

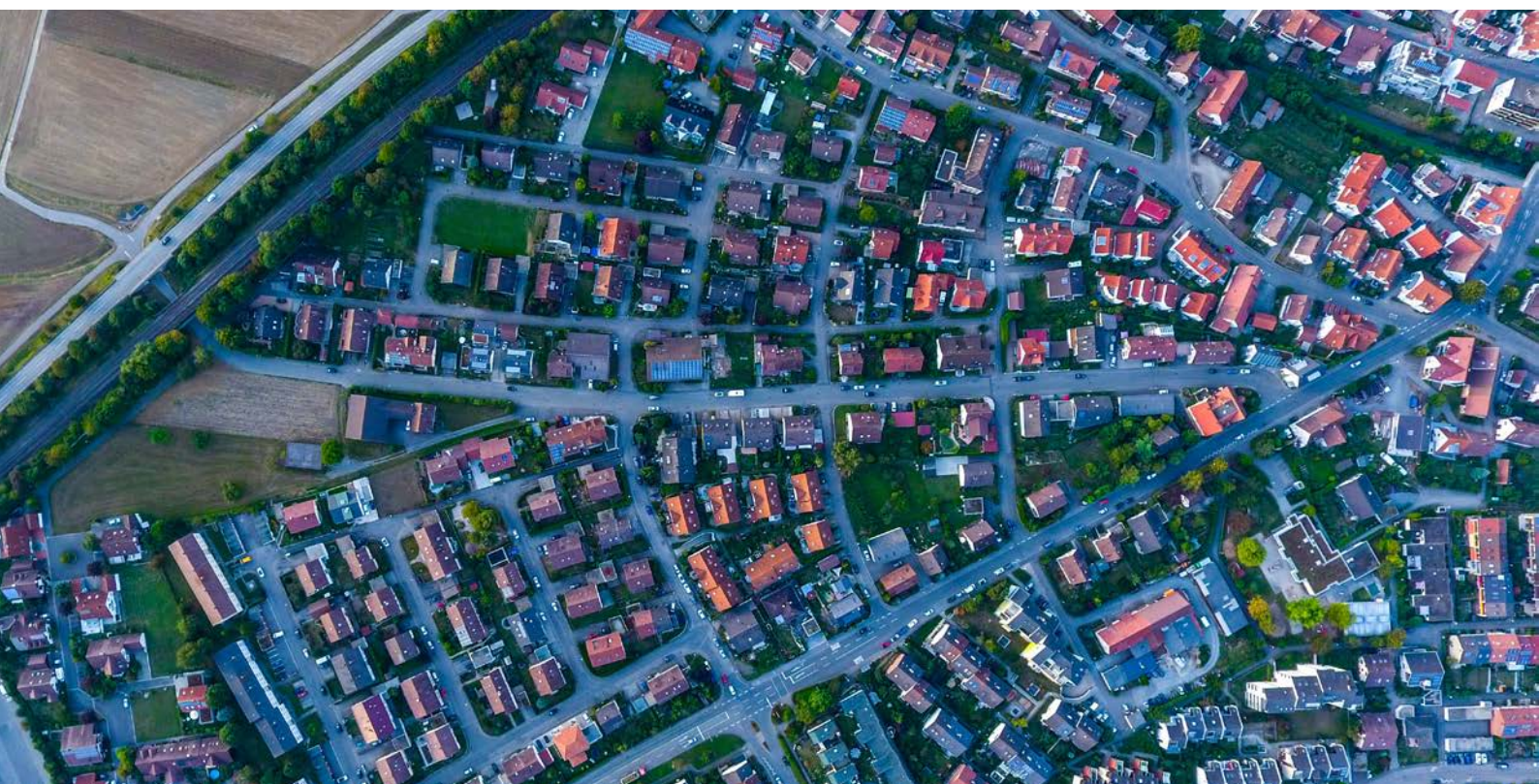
Settlement Experience of Syrian & Iraqi Refugees:

*Opportunities, challenges
& the way forward*



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For: **Edmund Rice Centre**
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Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education (ERC) is a Sydney-based non-government research and advocacy organisation that was founded by the Christian Brothers in 1996. ERC conducts rights-based programs including people-centred research, community education, community empowerment and advocacy with Indigenous peoples (the first peoples), refugees and people seeking asylum (the last to arrive), and those facing climate change in the Pacific (the next to come). ERC's aim is to raise awareness that leads to social action and policy change in favour of the poor and excluded in Australia and internationally.

Foreword

Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education welcomes this report into the settlement experience of recently arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Australia. The purpose of the study is to learn about the gap between what is currently provided by way of settlement support and what is needed to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes for refugees. The study aims to enhance policy development, settlement service provision and consequently the settlement experience of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and to foster a better understanding of these new arrivals living in Australia. The findings and recommendations of this study will be used to advocate for filling the gaps in service delivery to refugees and to contribute to the improvement of refugee settlement services by informing relevant stakeholders, including the Australian Government, non-government service providers and the wider Australian community.

My deep appreciation is extended to the many participants in the study, including Syrian and Iraqi refugees, community leaders, key informants and representatives of government and non-government service providers, who offered their perspectives, views and opinions on the settlement experience of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. I greatly appreciate the time, honesty and passionate responses of the research participants, as their contributions informed the study and made it possible to complete this important and timely project.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the authors of the report, who worked very hard to complete the research and produce an in-depth and nuanced analysis of the settlement experience of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, including concrete recommendations for further investigation and policy improvement in the refugee settlement space. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the genuine contribution, expertise, commitment and determination of the authors during the past twelve months.

I would also like to sincerely thank the Edmund Rice Centre Human Research Ethics Advisory Committee for their time and contribution in reviewing the primary research proposal, providing comprehensive feedback and guidance, and finally approving the research project.



Sincerely,
Phil Glendenning AM
Director, Edmund Rice Centre
President, Refugee Council of Australia



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Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	JSCOM	Joint Standing Committee on Migration
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program	MHCS	Multicultural Health Communication Service
AUSCO	Australian Cultural Orientation Program	MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
CA	capability approach	NCHP	National Community Hubs Program
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse	NGO	non-government organisation
CBO	community-based organisation	NRSN	NSW Refugee Support Network
CEO	Catholic Education Office	NYHP	National Youth Hubs Program
COAG	Council of Australian Governments	RCoA	Refugee Council of Australia
CPD	Centre for Policy Development	RESP	Refugee Employment Support Program
DE	Department of Education	SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
DES	Disability Employment Services	SCOA	Settlement Council of Australia
DHA	Department of Home Affairs	SEE	Skills for Education and Employment
DI	Department of Industry	SETS	Settlement Engagement and Transition Support
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship	SHP	Special Humanitarian Program
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection	SPP	Special Preparatory Program
DSS	Department of Social Services	SRF	Settlement Reporting Facility
EALD	English as an Additional Language or Dialect	SSI	Settlement Services International
FACS	Family and Community Services	SSP	settlement service provider
FCSAP	Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan	STARTTS	Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
FIS	Free Interpreting Service	TAFE	Technical and Further Education
FTS	Free Translating Service	TIS	Translating and Interpreting Service
HSP	Humanitarian Settlement Program	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IEC	Intensive English Centre	YTS	Youth Transition Support
IEHS	Intensive English High School		
IOM	International Organization for Migration		

1. Executive Summary





1. Executive Summary

‘Settlement’ can be described as a process, a set of services, a journey, a goal and a state as in ‘settled’ depending on whose perspective is taken. This report explores these different concepts of settlement from different perspectives, but most importantly through the experiences of Syrian and Iraqi refugees arriving in Australia since 2012 under the Australian Government’s refugee and humanitarian settlement program.¹ By the end of 2017 almost 25,000 places had been granted to these groups.²

The objective of this research is to identify areas for improvement and necessary changes to current policy and programs that support refugee resettlement in Australia, using Syrian and Iraqi refugees as a case study. In announcing an expanded program in September 2015, the Australian Government described its commitment as “a generous, prudent and proportionate response by a decent and compassionate nation” (DFAT 2015). The findings in this research validate this intent but identify opportunities to significantly improve settlement outcomes for refugees as well as the broader Australian community. The recommendations in this report, while drawing on the experience of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, can be applied more widely where the settlement patterns, experiences and outcomes are similar.

In this report we take a long view and consider the ‘beginning’ to be the first step a refugee3 takes to leave behind forever the life they have built in their country of origin and move

permanently to Australia. Defining an end point is much more problematic and individually subjective. We acknowledge that government policy, programs and funding will always be finite in quantity and timeframes and, as this research shows, can often fall well short of group and individual needs. However, civil society has much greater flexibility to respond to individual needs over a range of timeframes and in different locations, and so the question arises as to how group and individual needs can be better supported by government to achieve what one key informant in this study refers to as “structured serendipity” (KI6) or ensuring the appropriate support is available wherever and whenever needed.

This project is a qualitative study of the refugee settlement experience primarily from the perspective of refugees themselves. Twenty refugees from among the Syrian and Iraqi arrivals who have settled in the Fairfield and Liverpool areas of Sydney in the past five years were interviewed. A summary profile of this sample is provided in Table 1. Refugees were recruited through advertisements placed in locations frequented by the target group in seeking support for settlement, including schools and relevant community organisations. Most refugee interviews were conducted through an interpreter as most interviewees were more comfortable in Arabic, although some chose to do the interview in English. Interviews were translated and transcribed for analysis using a simple methodology of thematic coding and categorisation of codes.

¹ For 2015–16 the number of places allocated under the program was 13,750, in 2016–17 it was 13,750 and in 2017–18 it was 18,750 (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2017 as cited in Collins et al. 2018, p. 5). In September 2015 the Australian Government announced that it would “resettle an additional 12,000 refugees who are fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq” (DFAT 2015). The 12,000 was in addition to the existing humanitarian intake and these additional places were filled by March 2017.

² Collins et al. (2018, p. 5), drawing on the Settlement Reporting Facility data of the Department of Home Affairs, puts the total number of visas granted as at 31 December 2017 at 24,926, of which 22,398 places were granted to those from Syria or Iraq from 1 July 2015 until 30 June 2017.

³ The term ‘refugee’ is used in this report to refer to both refugees as defined by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as well as migrants coming to Australia under the Australian Government’s wider Humanitarian Settlement Program, which covers refugees and others in similar situations (Centre for Policy Development – CPD 2017, np).

Table 1 Profile of refugee interviewees

Demographics	Gender	10 female 10 male	Marital status	15 married, 5 single
	Accompanying children	14	Accompanying elders (parents/in-laws)	5
	Nationality	14 Iraqi 6 Syrian	Religion	6 Catholic/ Christian 4 Mandaean 1 Sunni Muslim Remainder not noted
Getting to Australia	Country of refuge (before Australia)	11 Jordan 6 Lebanon 2 Egypt 1 Syria	Time in last country of refuge	Majority 1.5–2.5 years Longest 4, 6 and 8 years
	Sponsored visa subclass	11 sponsored 2 refugee Remainder not noted	Time from application to visa	6 months – 2 years
Education/ qualifications/ employment	Education level	2 high school 10 bachelor's degree	AMEP completed	8 only
	Profession	Engineer, chemist, pharmacist, teacher, journalist, IT, driver, quality control, pharmaceuticals, accountant, jeweller	Australian accreditation	None
	Studying/ qualifications obtained post-arrival	7 enrolled in TAFE	Current employment status	2 employed (1 casual) 1 volunteering

To arrive at concrete recommendations for the Australian community, we have also considered the perspectives of service providers and community organisations. Interviews were conducted with ten service provider and community organisations working with the

refugees, and ten other key informants closely involved with specific aspects of the settlement journey. Service providers, community organisations and key informants were selected and invited to participate based on their role and engagement with the target refugee group.

This report is structured thematically to reflect the key steps in the settlement journey and the main challenges as articulated by refugees themselves:

- **Chapter 2 – Getting to Australia:** The first step taken by refugees in coming to Australia is to begin the process of applying for and meeting the qualification criteria for a refugee or humanitarian visa. We examine the relevant aspects of the Australian visa system and refugee experiences in dealing with ‘the system’. Decisions can be made at this juncture without understanding of the long-term consequences, often leading to ongoing anxiety, especially from having to leave family behind. For many, the path to Australia is through sponsorship by family already in Australia. This is an increasing trend statistically and has in recent years in NSW led to a concentration of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Fairfield and Liverpool due to most sponsors (family or community members) living in these two Local Government Areas. Our understanding of vulnerability needs to be improved from the starting point of the refugee’s journey, and better information and greater transparency in the process need to be provided to help them make informed decisions.
- **Chapter 3 – Becoming Settled:** The idea of settlement, settling, becoming settled, has many interpretations. For the purpose of this report, we adopt a simple definition as a starting point: to be settled means to feel at home in Australia. The report examines the different outcome frameworks in operation in the sector against the evaluative framework of Amartya Sen’s capability approach (CA) (Sen 1999) and compares these with the refugee understanding of the idea of settlement. While the current outcome frameworks are well documented with best practice benchmarks and guidelines, these are not regulated and there is still a gap between the ideal of creating real opportunities for refugees to live the life they aspire to in Australia, as Australian citizens, and what is actually delivered in support of this goal. This gap hinges on a settlement support model which is top-down and silo-based, rather than refugee-centric. We consider the emerging shift to place-based or community-based models, and whether and how this might better meet the needs of refugees.
- **Chapter 4 – Communicating:** A key focus of the support model and target outcomes, from all perspectives, is communication skills. The ability to function and communicate in everyday settings including work and school is an essential element of successful settlement for refugees. Communicating remains a major challenge for new arrivals due to policy and program constraints, and the way that language support services are designed and delivered. It is important for the Australian Government to be engaged effectively in the design, development, delivery and evaluation of those communication and language support programs which are delivered by non-government service providers.
- **Chapter 5 – Working:** The next ‘settling-in’ challenge is work. Refugees are often individuals with a work history and career behind them which they now need to begin again from scratch, due to the barriers to recognition of qualifications and experience. This is not captured in employment statistics and outcomes, however tailored the support is. Despite the importance of work for these new arrivals, many of the interviewees have not been able to find work or keep their jobs due to a number of

interconnected challenges. It is important to improve consistent information exchange across the public, community and private sectors to better help new arrivals with preparing them for work, helping them find employment and enabling them to keep their jobs.

- **Chapter 6 – Living Day to Day:** Day-to-day living and economic survival have also emerged as key issues for refugees. While a level of government support is welcome in the early stages, the cost of housing is often their first encounter with the structural aspects of the Australian economy which are very different to what many have left behind. Adjusting and surviving in this new context are stressors layered on top of the losses they have already experienced. Our findings confirm that housing unaffordability, economic and financial hardship, and welfare dependency are some of the major challenges affecting the day-to-day living of these new arrivals as essential elements of their settlement. New, innovative programs and initiatives need to be developed in collaboration with refugee communities that help in practical ways to reduce long-term welfare dependency and assist them to become socially and financially independent.
- **Chapter 7 – Cultural Adjustment:** The main program contributing towards cultural adjustment is the Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO), which is delivered offshore prior to arrival. Although the program is periodically reviewed, refugee responses indicate the necessity of all recommendations from such reviews being implemented. The refugee experience of the AUSCO program is examined from the perspectives of its timeliness, its adequacy and the factors contributing to effective receptivity.
- **Chapter 8 – Community Acceptance and Social Integration:** Refugees find that the Australian community demonstrates a high level of acceptance. The most positive aspect of their settlement experience is the safe and secure environment, free of violence and oppression, which enables them to restore their sense of self-worth, dignity and respect. However, refugees prefer to seek support from community-based organisations (CBOs) and their community leaders, rather than government service providers, because they experience these as providing nurturing environments where they feel comfortable and safe in their experiences and identity. This reinforces the importance of community-oriented support structures.
- **Chapter 9 – Building Resilience:** Resilience has emerged as an important capacity that refugees bring with them to their new country. This capacity stems first and foremost from their experiences, which begin with their forced displacement from their home country. Other important contributing factors are the values they bring with them including the importance of education, and the social support and capital found in the Australian community. These are important for survival, but not sufficient to ensure sustainable integration and long-term stabilisation of their lives given the struggles they face.

The following chapters of the report elaborate on these themes, drawing on refugee perspectives on the settlement experience, the views of service providers and CBOs, and other documentary and online sources and literature.

A number of proposals for further research, policy review and improved service delivery have emerged from the data. They include:

- Implementing measures to assist refugee applicants to navigate the visa application process and make informed decisions through improved sources of information, expanded capacity of sponsoring organisations and greater transparency in the application vetting process
- Improving settlement programs by adopting a refugee-centred model, reframing outcomes around capabilities and resilience, involving refugees in the design of programs and providing additional resourcing to enable effective monitoring and reporting on outcomes
- Promoting economic security for refugees through improvements in support for skill recognition, finding work, learning English and meeting the costs of housing
- Helping refugees to feel part of the Australian community through enhanced cultural orientation programs and support for community- and faith-based organisations, including incentives for support networks to extend their reach beyond the areas where Syrian and Iraqi refugees are currently concentrated

These suggestions are described in more detail in the Recommendations section. We hope that they will generate discussion and action for the benefit of current and future refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia.



2. Getting to Australia



2. Getting to Australia

This chapter examines the first stage in the refugee's settlement journey as they navigate the process of getting to Australia. The aim of the Australian Government's refugee and humanitarian settlement program is to provide a safe and secure home for the most vulnerable, often people who are fleeing conflict in their home country. This aim is fulfilled in the first instance through the refugee and humanitarian visa system in conjunction with international agencies, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and non-government organisations (NGOs). On their arrival in Australia, the program aims to support new entrants to develop the capabilities needed to participate fully in the Australian community. This is done through third party service providers contracted by government, as well as through Federal and state government departments and agencies as appropriate. NGOs and CBOs also play roles.

Refugees come to Australia under different types of visas, referred to as subclasses. Essentially there are two main categories: sponsored, in which a relative, friend or accredited community group⁴ in Australia financially sponsors the applicant; and refugees, who are referred by the UNHCR. These categories are discussed in more detail below. While the government does not itself determine or influence the visa subclass chosen by individual applicants, the entire process, including the different formal and informal sources of information that refugees rely on in making settlement decisions, has skewed the visa subclass take-up by Syrians and Iraqis towards sponsored visas. This in turn has led to a concentration of these groups in NSW, specifically in Fairfield and Liverpool in Sydney, as their primary settlement location due to

their family and community connections in these areas. The lack of planning for this outcome has resulted in a shortage of services in this area and led to a settlement experience which falls well short of meeting the hopes and expectations of both government and the new arrivals.

This section describes the visa system and key statistics relating to Syrian and Iraqi arrivals since 2012 and then illustrates, drawing on refugee interviews, the experiences of refugees with the system and its impact on their settlement experiences. While the operation of the system itself has resulted in challenges for government and service providers as mentioned above, refugees implicitly seek greater acknowledgement of the trauma they have experienced pre-application and its contribution to their vulnerability on assessment of their visa applications. The information channels accessed by refugees prior to applying for a visa seem to be fragmented and not always reliable. This leads to decisions which have unforeseen long-term consequences for families and their settlement experiences post-arrival.

⁴ Organisational sponsors are approved under the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) Community Support Program. Sponsoring organisations qualify if they can ensure that humanitarian entrants will become financially self-sufficient within 12 months of arrival (DHA 2018).

2.1 Australia's Humanitarian Program

As mentioned in the Introduction, between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017 almost 25,000 Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan entrants arrived in Australia under the humanitarian program as part of its offshore resettlement program⁵. The vast majority were from Syria and Iraq. In September 2015 the Australian Government announced an additional 12,000 places for Syrians and Iraqis. (These places are included in the 25,000.) The government specifically targeted or prioritised women, children and families of “persecuted minorities” who had fled to Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey and were living in UNHCR-run camps or among local populations (DFAT 2015). They were deemed to be the most vulnerable of those seeking refuge, being unlikely to ever be able to return safely home. There is a level of complexity in defining what constitutes a persecuted ‘minority’. In the Iraqi refugee population, refugees came from eight ethnic groups, six religious affiliations and five different language groups. From the Syrian refugee population, refugees came from the same eight ethnic groups plus one additional, a subset of the same religious affiliations but with more sub-groups especially among Muslims and Christians, and the same group of languages (see Collins et al. 2018, pp. 10–11 for details).

Recent media reports have questioned the government’s commitment to non-discriminatory immigration policy, suggesting that the disproportionate number of Christians among the refugees indicates possible bias in the selection process:

80% of those settled under the special program were Christian, from a part of the world that is overwhelmingly Muslim. Christians make up less than 1% of the Iraqi population, and 10% of the Syrian. Australia's intake is disproportionate too compared with the proportion of Christians among the region's displaced. The UNHCR estimates the number of Christian refugees from Iraq at 15%, from Syria it is less than 1%. (Doherty 2018)

Likewise, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported that UNHCR Senior Resettlement Officer Emad Aziz Sedrak was also concerned about Australia’s selection criterion for humanitarian intake:

it was not clear how Australia selected people for resettlement under its Special Humanitarian Program, but stressed that they may not include the “most vulnerable” people from the UNHCR's perspective ... For us this would not necessarily be refugees or be the most vulnerable. (ABC News 2018)

The Australian Government, on the other hand, asserts that refugees are selected only on humanitarian criteria and that what constitutes ‘most vulnerable’ emerges through field engagement with refugees in the camps:

⁵ Offshore resettlement is available to people outside Australia who cannot return home or remain where they are, and are in need of humanitarian assistance. Onshore protection, by comparison, is afforded to people who arrive lawfully in Australia and seek protection here.



The interesting thing was when we went to the big refugee camp in Jordan and we engaged with families as they were sitting in their UNHCR tents, the overwhelming – I mean, how can I put it? The Muslim communities that – members that we interviewed, they wanted to go home. Their first priority wasn't resettling in a country they'd never heard of. They wanted to go home. That's why, when they set up shop across the border, they stayed as close as physically possible to the border, in the hope that one day they could just cross over ...

But when you're talking to the vulnerable minorities that saw their existence as under threat, they were reluctant to go home. So that actually contributed to our thinking about how we'd construct the composition of the program.

... my understanding was that the ethnocultural mix of that group reflected the vulnerabilities we had identified amongst the communities living in the UN refugee camps – and outside the refugee camps for that matter. (KI7)

The final composition in terms of religion is also a factor of the type of the growth in sponsored visas (discussed in more detail below):

They [Syrian and Iraqi refugees] were predominantly Christians, not Muslims, because they were being sponsored in that way, Syrians and Iraqis ... they were predominantly broadly of the Christian faith. Because most Syrians who were doing the sponsoring lived in Sydney and if they'd been here 10, 15 years, which is what you usually need to have been to be an effective sponsor, they tend to be Christian. Large number of Armenians from Aleppo, very sad story of the Armenians, but otherwise there were [Chaldeans], Orthodox, Assyrians and this odd group [Mandaeans] and so on. (KI6)

To obtain a relevant visa, assuming an individual or family meets the stated qualification criteria, refugees need to either be referred by the UNHCR,⁶ who perform an initial assessment,⁷ or have an Australian sponsor. Those applying to come to Australia must fit within one of four visa subclasses, all of which offer permanent residency, as shown in Figure 1. Two of the four available visa categories require sponsorship.

⁶This referral process is part of the UNHCR's resettlement program (see <www.unhcr.org/en-au/resettlement.html>). The UNHCR assesses applicants as individuals or family groups and submits a referral to a partner resettlement country. However, the media reported (Special Broadcasting Service – SBS 2015) that from October 2014 to June 2015 the Australian Government blocked referrals of refugees in part due to pressure on the humanitarian program driven by the conflict in Syria.

⁷ See the UNHCR Referral Form (UNHCR nda), which also assesses urgency as one of normal, urgent (i.e. priority case) or emergency.

