Scope of the consultation process

In preparing a submission to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection on the 2016-17 Refugee and Humanitarian program, Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) staff travelled to all eight state and territories between July and December 2016. We conducted 63 face-to-face consultations with service providers and members of refugee communities, including 11 in regional areas and 12 targeted consultations with women, young people, people seeking asylum and specific refugee communities. We also held two national teleconferences focusing on mental health issues and on regional and rural settlement. We also received 4 written submissions and 41 survey responses.

Key recommendations

Increase the official resettlement intake beyond current plans

- With the additional places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees, in 2016-17 Australia resettled more refugees than any year in the previous 30 years. While the annual program in 2017-18 will increase to 16,250 places, this will represent a decrease of around 5000 refugee arrivals on the year just completed.
- Australian settlement services have demonstrated that they have the experience, capacity and skill to resettle more refugees into our country. Considering the scale of the crisis of displacement, Australia now has an opportunity to demonstrate its international leadership in supporting the most vulnerable.

Establish an Emergency Response contingency quota

- The success of the resettlement of refugees from Syria and Iraq highlights the capacity and goodwill that exists in Australia for our Government’s leadership on humanitarian crises.
- The establishment of an Emergency Response contingency quota over and above the annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program intake would provide additional capacity to respond to urgent protection needs during emergency situations, such as the current crisis in Syria, the escalating violence for Rohingya people and the continued conflict in South Sudan.

Expand private refugee sponsorship program in addition to the current intake

- Substantial untapped goodwill exists in the Australian community for welcoming refugees into our communities. RCOA, like many organisations, was overwhelmed with thousands of offers of support for the resettlement of refugees from Syria in 2015 and 2016.
- An opportunity exists to test the strength and support of the Australian public to increase refugee resettlement by adopting a comprehensive private sponsorship program. However, vulnerability must remain central to refugee resettlement priorities. Any increase of resettlement places through community proposals should be additional to the existing quota.

Increase proportion of resettlement places from Africa

- Noting that 43% of the 1.2 million refugees identified by UNHCR as being in need of resettlement in 2018 are in Africa, Australia should ensure resettlement from this region is given greater priority, with the Africa program making up at least 25% of the offshore program in 2017-18.

Focus on secondary settlement to rural and regional areas
• The majority of refugees have understandably settled where support services and familiar communities are already established. Considering the high cost of housing in the largest cities and the interest in reinvigorating some rural and regional areas, there is a substantial opportunity to develop a formal program to investigate secondary settlement opportunities.

• The Karen community's role in revitalising the community of Nhill in Victoria is a powerful example of the potential impact refugee communities, once familiar with life in Australia, can make when viable and supported secondary settlement opportunities are developed.

Engage the Asia-Pacific community in an integrated response to displacement

• The Australian Government should convene a forum with NGOs, peak bodies, intergovernmental bodies and other relevant stakeholders to advance the development of an integrated response to displacement, including:
  o promoting peace and reconciliation in countries of origin, particularly Myanmar and Sri Lanka,
  o access to some form of legal status and the right to work in countries of asylum, particularly in South East Asia, and
  o cooperation between resettlement states to increase engagement with host states on other forms of durable solutions.

• As co-chair of the Bali Process, Australia should revive efforts to operationalise the Regional Cooperation Framework agreed to by Bali Process members in March 2011.

Support the Global Compact on Refugees by developing alternative pathways

• Develop labour mobility programs: Explore ways in which humanitarian entrants with marketable skills can help to fill gaps in the Australian workforce.

• Provide education pathways: Support tertiary and trade study opportunities that consider the protection and safety of refugee students and lead to their economic and social empowerment.

• Keep families together: Develop a separate Humanitarian Family Reunion Program outside of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program or enhance access to the existing family reunion program through administrative concessions and waivers for refugees.

Address key refugee settlement concerns

• Establish an independent review into the failures of Jobactive to meet the needs of job seekers, and invest in existing and further specialist programs targeting barriers to employment (forthcoming report)

• Ensure coordination and support for refugees with disabilities (forthcoming report)

• Ensure refugees continue to have access to Australian citizenship

• Abolish temporary protection visas. In the absence of this, amend existing conditions to expand access to overseas travel and family reunion options, extend transitional support when temporary protections are granted, and expand access to other settlement services.

Relevant research reports and briefs


• Addressing the pain of separation for refugee families (November 2016): http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/reports/family-separation/


• Delays in citizenship applications for permanent refugee visa holders (October 2015) http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/delays-citizenship-applications/