

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Western Sydney MRC

Australia Humanitarian Program Community Consultation 2021

21st May 2021



It takes
a community

On Friday 21st May 2021, Western Sydney MRC held a community consultation with 16 community leaders to input into the 2021 Australian Humanitarian Program.

The following has been produced summarising the views and insights of the consultation participants.

The discussion has been collated into 5 categories.

1

Australia's
role as a
resettlement
country

2

Regional
settlement

3

Management
and
composition
of the offshore
component

4

Management
and
composition
of the onshore
component

5

Settlement
assistance to
Humanitarian
Program
entrants

Community leaders were resourced with the following.

Discussion Paper, Australia's Humanitarian Program 2021-22 - pdf

Australia's Humanitarian Program 2021-22 - website

Review into Integration, Employment And Settlement Outcomes

Visa statistics

We also collected more generalised comments and feedback from the consultation session.

1 Australia's role as a settlement country

Context: Australia is one of a relatively small number of countries that operate an annual permanent resettlement program, and consistently ranks among the top three permanent resettlement countries, in both absolute and per capita terms.

The Humanitarian Program intake has been drawn from a range of nationalities, ethnic and religious groups, reflecting global displacement arising from conflict and persecution.

Community Response



- Resettlement in Australia is the best, it's providing all the resettlement services for (the) newly arrived - based on their needs to start new life in Australia.
- (It is there) to provide opportunities for those resettling to live their lives and to provide them with the opportunity to have their human rights met.
- With 66 million refugees around the world, Australia needs to continue its role, allowing us to lead and speak with authority - not about the number but the commitment and values
- Migration is important to Australia as it adds value in Australia. More intake to come from that are most vulnerable.

2 Regional Settlement

Context: Since September 2013, the onshore component of the Program has been reserved for people who arrive lawfully in Australia and engage Australia's protection obligations because they are either found to be a refugee or meet the complementary protection criteria under the Migration Act 1958 (the Act). People found to engage Australia's protection obligations must also satisfy health, character and security requirements for the grant of a Permanent Protection visa.

Community Response



- There are thousands waiting in refugees camps and another country specially Iraqi and Syrian people from minority groups.
- This is a great idea. However it's easier said than done. Number one issue is that are regional communities ready to accept new communities who will have significant differences with the mainstream. The issue of racism and discrimination is huge. Secondly, are there adequate services and infrastructure to provide support to the newly arrived. Thirdly the regional communities must have opportunities for employment and business opportunities as well. Also think about employment for those people who are already living in those regions.
- There is so much trauma for some individuals - in the long run this will cost the government more, if they don't put in the infrastructures and supported in place for regional settlement - it will be more work.
- Considerations around additional trauma to the newly arrivals and can create more challenges for the Govt.
- Where are the regional staff and settlement experts? The issues are there - limited infrastructures.
- Excited - plenty of work, but no residential areas. Questions on places to live - homes... Accommodation needs to be considered. Housing is crucial and settlement support, health and mental health support, family sponsorship where an applicant resides in those areas. 50% of is too high
- Supportive of the regional settlement however there's no residential areas available. Experienced prior to COVID, 90 people were introduced however there's one residential area and is already full. Services were over capacity.
- Government should be more transparent providing some level of clarity on how it allocates placements. Are there considerations regarding the level of settlement support required and therefore made available (such as an MRC, language training)? Mention of the existing gaps in medical services in regional areas. Does the increase in humanitarian arrivals increase the pressure?
- Regional residents, are they welcoming? Regional racism is this higher? Don't know the culture or the country. The cost of the regional settlement - or post-settlement. Trauma, etc will be increased.

Community Response - regional settlement continued



- Regional residents, are they welcoming? Regional racism is this higher? Don't know the culture or the country. The cost of the regional settlement - or post-settlement. Trauma, etc will be increased.
- Will there be Community Support and Services similar to MRC? Are the Regional people welcoming to Refugees? Level of Racism present in the Regional areas which may cause more trauma to the Community and the Newly arrivals. What will be the %?
- Numbers need to be considered and the service available - we also find that settlement takes place and individuals eventually move. They get a lot of support from their communities and this needs to be considered.
- Wolla Wolla - community members were taken on a visit to regional areas of NSW - they loved it - rather than to western suburbs - they were disappointed because there a lack of residential places to settle.
- Children might settle well in the Regional area environment however schools and necessary supports; health system needs to be available to support their needs of the children of these families.
- Focus on children in the families. With the regional settlement - it is out in the open country - the children would be a better choice for them. I have concerns with the support services. Services to support the children, for the schools to be prepared, to support and they have the necessary support for education, and health systems. All though families are impacted severely, there needs to be a special consideration and focus on children and what the government is able to put in place, especially 0-5 years. School preparation another area of focus.

3 Management and composition of the offshore component

Context: The offshore component of the Program has three parts: Refugee category; Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) category; and Community Support Program (CSP).