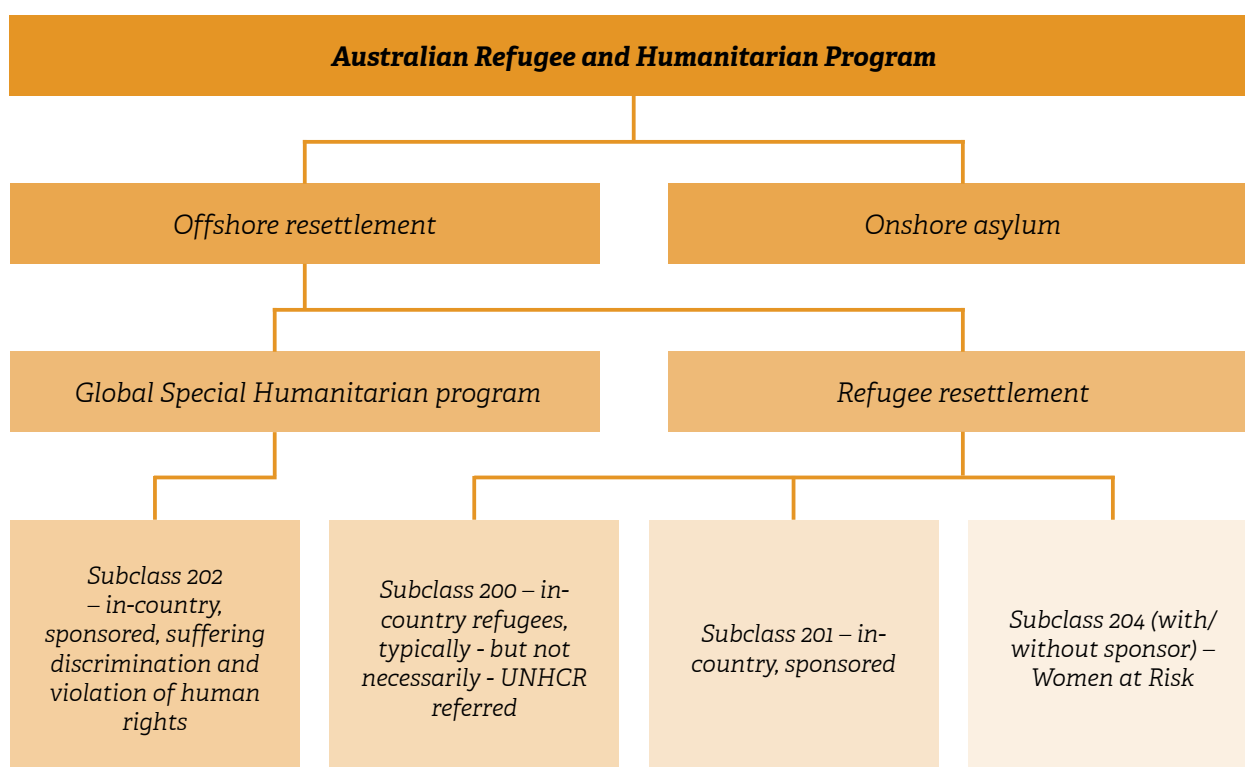


Figure 1 Offshore resettlement visa subclasses

Statistics available from the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) indicate that a large proportion of Syrian and Iraqi entrants were in sponsored visa subclasses. Table 2 shows the breakdown of Iraqi and Syrian arrivals in visa categories 202 (sponsored) and 204 (women at risk) between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017 in the three most popular destination states. This demonstrates that a significant number

were sponsored. Detailed statistics are not available for applicants under the additional 12,000 places announced in 2015 other than that 7442 visas were offered under the sponsored Global Special Humanitarian Category – subclass 202 – and 4885 visas were offered under the three other subclasses – 200, 201 and 204 (DHA 2017, p. 32).

Table 2 Total arrivals of Syrian and Iraqi refugees from 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2017 (DSS Settlement Reporting Facility (SRF) as cited by Collins et al. 2018, p. 8)

Breakdown	Syria	Iraq
Total arrivals (NSW, QLD, VIC)	11,359	13,567
Visa subclass 202	6,406	6,672
Visa subclass 204	186	235
Other subclasses	4,769	6,660

This pattern has several implications. Firstly, a smaller proportion of the intake was referred by the UNHCR. The Refugee Council of Australia (RCoA 2017a) found that the percentage of UNHCR referrals for refugees for unsponsored visas (subclass 200) declined from 50% in 2012–13 to 30% in 2015–16. Those applying based on a UNHCR referral are, by definition, more vulnerable because they have no other place to turn. However, this appears to be a factor that is a consequence of the UNHCR's referral assessment of urgency. Otherwise the proportion of unsponsored versus sponsored visas is assumed to be a function of refugee choice or preference and processing time.

The second implication thus relates to the processing times experienced by applicants. Unsponsored refugee subclass visas are processed much faster than the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) sponsored visa subclass 202 (DHA 2017, p. 31), presumably because the majority are pre-screened by the UNHCR. The trend towards sponsored subclasses means longer wait times for the majority of those coming to Australia. Moreover, DHA indicates that for all visa subclasses the 'average' processing time for applications can range from months to years.^{8,9} However, averages are not useful in evaluating the settlement experience as the median, given such a wide range, may tell a very different story, as indicated in Table 1.

However, while UNHCR-referred refugee visas (subclass 200) are processed faster on average, this does not include the time taken

by the UNHCR itself for processing prior to a referral being issued. The UNHCR process begins with registration, interview and status determination (if denied refugee status, there is a further appeal process) and only then referral/submission to a participating resettlement destination country. If the first country refuses the refugee or refugee family, the submission is withdrawn and resubmitted to another resettlement country. The UNHCR is severely capacity constrained and the status-determination steps alone can take years (Barbour 2018).

The third implication from the visa subclass mix, that is, the dominance of sponsored arrivals, in particular subclass 202, relates to where refugees settle in Australia. The majority, consistent with normal migration patterns, settle on the east coast (NSW, Qld, Vic) and in particular NSW (Settlement Reporting Facility (SRF) as cited in Collins et al. 2018, p. 8). Those arriving with sponsorship tend to settle close to their family and their ethnic and or religious community. In the case of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, this places the vast majority – 77% of those arriving under subclass 202 visas – in western Sydney, specifically Liverpool and Fairfield (SRF as cited in Collins et al. 2018, pp. 8, 20). This trend has implications for the demand for settlement support from these areas, accessibility and longer term integration as an aspect and goal of settlement. These are discussed in the next chapter.

⁸ In its annual report for 2016–17 the DHA (2017, p. 31) documented the average processing times for refugee (subclasses 200, 201, 203, 204) and SHP (subclass 202) visas granted and refused/withdrawn, that is, finalised in the reporting period. In both categories, approved visas finalised in 2016–17 took at least 50% longer than those refused (47 weeks vs 24 weeks for refugee visas, 71 vs 51 weeks for SHP visas); however, the ratio was not as pronounced as in 2015–16. In both years SHP visas took on average ~40% longer to be granted than refugee subclasses.

⁹ The Department notes key determinants in individual cases: "An application cannot be granted until health, character and security clearances are obtained. Other issues such as restricted access to clients due to instability in the countries in which they reside, the need for additional or specialist health and character checks and other variables, can delay visa grants" (DHA 2017, p. 31).

2.2 The Refugee Experience

From the interviews conducted with refugees, two main themes have emerged in relation to this first stage in resettling in Australia. Firstly, the vulnerability of refugees as individuals and families while awaiting resettlement goes well beyond the circumstances they find themselves in at the time of application and possibly exceeds the capability and capacity of UNHCR and Australian immigration processes to appropriately triage and prioritise. This vulnerability arises not only from the circumstances in which the UNHCR finds them, but also the journey, suffering and trauma they have experienced in getting to

Jordan, Lebanon or other country of refuge, which become the first step in the trauma rather than the first step in resettlement.

While DHA statistics report on processing times for applications, a more comprehensive timeline analysis, starting with the initial flight from home up until at least arrival in Australia, may tell quite a different story on how well or poorly these international processes are serving refugees. For some the journey is long, spanning years, during which some applicants are also caring for parents, spouse and children:

I was in Jordan. I am from Iraq, I travelled to Jordan and stayed in Jordan for 2 years and 8 months and from there ... I came to Australia ... It [application processing] took 1 year, 7 months and 10 days ... My father and mother were paralysed. (R9)

Our [interviewee, husband and four children] circumstances were very difficult when we came; our Christian regions [in Iraq] were taken over by Daesh. We were very scared. My husband feared for me and my daughters and we decided, we migrated to Erbil for 2 months. After that we decided. Before that we were in Baghdad. In Baghdad we migrated twice because of sectarianism and such issues. First we went to our birthplace, Mosul, some 40 minutes from Mosul, and when Daesh came we migrated from our region in 2006 ... I mean, they had no mercy, and migrated to Ankawa [in Iraqi Kurdistan] and in there we decided to go to Amman. We got the visa, then we travelled to Amman and applied for humanitarian refugee in Australia and they accepted us as refugees ... We applied to the UN and the first interview but there was delays; roughly, we applied in March and we came here in September the following year. (R2)

For others, the circumstances they find themselves in lead to despair. This makes the randomness of finding a sympathetic hearing at an embassy or elsewhere, while helpful to some, unfair to others who are not so fortunate. One woman spoke of the difficulty of living in Lebanon in a small room with her husband, parents and two children, and prior to this in a single room with other families in Erbil, while waiting for resettlement:

For 1 year and 9 months we suffered like no one has seen, but at the end, I could not take it anymore [Arabic "my soul exploded"] so I called the embassy and I started to cry and cry and cry because of my anger. I told her, "You should find us a solution, what should I do? Do I kill myself?" You know I have small children and they became sick [her husband was also suffering from lupus] ... So thank god they [the embassy] respond to my call ... The UN, they did not help us at all ... Thank god my brother sponsored us and we came here [process took 1 year and 9 months]. (R6)

The second theme to emerge from the interviews is the lack of recognition of the ongoing anxiety and possibly feelings of guilt about close family members, themselves especially vulnerable due to age and ill-health, who have stayed behind or had to be left behind because their applications were unsuccessful or to give the younger people a better chance. This anxiety weighs heavily on new arrivals and hinders their personal settlement journey. Some perceive the system to be random, inconsistent, unfair:

But I am feeling very distressed, not because of what happened to me, but I feel with the people who are there. They are suffering every day; they sleep all day at the UN gate asking for a solution. Some people are waiting 4 or 5 years and til now they have nothing. That is what frustrate me, why is that happening? Has human become so cheap like that? My parents were with us. The only one left behind are my father and my other single brother and mother. They are still in Lebanon. They left Iraq before me, but they still have nothing even though they have [immediate] family here. Every time we apply, his application comes back with a refusal. What is the reason? We don't know. ... My father and mother are elderly, because of the stress my mother fell sick ... my father lost his sight, they became a mess. So they decided to go to Jordan ... This is our suffering and we are still suffering as our parents are not here. (R6)

In the following case, the interviewee was a woman with a small child and without her husband, who had to try several approaches (visa types) before being successful:

The first time we [brother, interviewee and her daughter] submitted an application [from Egypt, having fled Syria] for an Australian visa together with my parents ... We put our applications under one refugee case ... When my parents' application approved and they moved to Australia, after 6 months our applications were unsuccessful. It was shocking news for us as we for the first time in our life were separated from each other. Again, my brother and I submitted a new application applying for the same visa 202 and we waited for 2 year. In this period, my parents were suffering a lot from our separation and my father was suffering from depression ... the result of our second application came and it was rejected ... My uncle who has been living in Australia for 40 years ... agreed to become our proposer and our application was successful this time. (R10)

Navigating the system for an optimum outcome for as many family members as possible while trying to keep the family together can produce competing objectives:

It took us 9 months to get the visa, but the treatment was good, thank god ... there are people who are still waiting for 4 years. Like my daughter left to Jordan 4 days before me and she is still waiting and nothing yet. Even though the ambassador promised me: "It will not take 3 months before your daughter joins you" but she did not do as she promised ... My daughter was not in the same application as my family [husband and younger children] but the ambassador told me to fill up form

2.3 Key Informants' & UNHCR Perspectives

681 and "your daughter will join you soon". We filled up the form and still my daughter received nothing. Then I did a new form under her father's name and she got a file number which she still has. We followed up here in Australia. We even raised the case with the immigration minister and we got a message through the post – he said, "God willing your daughter will come here but there is a queue." We know that people were arriving to Australia within 4 months and we were still waiting. Some came to Australia after only 5 months, some applied in 2016 and they got here, some 2017 and they are here – my daughter in 2014 and she is still there, so there is no queue. (R1)

In yet another case, a couple who have left parents behind in Lebanon as well as the wife's brother, observed:

So there is no fixed parameters, there is no measure. You feel that there are people who are unjustly treated, who suffer injustice in this process because there's no – you don't understand, you don't know how things work. Some people will come quickly and some people will stay forever, a long time. (R4)

A key informant on the establishment of the vetting process for the additional 12,000 places in the Australian SHP explained the parameters that were used to vet applicants under the scheme. Security concerns are a special consideration in this part of the world:

So established processes and procedures that had been used for decades in terms of refugee selection processes [were used]; however, given the national security issues, the prevalence of ISIS and others in the Middle East, the security [vetting] over the top of this caseload was quite detailed ... So a core part of the early stages was to set up a very comprehensive, multi-layered, detailed vetting process because of the national security implications and the part of the world that we were dealing with. (KI7)

The processes of "identification, interviewing, selection and visa granting" (KI7) in conjunction with partners such as UNHCR were pre-existing; however, what was new was the framework or parameters within which these processes would operate:

Now the government's directive at the time was to select people who were the most vulnerable, with the least likely chance of being able to return to their homes, and to identify those minorities that were at greatest personal physical risk. (KI7)

This "personal physical risk" arose not only from the threat of ISIS and civil war, but also from the breakdown of centuries-old "control mechanisms" as a result:

when you have multi-ethnic, multi-religious communities living together with historical enmities, there are certain

control mechanisms in place that hold it all together ... So when you start taking that sort of thing into account, there are a lot of those communities that simply could not go back to their traditional home, their traditional village, because there were no control measures in place to protect them, whether it was a legal framework or a domestic security framework or whatever. So that's where the complexity comes into it. (KI7)

The journey many refugees had been through before applying to come to Australia seems to be viewed by them as a validation of the persecution and/or threats of physical violence they faced and their inability, therefore, to return to their homes. This is consistent with the UNHCR's refugee status determination criteria based on the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR 2011a, pp. 82–89). Vulnerability is multidimensional and has a longitudinal aspect as well. It has to do with identity, history, circumstance, kinship and the journey leading up to application for resettlement. This is complex both for those dealing with asylum seekers applying for refugee status and resettlement visas and for the applicants themselves. While acknowledgement of the longitudinal as distinct from the static current circumstance nature of vulnerability may not change refugee status or resettlement acceptance outcomes, it can potentially change the settlement experiences of new migrants when addressed on arrival and in the first months and years. It should also be reflected in the standards and procedures for carrying out the assessment of visa applications in the country of refuge. The UNHCR does apply appropriate standards as it is not constrained by quotas; however, the Australian Government is far less transparent in its processes.

In response to a question about families being broken up in the process (the example being elderly parents separated from adult children and their families), a key informant (KI7) indicated that “The family unit was in front of us ... the family unit was interviewed”. They were aware that families were being broken up. The key informant was unable to shed any further light on this issue. The following case of a single mother, child, brother and parents illustrates the issue:

The first time we submitted an application for an Australian visa together with my parents. We had 3 separate applications: one for my parents, one for my brother and one for myself and my daughter. We put our applications under one refugee case and they sent the applications to Melbourne in Australia ... We submitted our application to the Australian immigration agency. That was the first application. We were expecting that they will consider and process all applications; however, they processed my parents' application and put on hold our applications in the waiting list. When my parent applications approved and they moved to Australia, after 6 months our applications were unsuccessful ... Then my parents told us about a program, SSP, from an organisation called LMRC in Australia in which a proposer should agree to cover our expenses for one year after arrival in Australia. My uncle who has been living in Australia for 40 years and owns his house agreed to become our proposer and our application was successful this time. During this process, the result of our second application came and it was rejected. (R10)

The UNHCR, however, advocates for all dependent family members to be resettled together:

Every effort should be made to keep dependent family members together and to advocate with the resettlement State for a durable solution in the manner least harmful to the family, both collectively and individually. However, if the resettlement State has accepted only part of the family and will not reconsider the split decision, UNHCR should advise the family to consider withdrawal and resubmission of all linked cases to another country in order that no individual is left behind. (UNHCR 2011a, p. 368)

Moreover, where a family decides to accept a split decision by the country of resettlement:

Such a choice should not be construed as evidence against the family's interdependency, but rather be viewed as a pragmatic approach to a situation with few available options. Nevertheless, the departure of part of the family may leave one or more family member(s) behind, where they may become particularly vulnerable or face specific protection problems. (UNHCR 2011a, p. 368)

In determining refugee status, the UNHCR further endorses a “derivative family status” based on the “right to family unity” (UNHCR 2011a, p. 5.1), which means that dependent parents of applicants, for example, may be granted refugee status. The Australian Government allows for new arrivals to sponsor immediate family members under the “split family” provisions (UNHCR 2011b, pp. 13–14) and this may include parents and siblings. High priority is given to sponsors holding a permanent humanitarian visa, while holders of protection visas are given the lowest priority and can only apply if they arrived before 13 August 2012. Holders of humanitarian visas must apply within five years of their own visa

being granted and “immediate family members must have been declared by their proposer in their application before the grant of the proposer’s visa” (UNHCR 2011b, p. 14). This means that if a family takes the pragmatic decision as described by the UNHCR above, this may compromise their family reunion prospects after arrival in Australia. The system as a whole places refugees in an impossible position even if they understand the consequences of decisions they are making under highly stressful circumstances. Many do not understand but put their faith in individuals:

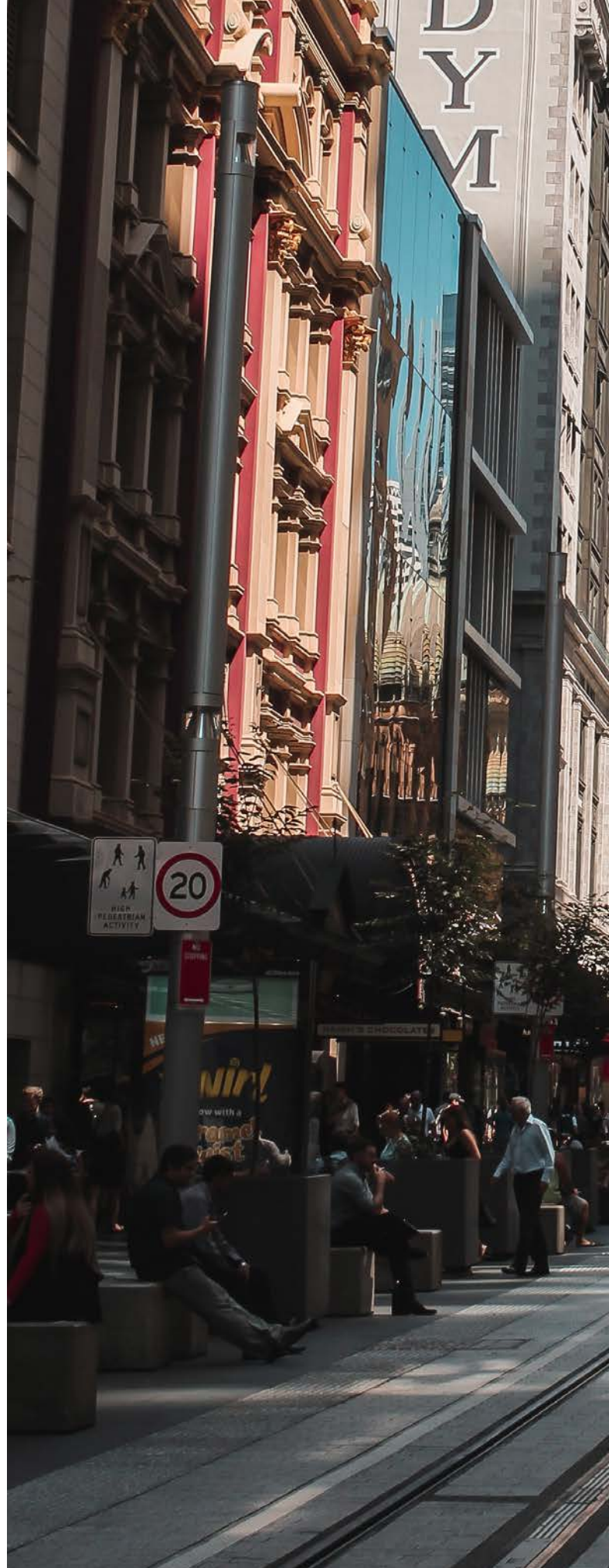
So we did the interview but I did not say anything. She [embassy official] said, “You should not go into the interview, you husband only goes in.” So she spoke with my husband, I don’t know, she asked about the information they need and she said, “If you may have a last question you can ask.” I told her, I knocked on the door and asked to get in, she gave me permission. I told her, “I want nothing of this life except that my brother, father and sister come with us, where would they stay? What is their destiny after we all leave?” She asked for the application number and the date. When she said that I felt very happy, I thought even if they do not go with me, they will follow. I wrote their file number on a piece of paper; she took and stick on the computer. Since then it is probably sitting there, I don’t know. [Parents have still not come to Australia.] (R6)

2.4 Implications For Policy

A system which forces families to choose who is able to resettle and who stays behind, sometimes without realising the implications of a choice made in the application process, is one which at the very least needs greater transparency and also a clear and consistent approach by the UNHCR and resettlement countries to reuniting families based on the right to family unity. In the first stages of the resettlement journey, refugees must navigate a complex system administered by the UNHCR and its settlement partner countries including Australia. Decisions are made by – or for – refugees that have long-term settlement implications but are based on limited information or limited ability of refugees to process the available information. This is a further aspect of their vulnerability. While there are NGOs and other organisations that play a critical role in helping refugees navigate this maze, any evaluation of the refugee settlement experience must consider how effective these processes and available support are in contributing to a long-term positive resettlement experience.

The growing trend towards sponsored visa subclasses in general, and among Syrians and Iraqis in particular, has led to a high concentration of particular groups in two Local Government Areas in Sydney, which, as will be seen in the next section, has advantages and disadvantages from both government and refugee perspectives. However, a strategy that attached settlement location conditions to visas would be a blunt instrument.

The following chapter explores the factors that shape settlement experiences and outcomes post-arrival and suggests an alternative approach to settlement support that would allow new entrants to be supported by their cultural network while finding their own path to connection with the wider Australian community.



3. Becoming Settled



This chapter compares and contrasts the settlement outcomes targeted by the support model put in place by government with the outcomes of value to refugees in becoming settled. There are many ways to think about the idea of settlement and what it means. The simple working definition that has been used in the refugee interviews is that to be settled means to feel at home in Australia. Each person attaches their own meaning to that simple, overarching goal based on their family circumstances, the journey they have taken to Australia and the challenges they face. “The settlement journey is not straightforward. New arrivals may report a sense of wellbeing in their first few years of arrival: however, they may experience challenges further down the track. The highs and lows of refugee life can be profound” (Shergold 2018, p. 18).

A key dimension of being settled is time, that is, how long it takes to become permanently settled. Again, from an individual perspective this is very subjective and varies widely. Within the formal government-funded settlement support sector, however, the accepted view is that: “The first five years of permanent residence in Australia after arrival is generally considered the settlement period. This is a time of adjustment as migrants and new arrivals seek to become oriented, established, integrated and independent in their communities” (Department of Social Services – DSS 2016b, p. 2) Refugees are expected to make progress in specific areas within this five-year period, drawing on available support services which also have finite timeframes, funding and conditions attached.¹⁰

All parties involved in the settlement journey are looking for the achievement of specific

outcomes which in their view constitute ‘being settled’. What are these outcomes? Do all parties agree on what they should be? How do we know if they have been achieved? In this chapter Sen’s (1999) capability approach (CA) is used as a common reference point for comparing the published outcome frameworks based on the settlement model with the experiences and desires of refugees. The CA distinguishes between capabilities, which are opportunities or freedoms to be and do what we value as individuals, that is, the opportunity to achieve valued functionings which constitute wellbeing, and utility value inputs. The CA looks beyond utility value inputs to the ultimate goal or outcome of human wellbeing. It identifies the conversion factors that create capabilities and functionings from these utility inputs. Figure 2 illustrates the framework.

The CA:

is generally understood as a conceptual framework for a range of evaluative exercises, including most prominently the following: (1) the assessment of individual levels of achieved wellbeing and wellbeing freedom; (2) the evaluation and assessment of social arrangements or institutions; and (3) the design of policies and other forms of social change in society. (Robeyns 2017, pp. 23–24)

The discussion which follows highlights gaps and differences between the objective sectoral perspective (of government and service providers) and the subjective, refugee perspective on what constitutes being settled. The key finding is that, while the government and service delivery sectors have a set of guidelines for converting resources to

¹⁰ Clients of the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) are assigned a case worker and “remain in the HSP until they have achieved the outcomes set out in their Case Management Plan. Most clients achieve these outcomes within 18 months of their arrival in Australia” (DSS 2017c, np).

capabilities (see Settlement Council of Australia – SCOA 2015), these are not necessarily adhered to and there is no consistent measurement and reporting. At the same time, refugees articulate their goals in terms of desired functionings and achieved wellbeing as individuals, families and community in their new home, but do not readily find a path to acquiring the necessary capabilities. A wealth of resources or inputs are provided, but converting these to real opportunities requires something more. The key finding is that this is most likely to come from a community- or place-based support model, rather than a top-down approach.

