



Australian Government

Australian Government's Response to Recommendations in the Report:

**Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia: The Findings
of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement
Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in
Australia**

November 2019

Preamble

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the report: *Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia: The Findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia*.

The review and report was commissioned by the Government to provide advice on how to better support refugees and humanitarian entrants to make valuable contributions to our social fabric and our economy.

Recommendations – Australian Government’s Response

Recommendation 1: Establishing a ‘Centre of Gravity’

In order to provide a ‘centre of gravity’ for refugees, the Commonwealth Government should appoint a Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Humanitarian Settlement to coordinate refugee settlement, employment and integration programs across the Commonwealth Government. The Coordinator-General would work closely with state, territory and local governments, industry and the community sector to ensure that complementary programs become part of a ‘joined-up’ approach.

More specifically, the Coordinator-General would:

- a) *articulate publically a strong positive narrative by promoting Australia’s proud record of accepting refugees and emphasising the contribution this has made to our national development and identity;*
- b) *provide performance based accountability for specialist and mainstream spending on refugees by Commonwealth Agencies;*
- c) *support the redesign of the Commonwealth Government’s specialist and mainstream services, placing a particular focus on labour market outcomes and social integration;*
- d) *facilitate cross-governmental and cross-sectoral collaboration to improve settlement outcomes;*
- e) *promote and invest in community measures that foster positive relations between refugees and other Australians by engaging the goodwill of local communities;*
- f) *foster and support greater opportunities for regional settlement; and*
- g) *provide regular advice to the Commonwealth Government on the implementation of Review recommendations.*

Supported

- On 29 May 2019 the Prime Minister appointed a single minister for migrant services: the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs. Responsibility for the settlement of refugees, humanitarian entrants and migrants and programs to support adults to acquire English language skills fall within the Minister’s remit and were brought together into the Department of Home Affairs (Department) on 1 July 2019.

- The Australian Government will appoint a Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Migrant Services within the Department from 1 December 2019. The Coordinator-General will be a senior executive officer charged with providing national leadership on migrant services, and will drive better results around labour market outcomes, English language acquisition and integration. The Coordinator-General will work closely with federal departments, state and territory governments, industry and the community sector to ensure a joined up approach and will also promote the contribution migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants make to our nation.
- The Australian Government recognises the goodwill and desire of communities and community organisations to get more involved in helping refugees to successfully settle in Australia. The Coordinator-General will work with the community sector to enable this involvement in practical ways. The Department has already established a team of settlement officers with a focus on community outreach and commenced consultations with community organisations in existing settlement locations to support the Coordinator-General.
- The Australian Government is committed to continuing to increase the proportion of refugees and humanitarian entrants that settle in regional areas. The proportion of humanitarian entrants settling in defined regional areas has grown year-on-year and is expected to exceed 40 per cent in 2019-20. The Department has commenced engagement with state and territory governments on the identification of potential additional regional settlement locations. It is also working with local government, the community and business sectors to support the ongoing success of existing regional settlement sites. The identification of new regional settlement sites is being progressed through careful planning that takes account of the infrastructure, services, labour market profile, community support and other opportunities needed for successful settlement.
- The Coordinator-General will review the implementation of the Review recommendations and report to Government on progress by 1 July 2020.

Recommendation 2: Bringing Refugee Services Together

In order to deliver end-to-end service design that supports the economic and social participation of refugees, the Commonwealth Government should:

- a) *bring together adult migrant English programs and employment services for refugees with humanitarian settlement services within a single social services program;*
- b) *recognising that good health is vital to economic participation, ensure that refugees have good access to appropriately funded primary health care and (as necessary) torture and trauma counselling, supported by the provision of interpreter services for all allied health services; and*
- c) *improve coordination of those programs with other specialist and mainstream services, such as immigration, human services, housing, education and training.*

Supported in Part

- The Australian Government supports the provision of end-to-end service delivery that enables the economic and social participation of refugees. Responsibility for the settlement of migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants, and an English language program for adult migrants were brought into the Department on 1 July 2019.
- Responsibility for employment services remains with the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. A New Employment Services Model, administered by the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, will deliver more targeted services to vulnerable job seekers. The most disadvantaged job seekers will receive Enhanced Services delivered through employment services providers. Providers will deliver a professional, individualised service to help prepare and support job seekers into work. Providers will help address a job seeker's barriers to work through services such as career guidance, mentoring, vocational training, and assistance in accessing non-vocational services such as counselling, work experience, job placements and post-placement support. The new system is being piloted in two regions from July 2019 before being rolled out nationally from July 2022. Humanitarian settlement and English language providers are working closely with employment services providers to provide continuity of support for refugees and humanitarian entrants.
- The Australian Government recognises the importance of good health in supporting the full social and economic participation of refugees.
 - Some Primary Health Networks (PHNs) fund Free Interpreting Services for allied health services in their region. The Department of Health has provided other PHNs with information on refugee and migrant populations with low English proficiency to assist them in identifying and prioritising health care in their region.

