory – from 27 October 2016
New South Wales	All of regional NSW (excluding Sydney, Newcastle, Central Coast and Wollongong) – from 1 July 2015. Additionally, postcodes 2320-2323 and 2415 commenced on 27 October 2016
Queensland	All of regional Queensland (excluding Brisbane city and the Gold Coast) – from 27 October 2016
South Australia	All of South Australia – from 27 October 2016
Tasmania	All of Tasmania – from 10 October 2015
Victoria	Many parts of Victoria (excluding Melbourne Metropolitan and some regional local government areas) – from 27 October 2016
Western Australia	Most of Western Australia (excluding Perth and some areas in the Pilbara and Goldfields-Esperance regions) – from 27 October 2016
Northern Territory	Many parts of the Northern Territory (including Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs) – from 6 April 2017, with retrospective effect from 27 October 2016

1.3.3.   People who arrived in Australia by boat after 13 August 2012 (and were not transferred to an offshore processing centre on or after 19 July 2013) can apply for one of the two temporary visas: a SHEV or a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV). Further, those who arrived in Australia by boat before 13 August 2012 and applied for a permanent protection visa, but whose application was not finalised before 18 September 2013, are only eligible for a TPV or a SHEV.

1.3.4.   There are more than 30,000 people in this group. Not all of them will apply for or be granted a SHEV. Further, the applicant only needs to declare an *intention* to work or study in regional Australia, meaning many SHEV holders may not eventually relocate to regional Australia. However, this new visa is likely to encourage people to move to regional and rural areas.

2.   Best practice approaches to regional development

2.1.   Examples of successful settlement of refugees in regional Australia

2.1.1.   There are several documented examples of successful settlement of refugees in regional Australia, where refugees contributed to economic growth and developed the capabilities of regional towns. By settling in those areas, refugees increased and diversified the population base of regional Australia.

2.1.2.   The resettlement of Karen refugees from Burma in the regional town of Nhill in Victoria demonstrates how well-supported refugee settlement can reverse the trend of regional decline. In a joint report,[11] AMES Australia and Deloitte Access Economics assessed the impact of the settlement

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[10] Full list of postcodes is available at: Department of Immigration and Border Protection. *Regional Australia Postcodes.* https://www.border.gov.au/Refugeeandhumanitarian/Documents/regional-australia-postcodes.pdf

[11] AMES and Deloitte Access Economics (2015), *Small towns. Big returns – Economic and social impact of the Karen resettlement in Nhill.* https://www.ames.net.au/files/file/Research/19933%20AMES%20Nhill%20Report%20LR.pdf

of over 160 Karen refugees (about 10% of the population of Nhill at the time of publication) on the township of Nhill.

2.1.3.   The report found that the resettlement of Karen refugees had a significant impact on Gross Regional Product (GRP) and employment levels in the region, generating around $41.5 million for the regional economy over the five years of analysis. In the financial year of 2013-14 alone, the resulting economic growth from the resettlement of Karen community amounted to 4.4% of the GRP of Hindmarsh Local Government Area, where Nhill is located.

2.1.4.   The positive contributions of Karen refugees to the town of Nhill were not limited to the growth of the local business where most of them worked. They also revitalised other local businesses through increased trading of goods and services. As a result of population growth and the greater need for services, local neighbourhood houses and local schools attracted more government funding and could deliver more programs and employ more people, including from the Karen community. The increase in local services also reduced the need for local residents to commute to access important services, such as those related to health and education.

2.1.5. All these benefits resulted in positive attitudes of local residents towards the Karen community and a remarkable increase in social capital. According to the CEO of the Hindmarsh Shire Council:

> *The social impact of the Karen settlement is extraordinary. Nhill, a very conservative community, has embraced and opened their minds and hearts to the Karen. This has made Nhill a better place to live.[12]*

2.1.6.   Another example of successful regional settlement is the Bhutanese community living in Albury in NSW. This community includes those who were resettled directly in this town, as well as those who moved to Albury after living in metropolitan areas.

2.1.7.   One community member noted what contributed to the attractiveness of regional relocation is "being able to look beyond just survival". This is evidenced by the significant level of house ownership within the Bhutanese community. Approximately 100 houses have been purchased in a period of 7 years of settlement, achieved through a system of collaborative saving and shared ownership of houses.

