Refugee and Humanitarian Issues

Australia’s Response
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ISBN 978 1 921446 89 1
ISBN 978 1 921446 90 0 (online version)

How to provide feedback on this publication

The department is committed to making sure this booklet is a useful resource. To help with this, we are undertaking a brief survey to find out what you thought.

If you would like to participate, please email humanitarian.projects@immi.gov.au to request a copy of the survey.

Cover photo credits

Front: A Karen refugee from Burma, in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border © Getty Images / Paula Bronstein

Back (clockwise from right): A young Burmese refugee in Mae Ra Ma Luang camp, Thailand © UNHCR / J. Redfern

An Iraqi girl waits in line with her mother for their share of aid © AFP / Ahmad Al-Rubaye

A family of Sudanese refugees heading towards a registration point at Wandalou on the Chad-Sudan border © UNHCR / H. Caux
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Foreword

Australians can be proud of our long tradition of supporting those whose lives are in crisis, people from war-torn countries, people who face persecution and even death. This is nowhere more evident than in our world class program to assist refugees and others in humanitarian need.

This year we celebrate the fact that it is 55 years since Australia signed the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugees Convention). We were the sixth country to ratify the Convention and since that time we have made a major contribution to the protection of refugees throughout the world.

In cooperation with our international partners, we have resettled around 700,000 refugees in Australia since the end of World War II. This is more than double the population of our national capital, Canberra.

This year we also welcomed the visit to Australia of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. This was a great opportunity to strengthen the important relationship between UNHCR and Australia, to share our knowledge and expertise and to look at ways in which Australia can strengthen its engagement with UNHCR and the international protection system. The High Commissioner’s praise for Australia’s settlement services is a testament to the quality of the support we provide to refugees as they work to establish themselves in our community.

This booklet provides information about Australia’s role in international protection, our Humanitarian Program and the initiatives that we have developed to help refugees. It includes personal accounts from some recent arrivals, their journeys and the grave difficulties they faced in their home countries.

You will also see how Australia works with organisations such as UNHCR to help resolve refugee crises.

The Humanitarian Program is one that is developed and refined in consultation with the broader community and with Australia’s international partners. This ongoing process ensures that the program engages the support of the Australian community and is responsive to global needs.

Immigration is central to the nation’s identity. How we develop and manage our immigration policies reflects what we value as a people and how we think of ourselves as a nation. How we welcome and support people on arrival—particularly those who have come to Australia as refugees—speaks to our humanity.

It is inspiring to hear about the journeys and to see the contributions that refugees are making to the Australian community.

I trust that you will find this edition of Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia’s Response an interesting read.

Senator Chris Evans
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
From Iraq:
Ali’s story

According to UNHCR estimates, there are more than 2.2 million Iraqis living outside their home country as refugees, with a further 2.4 million people displaced within Iraq.

Over the past four years the Australian Government has provided around $13 million in funding through international agencies such as the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced Iraqis and refugee populations in countries neighbouring Iraq.

In recent years, the UNHCR has referred more than 50,000 Iraqi refugees for resettlement around the world. Since 2001, more than 11,000 Iraqis have been resettled in Australia. Among these arrivals are Ali and his family.

Ali was 17 years old when his family was forced from their home in Baghdad. His father was a prominent surgeon who was persecuted after the fall of the Ba’ath Party. When life became too dangerous, they sold everything, spent 18 months living in war-torn northern Iraq, then escaped to Beirut, Lebanon.

Life in Lebanon is difficult for refugees. They are not allowed to work and risk being imprisoned or sent back to Iraq. After registering with UNHCR and having his family recognised as refugees, Ali’s father applied for the family to be resettled in Australia.

They waited for many months before they were granted visas. They flew to Australia in June 2003 and quickly began rebuilding their lives in Queensland.

Ali’s family enrolled in TAFE and school and began learning English. Ali picked up the new language quickly but soon realised that he needed to undertake further study to improve his skills.

‘Migrants are new born people... there’s such a large gap between two cultures and the gap begins with language, so I got out and I tried to overcome this,’ Ali said.

‘People like the comfort of others who understand them and many migrants stick with their own community. I tried living in Sydney for a while, then I realised that I needed to lose some cultural identity and do more with Australians.’

Ali moved back to Queensland to be closer to his family. He is now married with one daughter and a second child on the way. Ali speaks five languages and has great interpersonal skills, which have helped him pursue his career.

As a Police Liaison Officer, Ali fosters understanding between culturally diverse communities and the police.

‘I would really love to be a cop. I’m just so grateful because we are really lucky to be here.’
Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia's Response
Chapter One
Australia’s role in international protection

Who is a refugee?
The most commonly accepted definition of a ‘refugee’ is set out in the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the ‘Refugees Convention’). This Convention defines refugees as people who are outside their country of nationality and are unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. It is the key document outlining the obligations under international law for countries who have signed the Convention.

The Refugees Convention only applied to refugee situations known in 1951 and was therefore limited to European countries. The United Nations 1967 Protocol (the ‘1967 Protocol’) removed this limitation and extended the Convention to cover refugee situations occurring after 1951 in any country.

Australia was the sixth country to ratify the Refugees Convention and ratified the 1967 Protocol in 1973. This means that the Convention and its definitions are reflected in our domestic law.

The Refugee Experience
Common refugee experiences include seeing their homes and communities destroyed and spending many years living in refugee camps or in volatile urban situations. Mobility and opportunities for employment are limited, and they often do not have access to health or education services. Many have been subjected to rape and torture, witnessed friends being murdered or been separated from their family when fleeing their homes.

These experiences are impossible to forget, but Australia’s Humanitarian Program offers refugees the chance to make a better future for themselves and their families.
The global refugee situation

One of the major challenges facing the world today is protecting refugees who have been forced to leave their homes by armed conflict and human rights abuses.

At the end of 2007, there were 31.7 million refugees and other people of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Of those, 11.4 million were refugees who had fled their home country and 13.7 million had been displaced within their home country due to conflict or persecution. More than half of these refugees are living in protracted situations (see page ten for more information).

UNHCR concerns also extended to 740 000 asylum-seekers, 731 000 refugees who had repatriated during 2007, 13.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 2.1 million IDPs who had returned to their place of origin in 2007, some 2.9 million stateless persons and some 69 000 others of concern.

Figure 1: Refugee population by UNHCR regions, end 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNHCR Regions</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>People in refugee-like situations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Africa and Great Lakes</td>
<td>1 100 100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 100 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East and Horn of Africa</td>
<td>815 200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>815 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>181 200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>181 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>174 700</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>174 700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>2 654 000</td>
<td>67 600</td>
<td>2 721 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and Pacific</td>
<td>2 674 200</td>
<td>1 151 000</td>
<td>3 825 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>499 900</td>
<td>487 600</td>
<td>987 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>1 580 500</td>
<td>5100</td>
<td>1 585 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9 679 800</td>
<td>1 711 300</td>
<td>11 391 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2007 (December 2008)
Above: An internally displaced woman in Gereida Camp, Sudan. The mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, the Red Cross operates an International Refugee Tracing service to reunite families separated by war and other humanitarian emergencies. © ICRC / Boris Heger

Opposite page, left: A community nurse offers assistance to a sick woman and her child © DWSPL / J. Haynes / 1994

Centre: This ten year old girl was born and raised in Pakistan in the Jalozai Refugee Camp. Today, she and her five siblings have returned to Afghanistan where they are facing extremely poor living conditions. © UNHCR / M. Maguire / 2007

Right: Overlooking a Rwandan refugee camp © DWSPL / J. Haynes / 1994
Australia and UNHCR

The UNHCR leads and coordinates international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. It was established by the United Nations General Assembly on 14 December 1950 and since then has helped an estimated 50 million people to rebuild their lives. UNHCR has offices in more than 110 countries around the world, and around 6300 staff.

Australia has a long history of supporting UNHCR and the international protection of refugees. Australia was a member of the United Nations Advisory Committee on Refugees (1951–1954) and of the United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF) Executive Committee (1955–1958) before joining UNHCR’s Executive Committee at its inception in 1958.

For more information about UNHCR and the Refugees Convention, please visit www.unhcr.org.

Protracted refugee situations

UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as a refugee population of 25 000 or more people who have been in exile for at least five consecutive years.

It is estimated that at the end of 2007, 6.2 million refugees (54 per cent of the global refugee population) were living in these situations. A total of 31 protracted refugee situations were identified in 25 different countries.¹

Due to the long periods of uncertainty and insecurity, refugees in protracted situations experience high levels of personal trauma, social tension and sexual violence. As a result, many are forced to resort to desperate measures to survive. While their lives may not be in immediate danger, their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile.