- The Australian Government will continue to review Medicare Benefits Schedule items relevant to refugees through the Medicare Benefit Schedule Taskforce.
- The Australian Government will continue to ensure there are strong linkages between torture and trauma counselling and settlement services providers. *Humanitarian Settlement Program* (HSP) service providers are familiar with, and attentive to, mental health issues that may affect humanitarian entrants, including the need for specialist torture and trauma counselling services. HSP service providers are required to arrange referral to appropriate mental health services where there is concern for a client's mental health, including services provided through the *Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma*.

Recommendation 3: Creating Pathways to Economic Participation

To improve the social and economic participation of refugees, the Commonwealth Government should invest in labour market integration strategies by trialling a range of specialist place-based employment services, that:

- a) *work with refugees to develop and implement a personal plan based on their strengths and aspirations and labour market opportunities, which can be periodically reviewed to reflect changing circumstances;*
- b) *engage with industry to meet employer needs;*
- c) *incorporate employment preparation, mentoring, work experience, skills assessment, recognition of prior learning, provision of workplace English, vocational and professional training, job placement, career development and assistance with setting up small businesses;*
- d) *ensure that more vulnerable groups – such as young people, full-time parents, older refugees and at-risk women – are not excluded, by tailoring English provision to their particular needs, identifying volunteer and part-time job opportunities, increasing their financial literacy and building their social capital and capabilities;*
- e) *use collective impact approaches to ensure strong cross-sector collaboration in the delivery of services; and*
- f) *identify appropriate measures of success against which performance can be assessed.*

Supported

- The Australian Government agrees that the social and economic participation of refugees and humanitarian entrants can be advanced through the application of robust labour market strategies.
- Australian Government employment services are being transformed to provide better services for all job seekers and employers and a better system for providers. The New Employment Service Model system is being piloted in two regions from July 2019 before being rolled out nationally from July 2022.
 - Job seekers who are job-ready and digitally literate will enter Digital First and self-manage online.
 - Job seekers who need extra support will be able to access face to face support to help them use and access digital services.
 - The most disadvantaged job seekers will receive Enhanced Services delivered through employment services providers. Providers will deliver a professional, individualised service to help prepare and support job seekers into work.

Providers will help address a job seeker's barriers to work through services such as career guidance, mentoring, vocational training, and assistance in accessing non-vocational services such as counselling, work experience, job placements and post-placement support.

- The *Regional Employment Trials* (RET) program, administered by the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, recognises that some regions face challenges in terms of employment opportunities and growth. From 1 October 2018, the RET program has been rolled out in 10 disadvantaged regions, using a place-based approach to draw on local stakeholder expertise to develop employment related projects. Five of the RET projects have a specific focus on refugees and migrants.
 - *Costa: Refugee and Migrant Employment Pilot (Tomato Exchange)* in NSW (Northern Inland) – The project is delivering an employer-led, culturally customised employment program to support vulnerable unemployed refugees and migrants living locally to build their skills and capability to be ready for work in the Costa Group on a tomato farm.
 - *Improving Economic Participation for Refugees in Wyndham* in Melbourne (Western Melbourne/North Western Melbourne Employment Regions) – Through this project the Wyndham City Council has adopted a coordination role and is using established networks with business and industry to develop employer-led solutions to address barriers for refugees and open up employment opportunities with local businesses.
 - *Bricklaying and Construction Pathways for Young Refugee/Migrant Job Seekers* in Melbourne (Western Melbourne/North Western Melbourne Employment Regions) - This project targets young job seekers of refugee/migrant backgrounds, particularly those who have been unemployed for more than six months. The project also aims to address the region's general skills shortage in bricklaying and general construction. Working directly with large construction employers, the project aims to deliver a pre-employment program, accredited training for work as bricklayers and construction workers, as well as potential placement of participants into employment.
 - *Job Ready Townsville* in Townsville - This project is delivering a comprehensive range of activities to Townsville's most disadvantaged cohorts, including personal development for job seekers, linking to employers and cultural training for employers, employment services providers and job seekers.
 - *Skilling Up for Regional Employment* in Northern Tasmania (Tasmania North and North West Region) – This is a customised training and employment pathways program designed to assist vulnerable migrant job seekers, specifically with refugee backgrounds, to transition to employment. The project aims to tap into the skills shortage being experienced in Northern Tasmania in the advanced manufacturing, mainstream minerals and associated heavy industry sectors by bringing employers and job seekers together with specialised job placement and training support.