Community Response



Refugee category

- The intake numbers must increase. But the problem is always the amount of support given to a newly arrived family. Settlement is not an easy process and it is so important to support newly arrived families. Our communities need more infrastructures to provide adequate support.
- What about the battles of COVID - there are many struggles to get issued the visa - they are stranded. Is there a backlog? 7000 visas are issued - and awaiting borders to be reopened.
- Is there a weighting towards 200/204 category? An emphasis to support 204 visa applicants should be considered as the highest priority for applicants as they are vulnerable and waiting for many years.
- As a nation that has value to look after others in needs. As a nation that needs to refurbish its human resources. Immigration is important. As a nation that has people who have relatives abroad. Aspects that funds the reason for migration and its process - to be a continued project. Regarding the question about whom we bring in - it is fine to draw those that are relatives, but at the same time - if we do not increase the intake - then those who do not have relatives may see it as being bias - and we leave the most vulnerable in camps. More intake should come from those who are most in need or vulnerable.
- Consideration should also be given to Delink the onshore and offshore settlement program.

Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) category

- The SHP program support refugees who looking for safety and better future for their children and families, it's help them to start new beginnings with support from resettlement providers and guides them step by step to engage with the Australian community.

Community Response - offshore component continued



Community Support Program (CSP).

- The CSP program is for the people who can pay to resettlement in Australia regards to the capacity of this program.
- CSP is expensive to use, especially for most vulnerable people. It'd would be cheaper to do an assessment by the Community and the cost needs to be reviewed.
- CSP - after an introduction to this program - the very expensive to accomplish - using myself - if I wanted to travel back home - it doesn't cost me \$40k to do this - if we wanted to bring someone here who was in trouble... if communities were allowed to reassess what it would cost them to do that - accommodation, food etc - families and the individuals will be helped by the community. Coming as a student is a cheaper option - and accessible. If the CSP program is for the most vulnerable - the increase in price is a barrier. Whilst community is actively involved but it is out of reach for the people.
- It is expensive for those seeking refugee from another country. In the long run it is in for the benefit. CSP applications are processed quicker. They have to be able to speak English. 30-40%.
- Agree CSP is Expensive for vulnerable migrants seeking visas however it's a quicker process.
- CSP is a program that welcomes people with their money, but what about those who don't have the money and they need to come. What is the humanitarian concept?
- Expensive but opportunity available for families who are willing to pay.
- Uptake may have hindered - some are willing to pay for someone but the eligible criteria - age, single males are falling within and locations where those applicant residing - broadening that and revisiting that - increasing age category.
- Restrictions to be broadened for the eligibility criteria.
- Regardless of how it is compiled or designed the community should be part of the design and ownership. The government is setting the guidelines. It should be de-linked.

4 Management and composition of the onshore component

Context: Since September 2013, the onshore component of the Program has been reserved for people who arrive lawfully in Australia and engage Australia's protection obligations because they are either found to be a refugee or meet the complementary protection criteria under the Migration Act 1958 (the Act). People found to engage Australia's protection obligations must also satisfy health, character and security requirements for the grant of a Permanent Protection visa.

Community Response



- Onshore component takes long and difficult process, looking for an easier discussion regarding human purposes.
- Numbers should increase. But more support for the sector. The number of irregular arrivals are low, they are not posing a threat

5 Settlement assistance to Humanitarian Program entrants

Context: The Australian Government works to improve the lifetime wellbeing of migrants and refugees settling in Australia by responding to their specific needs, and encouraging their independence and participation in the Australian community. Settlement services are delivered through the Department of Home Affairs and provide early, tailored and intensive support to refugees and humanitarian entrants in the first five years after their arrival in Australia.

Community Response



- The most important is settlement assistant Humanitarian Program entrant to support refugees to resettlement in Australia with (SSI) as they provide perfect service to new arrivals from different countries, in all the professionalism, and respect.
- Yes. This program should be doubled to cope with demand. Settlement is difficult and the more support we offer the better it is.
- Current provision for English language training isn't enough, particularly for those from traumatized backgrounds
- More support. There is much reliance on the community. Hardly seeing any service from the government. English - integration into Australian community - outside of employment... there are not enough... we need more staff in the settlement services.
- Support and capacity building to travel outside of the main area of settlement need to be a focus – the language barrier acts as a barrier, but travel is crucial to settlement success. Are there ways in which transport services can support this further?
- Local communities are still undertaking a lot of support to new arrivals without acknowledgement. Even in the most simplistic things, there is a lot of support required eg: catching the bus can be stressful.
- There needs to be more community support and as there is not enough support/capacity from Service Providers. This in turn puts pressure on employment and language training.
- The employment focus - Newstart recipients - does not work well with refugee and humanitarian entrants, specifically tailored programs should be introduced to support employment-ready arrivals.
- Department has been in regular contact to get feedback from Service Providers and the community and there needs to be two-way consultation and not passing on information as a tickbox exercise.
- Service Providers need to be aware and across the AUSCO information.