Core Elements of the Capability Approach

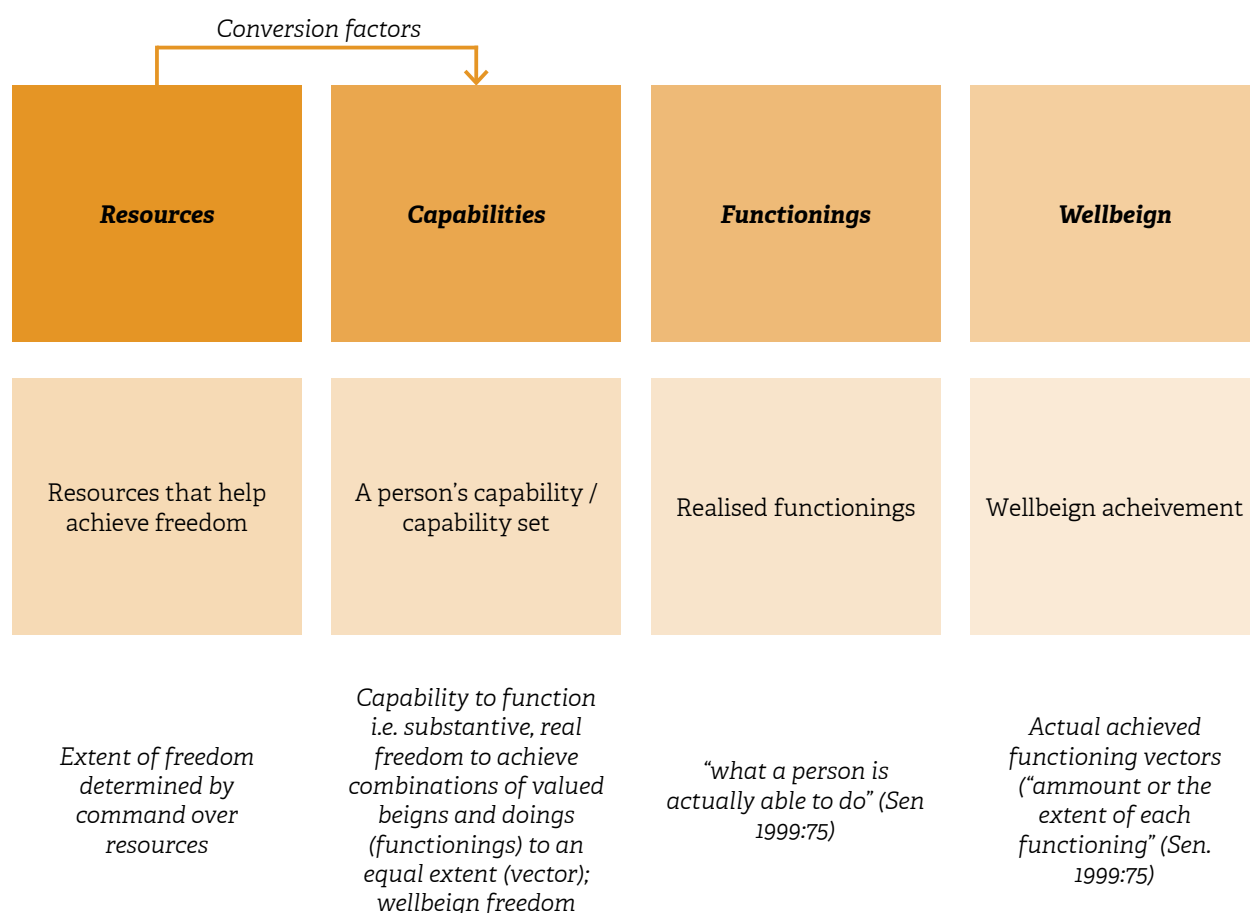
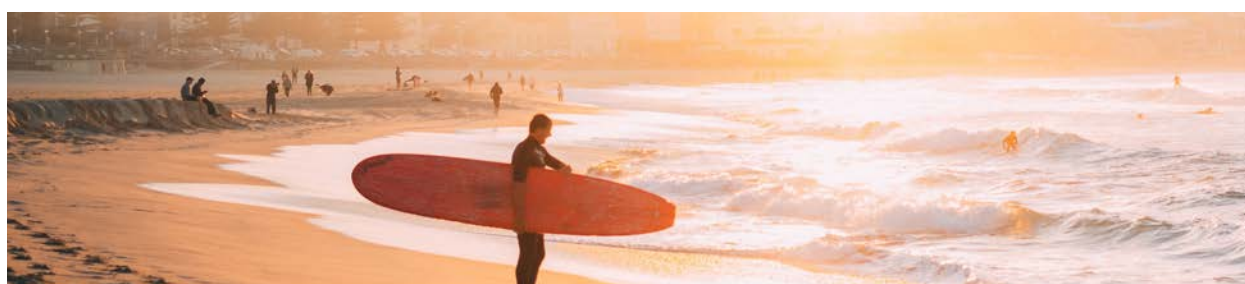


Figure 2 Capability approach overview (adapted from Vaughan 2011, p. 60)



3.1 Settlement Outcome Frameworks

The outcomes that are achieved, or the opportunities and capabilities that are created, are measures of the effectiveness of the settlement support model. We begin, therefore, by mapping out this model. The settlement support model is a top-down, distributed model with responsibilities residing at Federal and state levels but delivery also involving third party service providers and NGOs, as shown in Figure 3. Program funding flows to service providers and

their network of subcontractor NGOs. Other civil society and community organisations, however, may only access grants for their specific projects. This means that, at the level closest and most accessible to refugees, support is fragmented and unstructured and lacks funding continuity from year to year. As Figure 3 demonstrates, within the structured domain the model is complex and assumes some understanding of levels of government and how they operate.

NSW State Refugee Settlement Support Funding

- Education: e.g. Intensive English Centres, school support programs, STARTTS school liaison
- Employment: e.g. RESP
- Family and Community Services: e.g. Youth Mentoring, Families in Cultural Transition
- Housing: rental assistance incl. bond payment
- Specialised Health services
- Legal Aid

Commonwealth Refugee Settlement Support Services

- Humanitarian Settlement Program (accessed on referral to DSS by Department of Home Affairs on visa)
 - Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO) - pre-arrival
 - Arrival support
 - Foundation support (getting established and accessing other entitlements)
 - Specialised and intensive services (SIS)
 - Career Pathways Pilot
 - Youth Transition Support
 - Free Interpreting Service
 - Free Translating Service
 - Settlement Reporting Facility (no longer available)
 - Volunteers

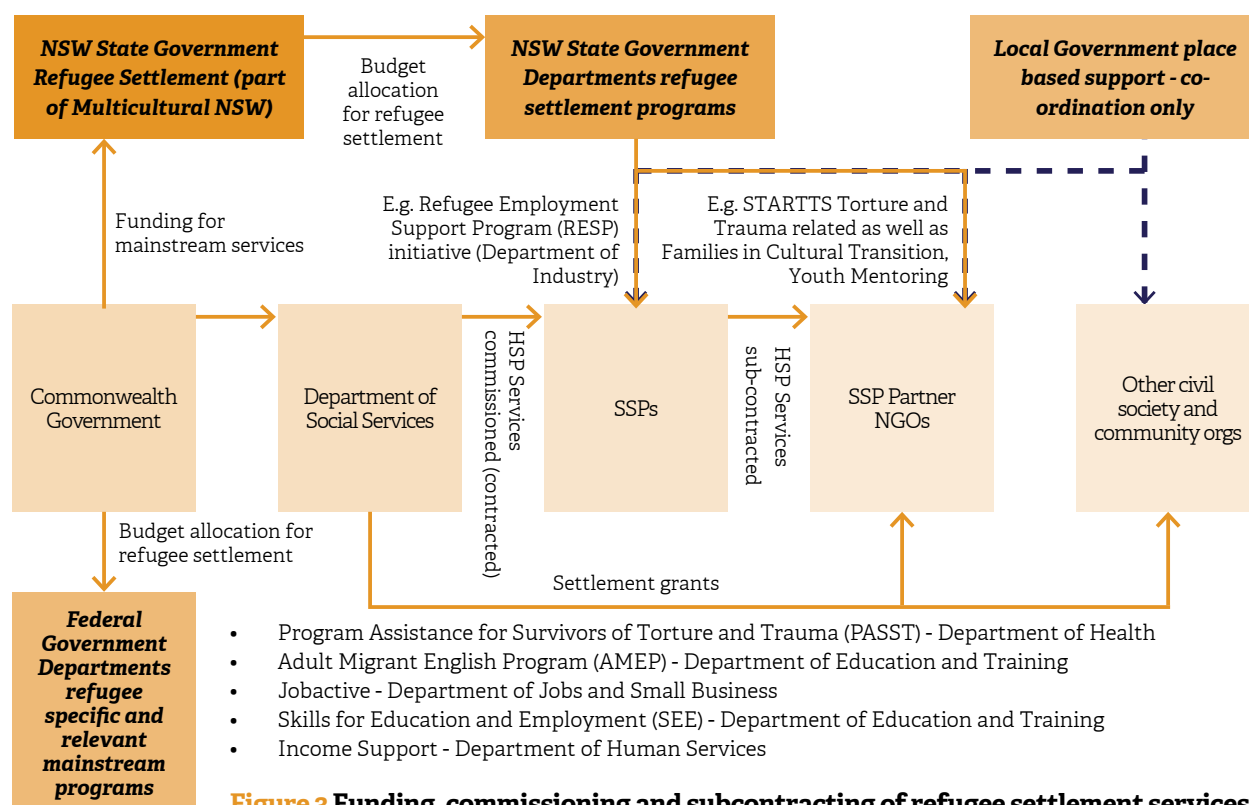


Figure 3 Funding, commissioning and subcontracting of refugee settlement services

The Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan (FCSAP) (Fairfield City Council 2017) attempts to provide a place-based lens through which to view the top-down model. In doing so, it aims to identify and fill gaps in the cooperation between government, service providers and other state agencies in the normal course of their work. This is an important mapping exercise. However, it does not address the information needs of refugees or help in navigating the model. Moreover, given that the top-down model has not been designed from a place-based demand perspective, even with a local lens it does not guarantee adequate support in the settlement journey, especially given the high concentration of refugees in Fairfield and Liverpool.

In addition to the issue of the orientation of the support model, outcome targets similarly reflect a public policy/public value view of settlement, and neglect the individual and family experience pre and post arrival. Figure 4 shows the main Commonwealth, state and local government sectoral outcome frameworks currently in place for refugee resettlement in NSW.¹¹ The National Settlement Framework (DSS 2016b) identifies nine priority areas: education and training; employment; health

and wellbeing; housing; language; transport; civic participation; family and social support; and justice. The HSP Outcomes Framework (DSS 2017b) specifies the outcomes for each of these nine areas and the National Settlement Service Outcomes Standards (SCOA 2015) establish a minimum standard for delivery in each area together with a set of concrete indicators for self-assessment (by service providers) against the standard. The NSW Government Refugee Settlement Outcomes Framework (Shergold 2018) is applied to the responsibilities of the state government which are articulated in the National Settlement Framework relative to the Commonwealth and local government and the non-government sector. Finally, the FCSAP (Fairfield City Council 2017), while anchored in a set of broad outcomes or objectives, is made up of a lengthy list of related actions and initiatives to be undertaken by the most appropriate parties (government and non-government) to achieve a place-based, coordinated response to the specific needs in the Fairfield community. Each of these frameworks has a different purpose and this purpose shapes the detail of the framework and the extent to which it actually builds or enables capabilities.

¹¹ Private sector organisations have not been included although they do play a role and offer specific opportunities for refugees within the state government framework. Their contribution is purely voluntary.

Frameworks, Outcomes Monitoring and Reporting	Governance	Scope					
		Federal Government	State Government	Local Government	Settlement Service Providers (SSP)	NGOs contracted by SSPs	Other civil society and community organisations
National Settlement Framework	Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group (SOSOG)						
Humanitarian Settlement Program Outcomes Framework	Settlement Outcomes Planning Committee Settlement Outcomes Plan						
National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards	Settlement Council of Australia (peak body for SSPs and their sub- contracted organisations)						
NSW Government Refugee Settlement Outcomes Framework	Joint Partnership Working Group on Refugee Resettlement						
Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan	Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan Working Group						

Figure 4 Settlement frameworks, governance and organisational scope

The National Settlement Framework (DSS 2016b) has been established to enhance collaboration and coordination across the service delivery supply chain for more effective and efficient delivery and better outcomes for refugees, as well as a “smooth settlement process” (p. 1). The scope of the framework, that is, the nine areas mentioned above and the list of associated services to be provided (pp. 8–9), covers the essential inputs or resources that the government believes are needed by new arrivals, who “seek to become oriented, established, integrated and independent in their communities” (p. 2) and which fall within the responsibility of government.

The HSP Outcomes Framework (DSS 2017b) takes each of these areas and related services, and articulates an associated objective in terms of what a client should be able to do having

received this support. These are referred to as “intermediary outcomes”. For example, as a result of the Language Services support: “A client participates in AMEP [Adult Migrant English Program] and other English language learning”. However, their participation does not constitute an outcome or capability based on language, such as being able to function practically and socially in the workplace of their choice. Most of the nine areas set objectives relating to ability to access other services used by other Australians (banking, real estate, legal assistance, etc.). The one that comes closest to creating a capability falls under Community Participation and Networking: “A client can develop and maintain links with local communities and continue cultural practices.” A key informant (KI5) tells us, however, that the real focus of government is on the “three E’s” (DSS 2017c) – education, employment and

English language. These are, of course, core enablers of participation in Australian society and the economy, but are very narrow in terms of the broader objective of human wellbeing.

The National Settlement Service Outcomes Standards (SCOA 2015) attempt to move in the direction of enhancing the settlement experience of clients and potentially, therefore, ensuring that real capabilities are in fact expanded:

The National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards seek to drive improvements in the outcomes of settlement service provision, such that clients who access these services experience a consistent level of support that enhances their potential for effective settlement. (SCOA 2015, p. 4)

The purpose and objective of the standards are consistency, identification of best practice and making a link to client outcomes and impact indicators (SCOA 2015, p. 4). It is these

indicators which move the can do type of outcome articulated in the HSP Outcomes Framework (DSS 2017b) discussed above closer to real capabilities. For example, language outcome indicators in the SCOA framework link language training to workplace readiness, and require other education and training programs to integrate English language learning. In each of the nine areas, the standards address provision of services that recognise the unique needs of the clients and their situation, that build competence and confidence, that provide meaningful information, and that ultimately result in creating freedoms or capabilities among clients which enable them to achieve not only the integration goal of government, but also wellbeing on their own terms, as will be seen later in this report. In other words, the SCOA indicators provide a guide as to how to convert inputs or resources such as AMEP into real capabilities or freedoms. The graphic below, published by SCOA (2018b), sums up the goals of the standards in terms that marry the institutional view with the individual client experience:

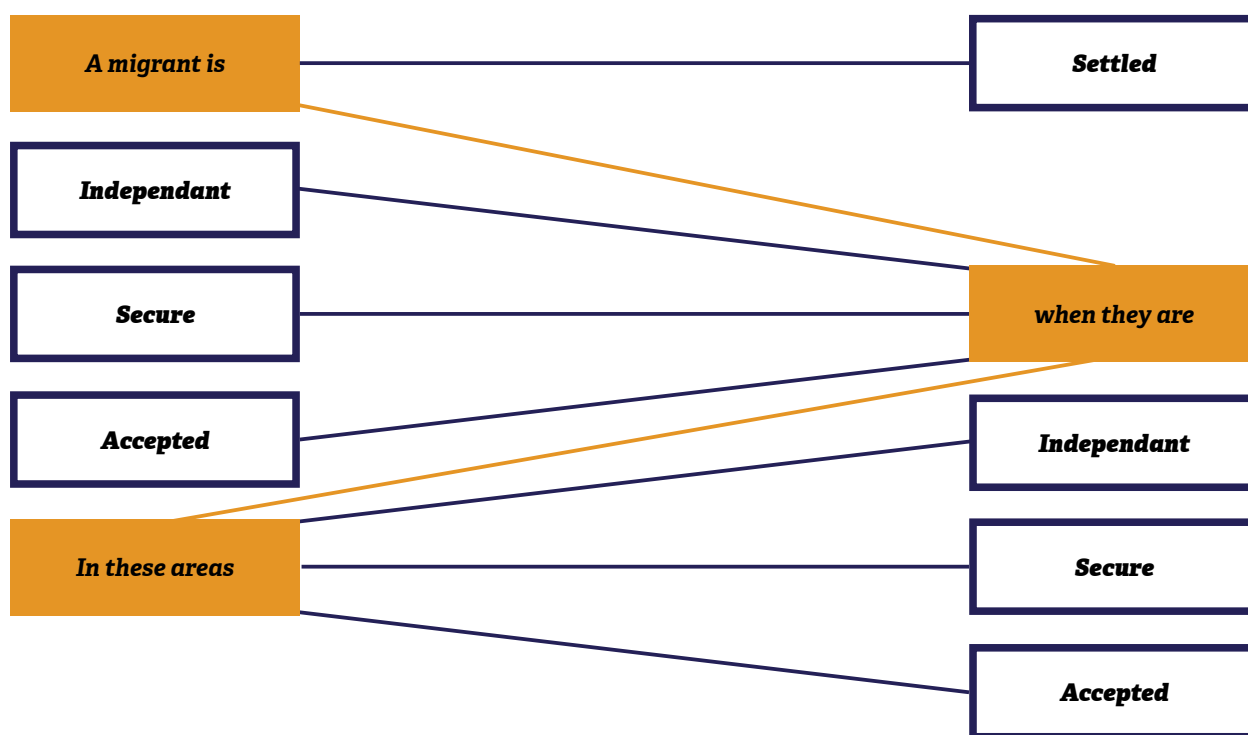


Figure 5 Fundamentals of effective settlement (adapted from SCOA 2018b)

A key informant familiar with the SCOA standards and their development points out that they are not intended to capture specific individual outcomes such as whether someone gets a job, but rather to capture “the outcomes of the services so that the services are designed in a way to best support people to enter employment in the case of economic engagement” (KI5). The standards are not a prescription, but rather a guide to best practice to be used “for self-assessment and reflection” and as “a strategic planning tool in terms of these are the ways that services should be crafted and the things that you should be aware of when you’re delivering services” (KI5). SCOA, however, does not have access to client feedback and so it is left to individual service providers to collect this feedback and use it to enhance their services. There is no public reporting against the standards. This raises a common issue relating to settlement outcomes, which is the lack of comprehensive and consistent reporting end-to-end in the supply chain. The Joint Standing Committee on Migration (JSCOM – 2017, p. 63) recommended that the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) should have oversight of the National Settlement Framework, including reporting to their meetings. This has not been implemented.

Turning now to a different framework, the NSW Government Refugee Settlement Outcomes Framework (Shergold 2018), this has a dual purpose: “1. Help identify programs and services that have the greatest impact”; and “2. Be a resource for government agencies and NGOs to collaborate on achieving better results using evidence that works” (p. 18). Reporting against the framework is done annually, directly to the Premier of NSW in a form which also functions as an accountability mechanism to ensure that “the NSW Government’s investment results in better outcomes at both the individual and systems level. Careful evaluation is a crucial part of the delivery process” (p. 4).

The areas covered by the framework are very similar to the nine adopted at the Federal level: “education and training; social connections; employment; housing; family relationships; health and wellbeing; language; transport; confidence to self-advocate; access to legal information and information on rights and responsibilities in Australia” (p. 17). Reporting is done by the relevant state government departments: NSW Health, Department of Education (DE), Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), Department of Industry (DI) and Legal Aid NSW. The annual report works through each outcome area, summarising the overall objective. For example, “Ensuring refugees have access to the health services they need” lists state government investments by program, key achievements (outputs such as clients receiving a service or treatment) and specific outcomes (e.g. early identification of a health issue by virtue of the program being in place). The report is a quantified, measured accounting and justification of how public funds have been used to provide specific support services and the public value that has been created as a result in terms of refugee integration and settlement. The framework and reporting, while dealing with outputs and outcomes, do so within a public policy frame rather than a capabilities frame, but acknowledge (p. 19) that further improvement requires input from and participation by clients themselves:

What has been a challenge, and an area I would like to further pursue over the next year, is how to work more collaboratively with refugees themselves. My aim is to work with key government and non-government agencies to understand how person-centred design methodologies can be embedded across policy making and program design,

delivery and evaluation so that the refugee is always front and centre of the approach. What we need to focus on is how refugees can genuinely influence the programs that affect their day-to-day lives – how they can take control and exercise agency; how they can fully understand their rights but also their responsibilities; and how they can direct the services they need to best effect. (Shergold 2018, p. 19)

Finally, the FCSAP (Fairfield City Council 2017) was developed in response to the very high concentration of Syrian and Iraqi refugee arrivals in the Fairfield Local Government Area creating a demand for services and support that were, for the most part, outside the scope of responsibility of local government. Nevertheless, the impact has been felt very much at a local level by the community and the refugees. Consequently, FCSAP is explicitly “place-based and grounded in collective impact principles” (p. 5):

The overarching aim of the FCSAP is to contribute to the best possible settlement outcomes for all refugee and vulnerable migrant groups in and around Fairfield Local Government Area. (p. 5)

“Place-based” means that the focus is on the environment in which the migrants find themselves – both social and physical – and enhancing that environment to address the challenges faced by the community as a whole. “Collective impact” means that all parties involved in supporting migrants come together to collectively solve problems and better coordinate roles and delivery.

The FCSAP identifies eight areas of need and documents a detailed, concrete action plan to address each area with one agency taking the

lead in each area. The eight areas are: safe and responsible communities; physical and mental health and wellbeing; people with a disability; meaningful engagement; volunteerism; information and coordination; housing accessibility; and evidence-based planning and advocacy. As with all government initiatives, outcomes are identified, but outcomes in this context do not necessarily create or expand capabilities. Much of the plan is about raising awareness, ensuring appropriate information is available and accessible, and making it easy and welcoming for migrants to approach the relevant agencies and service providers. As such, that plan, when implemented, will play a valuable role in converting inputs and resources to capabilities. This unique place- and community-centred approach contrasts with the top-down approach of the other frameworks, which have an inherent weakness in that they resemble a trickle-down system where the support only goes so far but not far enough. As an action plan, the FCSAP can be easily monitored and results are visible to all stakeholders.

The limitation of the FCSAP is that it does not represent a support model designed from a place-based, demand perspective. None of the frameworks discussed above start from the point of valued functionings and prerequisite capabilities. The challenge for government in re-orienting its approach is to identify these elements. The first step is to listen to the refugees.

3.2 Refugee & Community Perspectives

3.2.1 Support model

A key theme from the interviews in relation to the support model is the relatively low importance and value attached to government-funded settlement support services (such as those provided by Settlement Services International – SSI – and the Migrant Resource Centre – MRC – on arrival and including the pre-departure cultural orientation program) relative to the support that comes from social networks of family, friends and culturally accessible CBOs. While comments about service providers are, overall, positive as far as the services offered went, the settlement journey often requires something more – and for a much more extended timeframe – than can be accommodated in a top-down structured support model. It is the more informal community support that many find most helpful after the initial period, which can be from one to six months. The reasons for this include that many in the network have a shared experience, have found their way around the health, education and welfare systems, and can share this knowledge in a way that new arrivals can better relate to, coming from a common language and cultural background:

Our friends give us advice, the people we know here, they told us how they did things, we learned from them ... We have to make an effort, we have to go and find information, they [service providers, government agencies] only give us key information, but we should get it by our own efforts. It was hard ... [Now] I give my advice, I share what I learnt. Yes, I don't want them to be burdened like me ... it makes a difference if a friend goes with you and help you, rather than you go on your own and it is the first time where you have to fill forms and so on. Even me, lots of my friends helped me and I help them now. (R11)

Language also plays a role:

Honestly, they [case manager] was contact, the case manager [was of] use to all us, but I mostly relied on my friends. I had friends who came here, my friend came here 15 years ago and I have another friends who helped me ... When the case manager sees, uh, when I ask for something, she finds me an interpreter or they may organise an appointment, but when you call a friend or relative they immediately attend. There things a case manager cannot do; too many things she cannot do, she is committed in a program which she completes. (R4)

As does religion:

Most of our refugee students [are] of Iraqi background, so we are connected to Iraqi families and community, and also through the Syrian and church and Bishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church. These institutions played a key role – introduced the families to us and take up enrolment for their children. The organisations are also assisting the refugees and connecting the families to the school. (KI8)

Key informants from community organisations who are part of these networks have also observed this phenomenon and recognise that they play an important role even though they are not part of the formal structured support model:

So you're getting very, very good if actually excellent quality candidates [with degrees], but they don't get a chance [at employment] and that's the shock. Then from there you see them tail off. That enthusiasm takes a nosedive and they get into depression and into that

negative spiral where they don't see a light at the end of the tunnel. It's for people like myself and others, we have a responsibility because we've been here for a while and we understand the challenges, is to connect with them, reignite that belief and just tell them it's okay. All you have to do is reach out to someone like me, like us, ask the question and we will help ... So being a not-for-profit organisation, we have absolutely no capital, so we rely on grants from the government. We also rely on donations if any, but we hardly get any and in the beginning we contributed a sum of our own money ... Everyone who works in the organisation is free of charge ... we don't have an office. (CL5)

In spite of the best efforts of government at all levels and service providers, through websites and other information sources, to map the pathways and options available in terms of the settlement support model and to deliver services where needed, awareness among the target audience is limited. Too much reliance is then placed on social networks for information, which may be out of date, incomplete or inaccurate, or on inadequately resourced, limited-coverage CBOs. The risk here is that information acquired through these informal, unstructured networks may not be accurate or current. It may also inhibit cultural adjustment and integration with the wider Australian community:

Having community, it really help too much, because family relations or the communities are available at any time. As case manager, you find you meet with them one hour a day or one day a week. So they [community] are available at any time and they have their own experience, so they can give this experience to the

new arrivals, so that will help them a lot to navigate Australian work style or communities or all this stuff ... But there is downside to that, having communities. Having communities will also delay their English learning. So, for example, if anyone arrived in Fairfield now is resettled in Fairfield, there is no need to speak English in fact. There is no English speaking in Fairfield because everyone there is speaking Arabic or Assyrian. (CL6)

These responses also indicate that refugees seek out those who understand what constitutes wellbeing in their particular circumstances and social and cultural traditions.

3.2.2 Capabilities and outcomes

Interviews conducted with refugees, community leaders and CBOs reveal many of the same focus areas as the formal outcome frameworks discussed earlier. However, they differ in how they articulate a need, goal, hope or aspiration, in other words, how they define capabilities and desired functionings. The discussion which follows illustrates the capabilities – freedoms and opportunities – that refugees see as essential to living a life they value and achieving wellbeing.