- Young refugees who are early school leavers are able to benefit from the *Transition to Work* services. *Transition to Work* provides intensive pre-employment support to improve the work readiness of young people and help them into work or further education. *Transition to Work* is currently available to eligible young people aged 15-21. Eligibility for the service will be extended to young people aged 22-24 years from January 2020.
- Refugees receiving parenting payment may benefit from *ParentsNext* if they meet the eligibility criteria. *ParentsNext* helps parents plan and prepare for employment before their youngest child reaches school age.
- The Australian Government's *Try, Test and Learn Fund* commenced in 2018-19 and is trialling new and innovative approaches to assist some of the most vulnerable in society onto a path towards stable and sustainable independence. It is administered by the Department of Social Services. Migrants and refugees are a priority cohort under this fund and several projects have a specific focus on migrants and refugees, young people and women.
- Additionally, the Australian Government's *Launch into Work* program supports job seekers (including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) to build their employability skills and confidence for the workplace. The program works with employers to co-design pre-employment projects that provide accredited and non-accredited training, mentoring and work experience to support job seekers to build the skills they need for the available roles within the employing organisation. Projects may be conducted in a variety of industries nationally, and the organisation must commit to hiring all job seekers who successfully complete the pre-employment project. The program prioritises female job seekers, consistent with the Australian Government's G20 commitment to improving women's workforce participation.
- Foundation language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills are key to Australians' participation in the economy. As the labour market continues to shift towards service industries and non-routine manual or cognitive jobs, workers will need to develop new skills throughout their lives to transition within and between jobs and industries. A new *Foundation Skills for Your Future* program will support workers who are currently employed, or recently unemployed, to identify any literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs and where appropriate, access training. *Foundation Skills for Your Future* is expected to commence in early 2020 and is administered by the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business.
- Innovative approaches to the delivery of settlement and English language services are being trialled under the HSP, *Settlement Engagement and Transition Support* (SETS) program and *Adult Migrant English Program* (AMEP). This includes partnering with social enterprises, using digital platforms where appropriate and making it easier for community groups and businesses to assist humanitarian entrants.

- The Department will trial innovative and flexible delivery of English tuition in select regions to provide alternative models to traditional AMEP services. The trials will focus on better English language outcomes, particularly for vulnerable cohorts like women and young people who may not be accessing the program and innovative approaches that allow for tuition to occur outside institutional classroom settings, to best meet client needs and facilitate employment opportunities. The trials will commence on 1 July 2020.
- The Department is continuing work to better align AMEP with other settlement and employment services to ensure referral pathways across settlement and English language programs for migrants are clear and case co-ordinated.

Recommendation 4: Improving Accountability for Outcomes

To develop a results-based performance regime that is embedded across programs, and to measure success, ensure accountability and improve planning, program design and service delivery, the Commonwealth Government should:

- a) *improve the collection and coordination of de-identified information across government agencies;*
- b) *capture greater information from refugees before they arrive in Australia to inform better case coordination;*
- c) *with the informed consent of refugees, enhance case coordination by allowing real time sharing of information on their personal circumstances with government and community service providers; and*
- d) *utilise technology to provide a personal digital record for refugees which would reduce the need for duplication and streamline their relationships with government agencies and service providers.*

Supported

- Moving responsibility for the settlement of migrants and humanitarian entrants, and the English language program for adult migrants into the Department has provided opportunities for the consolidation of data and exchange across settlement programs, including offshore data collection.
- The Australian Government is conducting a stocktake of data collected to support the arrival and settlement of humanitarian entrants to identify new ways of distributing and sharing this information with relevant agencies. For example, the Australian Government recognises that humanitarian entrants often need to provide information to several different services and agencies. To assist with this, the guidelines for the HSP have been updated to require providers to give humanitarian entrants a copy of their information (their case management record), so the person can share this information with other service providers such as job active.
- The Australian Government is reorienting the HSP from an outputs to an outcomes-based model, to commence from 1 July 2020. This will improve measurement of client outcomes through a strengthened performance management framework.
- The Australian Government is making improvements to the measurement of English language acquisition in the AMEP. From 1 July 2020 there will be a sharpened and simplified focus on the measurement of student progression. This will make it easier to measure improvements on a program and individual basis including for the vast majority of students who enter the program with no, or limited, English. Innovative delivery of AMEP will be trialled in specific regions from 1 July 2020 to more flexibly meet the needs of different cohorts such as young people and women.