The enormity of these situations led to UNHCR identifying protracted refugee situations as a key theme for all major forums on international protection in 2008. Due to the large number of people affected, UNHCR decided that initiatives need to be specifically targeted to situations with the greatest chance of resolution.

¹ UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2007 (December 2008)
Five refugee situations were selected for immediate focus based on their prospects of success, actual need, negotiations with host states, cost/benefits and UNHCR's capacity. These are:
- Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan
- Rohingya refugees (from Burma) in Bangladesh
- Bosnian and Croatian refugees in Serbia
- Burundian refugees in Tanzania
- Eritrean refugees in eastern Sudan.

Australia has consistently been a strong supporter of international efforts to address protracted refugee situations around the world. In 2008–09 more than half of the refugees accepted for resettlement under Australia's Humanitarian Program are expected to come from protracted situations. Groups resettled in Australia as part of this commitment include:
- Afghans from Iran and Pakistan
- Burundians from Tanzania
- Liberians from Ghana
- Burmese from Thailand, and more recently
- Bhutanese from Nepal
- Rohingya refugees (from Burma) in Bangladesh.

Other assistance includes more than $12.5 million in funding during 2007–08 for projects to improve conditions for refugees and displaced persons living in protracted situations.
The system of international refugee protection

As a member of the international community, Australia shares responsibility for protecting refugees worldwide and resolving refugee situations through the system of international refugee protection.

The system of international refugee protection has a number of elements. They include:

- Preventative measures. These involve providing development assistance, helping with conflict resolution, peace keeping and rebuilding infrastructure.
- Temporary protection in a country of first asylum. If preventative measures fail, humanitarian crises can cause people to leave their home country and seek asylum elsewhere, usually by crossing borders to a neighbouring country (also called a country of first asylum). These refugees need immediate protection until a durable (or long-term) solution can be found.
Durable solutions promoted by UNHCR. Three solutions provide for the long-term protection needs of people displaced by humanitarian crises. They include:

- **Voluntary return (repatriation) to their home country** in conditions of safety and dignity. This is the most desirable outcome for the individual, their society and the international community. Most refugees want to return to their homes when it is safe to do so. Support for reconstruction, reintegration and reconciliation helps ensure the success of repatriation as a durable solution.

- **Local integration in the country of first asylum**. This may be an option if voluntary repatriation is not possible. Helping countries of first asylum to increase their capacity to offer long-term protection enables more refugees to settle. Because the countries of first asylum are usually in the same region as the refugee’s home country, cultural ties can make the integration process easier.

- **Resettlement** in a third country is used to provide protection to refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk in their country of asylum. It is normally only promoted by UNHCR where returning to their home country or local integration may not be suitable, or as part of a responsibility sharing arrangement. Due to ongoing protracted refugee situations, resettlement has become a key element in the system of international refugee protection.
Australia’s commitment to international refugee protection

Australia is an active contributor to the system of international refugee protection. We express this commitment in a number of ways.

Contribution to international policy and resolving refugee situations

Australia is a member of UNHCR’s Executive Committee. This committee meets every year to review and approve UNHCR’s programs and budget, provide advice on international protection and discuss a wide range of other issues. Australia also engages with regional forums to address international protection issues. For example, Australia is a member of the Inter-Governmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants, a regional consultative body on protection and migration issues.

Australia supports comprehensive, integrated responses to humanitarian and refugee situations. We actively seek durable solutions to assist affected populations to integrate into countries of first asylum, return home voluntarily when circumstances allow or be resettled to a third country.

Along with other resettlement countries and UNHCR, Australia has been closely engaged in seeking durable solutions for protracted refugee situations that have persisted for decades. For example, Australia has been a key player in a Core Group of countries to resolve the impasse between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal over the plight of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. The efforts of the Core Group in engaging with the Government of Nepal has enabled UNHCR to conduct a census of these refugees and paved the way for large-scale resettlement in Australia and other countries.

Refugees and other displaced people are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by people smugglers and people traffickers. Australia has reinvigorated efforts to work closely with countries in our region to address the challenges of people smuggling and ensure that refugees are not subjected to dangerous sea journeys. This includes practical support for the care of people intercepted in transit countries while any claims for protection are considered.

Australia has also renewed its commitment to regional forums, such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.
The Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime

Following large numbers of irregular boat arrivals run by people smuggling operations in the Asia-Pacific region, a Bali Process Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime was held in February 2002. Ministers committed to cooperative action to prevent and combat people trafficking, smuggling and related transnational crime. The Bali Process has since brought together 44 source, transit and receiving (destination) countries from throughout the region as well as numerous international organisations and observer countries.

The third ministerial conference was held in April 2009. This conference included ministers from more than 40 countries, as well as key international organisations such as UNHCR. The forum was co-chaired by Australia and Indonesia. Ministers discussed regional solutions to current and emerging challenges on people smuggling and human trafficking and agreed to continue a program of practical cooperation to combat these issues.

The Bali Process has organised and delivered numerous successful workshops for member countries aimed at developing essential skills and good immigration practices. In April 2009, a Bali Process Workshop on Document Examination at the Border was attended by more than 50 delegates. The workshop was an opportunity to enhance regional cooperation through multilateral engagement and to develop appropriate document examination skills and techniques in the region for the prevention of people smuggling and trafficking activities.

For more information please visit www.baliprocess.net.

International development assistance

Australia helps to ease the plight of refugees and displaced persons through targeted development assistance provided by Australian Government agencies such as the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

Australia’s aid program provides assistance for the care, repatriation and resettlement of refugees and people displaced by disaster and conflict. Australia contributes financially to UNHCR and other key humanitarian agencies and supports protecting and improving conditions for refugees, finding durable solutions to refugee crises and the reintegration of returnees, particularly in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Australia also provides approximately 150 000 tonnes of food aid every year to people in crisis in countries such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Chad. Australia’s humanitarian aid program includes projects targeting disaster risk reduction and preparedness; conflict prevention, management and reduction; peace building; and post-emergency recovery and reconstruction. In 2008–09, the Australian Government committed $320 million for humanitarian, emergency and refugee programs and $60 million for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Iraq (Australia’s International Development Assistance Budget 2008–09, AusAID, May 2008).
Australia also contributes to the long-term resolution of refugee situations and the stabilisation and protection of displaced populations through the Displaced Persons Program. In 2007–08, Australia's assistance included projects delivered through international organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) such as:

- the provision of humanitarian assistance and legal protection for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal
- immediate relief and rehabilitation assistance to displaced Iraqis
- construction of shelters and improvement of living conditions for displaced Rohingya refugee families in Bangladesh.

Asylum

The onshore component of Australia's Humanitarian Program fulfils Australia's obligations under the Refugees Convention and the 1967 Protocol by granting Protection visas to applicants within Australia who are found to be refugees. Further information is in Chapter Three.

Resettlement

Some countries receive large numbers of asylum seekers, and focus their efforts on assisting those who claim their protection under the Refugees Convention. As Australia receives comparatively few asylum seekers, we go beyond our international obligations and work closely with UNHCR to help protect refugees in other countries through resettlement.
Australia is one of just ten countries that operate well-established and successful resettlement programs. Our program is designed to help people who are in greatest need and is one of the largest of its kind (Australia, Canada and the United States are the top three resettlement countries in the world). In addition to countries with consistent programs, others also resettle refugees on a less regular basis. This means the total number of resettlement countries changes from year to year, with 14 countries resettling more than 75,000 people in 2007.

Australia’s refugee caseload varies over time, to reflect changes in the global refugee situation. The Humanitarian Program offers resettlement to refugees and others overseas with links to Australia, who are subject to human rights abuses in their home countries, in need of assistance and for whom other durable solutions cannot be found.

Further information is in Chapter Four.

**Figure 3: Third-country resettlement of refugees by destination in 2007***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>Other (8 countries)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48 300</td>
<td>11 200</td>
<td>9600**</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>2560</td>
<td>75 300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* UNHCR statistics are based on a calendar year, while Australian statistics are based on the financial year. Statistics for the USA, Canada and Australia may also include persons resettled for the purpose of family reunification or under other humanitarian programs.

** In the 2007–08 program year Australia resettled 10,799 people from overseas and granted 2215 Protection visas within Australia.