Freedom from fear and violence

The most important freedom identified by the interviewees is freedom from fear and violence, and being able to provide their family with a safe and secure life. This encompasses respect as a minority, given that this minority status was the trigger for violence against them in their home country. All refugee interviewees, when asked to name the most positive aspects of their settlement experience, identified safety and security, especially for their children. For example:

We escape from violence, we stay away from security problem and we like to go somewhere there is respect and where we can resettle and be safe, like Australia and some other places. (R9)

The most important thing in life is security, and second to security and safety is work. To work, go out, think and live life, but in the first place security and safety. (R9)

This capability exists by virtue of the democratic, rule-based society that is Australia. However, other fears and anxieties also need to be addressed and these need to be specifically targeted.

Dignified employment

While public policy aims to get people into employment, even “sustainable employment” (KI10), refugees seek real opportunities that dignify their experience and qualifications, so they can support their families, contribute to rather than draw on the public purse and be free from exploitation:

Work is comfort for the person. It is not tiring. (R3)

In general, we adapted really quickly and thank god we are going ahead. However ... it is the job search, they are putting pressure on us. I am still studying, I cannot work now as I have a qualification in my country and I was teaching for 13 years. It is not reasonable that I work as a cleaner! ... We love to work, we are not here, we love work, you are a Syrian and you know Syrians love to work and they don't like to stay idle, but we cannot [due to language barrier]. (R5)

My husband was always working and now he cannot find a job ... I'm not

[happy] because we are not progressing ... Sometimes my husband tells me: let's go back. (R2)

When we first arrived we didn't have big ambitions because we did not know a lot, but there are services which helps people to help themselves in the future. I mean, things that help me build my future. (R11)

Experience is often undervalued and/or difficult to prove, making it hard for employers to take informally ‘qualified’ people on:

Here the system in Australia it is very difficult, different and, than our system. In our country, we don't need any certificate

or any qualification to work, especially the handy work. There is some work, but there is no, not like, the engineer. The engineers must have the qualifications. Or the doctor must have, but the qualification, or the lawyers or the accountant, but for the other jobs there is no need for any qualification. All our people are very professional when they are doing the tiling or the bricks or the rendering without any qualification. Or working as a mechanics to fix cars or something like – many things – or an electrician, without any qualifications they work. Many of them. A lot of them. They get it from the experience. (R20)

There are CBOs focusing on this aspect of wellbeing, that is, respect and acknowledgement of the potential contribution a person can make and their opportunity to do so. CBOs are constrained by capacity and the system itself, but can provide a more culturally attuned service. Even targeted, government-funded programs such as the Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP) in NSW has limited

capacity. This program is discussed in more detail in the chapter on Working. The issues that refugees face in finding suitable work and its importance to wellbeing are also discussed in more detail in the chapter on Working.

Ability to communicate

Reducing language need to a fixed number of hours provided as part of an AMEP program by a service provider with a target to provide functional communication skills is simply providing an input or basic resource. To grant people the freedom to move through the different areas of their life – work, education, day-to-day living – feeling secure and confident rather than trapped at home, or worse, stigmatised, requires both individual initiative and community support and acceptance:

Here, I only need the language. If I have the language, I can adapt, for example, I wouldn't be fearful and I wouldn't need an interpreter to be with me wherever I go. So, I need the language. (R3)

More importantly, we see our programs as an important key that opens their door to learn and build understanding of concept and ideas in other subjects. It's not a one-size-fits-all type of package, quite often we have updates and lessons to suit the learning capacity of individual students. In doing that we provide a caring environment where students can learn effectively and adjust to life in Australia. Our English program also provides support for students to ensure their emotional, educational, social and spiritual welfare. (KI4 – from a school environment)

The competing demands of the support model

and its outcomes often prove difficult if not impossible for refugees to meet and also achieve their own wellbeing objective:

And I don't have the language, only let us learn as it should and get a qualification as it fits ... we were something and we come here to be something else, so we need time. They should just give us some times to learn the language and find a suitable job for us ... people like my husband, he knew no English at all, he started learning English here. He is only studying for 4 months and they keep put pressure on him, telling him find a job, find a job. Okay, if someone who does not know the language goes to work, his job will be, uh, nothing. Even me, I was a teacher and they telling me you should

work, you should work, you should work, but to achieve my goals I need the language. I want to get a good job in an office or, so it is not conceivable that I go and work in a restaurant kitchen, but they tell you, no, even if the job in a restaurant, you should take it; they tell me, you studied English, that's enough. That's what causes distress here, this is the only thing. (R5)

Flexible employment arrangements, at the initiative of the employer, are one strategy to alleviate this conflict:

Because I was working on a casual basis, it was difficult for me to manage my time between studies and work commitments ... So I stopped my studies at Navitas as I didn't want to lose my employment. After some time, my boss liked my job and he wanted to give me extra hours, but I wanted to improve my English communications skills. I entered into an agreement with my employer that on

Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays I will do my studies, and the remaining days of the week, including Thursdays, Fridays and some Saturdays and Sundays, work casually with the them. This is my situation. I have now returned to Navitas and thinking to pursue my studies ... I am also going to the library after my Navitas classes and doing my studies in there until 7 pm. (R10)

Language feeds into the process as a barrier to understanding and navigating educational roadmaps, and being able to relate these to past experience:

Yes, very much, our programs are actually carefully designed to help them in careers. We have seen students unable to find suitable careers for themselves. Our program puts lot of focus on not only how to learn English, but how to apply English language to learn each of the subjects. This gives students better understanding of each of the subject areas. This helps them find direction – in which area to pursue with their studies. (KI4 – from a school environment)

This capability is explored in more detail, with a more extensive discussion of available programs, in the chapter on Working.

Education and recognition

Affordable access to education and bridging courses in support of recognition of overseas qualifications is assisted, for example, through school scholarships offered by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and help in navigating the roadmap to get professional qualifications recognised, such as the NSW Government-sponsored RESP. However, these initiatives are not universally available and are limited

in scope. Education is highly valued by this particular cohort of refugees and is seen as the path to 'success' as evidenced by the standard of living that their families enjoy. Moreover, this is an expression of the desire to rebuild and recapture the life they had. Further constraints arise from the need to work and the unaffordability of education and skills training:

After that [first 3 months] my husband tried to get a job because in our country we were not poor, we had a good life, we had everything, we were very comfortable, so he decided to start working to build a better life. He did not want us to feel like depressed. For him, I mean, to feel better and feel less under pressure, so thanks god we did that, it was tiresome, but we did it. He doesn't speak any word in English, but he tried to give us a better life. (R11)

There is this mentality among our refugee and even migrant students and their parents that going to university for a degree is the only way forward. This is their perception of success. Going to TAFE means they are not successful. It's very difficult to convince them that there is a wide range of opportunities with TAFE qualifications. I think this mentality is common in my culture and other Eastern cultures as well. If you haven't got a degree and gone to university, you will be seen as someone good for nothing. Parents actually put lot pressure on students to take studies in medicine, engineering and law. (KI4)

Finding the right course or educational pathway is also challenging, even frustrating. Additionally, access is a question of information delivered in a culturally appropriate way:

[From a refugee volunteering at a migrant support centre] Many courses, they did not find job. So that what are benefit, what is the benefit if I study a course and finally I do not find any job related to this course? So that we, when when I interview the person and I have a discussions with him in Arabic or in English, but a lot, a lot, a lot of them, they are speak Arabic, they's not speak English very well. I ask him, what is your skills and what is the kind of course of work you want to work? He will told, he will told me, I have this skills and I want to work landscape. I show him the pathway – what is the plans for him. I advise him to do these things, to study these things at TAFE, and wished if it is better than for him so that he, he will take that advice or he, he will not take that advice. It is his responsibility ... Many engineers sitting at Navitas. We are at Navitas – my friend, 5, until now 5 or 4 engineers, and all of them are proficient. And all of them 55 years – [A] 55 years, [B] 60 years old, me 60 years old, [C] he is one of my engineers, he work as, under my authority in Iraq, he is about 48 years old. Many engineers – sitting at Navitas studying English. This is the problem. They have to understand and support people because it is difficult. They have a lot of barriers. I cannot qualify my certificate. How can I cope/go? There is not enough time for me to qualify. It needs many years. (R20)

The challenge of getting qualifications recognised may be further compounded by the circumstances from which refugees have fled:

The problems that in Iraq they refuse to give us our degrees. They say that all degrees completed before 2003 were burnt or something, so it is difficult, we cannot get it accredited here, but we try step by step and maybe. (R3)

Refugees need more than information, scholarships and pathways. They need – and the country can benefit from – change in the system itself to allow alternative pathways that bypass the rigid structures of the professions and the education system's pre-qualification requirements.

Cultural and religious expression

Central to wellbeing are the freedom and opportunity to express culture and religion, including in mother tongues. This is a key reason for the continued concentration of Syrian and Iraqis in Fairfield and Liverpool. Real freedom in this context exists where such opportunity is afforded outside these areas. This can only be solved at a community level, but can be facilitated or encouraged by government through targeted grants. The risk is that a more heavy-handed strategy may emerge involving visa conditions relating to place of settlement. The community needs to take action first and work with government:

The kids were first enrolled in a public school because we were in Bossley Park. In 3 July we found a house in Liverpool and moved in. My parents moved to their house before us to Liverpool, as well as their friends, and we wanted to live close to them and the new area had more services. It was during the holiday, so we transferred the kids from their school and I was very happy that in Liverpool the Catholic school is giving a three-years free scholarship for the kids, because we heard that the public school in Liverpool is not that good. I also prefer that my kids, while growing up in a new and foreign country, to be reared according to our tradition and teaching. (R5)

This is really the problem because they, our, like, our community, they live together. They do not, it is difficult for them to live far away from each other because during our religious procedures, and a lot of things, we have to live together. I have the father and mother here. And I cannot live far away from them. And our, all of their place, it is like church, our church, what we call in Arabic "Mandea". It is here in Liverpool. We cannot, we can, difficult for us to live far away from them, so that the first reason why all our community are in [unclear] and Fairfield and Liverpool. (R20)

Social connection

Social connectedness within one's own cultural milieu is an essential element of wellbeing but, in a migrant context, equally essential is a feeling of being connected – in the sense of mutual support, interest, enjoyment, etc. – to the wider Australian community, even if only at a local level. This is especially important to those who lacked this freedom even in their home country due to their alienation as a minority:

Since the first day we arrived to Australia, and this is the truth, we felt as we are in our country, as if we are here for 50 years, on all the levels ... Australia gave us safety, services, social interaction. We never saw that before in Iraq nor in any other place. (R9)

However, the ability to make these connections is dependent on language:

It [English] is the key in Australia. If you don't speak English, you can't do anything and nobody can help you or give you a job. I also need to make my new friends and integrate in the society, and without

English I can't do so. I don't want just to engage with my own Arab community, I would like to be engaged with other people as well. (R10)

CBOs play a role in helping people overcome these barriers and convert their basic English skills to a real freedom:

They know that to successfully integrate here, you have to have that social construct, that you reach out to your neighbour, to the person across the street, that you strike up a conversation in the bus stop or at the supermarket, or with your child's teacher or with a fellow parent, or even the taxi driver or the bus driver ... because this is then how you (a) train your language, (b) raise confidence, because then you can speak in a different language. That confidence flows over to other things and it feels like a little achievement or, oh I spoke to a stranger today and even though my grammar or my pronunciation was offkey, but I still did it. So people from Iraq and Syria and other cultures, they have that fear of embarrassment where, if I speak and I don't express myself properly it's an embarrassment, because what if I say the wrong thing? What if I pronounce it incorrectly? What if I drop a syllable? ... so I'd rather not do it. But those confidence moments and those little things where we target in role-readiness programs and that mental EQ where we tell them, look, don't be embarrassed to say it wrong or pronounce it wrong. Don't be embarrassed if you say "babar" but it's supposed to be "paper", it's fine. (CL5)

Other organisations offer programs that are not specifically about settlement support but nevertheless make an important contribution, for example:

We target people who, they feel isolated because of the language barrier or because of stereotyping or because of lack of opportunities to be part of this society, so we try to attract them to use their mother language to come and join us in our artistic activities ... By them being part of a group, this will make them feel more welcome, ore accepted ... and slowly, slowly educate them and help them to feel more familiarised with the Australian system, and at the end this will help them to be included and at the end of course we are promoting Australian citizenship values. (CL4)

Facilitating this connectedness through community hubs such as schools, especially where a number of refugee students from the same cultural background attend, has proven effective although it is currently limited in scale:

The students are religious, we try and see them connecting them with the community and encouraging them to hold onto their culture and language. They engage in sports and other extracurricular activities. We are trying to better involve them at school ... In collaboration with the church and its activities, the school promotes social connectedness between refugee families and the school community. (KI8)

The specific challenges of language and communication are discussed in more detail in the chapter on Communicating.

Acceptance

Stigmatisation by the media and politicians has very dangerous consequences for refugees. This includes constant reminders that they have come from an unstable, conflict-riven area of the world and/or that they are now beholden to Australia:

There is also a remark about Centrelink, sometimes, some employees treat us like if they are paying our salaries from their own pockets, not from the government. Those things cause us distress; you [Centrelink staff] are employed here to assist us and we are new here. We want them to have a little patience, not everyone is like that, there are few of them. You [talking about herself in the second person, a cultural thing] feel like you came to your country and you are humiliated, this is not nice, you [Centrelink staff] are not paying of your own money, you are employed by the government same as us. We don't know anything, all the rules are new for us, we need someone who is a little relaxed, who gives us a little of his time and not being rude. (R5)

Freedom from such labelling and reminders so that they can be accepted like any other aspiring citizen is a foundational element of their wellbeing:

For sure, I don't feel a stranger, because here everyone is equal, there is no difference between young or old. First and most important is that there is safety and security; second thing is there is no difference between young and old, rich or poor, we are all equal. This makes the person feel like a human, truly a human, unlike the situations we lived through. Sometimes I was feeling my soul like an animal and I was saying that animals are much better than us, that's from what I witnessed by my own eyes. (R6)

The challenge of being accepted is discussed in more detail in the chapter on Acceptance.

Trust and the rule of law

One interviewee (R6) said that one aspect of Australia that appeals are the rules that govern

everyday life. This gave them a sense of security and predictability. Again, this is highly valued by those who have suffered discrimination in their home country due to their minority status:

[In Australia] you feel like a human person, I mean, with full rights, a human with full freedom. In Iraq we didn't have this because you are a Christian. (R9)

Unfortunately, refugees lacking information about the rules and their rights can be victims of exploitation, especially in employment situations. Hand in hand with language confidence comes knowledge and understanding of the rules sufficient to empower the individual or group to fight for their rights through the system itself. Exploitation in the workplace is not restricted to new entrants or people without language skills; however, these groups face significantly greater challenges and risks:

When we see somebody here from Syria and nobody give him job, especially, you know, special people, I don't like to mention the name. They're from Syria? No job or work for free, nobody give him any money. He working hard like donkey, sorry about that, but the end of the week or fortnight, "I don't have money now, come next week. Come next week, come next week, no, I pay you \$10 an hour." That's not fair. But you can do? The Syrian doesn't understand 100% the Australian law. This the problem, because everyone like [me assist] bit here I came to Australia since 1980s, I don't know nothing about the Australia law. Everything's upside down but I have to go to learn, I have to follow the Australian law because I live this country, I have to following the law. If he doesn't like it, okay, back to your country, don't come here anymore. (CL8)

3.3 Implications For Policy

There are strong outstanding examples of CBOs giving the additional support necessary to convert the inputs provided by government into real opportunities for refugees. In our interviews we spoke with organisations oriented to youth and university students, providing specialist programs such as arts and employment assistance, and focused on particular cultural groups, providing them with a wide range of assistance in navigating their way through the Australian system. All appeared to be playing very valuable roles, but none received government program funding. Some had applied successfully for grants but these were for one year only. Others relied on donations. One employment-based organisation operated as a social enterprise. Interviewees from these organisations highlighted the importance of the flexibility, innovation and responsiveness that are found at a community level. The challenge here is to preserve these elements but also ensure their effective contribution to building capabilities from the resources provided by government. This requires better government support than is currently available to ensure continuity and coverage:

However, we know that the government have limited – not limited resources but, like, resources that they need to work on, so it's okay if they have certain periods to support the people with initial settlement needs. They need to empower other small organisations like mine and others who they can go out of the circle and change their structured programs to be innovative according to the society needs ... Migrants who arrive to Australia are like waves. They're not the same migrants who arrived 10 years ago or 11 years ago or 20 years ago. Every new wave of refugees and migrants has new needs and the problems might be similar, might be different that led to their diaspora. So creating programs that are able to be updated all the time is good. (CL4)

A government-sponsored community place-based support model does exist in the shape of Community Hubs (2017), a Commonwealth Government-funded program operating in 71 schools in four states which establishes the school as a hub where migrant families can access information and services. This is a starting point. The funding is grant-based and grants can be multi-year up to three years.¹² Partial funding is also provided by the Scanlon Foundation (2019). These hubs act as a bridge to the wider community:

The advantages of a centralised community hub are many and include the provision of a space where complementary services can partner to achieve outcomes for clients, which is a perfect example of cross-cultural cooperation, understanding, and social cohesion. It enhances opportunities to identify service gaps, and provides a place to work on innovative solutions to address these, thereby providing a more centralised, seamless journey for clients. (AMES 2017 as cited in JSCOM 2017, p. 21)

Two words are worth highlighting in the above quote: “innovative” and “centralised”. Working together on innovative solutions is an example of the public policy concept of co-production, provided that government itself is actively involved. The use of the term ‘centralised’ in this context is original and innovative in its own way, in that it turns on its head the top-down model of service delivery which would purport to be centralised but in fact results in highly fragmented delivery for refugees.

In summary, good design and efficient delivery are the foundations of good outcomes from the

perspectives of government, the public at large and refugees. However, outcomes in public policy terms do not necessarily equate with capabilities:

*Where DIAC [Department of Immigration and Citizenship], like other agencies, defines successful outcomes in terms of **systemic outcomes** (social participation, economic well being, level of independence, and personal well being), Humanitarian entrants define settlement in terms of **life outcomes** (personal happiness and community connectedness). (Australian Survey Research Group 2011, p. 66)*

What are lacking in the current arrangements are: firstly, a model which is re-oriented with place and community at the forefront; secondly, an explicit focus on creating and enhancing capabilities or freedoms that enable refugees to live a life they value in Australia; and thirdly, not forgetting the current top-down model, along with comprehensive, integrated and transparent monitoring, reporting and evaluation across the supply chain against agreed outcome targets, standards and indicators.

¹² This program was previously known as the Diversity and Social Cohesion Grant scheme, but was replaced in 2018 by the Strong and Resilient Communities Grants scheme. See DSS (nd) for more information.



4. Communicating



This chapter looks beyond the issue of language skill to the barriers that refugees encounter in being able to function in English in everyday life, including work, social encounters and interactions with government agencies. Communicating, in the sense of English language proficiency and communication skills, is considered an important aspect of settlement for newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants in Australia because it enables them to secure employment, access further education and training opportunities, contact service providers for assistance and connect with the wider community. It is also important to note that lack of language proficiency outweighs all other challenges faced by refugees, as it makes them dependent on others in navigating their new lives and limits the available sources of information to learn about the new environment, settlement services and education and employment opportunities (Renzaho & Dhingra 2016, p. 7).

Despite the importance of language proficiency and communication skills as a prerequisite for

smooth settlement, the interviews conducted for this research indicate that many refugees have found communicating a major challenge. While the Federal Government and state governments provide funding to non-government service providers and have introduced various initiatives to address the communication needs and language barriers of refugees, communicating remains a major challenge for new arrivals from Syria and Iraq in NSW.

This chapter examines the importance of communicating as an essential element of successful settlement for Syrian and Iraqi refugees based on their own experiences and perspectives. The chapter also draws on the views and comments expressed by community leaders and key informants, and a brief review of the existing literature. The interview material confirms that refugees recognise the importance of learning English and being able to communicate, but encounter a number of problems in relation to access to services, service quality and the impact of government-imposed conditions.



4.1 Communication & Language Support Services

Both the Federal Government and the NSW Government play very important roles in assisting refugees and humanitarian entrants with their settlement by funding a number of language support services, as detailed below. In addition, NGOs, including universities, CBOs, religious groups and Catholic schools, also provide communication and language support programs for newly arrived refugees (Australian Education Network 2018).

4.1.1 Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

Funded by the Australian Government and administered by the DE, the AMEP provides opportunities for eligible visa holders, including refugees, to develop basic English language skills. AMEP participants are entitled to attend up to 510 hours of English language courses in the first five years of their arrival in Australia (DE 2018b). Timeframes apply to access to the program. Newly arrived adult refugees must register with an AMEP service provider within six months of their arrival and complete their tuition within five years. Access to AMEP after five years is possible if a request for an extension is approved (DE 2018b). Nationally, the AMEP is delivered at over 300 locations including in rural and regional areas. Currently, the AMEP service providers in NSW are TAFE NSW and Navitas English (DE 2018b). According to the DE, in addition to English language teaching AMEP providers offer “pathway guidance” support to assist refugees to navigate further education and employment opportunities; AMEP providers should interview participants when they enter the program and keep track of their learning needs and outcomes using individual “pathway guides” (DE 2018b).

4.1.2 AMEP sub-programs

Various AMEP sub-programs provide refugees with extra study hours to improve their English. AMEP sub-programs include the Special

Preparatory Program (SPP), Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training, and AMEP Extended (DE 2018b).

- The SPP provides up to 400 additional hours of tailored English classes targeted at young people between 16 and 24 years of age who have greater learning and support needs due to their difficult pre-migration experiences, such as torture, trauma or limited prior schooling (DSS 2018b).
- The Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training is designed to assist refugees with their transition to work in Australia by providing up to 200 additional hours of vocation-specific English language tuition. This includes up to 80 hours of work experience placement to help them gain familiarity with Australian workplace cultures and practices (DE 2018b).
- AMEP Extend offers up to 490 hours of additional English language tuition in certain circumstances beyond the 510-hour AMEP entitlement in order for participants to achieve English language proficiency. This can be used in either the Pre-employment English or Social English tuition streams in the classroom or via distance learning (DE 2018b).

4.1.3 Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National

The Australian Government funds TIS National, which includes the Free Interpreting Service (FIS) and Free Translating Service (FTS) for refugees.

- FIS enables eligible service providers, including private medical practitioners, pharmacists, NGOs, real estate agencies, local government authorities, trade unions and parliamentarians, to communicate

with clients who have low English language proficiency (DSS 2018d). FIS provides interpretation services over the phone or on-site. The DSS stresses the ease of use of the service as one of its benefits. Phone interpreting can be accessed quickly and it is easy for service providers to register to use the service (DSS 2018d).

- The FTS is available to people settling permanently in Australia for the translation of essential personal documents. Translation services are available within the first two years of arrival for a maximum of 10 documents. The service is accessed online through a DSS website (DSS 2018d).

4.1.4 NSW Government

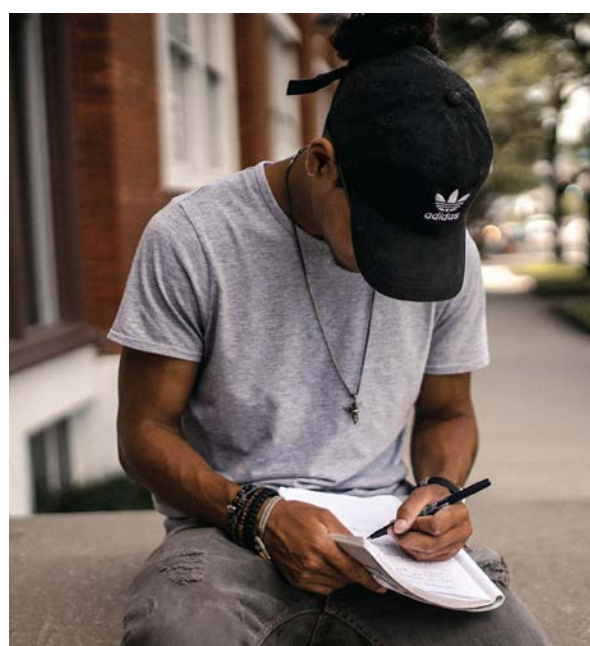
The NSW Government offers a number of communication and language support services for refugees and other migrants, including the Smart and Skilled program, Multicultural Health Communication Service (MHCS), Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), Multicultural NSW Language Services, Intensive English Centres (IECs), Intensive English High School (IEHS) and English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) program (Multicultural NSW nd b).

The Smart and Skilled program, offered by the DI, provides language support and professional training courses to refugees who are over 15 years old and no longer attending school to help them gain skills and find employment. Support provided includes fee-free access to training for qualifications up to Certificate IV level (Dept of Industry, nd).

The Multicultural NSW Language Services provide interpreting and translation services in 104 languages and dialects (Multicultural NSW nd a). The stated aim of the service is to ensure equal

access to services, programs and opportunities. Fees are charged for interpreting services, but may be waived in certain circumstances (Multicultural NSW nd a).

The IECs and IEHS programs provide intensive English language teaching at high schools for newly arrived students whose first language is not English, as well as various welfare programs to help students settle into the high school environment. IECs are located in metropolitan Sydney and Wollongong, and there is also an IEHS (NSW Government 2017).



4.2 The Refugee Experience

Several themes emerge from the interviews conducted with Syrian and Iraqi refugees in relation to communicating. Refugees recognise the importance of English language communication skills in the settlement process, but have sometimes been disappointed with the standard of services or have encountered other obstacles to participation. Although translating services are available, they are not always used by service providers and some refugees saw a need for more bilingual staff to assist them in dealing with language barriers. Efforts to improve language skills are also disrupted by the pressures of Australia's welfare system.