2.1.8.   For many members of Bhutanese community buying a house was a sign of successful settlement. It not only ensured financial security, but also acted as a symbol of belonging to the new town and community. One Bhutanese community member noted:

> *I think buying a house is more than just money. It is also … you buy a house where you can make it a home. A home is where you feel the most comfortable, and I think that people who come to live in Albury Wodonga make a home out of a house.*

2.2.   Contribution of refugees to regional Australia

2.2.1. If well-supported, settlement of refugees in regional Australia can bring about economic, social and cultural benefits to the area. The examples of successful settlement discussed above highlight some of the economic benefits refugees have brought to regional towns.

2.2.2. In assessing these economic contributions, there are several factors which differentiate refugees and humanitarian entrants from other migrant groups. While these factors are not exclusive to those who live in regional Australia, their impacts should be considered when the role of refugees in regional development is discussed.

2.2.3. According to a study of conducted by Professor Graeme Hugo, the percentage of working age people within this group is higher than in other migrant groups, so they are likely to disproportionately contribute to the labour supply. As well, higher than average birth rates within several refugee communities can contribute to the population growth. Hugo also found that

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[12] AMES and Deloitte Access Economics 2015, 4.

humanitarian entrants leave Australia permanently at a much lower rate than other migrant groups, and therefore can make a greater and more long-term economic contribution.[13]

2.2.4. Refugees can bring energy to regional Australia. Young families can reinvigorate local schools. The new workforce can bring new business ideas, expertise, international experiences and language skills. Both Hugo[14] and FECCA[15] identified a strong entrepreneurial spirit in umanitarian entrants. All these elements can diversify the economic and employment base of regional areas. One Bhutanese refugee living in Murray Bridge in South Australia spoke of his ambitions for the future:

> *I would like to study for as long as possible, including doing a small business management course and getting a forklift and truck licenses. I would like to start a bee-farm and work in the field of animal husbandry.[16]*

2.2.5. Many refugees and humanitarian entrants demonstrate a strong level of community engagement and can improve the quality of life for regional Australians through volunteering. Refugees whom Professor Graeme Hugo interviewed for his research frequently provided skills and assistance to new arrivals and to the wider community.[17] Consultations carried out by RCOA with different communities in regional Australia confirmed these findings.

2.2.6. For example, the Bhutanese community in Albury participated in a large number of volunteer activities, including organising cultural events, sports coaching, settlement work, counselling and family mediation. The Burundian community in Wagga Wagga was equally involved in volunteer activities. A Burundian refugee who moved from Perth to Wagga Wagga exemplified this desire to contribute to the community, saying:

> *Two days after my arrival in Wagga Wagga I became a volunteer with the local fire brigade. This was an important decision for me that positively impacted on my community … I also became a liaison contact for the local African community and worked with the local multicultural community through Centacare … I was able to assist as I had walked the same journey and not only understood, but experienced similar confrontations.*

2.2.7. Another example of how refugees contribute is demonstrated by the recent media story of an Afghan asylum seeker who set up a restaurant in the South Australian town of Naracoorte and provided free food for volunteer firefighters when they battled with natural disasters.[18]

2.2.8. As with the example of Nhill, some refugees have resettled or moved to less ethnically diverse regional towns. These new and emerging communities added to the richness and diversity of those towns. In the words of a Bhutanese man who spoke to RCOA in 2015 and was resettled in Albury:

> *It is about making our country richer. The diversity is what makes us rich. Adding another dimension … making local communities know about what our cultures are, sharing our values and I guess picking the best out of both cultures as well.*

2.3. Push and pull factors

2.3.1. There are several factors that encourage or discourage refugees from moving to and/or staying in regional areas.

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[13] Hugo, G. (2011). *A Significant Contribution: Economic, Social and Civic Contribution of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants.* Department of Immigration and Citizenship. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/economic-social-civic-contributions-booklet2011.pdf, 4-15.
[14] Hugo 2011, 38.
[15] FECCA 2015. *Community Perspectives on Settlement Issues*, 12.
[16] Hugo 2011, 13.
[17] Hugo 2011,48.
[18] Elston, R. (2017). "From refugee to restaurateur: Afghan migrant making a difference with his Indian cuisine". *SBS News,* 26 August, http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/08/26/refugee-restaurateur-afghan-migrant-making-splash-his-indian-cuisine

2.3.2.   In almost all of the examples of secondary migration, the main reason people moved was to access employment opportunities. In some cases, regional areas were attractive because the employment they offered better matched the skills and expertise of refugees.