Source: UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2007 (December 2008)

**People potentially displaced by climate change**

There are increasing calls globally for governments to be more proactive in response to the possibility that people may be displaced as a result of climate change. The Australian Government is firmly committed to helping shape a global solution to reduce emissions. At the same time, the Australian Government is providing practical assistance to our Pacific and Asian neighbours to adapt to those impacts of climate change which cannot be avoided. In 2007, the government committed $150 million over three years from Australia’s international aid budget to address climate adaptation needs in vulnerable countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Australian Government supports the recent Niue Declaration on Climate Change, which recognises the desire of the Pacific peoples to continue living in their own countries. Where feasible, the best response is generally adaptation and well-supported internal relocation rather than resettlement. However, where relocation is not possible, the Australian Government will consider—in close consultation with others in the region—how best to respond to the needs of these people and to ensure that displacement does not become a source of instability.
From Bhutan:
Bikram’s story

The majority of Bhutanese refugees are descendants of Nepali people who immigrated to Southern Bhutan in the late 1800s in search of farmland. Following a census in the late 1980s, the Royal Bhutanese Government began to enforce citizenship laws to stress its Tibetan-based Bhutanese culture. These actions further alienated the minority Nepali-speaking community living in the south. By 1990 there was turbulent ethnic unrest as the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese fought for greater respect for their rights. Large numbers of Bhutanese began to flee and seek refuge in eastern Nepal. These people have been confined to seven refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal since that time.

Bikram, his parents and his two sisters are Southern Bhutanese people of Nepalese origin known as Lhotshampas. Although all the family were born in Bhutan, they are regarded as being of Nepalese origin as his paternal grandfather was born in Nepal.

Following the unrest in 1990, Bikram’s family were forcefully evicted from Bhutan. They crossed the border to Sikkim and travelled on to Nepal. Bikram’s family lived for 16 years in one of the UNHCR camps that had been set up for the refugees. Their camp housed around 33 000 people.

UNHCR proposed resettlement in a third country, Australia.

Before travel, the family undertook the Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO). Bikram said ‘I need to admit that the program was really useful and we benefited a lot from it. I can say that it is really close to reality. Some things are even better than described.’

The family were resettled in Adelaide and Bikram found the first few days somewhat nerve wracking. ‘Everything was new and first time for me… the accent was really a pain, but I have taken English classes to improve my ears and tongue.’

‘Finally we have something to call our home. We are really grateful to the government and the people of Australia for giving us a new life. Thank you for all the support you have provided in the course of the resettlement program.’
Chapter Two
Australia’s Humanitarian Program

What is the Humanitarian Program?
The Australian Government has two permanent immigration programs. The Migration Program caters for people who wish to work in Australia or be reunited with their families. The Humanitarian Program assists refugees and others in humanitarian need to resettle in Australia and rebuild their lives.

The Humanitarian Program has two important functions. It offers:

- protection to people already in Australia who are found to be refugees according to the Refugees Convention (known as the onshore protection/asylum component)
- resettlement in Australia for people overseas who are in the greatest need of humanitarian assistance (known as the offshore resettlement component).

Chapters Three and Four of this booklet provide further details on the onshore and offshore components of the Humanitarian Program.

Planning the Humanitarian Program
Australia's Humanitarian Program follows the financial year 1 July to 30 June. Each year, the Australian Government decides the size and regional composition of the program, taking into consideration advice from UNHCR on global resettlement need and priorities. These decisions also take into account Australia's capacity to provide comprehensive support services that assist newly arrived entrants to settle in Australia.

The Humanitarian Program is characterised by its flexibility. Each year, the size and focus of the program changes in response to evolving humanitarian situations and changes to the global need for resettlement. From 1996–97 to 2003–04, Australia's Humanitarian Program was set at 12 000 new places each year.

In 2004–05 the Humanitarian Program was increased to 13 000 new places and remained at this level until 2008. In 2008–09 the program increased to 13 500 new places, with 6500 set aside for the offshore Refugee category. The additional 500 places is a one-off increase for refugees affected by the conflict in Iraq.

The consultation process
The government has a comprehensive consultation process to inform decisions about the size and composition of the program. This process can include:

- preparation of a discussion paper on the Humanitarian Program that identifies key issues, and is made available on the department's website
- consideration of UNHCR advice on global resettlement needs and priorities
- a submission from the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) incorporating the views of more than 125 member bodies and other refugee sector organisations
inter-governmental consultations—DIAC undertakes broad discussions with many Australian Government departments, including the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Department of Health and Ageing and AusAID

an invitation from the minister to state and territory premiers and chief ministers and their opposition counterparts to provide submissions

consultations with peak refugee and humanitarian bodies such as the RCOA, Amnesty International and the Australian Refugee Association

the views of the Australian public expressed in letters, submissions and meetings throughout the year.

Once this consultation has been completed, the government decides how many people will be accepted under the Humanitarian Program, and what the regional priorities will be. These decisions are usually announced around May.
A short history of Australia’s Humanitarian Program

Since the end of World War II, Australia has accepted around 700,000 refugees and people in humanitarian need.

Humanitarian resettlement in Australia began with around 170,000 Eastern Europeans who had been displaced by World War II arriving between 1947 and 1954. The first two decades welcomed thousands of refugees from crises throughout Europe, including the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Warsaw Pact military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

There were many changes to global politics during the 1970s and therefore changes in the groups needing resettlement. The 1973 coup d'état in Chile brought General Augusto Pinochet to power and saw the first of more than 16,000 people from Central and South America begin to arrive in Australia. 1975 was another significant year, with civil war compelling 18,000 Lebanese to migrate to Australia and the fall of South Vietnam sparking massive outflows of Indochinese refugees seeking asylum in South East Asia and directly in Australia.

The Indochinese refugee crisis prompted the government of the time to introduce a clear refugee policy and administrative machinery in 1977. Before this, Australia’s approach to refugee resettlement was largely to respond to specific international events as they arose.

The key components of the new policy announced by the then Immigration Minister Michael MacKellar were:

- the decision to accept refugees should always remain with the Australian Government while honouring our international obligations
- Australia should increasingly engage with the international community to resolve global refugee issues
- a regular and planned Humanitarian Program should be established, based on community consultation and Australia’s capacity to assist (there was recognition that unlike other migrants, refugees need a program specifically tailored to their special needs)
- enhanced administrative mechanisms to deal with refugee issues should be established, with the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (the portfolio at the time) as the lead agency
- an efficient and fair mechanism to determine onshore protection claims should be established.

These basic principles have remained fundamental to Australia’s refugee policy for more than 30 years and have been flexible and robust enough to respond to evolving circumstances.
Until late 1981, almost all arrivals under the Humanitarian Program were refugees. The Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) was introduced in 1981 to provide resettlement in Australia for people who were living outside their home country, had suffered substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights in their home country and who had family or community ties to Australia.

The Indochinese situation was the focus of Australia's Humanitarian Program for close to a decade, but by the mid 1980s the Humanitarian Program had become global with priority being given to applicants who had family or other close links with Australia. The program had diversified with up to 40 nationalities represented, including significant Eastern European, Latin/Central American and Middle Eastern caseloads.

By the late 1980s the SHP had steadily become the main category in the program. 1989 was a significant year in the evolution of the Humanitarian Program and associated policy. In that year:

- immigration decision making moved from a policy/discretion based system to a regulatory environment involving an application and a legal decision-making process
- Australia played a key role in the development and operations of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indochinese remaining in camps in South East Asia
  - by the end of the CPA in 1996, Australia had resettled approximately 19 000 Indochinese under the CPA and 150 000 in total since 1975
- the Woman at Risk and Emergency Rescue visa subclasses were introduced and onshore Protection visa grants were included in the Humanitarian Program for the first time.
The aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991 resulted in a significant increase in the Middle Eastern caseload. The 1990s also saw growing resettlement following the war in the former Yugoslavia. At the same time there was ongoing community support for assisting other ethnic groups with close links to Australia whose lives were severely affected by conflicts in their countries, but who did not meet traditional humanitarian resettlement criteria. The government’s response was the introduction of the Special Assistance Category (SAC) in April 1991.

Overall, ten SACs were introduced. These included the following groups:

- Soviet minorities
- East Timorese living in Portugal, Mozambique or Macau
- citizens of the former Yugoslavia
- Burmese
- Vietnamese
- Cambodians
- Sri Lankans
- Sudanese.

The major growth in the SAC program occurred after the SAC for citizens of the former Yugoslavia was introduced.

In January 1993, the government separated the Humanitarian Program from the Migration Program to provide a better balance between Australia’s international humanitarian objectives and the domestic, social and economic goals guiding the annual Migration Program.