4.2.1 Importance of communication in the settlement process

Refugee comments indicate that communication skills and English proficiency play a significant role in their smooth settlement, enabling them access available services, pursue further education, search for employment, connect with the wider Australian community and build self-confidence:

I don't know about the services, such as electricity, safety and security and etc., we need, and I don't know how to access those services because of low English proficiency. Regarding other services, it is in our nature and culture that we do things ourselves and we do not wait for someone else to do it for us. Sometimes we need services, but we cannot access the services because of linguistic barriers. (R4)

My husband was a trailer truck driver in Iraq between 1991 and 2014 and he used to travel between Iraq and Jordan. Here, he was advised by TAFE to obtain his HR drivers licence. He did so, but when he applies for work now, the employers tell him, you don't know the language

[English]. It is difficult, if a person does not communicate well, nobody offers him a job. (R2)

One of the Iraqi refugees I am working with as a volunteer is a 61-years-old man. He wants to work as a cleaner, but his level of English language is zero and currently studying at Navitas. He told me to tell my supervisor at Western Sydney MRC that he wants to work as a cleaner. This is the problem. He cannot find a job because he doesn't speak English even after attending English classes for quite some time. (R20)

4.2.2 Barriers to learning English

Despite the importance of communication in their settlement, many of the refugees found learning English and improving their communication skills challenging due to their inability to access language support services and the ineffective delivery of language support programs:

I still had about 250 hours to study English, but when I went to Navitas they told me I cannot return to study because I don't have approval from my job provider. Navitas informed me that they would not provide me with the opportunity to complete my hours because the job provider has said that I have to find a job. So they decided to not give me my entitled hours to study English. I am now very upset that I have lost those hours. (R7)

The English teacher was honestly very good at TAFE but when he wanted to use the projector and the computer to give us some information, it was not working. He asked the technical people for support, they said it was working in the morning.

I felt it was waste of my time to study English at TAFE because of lack of access to necessary equipment and facilities. (R10)

I went to TAFE once and asked them about the possibility of the accreditation of my overseas qualification of Bachelor of Accounting. They suggested that I should improve my English to level 3 or 4. They enrolled me in an English course at TAFE, but I felt it was not helpful for me to improve my English. Navitas was better for me to learn English. (R10)

Some refugees felt there should be more attention by AMEP providers to helping them improve their conversation and professional skills. They emphasised that improving conversation skills and professional knowledge plays an important role in facilitating their settlement:

I feel frustrated because I go to TAFE and find that the teaching methods have a problem and I don't know why. I mean, I need the confidence to be able to speak English because I have a problem in conversation. What I need is a place to practise regularly conversation. You know what I am saying, I need to practise conversation regularly to improve my English. (R17)

I think AMEP providers must focus more on letting people to practise general conversations, rather than only providing them with learning materials in English classes. The main challenge for me has been the problem of not understanding English over the phone. I am fine in communicating face to face, but when I speak to people over the phone I have the problem of

understanding them. (R13)

During our [interviewee and her family] stay in Wollongong, SSI staff helped us enrol in English programs at TAFE. The teacher was very good. When we moved to Fairfield in Sydney, we started going to Navitas to complete our entitled 510 hours of English, but it is not enough. We need more regular and consistent support to improve our English, especially our conversation skills. (R12)

Another barrier identified by some interviewees was the preponderance of other Arabic or Assyrian speakers in the language classes, which limited opportunities for improving conversation skills:

The school [Navitas] is the only place in which I have the opportunity to practise conversational English, but the problem is that all my friends and classmates at school are Assyrian and Arabs who speak either Assyrian or Arabic, no English at all. So I don't have the opportunity to practise and improve my conversations. (R2)

At English classes, we are mostly interacting with our own Arabic-speaking friends and classmates. I also need to make new friends and integrate into the Australian society, but without speaking English I can't do so. I don't want just to interact with my own Arabic-speaking community, I need the opportunity to engage with other people as well, to practise conversation and improve my English. (R10)

In contrast, opportunities to interact with people outside their own language groups were considered very valuable:

My son works as a volunteer in a community centre close to our home to improve his English communication skills. He has been involved in this volunteer placement since our arrival, which he found it very useful because people in there assist him improve his English and to apply for IELTS tests and etc. (R12)

It would be helpful if the government puts us as volunteers in places [organisations] where we practise our conversation. We don't want money, but we want to improve our conversation and communication skills. When I apply for a volunteer position on my own, they don't offer me the opportunity. (R17)

4.2.3 Accessing translating and interpreting services and bilingual support

Refugees also noted the importance of accessing translating and interpreting services to enable them to take advantage of available settlement services, but one interviewee reported gaps in service access:

Most of the people I asked have the same opinion, Australia offers the same service to everyone, so for sure everyone experiences the same services and the services are useful. I also understand that all of Australians have the same entitlements in accessing services; everyone I have talked to, the majority share this opinion. However, there is a problem that usually translating and interpreting services are not available in medical centres. (R9)

Another interviewee argued the need for more bilingual staff, including bilingual teachers:

For the people they don't speak English, bilingual teachers can help them to decide which course is easier for them and which course they should enrol and complete to help them find a job in future. Bilingual teachers could also help them understand about the benefits of those English programs and vocational training they have enrolled to study. (R20)

4.2.4 Pressures imposed by Australia's welfare system

Refugees also commented that balancing their time to attend English classes and to fulfil the welfare system's obligations puts enormous pressure on them and disrupts their efforts to focus on learning English as a first priority in their settlement:

You know Syrians love to work and we don't like to stay idle, but we cannot work because of linguistic barriers. They [Centrelink] should just give us some time to learn the language first and then find a suitable job. My husband, who speaks no English at all, only studied English for 4 months, but Centrelink put a lot of pressure on him to find a job. Okay, if someone who does not know the language goes to work, his job will be nothing. They tell me, you studied English enough and now you should find a job. That is what causes distress here. (R5)

I receive Newstart Allowance from Centrelink every fortnight. In return, I have to apply for jobs and report back to them, which is not a useful process. I speak English, but many people don't speak English, even I have problem understanding over the phone. It is difficult to get a job as a requirement of

the Centrelink payments. People should be provided with the opportunity to learn English first and then apply for jobs. That is why it is not useful. (R13)

They [Centrelink] put extra pressure on me to find a job. I was about to finish my English studies, but they told me I am not allowed to continue because of the job search requirements. I told them, I love to study. I told them I am a little older and my language is still weak, so let me study at TAFE, perhaps complete a course, and after that I can work according to my TAFE qualification, but they didn't let me do so. (R7)

Centrelink still asks me to work. I am doing these two courses; how can I work? This is very stressful. I talked to Centrelink and told them how I can work, I am a human, not a robot. They know I am a student and I should focus on my studies, not on regular job search. Because of these pressures and stresses, I cannot focus on my English studies as I cannot do two things at the same time. (R14)



4.3 Community leaders' & key informants' perspectives

The comments and views expressed by the community leaders and key informants in their interviews for this research mostly support and reinforce the experiences and perspectives of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees in relation to the themes associated with communicating. However, some of their views also contradict what some of the refugees have said.

4.3.1 Importance of communication in the settlement process

An Iraqi community leader who works as a volunteer with a CBO to help refugees argued that low or lack of English proficiency significantly delays the settlement and social integration of refugees:

Before we talk about settlement and integration, learning English and becoming fluent is important. If the refugees can speak English well, then most of the settlement and integration problems would disappear immediately. Particularly, elderly people (50+) find it difficult to integrate and embrace the Australian culture because of low or no English proficiency. (CL2)

Another Iraqi community leader argued that English proficiency is considered very important for refugees as improved communication skills facilitate their settlement:

I am giving you an example of a family, consisting of mother, father and 4 children, who joined my choir in 2012. They had nearly zero literacy skills in English language and they were full of fear and uncertainty about their future. After 6 years, now one daughter has graduated with an education degree from the Australian Catholic University

and the other daughter did a Master of Pharmacy after completing a Bachelor of Medical Science. The son is going to graduate very soon with a construction management degree from Western Sydney University. The mother now can speak English very well and she translates within my group and tells others how they came and how good their experience is. So now they are all different, which is really something, they are confident and happy with their settlement journey in Australia. (CL4)

4.3.2 Barriers to learning English

A key informant who works with the NSW public service expressed his dissatisfaction with the way AMEP providers deliver the language support programs:

Obviously, one of our pathways is to make sure that refugees are still doing English. But we have had some tensions with the AMEP providers, because the AMEP works on this basis: refugees have got to do their 510 hours of English before. Because what happens, a lot of people drop out, because, unless they can see that English is taking them somewhere, so in a sense what we are saying is, be more flexible about this English. (KI6)

An Iraqi community leader who works with a CBO to help refugees argued that the structured method of English classes with less emphasis on improving conversation skills puts a lot of pressure on newly arrived refugees:

They feel pressured at Navitas and TAFE that they have to attend certain number of hours on a regular basis. There is less focus on improving the conversations

skills of participants. They are already traumatised and stressed mentally because of their past experience in their countries of origin. (CL2)

Another community leader argued that a non-structured method of engagement and teaching more effectively helps refugees to improve their English:

This is the embedded aspects of what we teach – let's say it is a teaching and a learning process by participants. We are not doing it in a formalised [structured] way that people sit, listen and feel we are the source of knowledge. We are going with them through various stages and all the way we are explaining only. We are facilitators to help them live better in such a wonderful country. (CL4)

A Syrian community leader also noted the barrier to language acquisition posed by the geographical concentration of refugees in some areas. Living within the same communities does not help new arrivals to improve their English:

Living within their own communities delays English learning for refugees. For example, if a arrival is settled in Fairfield NSW, there is no need to speak English in fact. There is no English speaking in Fairfield because everyone is speaking Arabic or Assyrian in there. So that is a downside where they cannot learn English. It is very hard for them to learn [a] new language when they interact with their own communities every day because there is no outside interaction. (CL6)

4.3.3 Accessing translating and interpreting services and bilingual support

A key informant who works with the NSW public service confirmed that some service providers are not regularly using translating services, particularly the FIS, for various reasons:

Obviously, there are ongoing issues with Jobactive providers in using the FIS. Also, GPs and specialists are not usually using interpreters. In public hospitals I heard it is better, people are using interpreters. When it comes to private GPs/specialists, there is still a lot of people who aren't using the FIS. Despite the government's strict rules, it is happening in the private practice that they do not use interpreters because it makes appointment times longer and it is actually time consuming. (KI1)

Most community leader comments on language services, however, relate to the value of using bilingual teacher aides and other bilingual staff as a means of facilitating language learning and access to services. An Iraqi community leader argued that bilingual teachers or bilingual teacher aides can play a very important role in helping new arrivals to learn English effectively:

I can see refugees face problems, especially the elderly people. Many of them do not speak English and this is the main difficulty. We have Navitas to help with English language, but they are emphasising that learners have to speak English only in the classes. I would argue this is not the way it should be. My suggestion is to appoint teacher aides who knows community languages. For instance, Arabic or Syriac teacher aides are needed for Iraqi and Syrian refugees because the information in English needs

to be translated into Arabic or Syriac. (CL2)

A key informant who works as a refugee mentor with a CBO explained how the presence of bilingual teachers makes language support programs more efficient for refugees:

I went to the English class of one of my mentees, a refugee woman from Iraq, at Mary Mackillop College, Wakeley and it was fantastic. They had a language community liaison person from the school in the class with this small group of women and, wherever necessary, she was doing the Arabic translation. They were developing community, they were developing relationships, they were building up a sense of being connected to the school and I thought it was wonderful. (KI2)

A Syrian community leader argued that bilingual community workers are in a better position to assist refugees effectively:

Most of the people who help the Syrian people don't speak Arabic. Because you are Australians, you know the Australian language (English), that is all right, you understand Australian people. Other people, you have to explain to them many times to understand what they have to do, so that is alright if the bilingual workers assist refugees. (CL8)

4.3.4 Pressures imposed by Australia's welfare system

A Syrian community leader who helps Arabic-speaking refugees with their settlement agreed that the way Australia's welfare system handles refugees raises concerns:

The treatment of government officials and Centrelink is that they expect refugees to be fully aware of the procedures. They don't understand that refugees come with no background about how everything works in Australia, including payments, services and other facilities. They should also know that most refugees are not able to use computer, internet, online search, website navigation, as well as some refugees are illiterate and cannot read and write in their own language. (CL3)

On the other hand, another Syrian community leader who leads a refugee employment support organisation argued that finding a job can be a useful strategy for refugees to improve their English proficiency and professional skills, although he also notes that the normal employment pathways usually do not help them get employment:

When you continue your job search and get a job, it is easier for you to learn the language, to integrate into the Australian community and learn more about the Australian culture and everything. Employment was issue number one when I thought to establish my organisation, as I realised that normal employment pathway channels are not working for refugees sometimes. (CL6)



4.4 Implications For Policy

The importance of learning English and being able to communicate is one of the major issues raised by refugees during interviews. Although newly arrived refugees have access to a range of comprehensive language support and communication services, their comments, together with the views expressed by community leaders and key informants, indicate that improving communication skills remains a major challenge for many. In particular, they identify problems in the way communication and language support services are designed and delivered by the service providers, and challenges presented by conditions imposed by the welfare system.

Previous analysis and research in this area by refugee organisations have drawn similar conclusions. The RCoA argues that the AMEP and the AMEP sub-programs, while valuable for new refugees' immediate needs, are not sufficient to provide the level of English required for employment or further education (RCoA 2018). In addition, some refugees face particular challenges learning a new language, for example, if they are older, disabled, illiterate in their own language or caring for family (RCoA 2018). Other problems identified by RCoA, although not specifically addressed in the interviews with refugees, include significant delays in enrolling in English courses experienced by newly arrived refugees with many waiting six months to enrol in AMEP classes, the high cost of English language tests for those refugees and humanitarian entrants who wish to pursue tertiary education, and a lack of support available to those seeking to undertake classes for academic levels of English (RCoA 2016a, pp. 70–71). According to RCoA, home-based tutoring in the AMEP is also ineffective and places additional pressures on students to host the home tutor. The report suggests that additional funding for childcare needs to be allocated by the government to

enable those with family responsibilities to attend AMEP classes instead of home-based tutoring (RCoA 2016a, p. 71).

Several previous reports have also identified problems in the use of interpreting and translation services. A 2018 report by the NSW Refugee Support Network (NRSN) highlights routine failure of services such as GPs, specialists and aged care assessment to provide a professional interpreter, relying instead on family members as interpreters (NRSN 2017, p. 8). Likewise, research conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 2017 found that the need for interpreting assistance continues over the longer term and is not addressed by services that focus primarily on new arrivals (Smart et al. 2017). The SCOA has also reported problems in interpreting services including failure by services to use interpreters appropriately, concerns about the quality of translation and reports of unprofessional conduct by interpreters such as becoming involved in the discussion and expressing personal opinions rather than simply translating what is being said (Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia et al. 2019).

One of the key concerns expressed by refugees relates to restrictions imposed by Australia's welfare system, which often disrupt their efforts to learn English. For example, refugees who receive income support payments from Centrelink with mutual obligation requirements to find work are not entitled to access the Social English stream of the AMEP (DE 2018a). Other researchers have also found that restrictions imposed by the welfare system affect the ability of refugee to improve their communication skills, often resulting in the discontinuation of their English studies (Nasser-Eddine 2017, pp. 18–19). The issue of

refugee interaction with employment support services is addressed in more detail in the following chapter on Working.

The comments of refugees and community leaders, and the findings of previous research in this area, suggest that there is scope to improve access to and delivery of appropriate and relevant language services. Interviewees expressed concerns about the variable quality of language learning services, the need for more assistance with conversation skills and the benefit of having opportunities to engage with people outside their own language group. Refugees also indicated the importance of having the opportunity to access bilingual language support and communication services. This would facilitate their smooth settlement, as many new arrivals are unable to use language support and communication services effectively due to lack of proficiency in English.



5. Working

This chapter examines the importance of work as a prerequisite for successful settlement of new arrivals based on the perspectives and experiences of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. It also draws on the views and opinions of community leaders and key informants, and the existing literature, to provide an overview of this important but challenging issue. Work is an important feature in structuring people's personal and social identity, as well as in shaping their family and social bonds and ability to access essential and non-essential goods, services and activities. Work contributes significantly to people's physical and mental wellbeing, self-confidence and sense of self-worth provided by the feeling of contributing to their societies (INWORK Project 2019). Work is also an important feature in promoting community cohesion and safety, increasing civic participation, reducing public spending on welfare benefits, promoting social and economic development and organising social life at a macro level (INWORK Project 2019).

In the meantime, work is considered one of the most important contributing factors to the smooth settlement of newly arrived refugees, as it empowers them to become self-reliant in building a future for themselves and their families (Friendly Nation Initiative 2018). Work is considered by most refugees, as well as the

wider community, a success criterion for their settlement and long-term integration, as it contributes significantly to their wellbeing, self-confidence, sense of identity, social inclusion and intra-familial relationships. There is overwhelming evidence that confirms the importance of work as a necessary foundation for successful settlement of newly arrived refugees in Australia, because through work they stabilise their housing, establish local connections, gain professional skills, improve their English and build social capital (Centre for Policy Development – CPD 2017, p. 11).

Despite the importance of work, many Syrian and Iraqi refugees interviewed for this research have not been able to find work. The reasons for this include low English proficiency, lack of local experience, non-recognition of overseas qualifications and experience, and unhelpful delivery of employment support programs by government and non-government service providers. Even after finding employment, their experience of work can be challenging because of difficulties adjusting to a totally different work environment and managing their expectations about working. The challenges associated with employment for refugees are not readily captured in statistics on employment and participation or measures of settlement outcomes.

5.1 Employment Support Services And Programs

Both the Australian Government and the NSW Government play important roles in delivering employment services and programs, funding employment support initiatives and investing in opportunities for refugees to seek and obtain local work experience. The private sector and the community sector also play important roles in developing targeted refugee employment programs, providing employment grants and assisting refugees to become job ready by committing themselves to train, mentor and employ refugees (NSW Government 2019). Companies that participate in these initiatives include Allianz, AMP Foundation, Australia Post, Clubs NSW, NRMA, Harvey Norman, Woolworths, Transurban, Telstra, Henry Davis York, First State Super, Crescent Wealth and Clayton Utz (Collins 2017, p. 21).

5.1.1 Australian Government programs

There are numerous programs and funds offered by the Australian Government to assist refugees to improve their employability skills and to find suitable employment. Employment is one of the key outcomes, along with education and English, targeted by government-funded settlement programs including the HSP and Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS Program). The government also assists new arrivals by offering multiple business support and entrepreneurship initiatives, including the Try, Test and Learn Fund, Australian Apprenticeships Program, Friendly Nation Initiative and New Enterprise Incentive Scheme. (DSS 2018i) The primary Australian Government programs are described below.

HSP and SETS programs

The HSP¹⁴ provides support to refugees in the period immediately after their arrival in Australia to help them in their settlement. The program provides intensive one-on-one support through case managers and focuses on assistance with employment, education, housing, language and other settlement needs (DSS 2018e). SSI is contracted to deliver the HSP in Sydney and regional NSW (DSS 2018).

The SETS program¹⁵ provides additional support, after the HSP, for refugees who do not have adequate support from family and community. The program provides individual support to refugees and other eligible permanent migrants to access information and services, and also provides grants to community organisations. Twenty-four service providers are currently funding to deliver the program (DSS 2018e).

Jobactive

This program is delivered by contracted job providers to help unemployed Australians, including refugees, to find work and keep a job, and to enable employers to find the right staff for their business. Jobactive services are generally available for those jobseekers who get an income support payment, including Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance or Parenting Payment, and are expected to look for work in return for Centrelink payments (Department of Employment Skills, Small and Family Business 2018). Penalties apply if jobseekers fail to comply with the requirements of Jobactive, including the suspension of Centrelink payments if they fail to report or miss appointments (Tahiri 2017, p. 7). Jobactive providers are expected not only to refer clients to jobs, but also to assist jobseekers to develop

¹⁴ The HSP replaced the Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support programs on 30 October 2017 (DSS 2018e).

¹⁵ The SETS program replaced the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) on 1 January 2019 and is an enhanced version of the SGP. According to the DSS, a policy review and independent evaluation of the SGP found that the program provides effective early intervention that contributes to clients achieving full participation in society as soon as possible (DSS 2019e).

the skills needed to find a job (Commonwealth of Australia nd b).

Other Federal Government programs

There are also a number of other programs currently being funded and delivered by the Australian Government to assist refugees with their employment.

- Career Pathways Pilot (CPP) was introduced in 2017 and provides access to a Career Pathways Adviser to assist refugees to pursue their career goals through recognition of qualifications, training to use their existing skills and other support (Commonwealth of Australia nd b, p. 19). The program is targeted at those who have arrived in Australia during past five years, speak English well and have professional or trade skills or qualifications (DSS 2017a).
- Youth Transition Support (YTS)¹⁶ is aimed specifically at young refugees and other vulnerable migrants aged 15 to 25. Service providers funded by the program deliver projects and activities to assist these young people to access employment services and education opportunities (DSS 2019). In NSW the program is delivered by the Community Migrant Resource Centre and the Lebanese Muslim Association (DSS 2019e).
- Skills for Education and Employment (SEE), a DE program, provides language, literacy and numeracy training to jobseekers. Participants are referred to the program by employment service providers because they face particular job search challenges due to their literacy and numeracy training needs. The program is available to a range of groups including Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islanders, and people with a disability, as well as refugees and other migrants (DE 2019b).

- Disability Employment Services (DES) provide job search and preparation assistance specifically for people with a disability, injury or health condition, including people with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- Overseas Qualification Recognition is very important for refugees and humanitarian entrants. Some may lack documentation relating to qualifications and work experience, and thus have difficulty proving that they have these qualifications and experience. DE provides information and advice on the comparability of overseas qualifications and experience, and has an Overseas Qualification Unit to facilitate the recognition of overseas qualifications. Australia assesses overseas qualifications in line with its obligations under the Lisbon Recognition Convention 2002 (DSS 2018i, p. 20).

5.1.2 NSW Government programs

The NSW Government funds and delivers a number of employment services and initiatives to support refugees. The most targeted in this context is the RESP managed by the DI and delivered by SSI in partnership with the corporate sector. In May 2017, the NSW Government committed \$22 million to deliver the RESP over four years and this is expected to assist up to 6000 refugees and 1000 asylum seekers to find employment (NSW Government nd).

¹⁶ YTS services, funded by the Australian Government, commenced in 2017 following the implementation of the Youth Transition Support Pilot between January 2016 and June 2017 (DSS 2019e).

¹⁷ These statistics were provided via email to the authors by the NSW Department of Industry.

5.2 The Refugee Experience

The RESP is targeted at the job-search needs of refugees, is outcome-focused and uses innovative delivery models to help participants develop and achieve their career plans. Services provided under the program include assistance with skill recognition and English language skills, mentoring, business skill development, work experience placements and assistance overcoming transport barriers. (DI 2017). As at 10 July 2019, in Western Sydney 1312 clients had been placed in employment, 1597 had enhanced educational outcomes as a result of the program (primarily in the vocational education sector), 974 clients had been able to obtain recognition of their bachelor's degree and 6769 had participated in work-readiness development activities.¹⁷

RESP is an outcome-based program. The targeted, measured and reported outcomes are:

- Work Ready Development
- Business Skill Development
- Transport Barrier
- Employment
- Overseas Skills and Qualifications
- Mentoring
- Education Barrier
- Work Experience
- Language Barrier

From the interviews conducted with Syrian and Iraqi refugees, three main themes emerge in relation to employment as an important element of their smooth settlement and long-term integration in Australia.