2.3.3.   The secondary migration of Rwandan families from Sydney to Mingoola[19] and the case of a Burundian family who moved from Brisbane to Gracemere in Central Queensland[20] were considered successful because all families who were involved had agricultural backgrounds. None could find suitable employment in capital cities and were feeling isolated. Opportunities to work on farms offered by regional Australian towns assisted them to prosper, become self-sufficient and contribute to their new communities.

2.3.4.   Another strong pull factor towards regional towns is the affordability of housing. As with the example of Albury, many South Sudanese families moved to Murray Bridge because of more affordable and more readily available accommodation. New arrivals employed by the local meat processing plant were housed in temporary accommodation and more broadly families found the cost of rents much cheaper than Adelaide, where most lived before moving to Murray Bridge.[21] Furthermore, smaller towns usually mean families and friends live closer to each other and to their workplaces.

2.3.5.   Additionally, for many the peaceful environment and tranquillity of regional Australia after years of persecution and displacement is a welcome transition.

2.3.6.   People who spoke to RCOA over many years and participated in other research have always emphasised that the support and receptiveness of host community plays an important role on their decision to move or remain in regional area, where (compared to capital cities) they have less support from established peer groups and social networks.

2.3.7.   Conversely, the reasons why some regional areas fail to attract or retain a refugee population include a lack of proper infrastructure and services (especially those in the areas of education and physical/mental health), isolation and the absence of a welcoming and inclusive environment. While some refugees might continue to live in those areas despite these challenges because of employment, these push factors mean the regional areas will fail to retain this population when the employment opportunities decline.

2.4.   Future settlement of refugees in regional areas: opportunities and challenges

2.4.1.   In many regional areas there is potential and willingness to host larger number of refugees. Many of the regional service providers, local councils and business owners who spoke to RCOA expressed their support for an increase in refugee settlement in their communities, whether they directly resettle in their towns or move there after living in metropolitan areas.

2.4.2.   A service provider from Albury spoke to RCOA about the goodwill and acceptance generated in regional communities after the Syrian crisis:

> *People are open to it, so can we use that more, because there is enormous support.*

2.4.3.   Another service provider in Armidale in NSW echoed the same sentiments and mentioned that in their town, most sections of the community, from the local council to university, local businesses and sports clubs, are supportive of refugee settlement. While frustrated at that time with their lack of success in becoming a primary refugee resettlement area,[22] service providers in Armidale mentioned they would focus on attracting and supporting the secondary migration. A

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[19] Hassall 2016.

[20] Stünzner, I. (2017). "Refugee resettlement in regional Australia brings success but needs more incentives" *The ABC,* 1 August, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-01/regions-offer-opportunities-for-refugees/8760412

[21] Taylor-Neumann, L. V. N. and Balasingam, M. R. (2009) *Sustaining Settlement in Murray Bridge South Australia.* Murray Bridge: Lutheran Community Care, http://www.rdamr.org.au/fileadmin/user_upload/docs/Major_report_Final_Version.pdf, 7.

[22] Armidale became a new regional resettlement location in August 2017 and new humanitarian entrants will be directly resettled in this area from next year.

service provider in Bathurst also spoke about the importance of encouraging SHEV visa holders to move to that area and how they can be supported.

2.4.4.   As mentioned, there are a number of pull and push factors that impact on refugee settlement in regional areas. Not all settlement in regional areas has been successful, and much could be learnt from the cases where the settlement has been successful. In its research, RCOA aims to look at these in greater detail.

2.4.5.   In analysing the success of settlement in Nhill, the proper preparation of host and settling communities was cited as an important factor. Strong leadership in the host community and the presence of influential 'local champions' were key to preparing the host community. Similarly, strong leaders within the resettling community were instrumental. They assisted in connecting employers with suitable potential employees and worked to connect the new arrivals to local services. In the case of Nhill, appropriate on-arrival support, including provision of temporary accommodation, orientation and support for families, was another vital factor that contributed to the successful settlement outcome.[23]

2.4.6.   Similarly in Murray Bridge, service providers and refugees spoke of the importance of proper support to ensure a successful settlement. The collaboration among service providers, businesses, clubs and employers in Murray Bridge to provide a welcoming environment contributed to the decision of many refugees to remain in that area.[24]

2.4.7.   Refugees in Albury also identified strong social support and a holistic support system they received from local community, community organisations and other service providers as reasons for their successful settlement. For many Bhutanese refugees, the efforts of the local community to understand and embrace their culture was valuable. According to one service provider, the community encouraged the Bhutanese refugees to showcase their cultural heritages

> *to help them [refugees in Albury Wodonga] understand that they belong, to develop their sense of belonging. Because if they are not allowed to practice what is important for them, then it feels foreign. We don't want them to feel foreign. This is not a foreign country for them anymore, this is their home. And being able to do those cultural events is really important.*

2.4.8.   In analysing the examples of successful refugee settlement, one can say the settlement has been much more successful when refugees are regarded not merely as a temporary supply of labour, but rather as active citizens and community members.