In 1995–96, SACs provided visas to 6910 people and more than half of the Humanitarian Program comprised either SAC or onshore protection grants. Following a review of the SAC program in 1996 all SACs were gradually brought to a close by the end of 2001.

Other changes introduced in the 1990s included:

- linking the onshore and offshore components of the Humanitarian Program to improve program management
- incorporating split family provisions in the SHP to enable permanent refugee and humanitarian visa holders to propose members of their immediate family.

The last decade has seen many changes for the Humanitarian Program. A spike in the number of people arriving in Australia by boat and applying for asylum in 1999–2000 led to a range of operational and legislative measures introduced in 1999 and 2001, including:

- penalties for people smugglers
- Temporary Protection visas (TPVs)
- the excision of some Australian territory from the migration zone
- the offshore processing of asylum seekers who arrived at these locations.

Following the 2007 federal election, the incoming government closed Offshore Processing Centres on Nauru and in Manus Province in Papua New Guinea and abolished TPVs.
Whilst maintaining excision, the government also introduced enhanced processing arrangements for asylum seekers arriving at excised Australian territories. These arrangements include access to publicly funded migration assistance, access to independent merits review and oversight by the Ombudsman.

In the last decade, the overall size of the Humanitarian Program increased in response to the global need for resettlement, from 12 000 places in 1998–99 to 13 500 places in 2008–09. Initially, Europe was the largest source region with around half those resettled between 1998 and 2001, but at the same time the proportion of resettlement from the Africa region increased from around 16 per cent in 1998–99 to a peak of 70 per cent between 2003 and 2005. Main countries of birth for these entrants included Sudan, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Sierra Leone. Resettlement from this region dropped off again after 2005 due to improvements to the situation in some African conflict areas and successful UNHCR repatriation efforts, but Africa remains a key focus of the Humanitarian Program today.

Due to various conflicts in the Middle East and South West Asia (predominantly Afghanistan and Iraq) this region has also seen large numbers of people in need of humanitarian assistance. Since 1998–99 Australia has offered 25 and 40 per cent, with an average of 30 per cent, of the available resettlement places each year to people from these areas.

Since 2005–06 the focus of the program has gradually shifted to also include Asia, due to the availability and access to refugee groups such as the Burmese in Thailand and Malaysia and, more recently, Bhutanese in Nepal. In 2007–08, around 33 per cent of offshore humanitarian visas were granted to people from this region.

In 2008–09 the Humanitarian Program focused equally on the current priority regions, Africa, Asia and the Middle East (including South West Asia), with 33 per cent of places allocated for each and the remaining one per cent reserved for contingencies.

Australia has a long and proud tradition of resettling refugees and people in humanitarian need. The fundamentals of the Humanitarian Program and associated policy that were established 30 years ago have served the Australian Government and community remarkably well and have assisted many thousands of refugees to find safety and rebuild their lives. Importantly, the Humanitarian Program has also been able to evolve over time to respond to changing domestic and international environments and to accommodate changes in government objectives.
Figure 4: Waves of refugees to Australia

1. More than 2800 people from Sierra Leone resettled since 1999
2. Around 2300 Liberians resettled since 2004
3. 170 000 displaced persons from Eastern Europe between 1947 and 1954
4. Almost 6000 Czechs resettled after the Prague Spring in 1968
5. 14 000 Hungarians resettled after the 1956 uprising
6. Around 42 000 people resettled from the former Yugoslavia since 1991
7. 18 000 Lebanese resettled after the 1975 civil war
8. Around 28 000 Sudanese resettled since 1996
9. Around 28 000 Sudanese resettled since 1996
10. More than 2700 Somalis resettled since 1996
11. Almost 43 000 people resettled from the Middle East and South West Asia since the late 1970s
12. 14 000 White Russians from China resettled between 1947 and 1985
13. Almost 6500 Burmese resettled since 2004
14. More than 155 000 Vietnamese resettled since 1975
15. More than 16 000 people from Central and South America resettled since 1973
Chapter two: Australia’s Humanitarian Program
From Afghanistan:  
Nerjes’ story

For 20 years, Afghanistan has been ravaged by war and violence. It is the world’s largest refugee producing nation, and millions have fled their homes in search of safety.

Hundreds of thousands have been killed or injured in indiscriminate bombing and shelling of residential areas. Thousands have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and raped, ‘disappeared’, or murdered for their political affiliation, ethnic identity, gender, or in reprisal attacks by the various armed groups fighting for control of territory. Schools, hospitals, homes, and farms have been burned and destroyed leaving millions of Afghans displaced and dispossessed. (Amnesty International)

Nerjes is a young Afghan woman from the Hazara ethnic minority.

In 1999, Nerjes’ father fled Afghanistan and the persecution he had suffered under the Taliban. He undertook a long and dangerous journey to Australia in search of security for himself and his family.

Soon afterwards, Nerjes was also forced to leave the country where she was born, travelling to Syria with her mother, four brothers and two nephews.

When Nerjes’ father arrived in Australia he immediately began the difficult task of finding his family among the millions of Afghan refugees living in countries throughout the Middle East and South West Asia. After initial attempts by the Red Cross Tracing Service were unsuccessful, luck, friends and an unusual family name brought him the good news that his family was still alive.

He worked to save the money he would need to bring his family to join him. In 2006 his hard work was rewarded. Nerjes remembers their reunion at Sydney Airport as a very happy moment, ending more than six years of separation and anxiety.

Since arriving in Australia, Nerjes and her family are working hard to build new lives in regional Australia. Her nephew, Moslem, grins when he says he wants to be a police officer and work with multicultural communities. On Australia Day 2009 Nerjes proudly pledged her loyalty to Australia and became an Australian citizen.

With a hint of sadness but in the calm tone of many refugees, Nerjes speaks for her family when she says that the only thing that could make their lives perfect would be finding the rest of their family members still lost overseas, and sharing with them the new sense of security they have found in Australia.
Chapter Three
Protection—the onshore component of the Humanitarian Program

Australia’s obligations to refugees

Australia’s fundamental obligation under the Refugees Convention (see Chapter One) is to provide protection to people who are in Australia and who face persecution in their home country on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. This includes not returning refugees or asylum seekers to places where their lives or liberties are in danger (non-refoulement).

The onshore (or protection) component of the Humanitarian Program enables people seeking asylum in Australia to have their claims for protection assessed. People in Australia who are found to be refugees and who satisfy health and character requirements are granted Protection visas.

Figure 5: Top ten nationalities of initial Protection visa applications lodged and top ten nationalities of Protection visas granted* in 2007–08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Initial Protection visa applications lodged</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Protection visas granted**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China (PRC)</td>
<td>1234</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>China (PRC)</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3987</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

* These numbers include some Protection visa grants that are not counted towards the Humanitarian Program, such as children born in Australia to Protection visa holders.

** Grants may include applicants from previous years
Protection in the industrialised world

Australia is one of the countries responding to the global increase in asylum claims, although Australia does not figure in the top ten countries receiving asylum seekers compared to the US and Europe.

UNHCR reports that in 2008 there was a 12 per cent rise in new asylum applications submitted in industrialised countries. After the United States (49 000 new claims), the main countries of destination for asylum seekers in 2008 were Canada (36 900), France (35 200), Italy (31 200) and the United Kingdom (30 500).

It can be expected that, in the future, many thousands of refugees will continue to flee their homes and seek protection in other countries.

Figure 6: New asylum applications in industrialised countries during 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>New applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>49 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>36 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>35 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>31 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>30 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>24 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>21 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>19 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>16 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>14 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (43 countries)</td>
<td>98 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrialised world total</td>
<td>383 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNHCR, Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries 2008 (March 2009)

Protection in Australia

Asylum seekers who are found to be in need of protection under the Refugees Convention and who meet health and character requirements are granted a permanent Protection visa.

The overwhelming majority of around 4000 people who seek Australia’s protection each year arrive lawfully by commercial aircraft. Asylum seekers arriving by boat in an unauthorised manner constitute a very small proportion of the total and have their claims considered on Christmas Island.
Assessment of an application

Each Protection visa application is assessed by a departmental decision-maker in accordance with the provisions in the Refugees Convention and the requirements of Australian law. The process takes into account all relevant information that is available concerning the human rights situation in the applicant's home country. Applicants are given a chance to comment on any personal information under consideration, and update their claims if country conditions change. These procedures ensure that the decision making process is fair, open, objective and consistent.

Information consulted by decision-makers comes from the following sources:

- the department's Country Research Service, which gathers information from sources such as the international media, academics, international agencies, human rights groups, Australian immigration offices overseas and foreign governments specifically for use in the assessment of protection claims
- relevant departmental guidelines and advice on the law, policy and procedures
- the applicant's visa application and any further comments provided in writing or in an interview (with the assistance of an interpreter if necessary).