5.2.1 Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and experience

The first theme emerging from the interviews concerns the lack of recognition of overseas skills, qualifications and experience by Australian employers. Many Australian employers, including the public service, the private sector and CBOs, will not recruit new arrivals whose overseas skills and qualifications are not recognised. In the meantime, getting recognition of overseas skills and qualifications is a very difficult, complex, time-consuming and costly process. There is no centralised agency in Australia to deal with this issue. Many refugees fail to get their overseas skills and qualifications recognised as a prerequisite for finding work or continuing further studies:

I am currently doing a teacher's aide course at TAFE. I am doing this to find a job in my field. It is very difficult here in Australia. The employers ask for experience and degrees, but the degrees from our countries are not recognised here. No matter what qualification we completed in our countries is zero in Australia. This is a difficult experience. (R5)

The government and service providers have to support us because it is difficult for us to deal with overseas qualifications recognition. We have a lot of barriers in this area. I am a civil engineer by profession, but I cannot qualify my overseas qualification in Australia. There is no support for me to get my overseas qualifications recognised. (R20)

My case manager helped me to get my overseas qualifications recognised. Now the difficulty I am facing is to find a job after qualification recognition, because no one will employ me without having local work experience. I have experience from my country, but the Australian employers don't recognise it. This is the main difficulty I am facing now. (R17)

5.2.2 Hostile relationships between jobseekers and employment support agencies

A second theme emerging from the interviews with Syrian and Iraqi refugees is the difficult relationships and hostile interactions between employment support agencies, including Jobactive providers, and refugee jobseekers. According to interviewees, refugee jobseekers face numerous challenges because Jobactive providers do not consider their career aspirations, educational backgrounds or professional experience. There are also issues with the efficiency of the Jobactive system, as many of the providers do not follow consistent approaches in assisting jobseekers to help them get ready for work, find employment and keep a job:

Sometimes the Jobactive providers think we are lazy people and we don't want to work. They think we want to depend ourselves on Centrelink payments. We do not want to depend on Centrelink. What we need is receiving specialised support from Jobactive providers to show us how to do the job by providing required job-readiness training and mentoring. The Jobactive people are not always respectful of refugee jobseekers and we are afraid of going to Jobactive and ask for support. (R20)

I found myself very unsettled in the Jobactive environment. They think refugees are not trying eagerly to find work. They are generally judgemental about the jobseekers from refugee background and they think all these people are not interested in trying genuinely to get a job. (R13)

I don't know how to use a computer and most of refugees like me don't have basic computer skills and knowledge. I am afraid to use a computer because back in my country we didn't use computers and we didn't have smartphones and iPads. We need support from Jobactive providers to help us improve our skills and get ready for employment. (R20)

I talked to Jobactive people for several times that I need a job. I asked my consultant at Jobactive if they can help me find a job and I am happy to do any job as long as the job is a safe job. My consultant told me, don't ask about this again and don't make excuses because in Australia there are safety procedures applied by the employers so no concerns for your safety in work environment. I feel they should be respectful of their clients from refugee background and listen to the concerns of refugee jobseekers. (R13)

5.2.3 Conflicts between language learning and job search

As noted in the previous chapter on Communicating, a particular problem in the relationships between refugees and employment support agencies is the tension between pressure to find a job as soon as possible and refugees' wish to improve their language skills and find employment consistent with their aspirations. A major

employment challenge for refugees is their low or lack of English proficiency, which holds back most of them from getting work even though they are keen to work as a means of standing on their own feet, ensuring economic security and contributing to their new home. Even for those refugees who have been able to find a low-skilled job which does not require communication skills or previous experience, they usually do not have time and capacity to work and attend English lessons simultaneously:

My husband is currently looking for job and also studying English. He did AMEP and now he is doing English for Speakers of Other Languages. This is a compulsory requirement for him to look for work while he is studying English. The government and Centrelink should just give us some time to learn the language first and then find a suitable job for ourselves. (R5)

The government wants us to find work as soon as possible and it is very hard for us to find a job without improving our English and getting our overseas qualifications recognised, but they don't know our challenges. They always tell us to start job search if we are not studying at least 4 days per week. (R7)

I was a teacher back in my country. Here Centrelink tells me I should work, but to achieve my goals I need to learn English. I want to get a good job in an office environment. It is unbelievable for me to go and work in a restaurant kitchen, but they tell me, even if the job in a restaurant I should take it. They tell me, you studied enough English and that is enough now. That is what causes distress here. (R5)

There were many difficulties we were facing after our arrival in Australia. We were tired, not just tired, but we also felt depressed. After that, my husband tried to get a job. In our country we were not poor, we had a good life, a comfortable life. My husband decided to start working to build a better life for our family, so thanks god he got a job at a furniture company. However, he doesn't speak any word in English. (R11)



5.3 Community Leaders' & Key Informants' Perspectives

The comments and views expressed by community leaders and key informants mostly support and reinforce the experiences and perspectives of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees. As one Syrian community leader noted, refugees face multiple challenges in finding and keeping a job:

When refugees come to Australia, they have this image that Australia is like their own countries, but it is not like their countries in the Middle East. Australia is more advanced, so they start struggling getting to find work and keep a job when they get it. They quickly realise that there are many challenges affecting their ability to find work and keep their jobs. (CL6)

5.3.1 Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and experience

A Syrian community leader who helps refugees with their settlement shared his own experience of overseas qualification recognition and the challenges associated with the recognition process:

I am a dentist by profession and have over 25 years' professional experience back in Syria. I have been trying hard to get my dental profession accreditation, for which I need to pay \$20,000 to \$25,000. Unfortunately, there is no support for professional refugees in Australia to get their overseas qualifications recognised. There is even no opportunity for applying for a loan to get it done. This is how the Australian Government treats professional refugees. (CL3)

A key informant who works at a CBO confirmed that there are many challenges associated with the recognition of overseas skills and

qualifications for refugees:

Overseas skills recognition is such a big challenge, especially in NSW, as we don't have any centralised government body that can help refugees and other migrants to get their qualifications recognised. There are some ways refugees can get their qualifications recognised. We can refer them to universities or TAFE, professional bodies like Engineers Australia, Australian Medical Council or the DET [Department of Employment and Training] in Canberra. When we started delivering the RESP, we realised that it is a big challenge for refugees because there is no structure in NSW to address the need for overseas qualifications recognition. (KI10)

However, this informant also noted that recognition of qualifications is only the first step in finding relevant employment:

After receiving a certificate that the overseas qualification is recognised, now there is a bigger challenge because is this piece of paper sufficient for refugees to find work? And the answer is no, because there are clear skills gaps. For example, for those refugees who hold accounting qualifications from overseas, there is a possibility that back in their country they didn't work with accounting software like MYOB, Zero and SAP, and you cannot work in accounting field in Australia if you don't have these skills. (KI10)

Another informant who runs a school in south-western Sydney highlighted the stresses resulting from the struggle to find appropriate employment:

I think a lot of concerns are that families are coming from educated backgrounds, but experience difficulty and stress in Australia. For example, someone has an engineering degree but it is not recognised in here, so they need to do work that is probably not the level of work what they normally did back in their country. They are struggling, first of all in finding employment that is suitable for their degrees and experience, and then facing the challenges of post-employment. (KI8)

5.3.2 Hostile relationships between jobseekers and employment support agencies

An Iraqi community leader who works as a volunteer with a CBO noted that some refugees have been pushed by employment support agencies to work in low-skilled jobs without preparing them for accepting such jobs:

Back home they may have been a teacher, an engineer or a school principal. Here they cannot teach because of their weak English, so they have to go and find work as a cleaner. However, they need support, encouragement and awareness from employment support agencies to choose a low-skilled job. For example, I tell them I was a teacher back in my country, now I am not teaching, I am volunteering. Awareness is very important for refugees to be able to cope with all the changes and challenges of pre- and post-employment. (CL2)

However, another Iraqi community leader, based on his own experience, argued that working in low-skilled jobs in the beginning to get some local experience is not necessarily a problem:

When I first got out of the detention centre, I worked as a toilet cleaner and I did not see any problem with that. I mean, work is work. Well look, this is not what I am skilled at, maybe I was a horrible toilet cleaner, but it was a job that paid a decent amount of money and I didn't have to put my hand out and beg from Centrelink. (CL1)

Several community leaders and key informants questioned the effectiveness of the services provided to refugees by some Jobactive providers:

The employment support agencies and Jobactive providers should know that most of refugees are not able to use computer, internet, online search and website navigation, and they need support to gain necessary skills. There are also refugees who are illiterate and cannot read and write in their own language, so they need extra support in their efforts for job search. (CL3)

I am filling in the gaps with the employment when I work with my mentees. One of my mentees' CV was developed quite inadequately by consultants from a Jobactive provider. The people that were advising her did not know the early childhood sector and we need to make sure that the CVs that people design are actually relevant to the sector to help refugees with their job-search efforts. If people don't know the early childhood sector, they are not necessarily going to do a CV that is going to get a refugee a job in that area. (KI2)

I did an investigation of the Commonwealth Jobactive scheme and, although there were

5.4 Implications For Policy

a couple of reasonable providers in Western Sydney, in part because of the contract, I would have to say it was doing, is still doing, a woeful job, in terms of helping refugees to find employment. (KI6)

An Assyrian community leader argued that sometimes CBOs are in a better position to help refugees with their employment compared to Jobactive providers:

I help them to stay here in my organisation to work on voluntary basis and then employing some of them subject to funding availability. They have gained so much knowledge and expertise, and it's a shame not to look after them. I also get job positions vacant; I print the job descriptions for them and I put it on the board for them. So, if they are interested to apply, I help them. And I am happy to be their reference too. (CL7)



Syrian and Iraqi refugees come to Australia with a wealth of skills, experience and aspirations, and they are committed to pursuing employment as a means of ensuring economic security and contributing to their new home. However, they face multiple barriers in applying their skills and experience, fulfilling their aspirations and finding work in Australia (Tahiri 2017). Only 17% of humanitarian migrants are in paid work after 18 months in Australia (Collins 2017, p. 5) and the employment problem is even more difficult for refugee women. While both the Australian and NSW governments provide a range of employment support services and engage with the private and community sectors in implementing these programs, the employment outcomes for refugees are disappointing.

Several recent studies have been critical of the available employment support services. Nasser-Eddine (2017, p. 12) argues that the Australian Government relies heavily on smaller second-tier service providers, religious organisations, charities and volunteers, as well as state and local governments, to deliver these programs. There is also little provision by the Australian Government for resources for regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure settlement services are delivered effectively (Nasser-Eddine 2017, p. 12).

An SCOA review argues that, despite the Australian Government's intention that the HSP should address the education, employment and English needs of refugees, service providers find it difficult to meet clients' needs due to the way the program is implemented (SCOA 2018, pp. 4–5). HSP service providers were critical of the administrative burden caused by conditions attached to the program and the inadequacy of the resources provided; these factors undermined their ability to deliver flexible, client-focused services (SCOA 2018c, pp. 6–7).

In response to the concerns raised, DSS has announced that it is undertaking an internal review of the implementation of the HSP with a view to making improvements if necessary (SCOA 2019a).

Barriers to the recognition of existing qualifications and the difficulty of finding employment that matches refugees' skills and experience emerge as major concerns in the interviews. Despite the fact that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) identifies Australia as an example of good practices in the recognition of overseas qualifications, the process is fragmented and complex. There is no centralised agency responsible for assessing all overseas qualifications (Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria 2014, p. 5). The process for recognition varies between different independent assessing authorities, with no centralised coordination agency and no independent avenue for appeals (Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria 2014, p. 11). While other states and territories have services to provide advice on getting qualifications recognised, there is no Overseas Qualification Unit at the NSW government level. Trade qualifications can, however, be assessed in NSW (DE 2019b). Referring to a community feedback survey, Tahiri (2017, p. 13) points out that the process of overseas qualification recognition for refugees in Australia is complex, costly and time-consuming, and effectively excludes people from using their skills and qualifications.

Highlighting the importance of overseas qualification recognition, a report from CPD points out that many refugees work in jobs below the skill level of the work they did before moving to Australia (CPD 2017, pp. 31–32). This means that the Australian labour market cannot take advantage of the extensive skills, training and experience of qualified

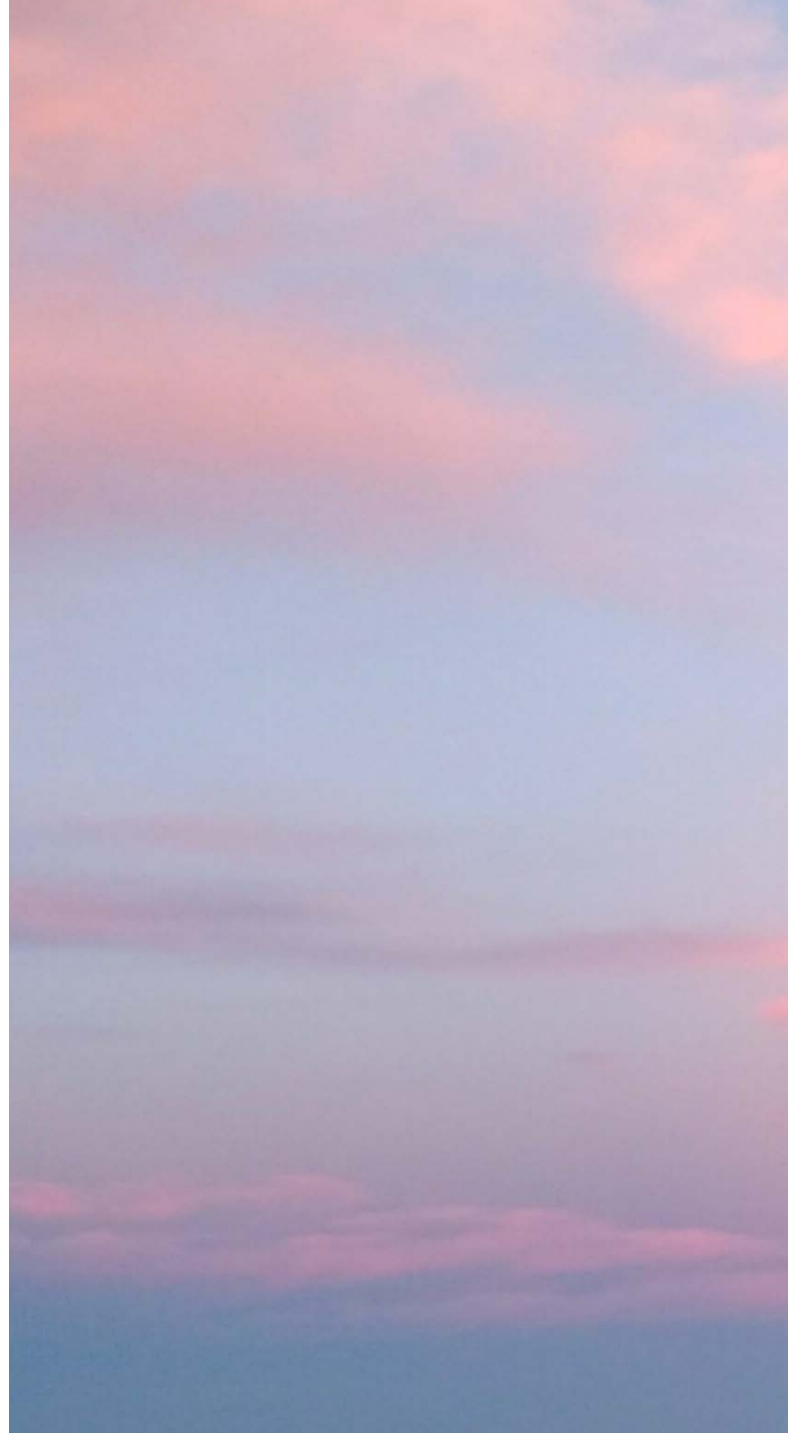
refugees and humanitarian entrants. Evidence from overseas shows that the employment outcomes for new arrivals with recognised qualifications are much better than for those whose qualifications have not been recognised. For example, in Germany refugees whose qualifications were recognised were 23% more likely to find a job and also more likely to earn higher wages, and in Norway 50% of humanitarian migrants whose qualifications were recognised found work or engaged in further education in their field of expertise (CPD 2017, p. 32).

The Jobactive program and Jobactive service providers have been criticised for applying a one-size-fits-all approach to diverse groups of jobseekers and failing to provide specialised services for people from CALD backgrounds (Tahiri 2017, p. 8). There are also claims that Jobactive providers are often unaware of the impact that refugees' low level of English proficiency has on their ability to find employment and that the Jobactive system pushes refugees to stop improving their English and thus to become stuck in low-skilled jobs (Tahiri 2017, p. 9). CPD research also suggests that Jobactive providers tend to focus on jobseekers with low and medium levels of disadvantage, rather than those with high levels of disadvantage, due to a lack of financial incentive to assist jobseekers needing a higher level of support. This results in a situation in which there is limited time available for Jobactive caseworkers and advisers to spend with individual clients ensuring that they are job ready (CPD 2017, p. 23).

Jobseekers from refugee backgrounds have reported that they feel disrespected and stigmatised by Jobactive providers and are often threatened that their welfare benefits will be suspended (Tahiri 2017, p. 13). These experiences undermine the relationships

necessary to ensure successful employment outcomes, especially for refugees who have previously experienced trauma. Negative interactions between jobseekers and job providers are especially harmful for refugees who are new to Australia and unfamiliar with the workplace environment (Tahiri 2017, p. 13).

Achieving positive employment outcomes for Syrian and Iraqi refugees is complex and variable. They must be supported with specialised settlement services based on their individual needs to achieve truly sustainable employment outcomes. While new arrivals are eligible to work from day one of their arrival in Australia, the need to find employment is in conflict with other important settlement issues that they need to deal with, most importantly learning English. Despite the fact that the Australian Government, the NSW Government and the private and community sectors have initiated positive employment support programs for refugees, high levels of unemployment, low participation rates and low average incomes persist. This represents a market failure that requires strong government intervention.



6. Living Day to Day

Numerous challenges affect the day-to-day living of Syrian and Iraqi refugees after their arrival in Australia. This section examines these day-to-day challenges from the perspectives and experiences of newly arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees. It also draws on the views and opinions expressed by community leaders and key informants, and information from the existing literature, to provide an overview of issues affecting the daily lives of new arrivals from Syria and Iraq.

In this section, housing unaffordability, economic and financial hardship, and welfare support dependency are identified as some of the major challenges associated with day-to-day living that have significant impacts on settlement. In fact, one of the first challenges

Syrian and Iraqi refugees encounter after their arrival in Australia is the unaffordability of housing and the high rates of rents they have to pay for their long-term accommodation. In addition, the psychological and social impacts of economic and financial hardship are very stressful for Syrian and Iraqi refugees, because many have already begun feeling losses in their lives when they compare their living conditions in Australia with their relatively privileged and more stable social and financial situation in their countries of origin. In the meantime, many of these new arrivals have to rely entirely on government welfare support payments because of a lack of employment and absence of other sources of income, which results in a more serious social problem of long-term welfare dependency.



6.1 The Refugee Experience

From the interviews conducted with Syrian and Iraqi refugees, three themes emerge in relation to their day-to-day living: housing unaffordability, financial and economic hardship, and welfare support dependency.

6.1.1 Housing unaffordability

Securing adequate and affordable housing is considered by the interviewees a key challenge that significantly affects their day-to-day living and overall settlement experience in Australia. The problem of housing unaffordability is exacerbated for refugee households as many have large families living together, including extended family members and in-laws, which requires them to rent larger houses, which are very expensive in Sydney and other capital cities in Australia:

Honestly, we are suffering because of the housing. The rent is very high and the house we have rented is too old. Even the health of my children, specially the health of one of my sons, has been affected because the house is made out of wood and it is humid. He has started having allergy in his eyes. We are trying to find a better place to rent, but it is not easy to find adequate housing as it is very expensive to rent. One of the biggest problems we are facing is the housing. (R3)

I am paying a high rent; our rent is too expensive. I have to cut buying necessary stuff for my family and children in order to be able to pay the rent. You know, we are a big family of 6 people (myself, my wife and our 4 children) and it is very difficult to manage our day-to-day living because of paying high rent. (R8)

After our arrival in Sydney, we stayed in Merrylands for 6 weeks before we had to search for long-term accommodation.

However, we couldn't afford to find and rent a suitable property to move in Merrylands because we are a big family and we need a big house. So, we decided to move to Liverpool, and with the help of our relatives we found and rented a larger house in Liverpool area. (R19)

We tried a lot to rent a big house in Wollongong, but we didn't find anything which we could afford to rent. So, our relatives in Sydney helped us to move to Liverpool, where we found a larger house to rent. We are a big family (myself, my husband, our 3 children, my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law) living all together. My in-laws and my family wanted to stay together because my mother-in-law is an old lady who needs regular care. (R12)

6.1.2 Financial and economic hardship

A second theme in the interviews is the economic and financial challenges that refugees face in their day-to-day living, affecting their settlement journey in Australia. While the level of the Centrelink support they receive is considered reasonable in their early stages of settlement, many quickly realise that the welfare support payments are not compatible with the high costs of day-to-day living requirements. The individual, psychological and social impacts of economic hardship and financial pressure on these newly arrived refugees become very serious and stressful, as many of them have already begun experiencing loss in their lives:

As you know, we are new arrivals and that is true that the government is giving us salaries [welfare support payments] but it is not enough to cover the bills of electricity, internet, housing, food and the taking care of children. It is difficult to

manage financially with the Centrelink support we receive but, as many people say, we were [warned?] before coming to Australia. We left everything and came to Australia with no money at all. (R3)

There is a lot of economic and financial stresses we are experiencing in our settlement journey. We have a big family and the Centrelink payment we are receiving is not enough to manage financially. I think finding a job is very important, I need a job to afford my daily expenses. (R8)

Back in our country of origin we weren't poor people, we had a good and comfortable life. We had everything we needed. When we came to Australia, we felt depressed and tired as we faced a lot of financial difficulties because my husband and I were not able to find work. (R11)

6.1.3 Welfare support dependency

A third theme from the interviews is the refugees' reliance on receiving welfare support and their long-term dependency on Australia's welfare system. According to the interviewees, most of them have to rely entirely on Centrelink payments. Refugees want to be financially independent, but also feel they should be given more time to improve their skills and knowledge and to find employment:

The negative thing is that we need more time to find a job and to become financially stable and independent. We are still receiving financial assistance from Centrelink, but we want to be financially settled and independent. However, this is difficult at this stage as we are still new in Australia and we are not ready to find work. (R5)

I appreciate the support I receive from Centrelink and other assistance from the government, but they need to understand that we didn't come from China, Britain or America. We came from Iraq and we are subjected to adjust to a lot of changes and challenges. It is difficult to handle all these changes given our past experience of trauma and the different economic systems we were living in back in our countries. (R20)

Thanks god that my husband is working now and we are no longer getting the Centrelink benefits and payments, because my husband felt that receiving Centrelink payments will make us dependent financially and it will not help us with our short-term settlement and long-term integrations. (R11)

There is a lot of pressure from Centrelink and we face many problems in there. Once I told them that they drive me to be mad or crazy, and sometimes I hated myself because of their consistent pressure. After my requests were being repeatedly refused by Centrelink, I finally became able to change the Newstart Allowance to Austudy when I completed Cert 4. So, the pressure is now less from Centrelink as I don't deal with them so often. (R19)

6.2 Community Leaders' & Key Informants' Perspectives

The comments and views expressed by community leaders and key informants mostly support and reinforce the experiences and perspectives of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees in relation to issues associated with day-to-day living.

Community leaders confirmed that the unaffordability of housing puts a lot of pressure on newly arrived refugees and is a big challenge for Syrian and Iraqi families as they are usually large and their adult children also stay with them:

After moving to Australia, refugees mostly experience the major challenge of finding suitable housing and the very high rent they need to pay. I mean, even we are talking, there is \$500 weekly rent in Fairfield, NSW. How can these families survive with paying that high rent? We have families who try hard to manage to eat once a day because there is a \$500 weekly rent to be paid. (CL7)

We stay together with our family for a long time. The family just stays together even in the same suburb and on the same street. Even if they move to another house, they try to rent a house which is just close to each other. You cannot go and rent outside of the family home and have your own life for so long. This causes a lot of financial stresses, as they need to find adequate housing which they cannot afford. (CL6)

A key informant noted that financial hardship and unemployment significantly affect the health and wellbeing of refugees:

It is often a long journey for refugees to get employment and become financially stable. One of the refugees I work with, she went

through quite a period of depression. What we want more than anything for our new arrivals is to help them become financially stable to have a sense of wellbeing. (KI2)

Key informants also agreed that refugees want to find work and be independent and that their aim is not to be reliant on welfare support:

The people from refugee background I work with hate receiving Centrelink support. They want a job but that is difficult to get it. They have a very powerful drive not to be getting Centrelink payments. They want to be independent; they have been independent all their lives, but how they actually make that happen is the tricky thing. (KI2)

Most refugees, particularly if they are not single mothers, their key aim is to become self-sufficient. When they come here, they are not attracted by the welfare support payments. They are grateful for the services, but that is not why they come to Australia. They want to build lives and they are finding it hard to get employment. (KI6)

6.3 Implications For Policy

The interview data highlights several significant challenges in relation to the day-to-day living of Syrian and Iraqi refugees which affect their settlement experience in Australia. Their pre-arrival experiences also play a role in the difficulty they face in adjusting to the new environment. Many have experienced violence and discrimination before coming to Australia, sometimes including torture and severe trauma. They may have spent long periods in refugee camps, unsure of what the future held for them (DSS 2018c). Additionally, new arrivals from refugee backgrounds must deal with numerous problems including language barriers, finding employment, separation from family left behind, isolation and loneliness (Lewig et al. 2009, p. 26). The pressures of high housing costs, financial insecurity and welfare dependency are added to these stresses.

Securing suitable and affordable housing is critical to the settlement process for newly arrived refugees to promote integration and establish a meaningful life in Australia. Housing provides not only a physical shelter for new arrivals, but also a foundation for their emotional, psychological and cultural growth after their experience of displacement and uncertainty for extended periods before coming to Australia (Flatau et al. 2015, p. 20). However, despite the fact that housing plays an important role in the settlement of refugees, they often encounter significant barriers when attempting to access safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing (Blythe et al. 2018, p. 18). In fact, housing is one of the top concerns for refugees in Australia because of the shortage of low-cost housing, competition in the private rental market, limited access to support services, financial hardship, discrimination in the housing market and family size (Blythe et al. 2018, p. 18).

Finding affordable housing is difficult for

everyone on a low income in the Australian housing market. Refugees, however, face additional barriers to securing suitable housing. The RCoA identifies numerous barriers including: refugees' reliance on welfare; lack of employment; poor understanding of Australian rental processes; low English proficiency; lack of rental history and documentation; lack of understanding of tenancy rights and responsibilities; negative attitudes among real estate agents and landlords; and risks associated with shared accommodation arrangements (RoCA 2017b, p. 2).

Refugees' large families are a particular challenge affecting their ability to find affordable housing. In most Australian capital cities, there is limited availability of houses with four or more bedrooms and they are generally too expensive for refugee families (RoCA 2018). Refugees also often find it hard to compete with other people in the private rental market for the few houses they can afford. They have to learn how the rental market works and, when they apply to rent a house, they often find they are not accepted because they do not have a rental history and are not working, and sometimes because of discrimination (RoCA 2018).