2.4.9.   Further, a place-based approach to refugee settlement in regional Australia is best practice. In this approach, before refugees are encouraged to move there is an evaluation of local circumstances, such as infrastructure, employment opportunities, suitability of employment, support services and the receptiveness of the local community.

2.4.10. In their evaluation of the settlement of Karen refugees in Nhill, AMES and Deloitte Access Economics confirmed the importance of a place-based approach, noting that successful resettlement in regional areas was not just because of employment opportunities and housing affordability, but that the unique characteristics of each town can contribute to or hinder positive outcomes. In the specific case of Nhill, they wrote:

> *Interestingly, in the case of Nhill, the locals identified the isolation of their town as a significant factor in the success of the Karen resettlement because in their experience, being geographically 'isolated' means people rely on each other and expect everyone living in the township to contribute to creating a sustainable community.[25]*

2.4.11. In 2016, SCOA set out a list of recommendations and factors to consider to ensure the primary resettlement locations are chosen appropriately. RCOA supports those recommendations

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[23] AMES and Deloitte Access Economics 2015, 27-9.
[24] Taylor-Neumann and Balasingam 2009, 8.
[25] AMES and Deloitte Access Economics 2015, 26.

and believes they need to be considered to ensure the selected primary resettlement areas are prepared and open to welcome new arrivals, providing them with appropriate support and a chance to prosper and integrate into their new community.[26]

2.4.12. However, as outlined in this submission, more and more refugees are considering secondary migration to regional areas because of employment and lifestyle reasons. Generally, humanitarian entrants with no family links in major cities are considered for direct resettlement in regional areas. However, in recent years the Government has placed greater emphasis on resettling refugees with family links in Australia.[27] That means more people will move to metropolitan areas and there will be fewer candidates to move to regional Australia. Therefore, to contribute to sustainable regional development through refugee settlement, decision-makers need to pay more attention to secondary migration and the ways it can be supported to ensure its success for all involved.

2.4.13. Many refugees might decide to move to regional Australia later on in their settlement journey when they no longer have access to casework support. For many, as will be outlined in the next section, this support may not be available at all. Navigating a new town where the established support networks are usually more limited than in capital cities can be very challenging.

2.4.14. All the examples of successful settlement highlighted the important role of supportive communities who looked after the new arrivals, often in their own time and by using their own resources. However, if the aim is to extend these opportunities to more regional areas, the expectation that the town can accommodate the needs of the refugees without added resources is unrealistic and is unlikely to promote social cohesion.

2.4.15. To support the secondary migration of refugees, Australian Government needs to adopt a strategy to offer relocation support to refugees. This should include support offered to refugees to help them relocate, as well as funding given to local service providers to support in the initial relocation stage and to prepare the host community. While this strategy will need investment, the economic and social benefits of the long-term contribution of refugees to regional areas will far outweigh the initial investment.

Recommendation 1

The Australian Government should, when selecting primary resettlement locations, carefully consider the advice offered by the settlement sector and regional communities.

Recommendation 2

Federal and State governments should work together to collect and make more data available in relation to the secondary migration of refugees and humanitarian entrants.

Recommendation 3

Federal and State governments should invest in offering relocation support to refugees who decide to move to regional areas. This should include support offered to service providers in destination locations. This strategy should be further developed in consultation with regional communities and settlement service providers.

2.5.   The specific challenges of the SHEV

2.5.1. In a number of submissions and reports, RCOA has outlined its concerns with the SHEV scheme. As it offers only temporary protection without the right to citizenship and family reunion, the SHEV scheme provides very limited opportunities for people to feel they belong to the Australian society and subsequently to make any long-term contributions.[28]

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[26] SCOA 2016, 15.

[27] RCOA (2017), *Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2017-18: Community views on current challenges and future directions,* http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/RCOA_intake-sub_2017_2018.pdf , 4,. 34.