Fact Sheet 61 – Seeking Asylum in Australia provides information on how to apply for a Protection visa. This fact sheet is available at www.immi.gov.au or from the department's offices.

Health and character checks

By law, all visa applicants must satisfy public interest criteria intended to protect the Australian community. These criteria include health and character requirements.

Health requirement: the health requirement applies to all applicants for humanitarian visas and any dependent family members included in their application. Applicants must undergo a health check, which generally includes an x-ray and medical examination.

This requirement is designed to prevent risks to public health, reduce public expenditure on health and community services and safeguard access to health services for Australians.

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship may decide to waive the health requirement if there is no threat to public health and safety and the applicant’s circumstances are so compelling that they outweigh the cost to the Australian community.

Character requirements: other public interest criteria help to prevent the entry of people who pose a threat to the community or to community harmony, or who place national security at risk.

Under these requirements decision-makers consider the applicant's criminal record, involvement in war crimes or crimes against humanity and any other conduct that might pose a threat to the Australian community.
The Refugees Convention’s character provisions

Generally, the Refugees Convention prohibits Australia from returning refugees to a country where they will face persecution. Exceptions are made for people who:

- are regarded as a danger to the security of Australia
- have been convicted of a serious crime and are a danger to the community, or
- are suspected of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Application success rate

Of the initial applications decided in 2007–08, some 46 per cent were successful. It is important to note that this figure varies across nationalities and can also vary at different times for applicants of the same nationality depending on country circumstances.

Review process

If a Protection visa application is refused, the applicant may apply to the appropriate tribunal for a review of the merits of the case. Applications for merits review must be lodged within 28 days of the decision notification.

A decision to refuse a Protection visa is reviewable by the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT). The exception is for applications refused for character reasons, which are reviewed by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

The Refugee Review Tribunal

The RRT is an independent statutory body with the power to review decisions on Protection visa applications that do not involve character matters. The RRT examines the applicant’s claims against the provisions in the Refugees Convention, providing an informal non-adversarial setting to hear evidence.

The RRT has the power to do one of the following:

- uphold the primary decision—agreeing that the applicant is not entitled to a Protection visa
- refer the matter to the department for reconsideration—the department makes a fresh assessment of the application, considering the RRT’s directions and recommendations
- set aside the department’s decision and substitute a new decision—if the RRT finds that the applicant is entitled to a Protection visa.

A decision by the RRT to set aside a primary refusal does not necessarily indicate an error in the earlier decision by the department. The RRT considers each Protection visa application afresh and takes into account any new claims or information advanced by the applicant and any changes in country information which have occurred since the initial decision.

During 2007–08, the RRT upheld the department’s decision in 71.7 per cent of all applications for review, while 18.2 per cent were either referred to the department for reconsideration or set aside. Further information is available at www.mrt-rrt.gov.au.
Ministerial intervention on humanitarian grounds

The Migration Act gives the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship the power to substitute a decision of either the RRT or AAT if he considers it to be in the public interest.

Procedures for ministerial intervention are currently under review, and several options for improving this process are under consideration.

Judicial review

Judicial review is available to consider whether legal errors occurred during the decision-making process. An application for judicial review must be made within 28 days of notification of the tribunal's decision.

Unsuccessful applicants

Individuals whose Protection visa applications have been rejected by a tribunal and who are no longer pursuing judicial review or ministerial intervention, who have no other legal reason to remain, have 28 days to depart Australia. If they stay beyond this 28-day period, they may be placed in immigration detention or removed from Australia.

Processing times

All Protection visa decisions are to be made by the department within 90 days of receipt of the application. Similarly, merits review of Protection visa decisions by the RRT must be finalised within 90 days of the application for review.

Cases where these time limits are not met are the subject of periodic reports to the Minister and are tabled in Parliament. This ensures that the department remains open and accountable at each stage of the application process. In 2007–08, the department decided 80 per cent of Protection visa applications within 90 days. In most cases where this timeframe was not met, delays were caused by factors outside the department's control such as security clearances by external agencies.
The applicant’s status during processing

The majority of asylum seekers are people who have arrived in Australia on a valid visa and subsequently apply for protection. Most of these applicants receive a bridging visa upon lodging their application, which allows them to remain lawfully in the community until the application is finalised. Many bridging visas provide the applicant with work rights in Australia and access to Medicare benefits.

Any person who arrives in Australia without a valid visa may be detained unless they are granted a visa or leave the country. Persons in detention who apply for protection receive priority processing of their applications and are provided with assistance for their applications under the Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme (IAAAS – see page 33 for details).

Applicants in detention who are refused a Protection visa at the primary stage are also able to seek merits review of the decision in the appropriate tribunal (see page 30) and to pursue judicial review or request ministerial intervention.

New immigration detention policy

In July 2008, the following seven ‘Key Immigration Detention Values’ were announced:

1. Mandatory detention is an essential component of strong border control.
2. To support the integrity of Australia’s immigration program, three groups will be subject to mandatory detention:
   i. all unauthorised arrivals, for management of health, identity and security risks to the community
   ii. unlawful non-citizens who present unacceptable risks to the community
   iii. unlawful non-citizens who have repeatedly refused to comply with their visa conditions.
3. Children, including juvenile foreign fishers and, where possible, their families, will not be detained in an immigration detention centre.
4. Detention that is indefinite or otherwise arbitrary is not acceptable and the length and conditions of detention, including the appropriateness of both the accommodation and the services provided, would be subject to regular review.
5. Detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time.
6. People in detention will be treated fairly and reasonably within the law.
7. Conditions of detention will ensure the inherent dignity of the human person.

Complementary Protection

In May 2009, the government announced that it would introduce legislation to enable people to whom Australia owes non-refoulement obligations under international treaties other than the Refugees Convention, to have their claims considered under the Protection visa framework rather than through ministerial intervention. This would include people who would be killed, tortured or subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment in their homeland, but would not be at risk for one of the specific reasons set out in the Refugees Convention.
The Resolution of Status visa

On 9 August 2008, the government abolished Temporary Protection visas (TPVs). Certain Temporary Humanitarian visas (THVs) granted to people outside Australia were also abolished on that date.

All people found to be owed protection and who meet health and character requirements are now granted a permanent Protection visa. These new arrangements treat refugees fairly and with dignity and will enable them to engage fully in the Australian community.

In addition, current and former TPV and THV holders who have remained in Australia are now eligible for a Resolution of Status (RoS) visa. The RoS visa was introduced to allow these individuals a speedy resolution of their status. It provides permanent residence and access to the same benefits and entitlements as the permanent Protection visa.

Assistance for asylum seekers

The department is committed to fair and reasonable dealings with everyone who applies for a Protection visa. Assistance is provided to those who need help with lodging a Protection visa application and supporting themselves while the application is processed:

Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme (IAAAS)

The IAAAS is a service administered by the department and provided by registered migration agents. It helps asylum seekers in detention and disadvantaged Protection visa applicants in the community to prepare, lodge and present visa applications at the primary and merits review stages.

The IAAAS is wholly funded by the government and is delivered by 23 service providers throughout Australia.

Asylum Seeker Assistance (ASA)

A Protection visa applicant in the community can request ASA to assist with basic food and accommodation needs if there are delays in processing the visa application or if they qualify for support on other grounds.

ASA provides financial assistance equivalent to 89 per cent of that available to Australians through Centrelink. The benefits also include, as needed, basic health care, assistance buying medicines, torture and trauma counselling services and bereavement assistance. The scheme is funded by the department and administered by the Australian Red Cross. Protection visa applications lodged by clients who receive ASA are processed as a matter of priority.

Further information about the IAAAS and ASA Scheme is provided in Fact Sheet 62 – Assistance for Asylum seekers in Australia and Fact Sheet 63 – Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme which are available on the department's website.

Many religious and community based organisations and volunteers also support asylum seekers in a variety of ways.
From Burma: Paw Gay’s story

In the last 25 years, more than 100,000 Burmese refugees have sought refuge in Thailand.

When she was just four years old, Paw Gay and her family fled their village in Burma following major offensives against the ethnic Karen by the Burmese Military.

During the night, they left their home and hid in the forest. Every few days they had to find a new hiding spot to avoid being found. Eventually they crossed into Thailand to seek refuge in the camps.

Paw Gay and her family lived in refugee camps for more than 20 years. The majority of those years were spent in Mae La camp which, with a population of more than 45,000, is the largest refugee camp in Thailand.