A 2017 submission by RCoA to the Federal Financial Relations Affordable Housing Working Group argued that the inability to find housing has forced people to move to outer suburbs where housing is more affordable, but where the settlement services and support that recently arrived refugees require are not available. This is therefore not a viable option (RoCA 2017b, p. 3). A recent national study found increasing levels of homelessness and housing instability among refugees, especially in Sydney (SSI 2014, p. 2). A 2014 submission by SSI to the Senate Standing Committee on Economics pointed out that,

although Australian Government programs are able to meet the immediate housing support and information needs of newly arrived refugees, they are unable to address the systemic housing supply and affordability challenges facing refugees in NSW (SSI 2014, p. 3).

In fact, not just refugees but everyone else in Australia finds it difficult to find low-cost housing. Waiting lists for social housing are very long due to a lack of government investment in social housing. While the provision of public housing by state governments has been a traditional response to delivering housing assistance to very-low and low-income families, public housing comprises only 4% of the housing stock in NSW and is thus unable to address housing affordability issues facing low- and moderate-income families, including refugees (SSI 2014, p. 6). The NSW Government has, however, recently committed \$3.9 million to deliver private rental assistance to eligible refugee families to assist them in securing a safe place to live as they rebuild their lives (NSW Government 2019).

While the socio-economic status of the new arrivals is improved significantly once they arrive in Australia because they feel safe and secure, enjoy certain freedoms and rights, receive welfare support payments and access better health services, there are many economic and financial challenges affecting their day-to-day living and settlement journey (Renzaho & Dhingra 2016, p. 10). According to the RCoA, many newly arrived refugees face financial hardship and may have debts to repay. They have difficulty finding employment, but at the same time are often sending significant amounts of the money they do have to family members who remained behind (RoCA 2017b, p. 2). As a consequence, many refugees live in poverty

for the first few years of their settlement in Australia (RoCA 2017b, p. 2).

Another RCoA report noted that refugees may also be inexperienced in financial matters such as getting a loan, insurance or entering contracts, and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation due to their lack of understanding of how these issues are managed in Australia (RoCA 2018). Overall, despite the improvement in their lives as a result of settlement in Australia, compared to the situation they left behind refugees still face significant economic hardship and financial pressure after their arrival which is a source of stress and has psychological and social impacts on their day-to-day lives.

The findings of this chapter reinforce the conclusions of the previous chapter on Working. A challenge for many newly arrived refugees is that they have to rely entirely on Australia's welfare support payments due mainly to problems finding work. Refugees usually arrive in Australia after long periods in refugee camps or as political prisoners or victims of torture, violence and/or discrimination. They often have limited skills, lack of English proficiency, lack of understanding of local socio-cultural values and low self-esteem (Camacho 1999). Therefore, during the initial periods of their settlement in Australia most refugees live with financial support from the government welfare system (Camacho 1999).

There is evidence, however, that refugees' reliance on welfare support continues in many cases for an extended period and leads to long-term welfare dependency. Upon arrival in Australia, refugees receive the same social security benefits from Centrelink as any Australian resident. The two-year waiting period for Centrelink eligibility that applies

to other newly arrived permanent migrants is waived for refugees and humanitarian entrants in recognition of the fact that they often arrive with few or no financial resources (SSI nd d). DSS data on the time that refugees receive working-age payments before finding work shows that almost half of those who begin looking for work in their first year of arrival eventually leave Centrelink's Newstart Allowance after five years (Yosufzai 2017). While the Australian Government argues that it tries to identify groups of people at risk of welfare dependency and disadvantage, and evaluates the effectiveness of its programs in order to help people move into education or employment (DSS 2018i), the data from DSS clearly indicates that new arrivals from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds are usually dependent for years on welfare support payments after their arrival, resulting in in long-term welfare dependency.

To address the challenges associated with the day-to-day living of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, a more effective approach needs to be adopted. Initiatives need to be developed that help new arrivals in practical ways to reduce their long-term welfare support dependency and become financially self-sufficient by improving their employability skills and finding work. In doing so, it would be useful to take an approach that incorporates step-by-step practical and bottom-up program management in which refugees are given the opportunity to engage effectively with government and non-government service providers in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of dependency-reduction programs.



7. Cultural Adjustment

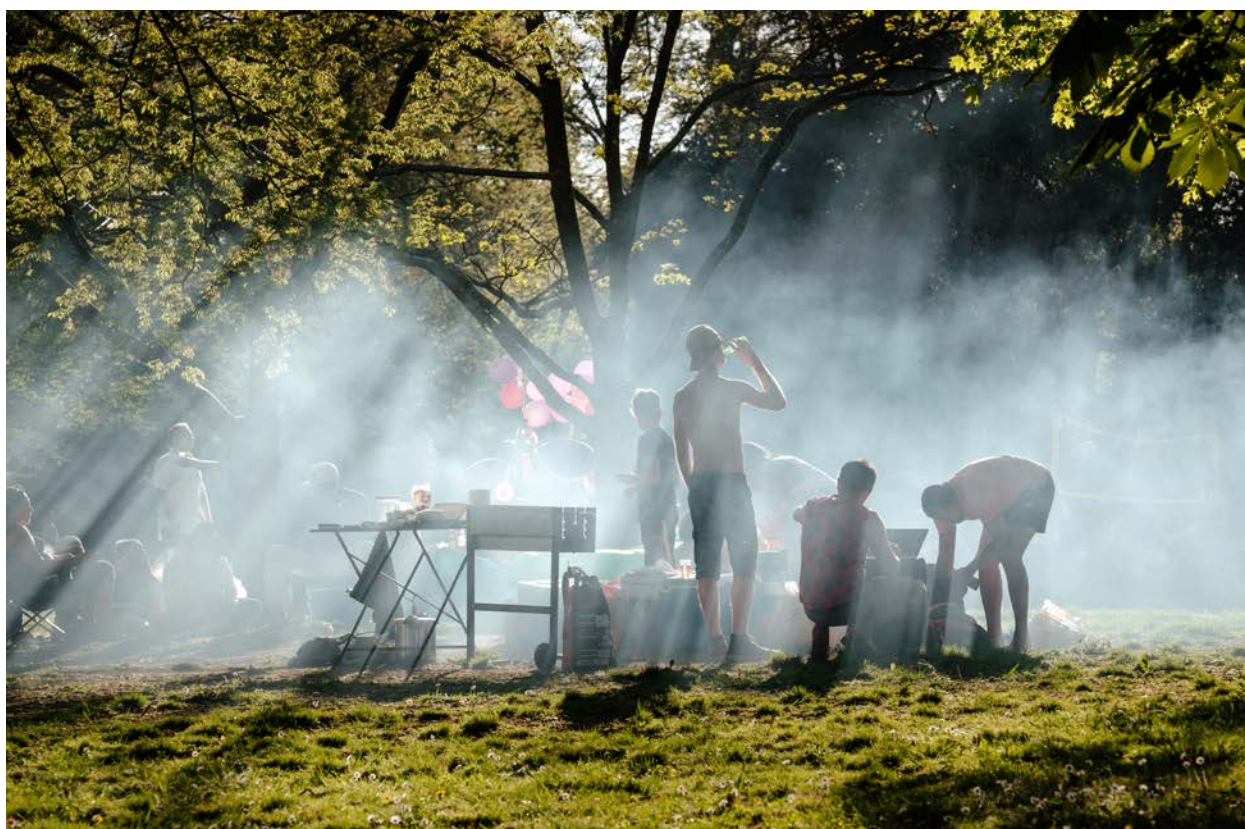


This chapter considers the contribution of the government's formal education program towards cultural adjustment. Specifically, this program is the pre-arrival AUSCO. However, in their comments some refugees referred to formal information sessions received post-arrival. The post-arrival AMEP, for example, re-addresses the same themes and content as the AUSCO program (DE 2018a). Some refugee interviewees also attended a two-day orientation program post-arrival, that is, formal information sessions delivered as part of the HSP. The relevance of post-arrival programs to the discussion in this chapter is in terms of their support to the AUSCO program in building cultural knowledge for migrants and refugees.

While the terms 'cultural adjustment' and 'settlement' can be used interchangeably in some contexts, for the purposes of this discussion cultural orientation and cultural adjustment

tend to be concerned with formal pre-arrival programs aimed at knowledge to be gained, while settlement is about the integration of this knowledge into new patterns of living and operating. Settlement is facilitated by post-arrival programs or settlement services delivered as part of the HSP. Cultural adjustment is facilitated by pre-arrival programs and in particular the AUSCO program.

This chapter primarily reviews the adequacy, timeliness and receptivity of the AUSCO program in facilitating cultural adjustment. It finds that refugees consider the information provided by the program prior to their departure for Australia to be timely and adequate for their needs at the time. However, interviewees identified several aspects of life in Australia that they felt were not adequately dealt with in formal programs. They thus rely heavily on CBOs and family networks for this type of information.



7.1 Australia's Formal Cultural Orientation Program (Ausco)

AUSCO is delivered to refugee and humanitarian entrants over the age of five prior to departure for Australia. The Australian Government contracts the IOM to deliver the program in the language of the recipients via an interpreter (IOM nd.). AUSCO was designed by the DSS and has designated outcomes, a curriculum and a handbook. AUSCO is provided, but it is not mandatory. Specifically, it:

supports eligible Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program entrants in the first stage of their settlement in Australia ... gives practical advice about the journey to Australia, including quarantine laws and information about what to expect post-arrival and assists in ensuring a successful start to the clients' settlement journey ... links closely with onshore settlement support and orientation delivered under the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP). (DSS 2019a)

Further objectives of AUSCO include:

- provide accurate information on the departure processes
- describe the settlement process and provide practical information about post-arrival settlement services and how to access them
- present a realistic picture of life in Australia
- encourage English language training on arrival in Australia
- provide participants with the basic skills necessary to achieve self-sufficiency
- equip participants with the necessary tools to deal with initial settlement concerns and the different stages of cultural, social and economic adaptation. This includes information about Australian laws and norms. (DSS 2019a)

The curriculum includes information on health, money, housing, employment and law, but it also covers information for more immediate needs such as settlement services, travel to Australia and an overview of Australia (DSS 2019a). The program uses a variety of methodologies for delivery including brainstorming, simulations, case studies, discussions, problem-solving and role-play activities (DSS 2019a). DSS also provides classroom and reference materials such as the AUSCO Student Folder, DVDs, maps, posters and books about Australia (DSS 2019a). The delivery organisation, IOM, also contributes to development of the program through:

improvements to teaching materials and the continuous training of trainers, including an annual Train-the-Trainer workshop, conferences with Settlement Service Providers in Australia and an Exchange Program between AUSCO trainers and Australian settlement case workers. (IOM nd)



7.2 Post-Arrival Cultural Orientation

7.2.1 AMEP

AMEP is a formal English language learning program with designated curriculum and guidelines developed by the Department of Employment and Training. Navitas and TAFE are contracted to deliver AMEP in NSW. At each level, language development is centred around the topics of health, housing, a new life, transport, work, environment, leisure and law. These topics correspond to the topics addressed in the AUSCO program. As official government programs developed by different government departments, they therefore evidence coordinated correspondence so as to affirm and translate cultural learning. However, whereas the AUSCO program material is made available in nine languages including Arabic (DSS 2019a), revisiting this information through AMEP is English-based. Provision of any cultural learning in the language of the refugee falls into the domain of settlement services.

An example of cultural learning topics within the AMEP curriculum is the tutor guide for law, which focuses at the pre-beginner level on the police being there to keep people safe when lost or in trouble, and deals practically with using pedestrian crossings. The post-beginner focus for the law topic is around language dealing with car accidents, Centrelink and door-to-door salespeople. It is not until the intermediate level that a topic on social customs is introduced, picking up on the AUSCO section on Australian families. It considers the appropriate style of greeting for someone you have met but don't know very well, how to address a teacher if they have introduced themselves by their first name, seeing two men walking down the street holding hands, seeing a married friend with another woman/man and what it is polite to ask. In all of this, discussion is invited on comparison between Australia and their country of origin. At this stage of their language development, this cultural

learning within the language development context should be experienced as affirmation and confidence-building to venture out and develop new relationships outside refugees' own language-based community. Thus AUSCO learning is further assisted and affirmed as part of the AMEP program, but within English-speaking vocabulary and concepts.

7.2.2 HSP

The settlement program, delivered in NSW by SSI, facilitates deeper experiential learning and processing of information, as refugees are personally accompanied and guided in practically using and learning the systems as required in situ. Information is thus integrated into day-to-day functioning within a new cultural framework. The HSP is individually tailored to facilitate practical learning. Therefore, when SSI provides orientation sessions, the objectives, content and methodology are determined by SSI's assessment of its clients' needs, rather than a formal orientation program developed by government. These SSI-provided post-arrival orientation sessions include a Welcome to Sydney kit which SSI developed and launched in 2015. This kit contains a checklist of things refugees will need to do within the first two weeks after arrival, as well as guides about safety in the home, tenants' rights and responsibilities, paying household bills, tips on living on a budget and an introduction to Australian law. This booklet complements the information clients receive during the SSI orientation sessions (SSI 2015).

In the words of a key informant interviewed for this research, SSI's two-day orientation program post-arrival covers:

7.3 The Refugee Experience

Australian law and culture, everything they need to know in a new country. The orientation program is quite comprehensive delivered in their own language. And it covers ten different topics, you know, including, you know, settlement services, including feeling at home in Australia, family functioning, employment, education, money management, housing, tenancy, child protection – everything they need to know, basically in a new country. (KI11)

The AUSCO program is not mandatory, but most refugees interviewed reported having attended the program before departure. They found the information that was provided timely and adequate for their needs at the time, although many noted that it was very general and identified a number of areas where they felt a need for additional information and support. They had thus relied heavily on family networks and CBOs to fill in the gaps. A number of factors may influence participants' receptiveness to the cultural orientation sessions and therefore the effectiveness of the program.

7.3.1 Timeliness

While none of the refugees went into detailed description of the program, for those who noted that it told them about what to expect on arrival, this is indicative of its timeliness. Positive comments related particularly to information about the journey and what to expect from life in Australia:

Yes, we attend the flight workshop [AUSCO] ... They told us about everything, transport, education, house, rent, they told us everything in details. Even about preparing for flight ... for 3 days, they explained to us about life, they showed us videos and pictures, everything, the water and the electricity. (R12)

I did it. In addition to that, when I knew that I was coming to Australia, I started reading about this country to learn more about its history and geography. (R15)

A few individuals also indicated its general, comprehensive nature:

We did it and they told us that, when you arrive to Australia, it will be hard in the

beginning, after that alright. If a person wants to persevere and work, this is the only hard thing. They told us, but we didn't have an alternative choice. (R11)

Yes, yes. We did 5 days, a flight session (cultural orientation program). We attend 5 full days, about 6 hours every day. There was lectures about Australia, some of the rules, tradition, uh, it was not in details, in general, they gave information in general, what are the essentials things a person who newly arrive to Australia should know ... Yes, the laws and legal system ... Yes, this information helped us in somehow. (R4)

Even for those who were not able to attend in person, the materials provided and the information shared by other participants were considered useful:

There was a workshop to give information about Australia, but unfortunately I was not able to attend because my children were young and we needed to prepare to travel. However, my mother and father attended, they brought the brochures and we kind [of] took a general idea about everything from them ... we both [wife and husband] could not attend. The location was far, the transportation was a little hard and we had two young kids – so we could not attend ... The information was enough. Most of it was to inform us that people will meet us at the airport, they will provide us with a house and furniture until we rent a house, they told us about schools and it was accurate. (R5)

Only two refugees noted receiving a formal orientation program post-arrival. For one, this was because they were only notified in Lebanon after their flight was booked:

there was workshops, but we did it here ... they called us after we got the visa and booked the flight. (R14)

and we did a two-days workshop when we arrive. (R2)

7.3.2 Adequacy

Opinions varied as to the adequacy of detail in the program, with some commenting that the information was general and only covered the basics:

Because, because the refugee people, he, he, when he came here, he did not have a lot of information, even if they give him in Jordan or in Turkey, the temporary places, but it is not enough. They give him the general information. (R20)

We have to make an effort, we have to go and find information, they only give us key information, but we should get it by our own efforts. It was hard, it was an adventure, we lived for 9 months and we still living an adventure. (R11)

A community leader who had also been a refugee commented on his experience of the program:

From my own experience, we get 3 days' training workshop in Lebanon before we arrive in Australia, general information and to us like general information. When we arrived in Australia, settlement services like SSI delivered the program. Also some few workshops about basic things about how to rent accommodation, how to do this, how to sign any contract, all these small things. (CL6)

Did the general information offered in the AUSCO program correlate with expectations and

lived reality? The majority of refugees thought it did, noting that lived reality will never be a perfect match for information received:

The information covered everything, they explained about everything, I saw what I expected. (R12)

and it was accurate, all the information they said were accurate; about the salaries, the Centrelink, everything. (R5)

No, honestly, the lecturer who was presenting the lecture went through the pros and cons. What is the things we are, the good things we will experience, and what are the difficulties we will face and how to get rid of the difficulties. He even divided it: the first 1 or 2 months you will feel that you are in a new beautiful country and you will have people who meet you in the airport, welcome you and help you; after that, you feel a little bit of anguish and tired because your relatives, family and friends are not around you, but you will get over the difficulties step by step. He didn't describe it as a paradise and when you arrive everything will be good. I mean, he was clear ... No, everything was clear, honestly, everything was clear, but in everything when you read about something or hear about it is not like when you experience it in life. (R4)

7.3.3 Unmet information needs

A number of refugees and community leaders identified areas where they felt a need for more information and assistance. One issue that refugees apparently struggle with and seek help on relates to rules and the paperwork aspect of Australian culture:

The negative part was, as they told us in the cultural orientation session, that you will face difficulties, don't get depressed, always be optimistic, it is okay, you will be okay eventually, language is the most important thing and after that everything will work. But they did not tell us that the rules are difficult and there is lots of paperwork here in Australia. I mean, there is lots of difficulties which we did not know about, but when we came here we were a little bit shocked, but as I told you we didn't have another choice. However, as a country Australia is very beautiful and they offered us many things, but because we are not familiar with the rules, we find it difficult ... In our countries, we are used to pay cash and get whatever we want. (R11)

What they ask for, about, information help in accepting some government forms, government papers, how to fill it, how to meet the requirement for any particular paper they need, from Centrelink, from banks. (CL3)

Another refugee noted the difficulty of relying on written information where it is being constantly translated:

A lot of them [refugees], they did not know what are the rules, because when I read something in English, I cannot understand when I translate to Arabic. I cannot understand because translate word to word does not give, they do not give you the right meaning – this is another problem. Even if I speak English very well or write very well, but tell – it is difficult to understand these things. So that they need to explain the rules here ... how it is working, how the system is working, how you can, how, how when

you work, what is your rights when you are work, what is the minimum payment for you ... A lot of people did, did not know what the minimum wages for them and it is change from year to year. (R20)

One of the biggest learnings for refugees in their orientation related to technological systems via the plastic card, and in particular bank cards:

We are not used to all these, we find it difficult not only in this area, but also handling everything else. (R11)

It's more about how most of them do the same mistakes, where some banks exploit them. I have many cases where, like, my friends and relatives have no idea and they went to the bank and the bank offered them a debit card (credit card?) and you can get money and pay later, because they didn't understand the credit card and debit card and all this stuff, so they think they can get money and pay it back later, and they realise it is very hard to pay it back and there is interest and this problem. We have many friends, they have this problem, I tell them, you don't have to accept anything, even if they offer it for free don't accept it unless you understand exactly what a debt means and you can manage it ... they just give them the good information – you can borrow money as much as you can – but they don't really understand the meaning of debts and interest. (CL6)

This is part of a broader technology gap in prior learnings:

In our country we don't have mobiles, we don't have iPad ... my mobile in Iraq is a small one and there is only the number, there is no camera, nothing of it. And I

don't know how to use. And we don't have laptop. This technology, it is far away from us. (R20)

they expect them to be fully proficient in using their computer, using the internet, using how to open, have their website, how to, to navigate, how to enter to the MyGovernment site, how to – so this is, some people are illiterate people who needs help and so we provide such help. (CL3)

The immersion in a cultural system that is heavily technology-reliant and plastic-orientated requires more than informal learning and guided experiential learning from settlement services. There is a place here for more formal orientation.

Also flowing from their prior experience and lack of trust, another area identified by community leaders as needing more formal orientation is the issue of legal rights:

Now in Australia they find – they have more rights than they had back in their home, so they have, they didn't expect that. Until now they didn't understand their rights in Australia. They don't know that they have the right to, for example, sue corporates or talk against certain laws of the government. They still have that fear that I can't say something against the government because something bad will happen to me. So they still have that fear that – and even they don't understand fully some of their rights; some employers, certainly not in our case because we follow up with them in one year, but some employers, especially small businesses, they exploit them and because they don't know what's their rights in Australia and they think "I can't say anything, I can't do anything, because no one will protect me if something happens."

So they still have this idea in their mind ... I think there should be information sessions about what their rights in Australia and how the law will protect them in Australia. For example, if they are not happy with certain law they can speak about it, if they are not happy with their employer they can go to court, if there is something happening that is not fair there is legal aid. This information must be provided in more details because those people, when they arrive here, have no idea what is their rights. Even back in their home they have this thing in their mind they have to follow certain lines ... they have nothing, no freedom ... It needs more details. (CL6)

Another community leader gave voice to the need for more education concerning the legal system:

Also, there is one factor that I noticed through the 20 years that people come to a new system, sometimes they make mistakes at the beginning, for the first quarter or 5 years. The 5 years learning stage, sometimes they make mistakes and the consequences will be absolutely damaging to their life. As soon as they will be labelled that they are bad and they have the record, life for them become meaningless. Very small ratio of them will endeavour to change and accept that as a learning process. The others will go from bad to worse. The legal justice system needs – I'm not sure – but I think needs to be looked at from different perspectives. (CL4)

7.3.4 Reliance on family and community

In their experienced needs for more information and help with rules, paperwork and the legal system, refugees turned to their own language-based sources – family, friends and CBOs. Formal orientation in these matters in their

own language was limited. While AMEP might also pick up on these topics, the medium is English and the capacity to receive information accurately is language dependent.

Further, as one community leader noted, the focus in AMEP is on language acquisition, rather than in-depth knowledge of the topic:

Learning the language and then learning the policy, it's a bit too hard for them. (CL7).

Predominantly adaptation in these areas is left to settlement services and the informal orientation and assistance of friends, family and CBOs:

the only source of information for us is SSI, and the school is also doing a good job. We receive information from those two sources and our friends; If someone hears about an organisation or something new, they pass the word. (R17)

The ready reliance on friends is not just a matter of language, but a further dimension of the trust issue. Refugees come with an innate distrust of official sources:

because where our upbringing is that we don't have that centralised system that was reliable. So it's always, you ask someone versus you go to the source, because the source is always changing without knowledge, without proper protocols. So we have lost faith in our system growing up, so it's ingrown almost in our DNA that – especially the older generations – and that's why. So it's not any fault of their own, but when they come here, we try to push as much as possible, look, if you're unsure, don't ask Person A or B, go to the source. Call the Department of Immigration, call the Department of Maritime Services, call

TAFE New South Wales, call University of Western Sydney and so forth and ask the question. That's their job, is to give you information. You can always go, book a meeting, see face to face, and these are the things that sometimes they're just worried or scared, or sometimes don't even know or aware that they can do. (CL5)

Hence orientation with respect to issues such as rules, managing paperwork and the legal system necessarily happens experientially and over time:

So you can see they are constantly learning about rights in their day-to-day activity as part of their broader settlement program. You can see the information is sinking in, gradually. So it is an ongoing thing and part of the settlement outcomes. (KI9)

7.3.5 Receptivity

Timeliness, adequacy and receptivity are interrelated. Receptivity influences not only perception of the adequacy of information, but also perception of its accuracy and the framing of expectations from the information received. The sheer volume of new information may itself be a barrier to receptivity, as one community leader noted:

Some of the young people said, I didn't know there was such a thing and no one told me. I said, that's fine, it's probably lost in translation because of the avalanche of information that you get ... Trying to fill a gap in terms of a cultural knowledge of how this system operates and how you need to directly contact organisations. So that would seem then to be not information they get in their preparation to come to Australia, or something they're not assisted to process. It might be given, but they don't process it. It's a learning for them. (CL5)

Perceptions of accuracy may also be affected by prior expectations that were quite different to subsequent experiences:

because we were not living the reality, it is not like they said ... When a person talks about something, he doesn't know how another person lives. I mean, I lived the situation. They actually spoke about it, but they said something, I can't remember what it was exactly, but it was different from reality. (R2)

Our expectation was very different. The first thing is my husband said that as soon as I arrive I will find a job. Even I was very optimistic, I thought I will find a job, I will work and help my parents. (R1)

The experience of R1 is seemingly not unique, according to one community leader:

So when they come to Australia they have this image that Australia is like ... it's not like the Middle East or the Third World countries. Australia is more advanced and they will easily find a job, it will be easy for them and their lives will just change so fast and they ... will be so happy. When they arrive to Australia, they find the safety they are looking for, but they really struggle with employment. They thought it would be very easy in Australia, but in fact it's hard. It's hard because they don't have local experience, the qualifications are from overseas, so they face these barriers and ... it's ... the expectation will be, like – you could spend a certain amount of time and you could apply for 10 or 20 jobs until you get one of them. It is not, like, that easy apply for this one and get this job, so the image of Australia is, all these big businesses here, I will find a job easily and quickly, and then they face

the reality of like that. (CL6)

Of note here is the section of the AUSCO program on employment, which highlights that refugees may not be able to find work immediately as they will need to learn or improve their English and study before they can find a job. The program then identifies some of the challenges they will face, including lack of work experience in Australia, inability to speak English well, lack of computer skills, non-recognition of professional qualifications and lack of social networks. The information material then urges refugees to “Remember: it takes time” (DSS 2018a). The comments of some refugees suggest, however, that such warnings in the AUSCO program about the difficulty of finding employment may not always have an impact. Hence the perceived accuracy and adequacy of information delivered in the AUSCO program can be undermined by preconceptions and excessive optimism.