[28] RCOA's detailed submission on re-introduction of temporary protection visas is available at: RCOA (2014), *Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill 2014.* http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/1410-Legacy-Caseload.pdf

2.5.2.   While the SHEV scheme is intended to encourage people to move to regional areas to work or study, SHEV holders, unlike other refugee and humanitarian entrants, are entitled to a much more limited suite of government support. SHEV holders are able to access limited social security payments, Medicare, short-term torture and trauma counselling and employment support. However, except for those whose cases have been identified as complex, other people with a SHEV visa have no access to casework support. SHEV holders are cannot access federal subsidies for tertiary education.

2.5.3.   While the SHEV may encourage the greater movement of refugees to regional areas, RCOA remains extremely concerned that it offers very little support to people who embark on those journeys, who need to tackle new challenges and to navigate areas that may have traditionally hosted a very small number of refugees.

2.5.4.   As one service provider noted in a written submission to RCOA in 2016, by limiting the support available to SHEV holders, Government denies people a chance to realise their full potential and puts added pressure on existing services:

> *We believe it is counter-productive to restrict access to settlement support services for temporary humanitarian visa holders, as this will significantly inhibit the settlement of these visa holders and create additional difficulties for them and for services working with them over the longer term. It is likely to place increased pressure on the few services those on temporary humanitarian visas will have access to, such as torture and trauma survivor rehabilitation services, and services may need to expand their activities beyond what they are funded for in order to try and fill the gap in service provision. It will also put pressure on unfunded refugee community organisations.*

2.5.5.   Many service providers in regional areas stated that there is no established system to alert them to the arrival of people on a SHEV to their area, given their lack of access to services. As a service provider in Armidale explained:

> *There is no formal process of knowing if they're in town. There is no referral processes to link them in with community health organisations even though they are entitled to support of resettlement health and that kind of thing. I have heard from other members working in the community that people with SHEV visas often have problems to do with social isolations when they get to new communities and that mental health support would be very valuable health resource for them.*

2.5.6.   Service providers who spoke to RCOA were also concerned that SHEV holders have insufficient information about the regional areas and the requirements of their visas. A gap in information that would not have existed if they had access to casework support.

Recommendation 4

All refugees on temporary protection visas, including SHEVs, should have access to settlement support services, similar to other refugees and humanitarian entrants. However, as a minimum measure, people on a SHEV visa who move to regional areas should have access to a full suite of settlement support services, including casework support. By doing that, service providers will be better informed of the number of people holding SHEV visas in their area and will be better prepared to properly assist them.

3.   Encouraging corporate decentralisation

3.1.   Attracting and retaining skilled labour to regional areas

3.1.1.   Corporates and businesses moving to regional areas can benefit from identifying and employing skilled refugees and humanitarian entrants who can contribute to the growth of the business in regional areas.

3.1.2.   There are a number of organisations that work to link businesses to refugees with suitable skills. One of these organisations is Refugee Talent, recently renamed Refugee and Migrant Talent.

It focuses on long-term employment by creating opportunities for people to gain local work experiences and has seen a major expansion since its inception in 2016.

3.1.3. Refugee and Migrant Talent involves an online platform that matches refugees and other migrants looking for work with companies offering opportunities. It aims to ease the difficulties faced by many refugees and migrants who struggle to gain their first local work experience in a new country, despite their qualifications and transferable skills.

3.1.4. Refugee and Migrant Talent offers a digital platform that connects skilled refugees with job opportunities in such a way that benefits both. Refugee and Migrant Talent assists refugees and migrants at various stages in the employment process. It reviews resumes, prepares individuals for interviews, gives local industry insights, matches individuals with businesses, and supports them after the placement.

3.1.5. Employment areas targeted varies across different industries and skills sets from accounting, banking and finance, HR, marketing, IT, sales and design. It works with more than 200 companies from government departments, corporates, small to medium businesses and start-ups. In 2017, after only operating for one and a half years, they have placed more than 100 refugees into employment across Australia..[29]

3.1.6. Many refugees who arrive in Australia have the skills and expertise that businesses and corporate sectors are looking for. Many were mid-career or upper-career professionals in their home countries before displacement. With proper support, combined with support from organisations like Refugee and Migrant Talent, these groups of refugees might be willing to relocate to regional Australia and assist businesses to thrive.

Recommendation 5

When encouraging corporate decentralisation, the Australian Government should consider and promote the role that skilled refugees can play in supporting the businesses after relocation, as well as the role of organisations that can provide linkages between businesses and refugee workers.

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[29] For more information, see: https://refugeetalent.com/