The camp is administered by the Thai Ministry of the Interior. UNHCR assists with registration activities and basic services are coordinated by NGOs. Whilst food, water, some health care and education are provided, UNHCR reports that the camp is overcrowded and there are frequently problems with basic supplies such as food and potable water.

In 2004 Paw Gay applied for resettlement and in 2006 was granted a visa through Australia’s Humanitarian Program.

Since arriving in Australia, Paw Gay has improved her English through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and has used her language skills to assist other Burmese refugees to settle. She plans to study community development and is extremely happy that the rest of her family have now joined her in Australia.
Chapter Four
Resettlement—the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program

The offshore component of the Humanitarian Program assists people who are subject to persecution or substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of their human rights in their home countries and have fled their home country.

Since the end of World War II around 700 000 people have been resettled under the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program. Of these, more than 100 000 refugees have arrived in the last decade, representing 40 different nationalities.

Figure 7: Humanitarian Program visa grants by category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>4134</td>
<td>5511</td>
<td>6022</td>
<td>6003</td>
<td>6004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Humanitarian</td>
<td>8927</td>
<td>6755</td>
<td>6836</td>
<td>5275</td>
<td>5026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore Protection</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>1272</td>
<td>1701</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Humanitarian Concern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13 851</td>
<td>13 178</td>
<td>14 144</td>
<td>13 017</td>
<td>13 014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Humanitarian visa categories and subclasses

Within the Humanitarian Program there are five visa subclasses. Four subclasses fall within the Refugee category and one within the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP).

Refugee category

The Refugee category assists people who are subject to persecution in their home country and have a strong need for resettlement. Persecution may be targeted on the basis of race, nationality, religion, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and involve harassment such as arbitrary arrests and interrogation, detention, damage to property, physical abuse including assault and in extreme cases, torture.

Travel for successful applicants under the Refugee category is fully funded by the Australian Government. Australia works closely with UNHCR in selecting people under this category, as most successful applicants are referred to Australia by UNHCR for resettlement.
An elderly Burmese Rohingya refugee, who has lived in squalid camps in Bangladesh for many years
© UNHCR / G.M.B. Akash / June 2006
The visa subclasses within the Refugee category are:

- **Refugee** for applicants who have fled persecution in their home country and are living outside their home country
- **In-country Special Humanitarian** for applicants living in their home country who are subject to persecution
- **Emergency Rescue** for applicants who are living in or outside their home country and who are in urgent need of protection because there is an immediate threat to their life and security
- **Woman at Risk** for female applicants and their dependants who are subject to persecution or are people of concern to UNHCR, are living outside their home country without the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender. This subclass recognises the priority given by UNHCR to the protection of refugee women who are in particularly vulnerable situations.

In 2007–08, 13.7 per cent of the Refugee allocation was granted to Woman at Risk applicants, exceeding the nominal annual target of 10.5 per cent (see Figure 8). Since the Woman at Risk visa subclass was established in 1989 a total of 8810 Woman at Risk visas have been granted. In May 2009, the government announced it would increase its target for women at risk and their dependents to 12 per cent of the Refugee allocation.

**Figure 8: Woman at Risk grants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Total Refugee grants</th>
<th>Top 5 nationalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00–01</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>3997</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Yugoslavia (Former), Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01–02</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>4160</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Yugoslavia (Former), Iraq, Sudan, Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02–03</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>4376</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Sudan, Liberia, Iraq, Yugoslavia (Former)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03–04</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>4134</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04–05</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>5511</td>
<td>Liberia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Burundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05–06</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>6022</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Liberia, Burundi, Burma, Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06–07</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>6003</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Burma, Congo (Democratic Republic), Burundi, Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07–08</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>6004</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Burma, Congo (Democratic Republic), Iraq, Somalia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: this table measures Woman at Risk grants as a proportion of all Refugee visas granted

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship
The Special Humanitarian Program

The SHP is for people who have been subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of their human rights in their home country, are living outside their home country at the time of application and have links with Australia. Substantial discrimination involves the deprivation of their basic human rights such as access to education and employment, freedom of speech and freedom to practice one's religion.

Applications for SHP visas must be supported by a proposer in Australia. SHP proposers help the applicant organise and pay for travel to Australia, accommodation and initial orientation in Australia if the applicant is granted an SHP visa. SHP proposers must be an Australian citizen or permanent resident over the age of 18, an eligible New Zealand citizen or an organisation operating in Australia.

People who would like to propose an SHP applicant can find more information, including application forms, on the department's website at www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore.

No-interest travel loans scheme

To assist SHP visa holders and their proposers to fund the cost of travel to Australia, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) operates a no-interest travel loan scheme.

The scheme received Commonwealth funding in 2005 to increase the number of people who could access loans. The department continues to work with IOM to ensure the scheme is as effective as possible and has the greatest coverage.

Further information and application forms can be found at www.iom.int/australia/projects.html.

The International Organization for Migration

Established in 1951 as an intergovernmental organisation to resettle European displaced persons, refugees and migrants, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has now grown to encompass a variety of migration management activities throughout the world. Acting with its partners in the international community, IOM upholds the human dignity and well-being of migrants; encourages social and economic development through migration; assists in meeting the operational challenges of migration and advances understanding of migration issues.

Source: IOM website

Assessment of an application

People who apply for resettlement in Australia must meet criteria set down in Australian law. Each applicant is individually assessed against these criteria, which are designed to ensure that visas are granted to applicants with the most compelling need for humanitarian resettlement. Requirements also include health and character checks. Applicants must be outside Australia when they apply and when the application is finalised.
While all refugee applications are processed by Australian immigration staff in overseas offices, most SHP applications from people in Africa and the Middle East (including South West Asia) are lodged at Offshore Humanitarian Processing Centres in Sydney and Melbourne, and after initial processing are either declined or referred to the appropriate overseas office for further processing. For details on application lodgement procedures please refer to the department’s website www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian.

Figure 9: Number of applications lodged for the past five program years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>18 996</td>
<td>19 994</td>
<td>12 090</td>
<td>19 957</td>
<td>12 880</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Humanitarian</td>
<td>59 975</td>
<td>70 545</td>
<td>69 592</td>
<td>60 329</td>
<td>34 451</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78 971</td>
<td>90 539</td>
<td>81 682</td>
<td>80 286</td>
<td>47 331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Health and character checks

As outlined in Chapter Three, all visa applicants must satisfy public interest criteria intended to protect the Australian community. These criteria include health and character requirements.

Pre-departure medical screening

Pre-departure medical screening (PDMS) is a voluntary health check typically undertaken around three days before travel to Australia. This check is in addition to the stringent health check applicants must undertake before a visa can be granted. It ensures that visa holders are fit to travel to Australia, recognising the possibility for changes in their health between initial health assessment and departure.

Depending on the location, PDMS may include testing for communicable diseases, a physical examination and assessment of the visa holder’s general health status and fitness to travel.

If any health problems identified at PDMS compromise the visa holder’s fitness to travel, medical treatment is provided free of charge. Their visa status is not affected and they can travel to Australia as soon as they are considered fit to do so. PDMS also links clients to healthcare services they need after they arrive in Australia.

First introduced in East and West Africa in August 2005, PDMS services were expanded in 2007–08 to include Southern Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan, India, Nepal and Malaysia. The location of PDMS services will continue to reflect the source locations of the refugee and humanitarian caseload.
Application processing times

The department appreciates the difficulties faced by humanitarian visa applicants while their applications are processed, and gives a high priority to finalising these applications.

Service standards require that 75 per cent of all offshore humanitarian applications are finalised within 12 months of lodgement.

Application processing times will vary according to circumstances in the country of residence, the results of medical checks, any character concerns prompted by the applicant's personal history and other variables that are outside the control of visa decision-makers.

Family reunion

During humanitarian crises and flights to safety, families sometimes become separated. The Humanitarian Program provides a means for separated immediate family members of humanitarian entrants to reunite with their family in Australia.

An immediate family member is either the proposer's spouse, dependant child or, if the proposer is not 18 or more years of age, the proposer's parent.

If a humanitarian visa holder in Australia included details of an immediate family member on their original visa application, they can apply for family reunion within five years of their visa being granted. Eligible family members do not need to meet persecution or substantial discrimination criteria, but they must prove they have an immediate family relationship and meet health and character requirements.

Applicants accepted under these provisions are usually granted the same visa subclass as their immediate family member in Australia. Holders of Protection or Resolution of Status visas are also eligible to be reunited with immediate family members under the Humanitarian program. These applicants are granted SHP visas.