Generalised feedback

Community Response



- In regards to the exemption - the only people that can apply for exception (blood relatives) relations are not allowed to apply for exceptions. This requires review.
- Consider increasing the overall offshore number. CSP should be in another special category
- The community have commented again on frustration, in that during consultations and the Government then making informed decisions. We are happy to sit in these discussions - but we need the issues to be heard and addressed. We have had a lot of one on ones with the department with the regional director.
- Emphasis on the plan from the government for the people already granted a visa - move them quickly before anything happens.
- Will the CCP program come back?
- My message to the Minister is (the Government) are doing a great job, Humanitarian program has helped and saved lives. The quicker this is implemented, the more respect it earns from the people.
- Thank you to Western Sydney MRC for always giving voice to the Community. Message to the Minister.
- Instead of 13750 raise it to 20000 - it been a couple of years - the vulnerable are facing issues - wherever there are refugees. Australia is a (group) of amazing people - open the doors to the people who need it most. We can accommodate more.
- Thankful for everyone being here tonight and the community's contribution.
- Raising the numbers - we have a huge capacity. A special focus on children and bringing in and looking for the most vulnerable - making children the highlight. If we can ask the minister to not only focus on the needs of the people but their strengths. the strength and the resistance, strength and courage of families and children - Australia could learn so much from their courage. Regardless of their suffering, utilise their strengths.
- The humanitarian program needs to be value-based. Increased local community consultations about what's happening overseas. Govt. should and can do more in this program. Acknowledgment of Western Sydney MRC Staff commitment to bring the voice of community so it's represented at the Minister's meeting.
- The most pressing problem for some refugees and migrants is family reunion. Some refugees parents who settle in Australia under a humanitarian program while they appreciate being rescued to safety and security, complain of missing their adult children who get relocated in different countries. such families live in constant worries and depression as they do not understand the reason for not keeping the family unit intact while being freed from war, danger and oppression.
- Many refugees are illiterate and do not cope well with being pressured to look for work or to study. This problem is an ongoing saga that is adding to those refugees' mental and physical health.
- We understand from some refugees that while still in their country being processed for the humanitarian program, they are not adequately informed about what to expect after the end of their three months of settling in a new lifestyle in a new country. Some refugees often suffer from all aspects of culture shock and, as they complain from, lack of adequate support and some remain isolated and anxious and continue to live in the past regardless of how many years since they arrived to Australia.

Western Sydney MRC Ministerial Meeting narrative Summary

Minister Hawke, Home Affairs, 21st May 2021

"Thank you for allowing me to speak. Great to be focusing on the future of the program, its with relief that these discussions take place again. Acknowledge the Dharug Nation, on whose land I am on today.

Minister and Department

"Australia needs to continue the refugee and humanitarian program whilst remaining values and principle-based allowing us to lead and speak with authority and influence others.

Intake needs to come from that are most vulnerable. We need to continue to focus on highly vulnerable groups, young children, women at risk.

Individuals who have been issued visas, and deemed at high need, should be allowed an exemption to Australia.

It is inconsistent that we deem these group in need but not issued visas – concerns on the current visa issues may impact future numbers.

Concerns about the numbers did not repeat others concerns about the ceiling cap language- perhaps the Government could introduce a once-off special intake akin to the 10,000 Iraqi and Syrian Intake.

Regional Settlement offers opportunities but also brings concerns. There seems to be tension in the program that we work with the most vulnerable of the humanitarian entrants and then seek to settle them in areas with a lack of infrastructure.

Newly formed community and social infrastructures need to complement existing services, not at the expense of the services where individuals from refugee backgrounds already settle.

Private Sponsorship seems to be working for some communities, but not for all – this program looks at skills and costs, needs to be delinked from the humanitarian entrant numbers (in addition, whether it be 13,750 or 20,000).

We look forward to continuing the discussions."

*Attended by Kamalle Dabboussy, CEO
on behalf of Western Sydney MRC*

27th May 2021

Dear Hon. Minister Hawke

On behalf of Western Sydney MRC we would like to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on Australia's Humanitarian Program for 2021-22.

As Australia and the world comes out of the COVID-19 pandemic, we appreciate the need for the Australian Government to consult on the management and composition of the Humanitarian Program going forward.

Australia has a long history of accepting refugees and humanitarian entrants. Western Sydney MRC has been a proud partner in Australia's humanitarian program for over four decades and looks forward to continuing to be a leader in the sector.

As an organisation that is proudly powered by community, we acknowledge the contribution community leaders have made to this submission. The feedback and opinions shared within this submission are a genuine reflection of our community.

Sincerely

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Kamalle Dabboussy
CEO, Western Sydney MRC

Cllr Nathan Hagarty
Chair, Western Sydney MRC