- The Australian Government is also ensuring, through rigorous procurement processes, that there is performance based accountability for all specialist and mainstream spending by Commonwealth Agencies, including those that provide services to refugees and humanitarian entrants.

Recommendation 5: Promoting Opportunities for Regional Resettlement

In order to support and assist regional communities to develop locally-led approaches to attract and retain refugees, the Commonwealth Government should:

- a) *promote the benefits of regional settlement and encourage communities to explore its potential;*
- b) *oversee a national strategy that supports regional settlement opportunities; and*
- c) *facilitate stronger planning, coordination and evaluation of regional settlement by bringing together all levels of government, community, and business.*

Supported

- The Australian Government is committed to continuing to increase the proportion of refugees and humanitarian entrants that settle in regional areas. The proportion of humanitarian entrants settling in regional Australia has grown year-on-year and is expected to exceed 40 per cent in 2019-20. The Department has commenced engagement with state and territory governments on the identification of potential additional regional settlement locations and is working with local government, the community and business sectors to support the ongoing success of existing regional settlement sites. The identification of new regional settlement sites is being progressed through careful planning that takes account of the infrastructure, services, labour market profile, community support and other opportunities needed for successful settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants.
- Through its employer engagement activities the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business is facilitating the relocation of refugee and migrant job seekers from Western Sydney to the Riverina to take up employment opportunities. Key to these efforts is linking up various Commonwealth and State government agencies, and non-government stakeholders to create fully supported pathways for the relocation of refugee and migrant job seekers.
- The Australian Government has set a target of 50 per cent for the referral of humanitarian entrants to regional Australia by mid-2022. This in line with the Government's plan to reduce the impact of increasing population in congested cities and support growth in smaller cities and regions.

Recommendation 6: Adding Complementary Visa Pathways

In addition to the current Humanitarian Program, the Commonwealth Government should introduce three complementary permanent visa pathways for refugees, based on a shared cost model:

- a) a place-based community sponsored visa which harnesses the collective strength of whole communities partnering with their local governments, service providers and community organisations;
- b) an employer sponsored visa offering immediate employment opportunities to suitably skilled refugees; and
- c) a university sponsored visa offering post-graduate or post-doctoral places to academically qualified refugees.

Supported in Part

- The Australian Government has a dedicated pathway for community sponsorship of refugees through the *Community Support Program* and will be reviewing the program after it has been in place for a three-year period. The report of the evaluation will be presented to the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs in 2020.
- The Australian Government will continue to examine additional ways to involve local community and businesses in the successful settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants across Australia. For example, a small trial will be undertaken to bring in skilled refugees within the existing skilled visa framework.

Recommendation 7: Bringing the Community Together

In order to harness the goodwill of many Australians who want to offer friendship and support to refugees, the Commonwealth Government should:

- a) *utilise and increase existing Commonwealth grant funding to establish a small ‘Bringing the Community Together’ grants program to encourage communities to develop innovative approaches at the local level; and*
- b) *sponsor the development of digital approaches that will connect refugees who require assistance and practical support with members of the broader Australian community who are willing to provide it.*

Supported

- The Australian Government recognises the important role communities can play in supporting newly arrived refugees, humanitarian entrants and other migrants to successfully settle in Australia. These efforts are already supported through a range of initiatives.
 - The Department is helping to connect local employers, charities, religious and community organisations, councils, sporting groups with refugees and settlement support agencies at a local level. This is already fostering immediate connections between refugees and the communities they live in and is enabling communities to get more involved in supporting successful settlement outcomes. For example, some local businesses have offered employment and volunteering opportunities to refugees, community members are hosting English language conversations in the park, and football clubs are supporting local refugees to join pre-season training with the support of a buddy, free membership and access to equipment. The Department will continue these grass roots initiatives in settlement locations across the country throughout the year. The Department launched an online interface in October 2019 to facilitate bringing the community together and is looking for other opportunities to link humanitarian entrants with the community.
 - SETS funds 100 organisations around Australia to improve social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being and community connectedness by equipping and empowering humanitarian entrants to address their settlement needs.
 - *Fostering Integration Grants* administered by the Department provides funding to more than 220 community organisations around Australia to help migrants and refugees better integrate into Australian life, such as promoting employment and community participation.

- *Try, Test and Learn Fund* funds innovative projects to help people live independently of welfare. Some of these projects specifically target refugees and migrants who have the capacity to work and are at risk of long-term welfare dependency.
- *Mutual Understanding, Support, Tolerance, Engagement and Respect* initiative Services supports organisations to improve community resilience and build opportunities for people to connect, contribute and thrive.