Applicants who do not meet the family reunion criteria are also assessed against the SHP and Refugee categories to determine whether they meet the persecution and substantial discrimination criteria in their own right. SHP applicants do not need to prove an immediate family relationship to the proposer, but the proposer must undertake to help the applicant meet the cost of travel to Australia and provide initial settlement assistance after they arrive.

Humanitarian entrants may also apply to sponsor family under other family migration categories in Australia's Migration Program. Further information on these categories can be found at www.immi.gov.au/migrants/family.
Current regional focus of the program

**Africa**

Africa remains a priority region for resettlement internationally and in Australia. Many people throughout the Africa region have been affected by armed conflict and civil disorder. Political instability and the management of population flows present significant challenges.

In 2007–08, around 30 per cent of all people granted visas under the offshore Humanitarian Program were from the Africa region, particularly Sudan, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Sierra Leone, but also Somalia, Togo, Ethiopia, Mauritania and Eritrea.

In the 2008–09 program year around 33 per cent of people coming to Australia under the offshore Humanitarian Program are expected to be from the Africa region.

**Middle East (including South West Asia)**

Over the last decade Australia has taken significant numbers of refugees from the Middle East region (including South West Asia) as a result of the Gulf War, conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the targeting of minority ethnic groups for human rights abuses.

In 2007–08, around 35 per cent of people granted visas under the offshore Humanitarian Program were from the Middle East (including South West Asia), particularly Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2008–09, 33 per cent of the available offshore Humanitarian Program visas were allocated for people from this high priority region. In addition, 500 refugee places were set aside in 2008–09 specifically for Iraqi refugees, in recognition of their critical resettlement needs.
Asia

Over the last few years, an increasing percentage of offshore humanitarian visa grants have been made to persons from Asia. This is a result of consideration of UNHCR’s regional priorities and reflects greater access to resettlement for refugee groups in our region. These have included Burmese refugees who have been living in protracted situations in Thailand and Bhutanese refugees from camps in Nepal. Rohingya refugees from Burma who have been living in camps in Bangladesh for many years were included in the Humanitarian Program for 2008–09.

In 2007–08, countries in Asia and the Pacific represented around 34 per cent of visa grants. Resettlement from this region has remained close to the same level in 2008–09.

Europe and the Americas

In line with global resettlement needs, less than one per cent of offshore humanitarian visas were granted outside the above priority regions in 2007–08.
Figure 10: Resettlement Program grants by region from 1998–99 to 2007–08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998–99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Europe 49.72%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 30.64%</td>
<td>Africa 16.29%</td>
<td>Asia 3.10%</td>
<td>Americas 0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1999–2000 45.64%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 29.83%</td>
<td>Africa 22.69%</td>
<td>Asia 1.56%</td>
<td>Americas 0.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2000–01 43.32%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 26.96%</td>
<td>Africa 25.43%</td>
<td>Asia 3.95%</td>
<td>Americas 0.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2001–02 33.12%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 32.43%</td>
<td>Europe 32.03%</td>
<td>Asia 2.23%</td>
<td>Americas 0.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2002–03 48.32%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 39.94%</td>
<td>Europe 9.93%</td>
<td>Asia 1.78%</td>
<td>Americas 0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2003–04 70.78%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 24.29%</td>
<td>Europe 3.00%</td>
<td>Asia 1.87%</td>
<td>Americas 0.06%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2004–05 70.16%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 26.24%</td>
<td>Asia 3.43%</td>
<td>Europe 0.16%</td>
<td>Americas 0.01%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2005–06 55.65%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 33.98%</td>
<td>Asia 9.88%</td>
<td>Europe 0.43%</td>
<td>Americas 0.06%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2006–07 50.91%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 27.95%</td>
<td>Asia 20.70%</td>
<td>Europe 0.44%</td>
<td>Americas 0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2007–08 35.25%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 35.25%</td>
<td>Asia 33.67%</td>
<td>Africa 30.48%</td>
<td>Europe 0.55%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2008–09 planned</td>
<td>Asia 33%</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; SW Asia 33%</td>
<td>Africa 33%</td>
<td>Contingencies 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship
From Sierra Leone: Mikhail’s story

For the past three years Mikhail has been teaching at the Beverley Hills Intensive English Centre in Sydney. The school is host to 40 different nationalities and the staff regard it as very special. ‘Every day is interesting’.

Mikhail came to Australia in 2000 as a refugee from Sierra Leone. He was accompanied by two brothers, five sisters and a nephew.

His journey from his home country Sierra Leone had been long and arduous. His father was killed in an ambush in 1996. The violence had escalated and on 6 January 1999 the rebels entered Freetown. Mikhail’s mother was abducted and his uncle killed. Mikhail was studying Year 12 when he escaped by boat to the border town of Pamelap with his elder brother and four of his sisters. From there they began their long journey to the refugee camp in Conakry, Guinea.

‘In Guinea, life was very difficult for me and my family. These were my darkest days.’

‘There was no food for us to eat, nine of us lived in a two bedroom flat...we had language problems and the soldiers robbed us and beat us sometimes. We could not go to school.’

‘I learned how to weave baskets, cane chairs and tables just to make ends meet. We were scared all the time because of the constant threat we encountered from the soldiers.’

‘We applied to UNHCR and eventually came to Australia.’

Mikhail and his family had mixed feelings and emotions on arrival in Australia. They were happy to be safe but worried about friends and family back in Sierra Leone.

Mikhail immediately resumed his studies and is now studying to be a school teacher. He has also coordinated the Sierra Leone Youth Group, formed with the primary aim of helping refugees with resettlement issues; the Day of the African Child celebrations; a community development health project for Sierra Leonean youth; and became involved in facilitating workshops for high school teachers on the culture and issues affecting refugee students from both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Mikhail hopes to return to Sierra Leone at the end of 2009 to work with the young people in the suburb where he grew up.
Chapter Five
Adjusting to a new life in Australia—assistance for humanitarian visa holders

Moving to a new country is often a difficult and stressful experience. This is particularly the case for humanitarian entrants who have experienced extreme hardship and trauma.

The Australian Government views successful settlement as a key objective of the Humanitarian Program and is committed to ensuring that people settling in Australia have the support needed to rebuild their lives and become fully functioning members of the Australian community.

The Australian Cultural Orientation Program

The Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program is the beginning of the settlement journey. It is an orientation course for refugee and humanitarian visa holders preparing to settle in Australia, delivered overseas before they travel to Australia.

The course provides an initial introduction to aspects of Australian life which will enhance entrants’ settlement prospects, help create realistic expectations for their life in Australia and help entrants learn about Australian culture prior to arrival. AUSCO supplements the on-arrival services provided through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy outlined on page 47.

The AUSCO course is available to all refugees and humanitarian visa holders over the age of five. It is designed for and delivered to four main groups—adults, youth, children and pre-literate entrants. Where possible, it is delivered over five days to ensure all topics are covered in sufficient detail. In September 2006, the IOM was awarded the contract to deliver the course on behalf of the department.
A wide range of topics are covered in the AUSCO curriculum, such as:

- an overview of Australia including government, geography and climate
- travel to Australia including arrangements for the airport, the flight, transit and arrival
- settling in, including on-arrival assistance, cultural adjustment, communication and behaviour
- healthcare including Medicare, hospitals, immunisation and preventative health
- education including learning English, schools, tertiary and community education
- finding a job including Centrelink, Job Network, recognition of overseas qualifications and experience and Australian working conditions
- money management including banking, budgeting, taxation and credit
- housing including renting and household management arrangements
- public transport and driver’s licences
- Australian law, values and citizenship
- access to torture and trauma counselling.

Family Day sessions have been developed so that family members attending different courses have one day of a joint session to learn about issues such as shifting family and gender roles.

From the beginning of the program in 2003 to the end of May 2009, courses have been held in Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, India, Iran, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Romania, the Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, assisting more than 30 000 humanitarian visa holders.

Travel to Australia

The IOM is contracted by the department to organise travel for refugee visa holders. These travel costs are paid for by the Australian Government.

The IOM also organises travel for SHP visa holders who have received loans under the no-interest loan scheme. Further information is in Chapter Four.

Settlement services for humanitarian entrants

Adjusting to a new life in another country presents significant challenges. For humanitarian entrants, the difficulty of adjusting often comes on top of a traumatic personal history. For this reason, Australia’s assistance to refugees and humanitarian entrants does not end when they arrive in Australia. The government has put in place a range of services to assist people once they arrive.

The settlement process for many begins with AUSCO before departure for Australia and, once in Australia, connection to essential services such as Centrelink and Medicare and the provision of appropriate accommodation. After this comes the more gradual process of establishing a livelihood and social networks, attending English language classes if necessary and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the Australian community. For some, specialised medical treatment and counselling will be needed. Our settlement services are designed and administered in ways that provide humanitarian entrants with the assistance they need to start building a life in Australia.
Specialised services available to permanent humanitarian visa holders

**The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy**

The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) provides initial, intensive settlement assistance for humanitarian entrants for up to 12 months after arrival. Clients' needs are assessed and addressed through an integrated case management approach.

Services provided through the IHSS include:

- initial information and orientation assistance
- assistance in finding accommodation
- a package of goods to help humanitarian entrants establish a household
- information and assistance to access local community services including mainstream services such as Centrelink and Medicare
- short term torture and trauma counselling.

**The Complex Case Support Program**

The Complex Case Support (CCS) program has recently been established to further assist newly-arrived humanitarian entrants to build a new life in Australia.

CCS provides specialised and intensive case management support to humanitarian entrants with special or complex needs that extend beyond the scope of existing settlement and mainstream services. A panel of service providers, known as the Humanitarian Services Panel, deliver flexible and tailored services to CCS clients on a needs basis.

Clients are eligible for CCS services for up to two years after arrival in Australia. Special consideration to extend this timeframe will be given in exceptional circumstances.

**The Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors Program**

Unaccompanied humanitarian minors (UHMs) are children who are not Australian citizens, and arrive in Australia without a parent to care for them. Some UHMs have a relative over the age of 21 years to provide care and are called non-wards. Children who do not have a suitable relative become wards of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship under the *Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946* (IGOC Act). The Minister's functions as guardian under the IGOC Act are delegated to officers of the department and to officers of the state welfare agencies.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments work together to provide settlement and welfare services to UHMs through the UHM Program. This program seeks to ensure effective care and welfare supervision and settlement support for UHMs. It is funded through cost-sharing agreements between the federal and state and territory governments.
Longer-term settlement services available to all migrants

Permanent humanitarian visa holders have access to the following longer-term settlement services that are offered to all migrants:

**English language tuition**

The Australian Government considers learning English to be one of the most important steps migrants and humanitarian entrants can take towards successfully settling in Australia. It offers a range of English language programs for new arrivals, including programs specifically focused on finding pathways to employment.

For information about the:

- Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) go to www.immi.gov.au/amep

**The Translating and Interpreting Service**

The department provides an interpreting service (TIS National) for people who do not speak English and for English speakers who need to communicate with them. TIS National is accessible from anywhere in Australia and is available to any person or organisation requiring interpreting services. Telephone interpreting is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Doctors Priority Line (DPL), provided through TIS National, is a telephone interpreting service which enables medical practitioners to communicate with their non-English speaking patients. The interpreting service is provided by the department free of charge to eligible medical practitioners and provides priority access to TIS National's telephone interpreters.

For new arrivals with low English language proficiency, interpreting services are crucial for the proper dispensing of prescription medicine. The department has recently introduced free access to interpreting services for pharmacies, for the purpose of dispensing medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.


**The Settlement Grants Program**

The Settlement Grants Program (SGP) provides funding to assist humanitarian entrants and migrants settle in Australia and participate in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival.

The SGP is targeted to meet the settlement needs of recently arrived humanitarian migrants and family stream migrants, as well as dependants of skilled migrants in rural or regional areas, with low levels of English proficiency.
The SGP funds organisations to implement projects that:

- assist new arrivals to orient themselves to their new community
- help new communities to develop
- promote social participation and integration.

The SGP will fund projects delivering settlement services under the following service types:

- Orientation to Australia – practical assistance to promote self-reliance
  Orientation services promote self-reliance in individuals and families through the development of life skills and familiarity with the Australian community. Orientation projects equip clients with the skills and information they need to operate independently and access mainstream services (such as Centrelink and Medicare) and opportunities.

- Developing Communities
  Community development projects focus on building the capacity of newly arrived communities to work together towards common goals, promote their culture to Australian society in a positive way, and welcome and assist new humanitarian arrivals.

- Integration – inclusion and participation
  Integration projects aim to promote inclusion and participation in Australian society by encouraging partnership initiatives with mainstream community and government organisations. Integration projects should assist new arrivals in interacting with and understanding the broader community while also encouraging the broader community to be responsive to new arrivals.

New Beginnings


The Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council

The Australian Government’s Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC) was established in 1997 and reappointed for a fifth term from March 2008 to June 2010. RRAC is an expert group on refugee and humanitarian settlement matters. It is comprised of members who have a wide range of experience in working with refugees or are former refugees themselves. RRAC members do not represent individual states, territories or community organisations.

RRAC advises on the delivery of settlement services and improves the information flow on settlement policy between the government and the community sector.

RRAC’s terms of reference include advising the Minister on matters relating to:

- the appropriateness and adequacy of Australian Government services, especially for humanitarian entrants
- priorities for attention in the planning of settlement services, with particular emphasis on housing, family support and employment.
How can you help?

Become a volunteer
Volunteers play an important role in providing humanitarian entrants with the knowledge, confidence and support to participate in the social, cultural and recreational life of their local community. They can provide friendship and social support and links to local ethnic, religious and other community support organisations. They also provide information, guidance and practical assistance to help people adjust to life in Australia.

For more information about volunteering go to:

Become a translator
TIS National is continually recruiting interpreters to meet high demand for interpreting services.
TIS National welcomes enquiries from people who have an interest in working as interpreters, and who can fluently speak English and at least one other language. Where possible, TIS National contracts interpreters who are accredited or recognised by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

To find out more about contracting with TIS National as a professional interpreter, please contact one of TIS National’s Contractor Managers on 1300 132 621.
Become a Home Tutor

The Home Tutor Scheme, which is part of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), assists eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants who cannot attend English classes due to family commitments. Tutoring usually takes place in the migrant's home, creating an informal, relaxed atmosphere. Alternatively, volunteers may assist in conversation practice in AMEP classes. Home tutors receive initial and ongoing training, support and access to teaching resources.

People wishing to become home tutors must speak and write English well and have a few hours available each week for tutoring. For details, contact your local AMEP Service Provider. For contact details go to www.immi.gov.au/amep.

Become a donor or fundraiser

There are many long-established NGOs in Australia that help refugees to rebuild their lives through social and economic programs.

From time to time they need volunteers to fill part-time positions in areas such as fundraising, marketing, communications, database management and administration. One-off donations, bequests and regular donations to finance special projects are other ways members of the public can help support refugees.

For more information, visit the websites of organisations such as the Refugee Council of Australia (www.refugeecouncil.org.au), the Australian Council for International Development (www.acfid.asn.au) or the Australian Red Cross (www.redcross.org.au).

Make a donation to UNHCR

Most of UNHCR's budget comes through donations from governments, NGOs and individuals. Donations can be made through Australia for UNHCR, UNHCR's Australian fund-raising agency. For details:

- visit www.unrefugees.org.au
- write to Australia for UNHCR, Reply Paid 428, Queen Victoria Building NSW 1229
- email info@australiaforunhcr.org.au
- telephone 1300 361 288.

If you would prefer to fund a project, UNHCR can match your interests, objectives and budget from more than 10 000 projects ranging in cost from $1000 to $200 000. For more information visit www.unhcr.org.

Be informed

Find out the facts about refugees in Australia and share them with your friends, colleagues and class-mates.
Regional Settlement: Roselin’s story

Goulburn South Public School is very proud of its refugees.

The school has a number of students from countries such as Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Burma, who have settled in Goulburn after coming to Australia under the Humanitarian Program.

The school is also proud of the specially tailored English as a Second Language (ESL) program that helps these students to bridge the education and language gap between them and the other students in the school.

At 19 years of age, Roselin arrived in Goulburn in December 2007. She and her family had escaped from Burma when she was a child. They spent the intervening years in India, before coming to Australia under the Humanitarian Program.

Roselin was asked to work with the ESL teacher at Goulburn South Public School, to help the children with their reading and to provide support to the children as they and their families face the challenge of rebuilding their lives.

‘I didn’t know anything about Australia’ Roselin said. ‘We were met in Canberra and brought to Goulburn to meet local volunteers’. 

Centacare Canberra & Goulburn, the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy service provider for this region, introduced Roselin to the Goulburn South Public School and helped her to secure her role as teacher’s aide. According to Centacare, Roselin has been a great support to the young students and is always ready to listen and help them with their problems, both in and out of school.
Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia’s Response