Prior experience of intimidation and loss of trust in government systems to protect them also affects refugees’ receptivity to official sources of cultural information. This is a key factor in refugees seeking the safety and security of their own community – a safe haven within a broader safe haven. Although they feel physically safe and secure in Australia, interacting at a legal level with authorities brings anxieties.

Receptivity to cultural information can also be affected by factors such as age. It was suggested that it is harder for older people to culturally adapt due to the difficulty of acquiring language and new work skills at an older age:

Over 40, 45, it starts to be harder for them to learn different language, to accept a different culture. (CL6)

the problems is with elderly people. No ... it is not easy for them find services ... there is

too much for them learn when they come here. (CL2)

Some aspects of the cultural orientation program deal with Australian values that may differ from the refugees’ religious and cultural backgrounds, but none of the refugees mentioned this in the interviews. The section on Australian families, for example, notes that it is against the law to have more than one husband or wife at the same time, divorce is common and acceptable in the community, most Australian women work outside the home, many men take an active role in helping at home and in some cases a man may stay at home to look after the children and the house while the woman goes to work (DSS 2016a). One key informant commented on this aspect of the program:

Some of the stuff that is presented in that cultural orientation program can be quite confronting for, let’s say, traditional village people from the Middle East, about the way we live in Australia ... although some of them said, this is not something I personally accept in my – I would not accept this in my own family, I accept that it is part of the way of life in Australia. (KI7)

7.4 Implications For Policy

7.4.1 Timeliness and adequacy

The feedback provided by refugees and community leaders indicates that the AUSCO program is considered to be timely. It is delivered shortly prior to travel to Australia and provides information of immediate relevance to the journey and arrival. With respect to adequacy, some refugees noted that the information provided is quite general. The general nature of the program was also noted by an ABC news item in 2017:

The cultural orientation program covers only the very basics – when to shake hands, how to introduce yourself in English, and a heads-up about having a brick house, a flushing toilet and a little green man telling you when to cross the street. (Cochrane 2017)

How much information is enough is difficult to gauge – when does more become less? This will be different for each individual, as there is a subjective element in the level of detail any one person can process, complicated by emotional and stress factors of current circumstances, the experiential unknown that lies ahead and even personality factors. One would expect a variety of responses, but the majority indicated that the level of information was enough at the time. It was certainly adequate for their arrival experience. In that respect at least, it was appropriately timely and generally in accord with their capability to receive the information at that moment in time. However, the detail is seemingly insufficient for the longer term settlement process and refugees are reliant on community-based organisations and less formal programs to reiterate and develop the cultural learning provided. This suggests a need for either reconsideration of the general nature of the orientation and the level of detail provided, or alternatively more detailed information to be made available in a formal program post-arrival.

A review of AUSCO in 2009 examined the balance between information provided in offshore and onshore programs, with a general finding for improvement in consistency and linkage (DIAC 2009, p. 10). Specifically, the 2009 report stated:

that AUSCO is best focused on the journey and preparing clients conceptually, detailed information should be left for onshore – that AUSCO was so beneficial that it should be extended (contradictory to the view above) – there needed to be much more done onshore and that this should reinforce AUSCO – that a formal and structured onshore orientation should be considered, which would reinforce and extend what is covered in AUSCO. (DIAC 2009, p. 9)

7.4.2 Rules, regulations, technology and the legal system

While the AUSCO program tends to be general in nature, timely and adequate at the time of pre-arrival, refugee responses indicated that further consideration needs to be given to developing information pertaining to rules, regulations, paperwork, technology and the legal system. The need for such information is one that arises sooner in the refugee's new life, rather than later. It cannot wait until the affirmation of such learning in the AMEP, which is directed towards language acquisition rather than cultural learning.

The need for information of this kind was identified in a submission to the JSCOM in 2017. It argued that "Settlement prospects can be improved through the provision of comprehensive community legal education programs for all migrants, especially those from refugee and CALD backgrounds" (The Humanitarian Group 2017, p. 4). The final report of JSCOM therefore recommended "that the Australian Cultural Orientation Program provide

at least 100 hours of Australian cultural training including civic and legal education to refugee and humanitarian entrants as well as other migrants who would benefit from this training” (2017, p. 37). To date, this recommendation has not been implemented. Refugees continue to rely on less formal programs and ad hoc information, some reliable, some less reliable, for this much-needed part of their cultural adjustment.

7.4.3 The role of community organisations

CBOs often find themselves being the providers of this kind of information, but not all refugees are aware of these sources. As one refugee noted about gaining further information: “It’s random. It’s accidental. If you stumble across it” (R15). Further, CBOs usually rely heavily on volunteers and so the currency of any information provided to refugees is dependent on volunteers’ ability to stay updated. There is also a need to consider the trust dimension in effecting the capability for receptivity of cultural information and the scope to further process and integrate this information into a new way of living.

As CBOs tend to be key sources of further informational orientation, there is a need for them to work with the same coordination and guidelines that underpin the effectiveness of the HSP:

We all believe we all have to work together very closely if we really want to help those people and there is no one organisation that are great in everything. (CL6)

if we all on the same page and coordinating services, we’re looking for more efficiencies and for the same outcomes and goals. (KI11)

For such coordination and effective detailing of the general information offered by AUSCO in a timely manner and in such a way that

the capacity for receptivity can be enhanced, appropriate funding is required. Without developed cultural learning or adjustment, the settlement services are strained, as they need to embrace being providers of information as well as facilitators of its integration into living in order to be fully effective in their designated role. The task of settlement services is integration of cultural learning. Cultural learning belongs to formal government programs, requiring funding, but with consideration of the appropriate delivering body to grow trust and facilitate receptivity.

One can survive as a refugee arrival in Australia without AUSCO or any formal orientation if one has the capability, together with family and friends:

Before coming to Australia, nobody provided us any information except our parents, who shared their experience with us that Australia is a beautiful country and the people are nice, nothing else. They didn’t speak English, so they didn’t have much information about the things, services and immigration to Australia ... after moving to Australia, we started to explore about available services and opportunities ... We also searched online to get some information about Australia and other countries. (R13)

However, as outlined elsewhere in this report, reliance solely on family and friends has potential limitations. For most people a formal education program is essential, both pre-arrival and post-arrival. The availability of such a post-arrival program also needs to be made known to all refugees, just as the pre-arrival program is made known. Reliance on chance for post-arrival cultural education is not adequate.

8. Community Acceptance & Social Integration





REFUGEES
WELCOME

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While the HSP provides assistance with income support, housing, employment, education and health care, this chapter aims to provide an understanding of the less tangible factors that are also vital in the settlement process – refugees' acceptance and tolerance in the wider Australia community, and their sense of belonging and social integration.

Ideally, the settlement of refugees is a two-way process of mutual understanding of cultural expectations, the host community working in partnership with the refugees. As the RCoA argues:

Settlement is not just something that a refugee must do, but there is also a need for the wider community to adapt to accommodate the refugees. A spirit of hospitality, where refugees are made to feel welcome in a community, underpins successful refugee settlement programs. (RCoA 2018)

The importance of this aspect of the refugee experience was highlighted by a former senior government official:

It is the receptiveness of the host society that in the long run will make or break the success of their [refugees'] settlement journey. (KI7)

Unless there is acceptance of refugees in the host community, positive social integration outcomes may be less likely. This research finds that refugees feel welcome and safe in Australia. CBOs play a vital role in promoting their social integration by creating a sense of belonging and encouraging broader social engagement. The Australian public generally demonstrates a high level of acceptance of refugees, but there is also some evidence of increasingly divided opinions among the Australian public and a discrepancy between the 'welcome culture' and generous settlement support the government extends to refugees and some current political discourse. Polarised public and political debate around the refugee intake has implications for all refugees regardless of how they arrive and is a potential barrier to their social integration.



8.1 Government Commitments to Multiculturalism & Social Inclusion for Refugees

The Australian Government's global commitments and its domestic multicultural and social inclusion policies present Australia as a favourable destination for refugees, committed to providing them with settlement opportunities. Australia's commitment to settle an additional 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees was made in the context of the adoption in September 2016 of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (UNHCR nd d). Under the framework, governments promise to respect the human rights of displaced people, to provide the conditions for them to live in safety and with dignity, and to empower them to enrich the societies in which they live (Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law 2018). This international cooperation is a way forward for Australia in setting common goals and strengthening the international cooperative platform, and to better address the needs and challenges of refugees within their national policy framework.

Moreover, Australia's multicultural and social inclusion policies, together with this global commitment, set a concrete framework for an inclusive society. Australia's multicultural policy aims to achieve a harmonious society based on Australian values by recognising diversity as a positive contribution to the workforce within Australian culture (DSS 2013). As a public policy, multiculturalism encompasses government measures designed to respond to diversity and differences (DSS 2013). Social inclusion, on the other hand, sits within a broader framework of multiculturalism. It aims to preserve human and cultural rights, especially in relation to language retention, participation in economic production, recognition of qualifications of refugees and skilled migrants, and participation in decision-making (Marston & Dee 2015). The basic values of multiculturalism and social inclusion policy in Australia include: a commitment to celebrate and value the benefits of cultural diversity for all

Australians, within the broader aims of national unity, community harmony and maintenance of our democratic values; and a commitment to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from CALD backgrounds (Marston & Dee 2015).

With this multicultural and socially inclusive society in mind, refugee community groups are considered deserving of special consideration under social inclusion services based on the realisation that some community groups are being excluded. These policy platforms therefore make Australia highly culturally responsive to and accepting of refugees. Such cultural and political values are seen to be providing refugees a sense of belonging in Australia, as they highlight a mutual obligation for all citizens, whether migrants or Australian-born, to accept that refugees have the right to retain, express and share their own cultural heritage in return for an overriding commitment to Australian norms, including the country's laws and democratic form of governance (Silver 2016). The government's social policy and vision of a socially inclusive society effectively mean that all Australians, including refugees, should: feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in society; have an equal opportunity to be involved in learning by participating in education and training; be involved in the workforce by participating in employment, in voluntary work and in family and caring; engage by connecting with people and using their local community's resources; and have a voice so they can influence decisions that affect them (Abur & Spaaij 2016; Silver 2016).

At the local government level, many councils have taken the initiative to create a Refugee Welcome Zone – a Local Government Area which is committed to welcoming refugees,

8.2 The Refugee Experience

demonstrating compassion and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community. Currently there are 161 Refugee Welcome Zones in Australia (RCoA 2018). Fairfield City is one of these and has a long history of settling refugees and migrants, welcoming about 1000 refugees a year into its community (Fairfield City Council 2017). In 2016, this number increased to about 5000 refugees, with a further 1700 received in the first five months of 2017 (Fairfield City Council 2017). FSCAP, devised in 2017, aims to contribute to the best possible settlement outcomes for the rising number of refugees settling in Fairfield (Fairfield City Council 2017).

The refugees interviewed have a perception of Australia as a country that has provided welcome support to humanitarian emergencies abroad and taken in refugees through resettlement quotas and community sponsorship. One of the most acknowledged positive aspects identified by refugees is freedom from fear, violence and persecution, and being able to provide themselves and their families with a safe and secure life to restore a sense of dignity and respect. These things all disappeared in Syria and Iraq during prolonged religious and political oppression, war and violence. The second positive aspect is their experience of tolerance and acceptance and a welcoming culture extended by the wider Australian community.

8.2.1 Security and safety

The refugees identified security and safety as the most positive aspect of their settlement. This sense of relief and freedom from fear was mentioned in many of the interviews:

when they applied to Australia, they were looking for, to, for resettlement in a country where you are safe, and there's no threat. You can live peace, securely, there's education for children and there's some peace. And Australia is a peaceful country. It's a secure country. (R8)

In Iraq, we didn't experience any security, safety or comfort ... Without it in life there is nothing. That was the situation there. (R9)

here are security and safety and there are services obviously that is not in Iraq. Services too. (R2)

the main things is have to, to settle in a country there where there is the peace or the freedom, or we can sleep without



thinking about anything from you put your head on the bed. You don't think, nothing scare you, nothing fright you, only things, we ... thought only about this things, the main things in our life. (R20)

No need to think what is Australia ... What is the laws ... but the only thing we know there [Australia] is a peaceful country, or the freedom, they respect people, they help people. (R20)

if it was up to me I would come to Australia some 45 years ago. The only reason is because in Iraq there is no freedom, there is no security there is no. (R9)

[My] kids is very happy here and I'm happy for them because I saved them from ISIS and from the war and all the horrible things happening back in Syria. (R7)

The principal requirement or the most important need is for human being, it is security, without security we cannot survive and once we obtain this safety and security we can think, we can go out, we can work, we can hope and life goes on. Without it in life there is nothing. (R9)

For sure this is my country because there is security, safety ... they treat me as a real citizen in this country. (R9)

8.2.2 Tolerance and acceptance

In interviews refugees also shared their experience of being treated with respect and Australian people responding to them positively. Hence, they felt welcomed and honoured as members of our healthy civil society:

Australia provided us with services we never seen it anywhere else, at least it's, you know, most importantly security, safety ... social relations and services that are not available anywhere. People respond ... to you positively. (R9)

They [interviewee's sister and cousin] have good Australian neighbours next door. To them they have a good relationship. (R8)

My children are happy. They're happy to be in Australia and happy with life in Australia. (R7)

Many interviewees commented in particular on the tolerance of different ethnic groups in Australia. This is a relatively new experience for Syrian and Iraqi refugees, given their sudden exposure to living in a harmonious, multicultural community as opposed to their stay in Iraq or Syria, which was predominantly driven by xenophobia and threat of persecution:

My experience in Australia, I see that Muslims live naturally like all other people, while we in our country, in Iraq, we were not, um, able to live normally [as a minority], well, because of, because of the Muslims there. So here is a different country, majority assume, he assumed that there is a Christian majority. Probably that's my comments and then even though Muslims are living here, they live a normal life with no persecution, no fears, nothing. (R9)

so I arrived Jordan, to Jordan ... the date was 21 March 2015 ... we are Christians, we try to avoid or escape violence and get to places where there is some peace and place that they respect people, such as Australia. That's why I came here. (R9)

8.3 Community Leaders' & Key Informants' Perspectives

Yes, here is every group, every community, every religion. Yes. So I like to make friendship, or relationship, with any person from other nationalities, from Middle East, from, like, Syrian, Iraqi, Jordanian and Lebanese or from China. There we have from Hong Kong, from Argentina. (R2)

Respect for the rule of law and individual rights was also noted:

[Here] they deal with you as a human being, the employees, they make you feel that you have rights in life. Respected rights in life. Really. They respect the people. People respond to a positive attitude and you have a very positive [attitude] and they respond to you positively. (R9)

I like the law very much ... this is the truth, thank god, the law here is very nice – do you know why? The simplest thing here, if you drive a car, start with me, for example. I learnt to drive a car now, in a street where the speed limit is 60, why would I drive 70? This is the law, why should I commit an offence? The traffic rules were made to protect us from accidents and so that's why I like the law here ... I am not being courteous, I just like this. If life has no rules, what is it for! (R6)

Community leaders expressed a variety of views on the issue of community acceptance and social integration. Community groups not only assist refugees in a range of practical areas, they also play an important role in enhancing harmonisation and integration of refugees in the Australian community. Refugees thus often prefer to seek support from CBOs than from government services, as one community leader explained:

I think they [refugees] prefer to be, to come to us [community leaders] than to go to a government or public organisation because the language barrier is one of the obstacles. And also, the treatment is unfriendly, the formal treatment of government officials sometimes is not that kind of treatment that they prefer to have. They would like to have our advice, and then later they go to a government. (CL3)

One community leader described how their CBO promotes broader social engagement with the Australian community by bringing together people such as officials from government, service providers, legal firms, police and policy units to build social connections with them. This initiative aims to remove refugees' fear of government officials and lawmakers, because some Iraqi and Syrian refugees continue to feel intimidated by government officials:

we link them to the government – example, you know, we help them say, besides socially, say for example, if there's any issues with fair trading, department of law justice. We will bring a department of law justice into sessions for these people, for example, if we change of names that they've got or any other issues with their drivers licence or anything that is linked with the government policy for them to be able to know to bring



the law justice into action, department of fair trading. So basically anyone from the police, because the reason why we do that for them, because back in Iraq, like Middle East, and Syria as well, the majority of these persecuted minorities were intimidated by the government. And hence, as soon as they see the police or the government officials, they feel so uncomfortable, they feel so intimidated. So for that reason, we have built so many good relationships and networks with anyone and everyone within the government sector. Just so we can bring them and introduce them to them and make them feel at ease, make them feel comfortable. (CL7)

Another cultural and arts organisation develops projects with the primary objective of enhancing multiculturalism and integration of refugees in the Australian community:

To bring about social change, we use the creative arts for social change. So it's not a purely artistic organisation. Probably the art can formulate 30–50% but there's a community and social aspects which are dominating the mission of what we do. The main reason to establish this is to use a fine method to enhance settlement, resettlement of refugees through singing and other forms of arts, music. (CL4)

One Iraqi community leader explained the role he plays in emphasising Australian values:

the main thing I focus on when I talk to people [refugees] ... is there is dignity here. Here no one disrespect you. We are treated with respect. No employer can point a finger at the workers. There [Iraq] dignity vanished. In Australia we have freedom, law and people can live with dignity and respect.

I focus on the concept of dignity. There we lost everything ... Iraqi people have not left their country because of poverty; they left because they lost the peace. (CL2)

8.3.1 Barriers to social integration

However, refugees' previous experience of insecurity and intimidation before arriving in Australia can have a negative effect on their willingness to venture out to engage with the broader Australian community. Home is considered the safest place:

the only things ... is how to go to the your work safe and how you will return back to your home safe. After we came here, when we close our door, we don't go out. Not all the time come and go. (R20)

As one community leader explained:

We need to understand the mindset of these people that are coming from these countries. All they care about is protecting their children and having a safe place for their children to grow in. They do not want to be in crowded places. What they care about is that no one will come and open the door in the middle of the night and kill them. (CL1)

CBOs make an effort to overcome some refugees' reluctance to integrate:

Say for example, to me, when they come in, they just want to stay in one place. You know, I get that, because they've been tortured, trauma. But then again, they're in Australia, they need to integrate, they need to, you know, socially. Just don't stay with your own community, because that's not what Australia wants. You know, Australia has opened their doors, their hearts, you know, to talk to them, not just, you know, stay. (CL6)

The need to travel to access services is another new experience which is a prohibitive factor in venturing out:

an intensive English program running four stops away on the train, remarkably difficult to get people to travel those four stops. One of the things you discover, even in cities, people lived in relatively small areas, especially in villages. They're very nervous. (KI6)

I think my father, perhaps took him about maybe 10 years or so to get accustomed, where he would stay home and he wouldn't go out because he'd need a car. He would need to travel an hour or so to get to the suburb where it has most of the Iraqis or Arabs, because we lived ... and he goes "what is this? I have to drive an hour and a half to get to Liverpool, Auburn, Fairfield areas?" Where in Baghdad, if you drive an hour you've left the state because the country is so small, and for an older man or woman it's kind of a challenge. (CL5)

They resettle them in an area far away, about 40, 30 minutes away from here. And so they need someone to go wait with them, go out with them. (R2)

The concentration of refugees in Fairfield and Liverpool also has a negative impact on their ability to interact with the wider Australian community, particularly by limiting opportunities to improve their English:

So having communities really help much and it can really help them to settle in Australia. But there is downside to that, having communities. Having communities will also delay their English learning. So, for example, if anyone arrived in Fairfield now

is resettled in Fairfield, there is no need to speak English in fact. There is no English speaking in Fairfield because everyone there is speaking Arabic or Assyrian. So that is a downside where they can't learn, it is very hard for them to learn new language when they interact with their communities every day, so there is no outside interaction. (CL6)

This geographical concentration, in the view of one community spokesperson:

is setting them [up] to fail because people in Fairfield and Liverpool have been living in very low socioeconomic standards for years and it has not picked up and it is a disaster. I see people coming in, elderly people who have been living here for 30 years and speak no word of English. That is totally unacceptable. How can you assimilate, how do you expect people to integrate and assimilate and become Australians if you do not give them the opportunity to do so? (CL1)

So venturing out from their familiar community networks is a multiply challenging event. It is more than language. It concerns feeling safe away from home, becoming comfortable with distance, using public transport and feeling comfortable in crowded spaces.

8.3.2 Ethnic relations among refugee groups

Since Syrian and Iraqi refugee communities comprise several ethnic groups and sects, some CBOs focus on enhancing harmonisation between cultures through cultural programs with the aim of invoking a sense of belonging among refugees:

within the Iraqi Australian community, you have multiple sects. So, you have Muslims, Christians, Mandaean, Kurds,

Turkmens, it's a fascinating region where it hosts so many faiths. So the organisation aims to bring people together through various means, so predominantly focused on culture. So, when they come here and they come together under one roof, it gives them a sense of belonging to the older days, specially those are the older generations that come in. (CL3)

However, the persistence of discrimination and hostility between different ethnic groups and sects is an ongoing challenge:

can I just say to you that honestly, in all honesty, yes, yes, the refugees that arrive, they saw non-Christians sitting down. They walked in and they pointed a finger at me. They said "How dare you!" instead of sitting down, seeing what I want, what they want from me – "How dare you having them in your, in your office here! Yes, it was because of these people did that to me." Then of course there's the teacher in me came out again: "But how dare you talk like that as a Christian! It's not their fault what happened to you. They're here in Australia, the same situation as what you are." "Yes, but it's their country." I said, "No, it's not. I said Iraq is, we are the Assyrians, the Christians are the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, not the Arabs. So that's your country. It's not their country. But you made it their country because you let them do that." I said, "It's not their fault." I said, "If you're not happy with what I am doing for you, there's the door. I will help anyone and everyone." Guess what? Now, they all sit together. (CL7)

Other community leaders also noted a willingness among refugees to embrace Australian values of ethnic harmony. In reference to AUSCO, one key informant observed:

The interesting thing was that in the room were people of, let's say, ethnocultural backgrounds that under normal circumstances they wouldn't sit in the same room, because of traditional hostilities. Yet there was an acceptance that we are now leaving our old life behind and we are going to a new place, and actually some of the older men who were perhaps more hostile to others that were in the room would accept and actually articulate in our presence, well, this is the way it is. We're going to a country where everybody lives together. (KI7)

Another CBO emphasised how they encourage inclusivity:

So, to me, it's not about religion, ethnicity, colour – it's about humanity. So they all come in. Anyone and everyone is more than welcome. They know that. (CL7)

One informant, however, gave voice to a fear as to whether the harmony and security they experience in Australia would still exist in ten years' time:

It needs experience, needs to go through things to prove to you, yes, this is a safe haven, because in some stage they thought they were living peacefully somewhere else, they thought they were safe, and things turned. So that uncertainty developed fear. "Is that process will be repeated one day? We hope that Australia doesn't go through ..." Many conversations among families, they have very pessimistic approach about the future. They say "Oh, we don't know, maybe in 10 years this can happen". (CL4)

8.3.3 Public attitudes to refugees

The positive experiences reported by the refugees reflect previous research findings on Australian public attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism. Opinion surveys generally find that Australians are positive about the benefits of immigration. The 2018 Scanlon Mapping Social Cohesion Survey, for example, found that Australians are positive about the contribution of migrants, including refugees, finding that 82% of Australians saw immigration as beneficial to “bringing new ideas and cultures”. In 2016, the Australian Government’s Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on Migrant Intake into Australia found that tensions existed between some immigrant communities and the broader community in Australia but said, “there is widespread acceptance of cultural diversity by the Australian community” (Productivity Commission 2016).

In relation specifically to public attitudes towards refugees, a comprehensive study of refugees settled in Queensland provides a positive view that refugees integrate well. The study confirmed that refugees are welcomed by their new communities, found it “easy” to get along and felt a strong sense of belonging to their new homes (Zhou 2018). The study found that 81% of those settled in regional Toowoomba said they found it “very easy” or “easy” to make friends in Australia, while 62% of refugees in Brisbane and Logan said the same, for an average of 68% across Queensland (Zhou 2018). It also found that 82% of refugee children said they felt they belonged to the local community – either “always”, “most of the time” or “often” (Zhou 2018). Only 18% said they belonged “occasionally” or not at all. Half of all refugees surveyed said it was “very easy” or “easy” to talk to their new neighbours (Zhou 2018).

There is some evidence, however, that public attitudes towards refugees, and migration more

broadly, are becoming more negative. Annual Lowy Institute surveys have usually revealed positive public attitudes to immigration (Lowy Institute 2018). In 2016, almost three-quarters of Australians agreed that “overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy” and that “accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger”. In the 2018 survey, however, attitudes appear to have shifted. While Australians remained positive about the contribution of migrants, the 2018 survey found that 54% felt that the then-current migrant intake was too high (Lowy Institute 2018). This shift may reflect the rhetoric of politicians in the period immediately before the survey. Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, for example, advocated in a speech in February 2018 (just before fieldwork for the poll commenced) for cuts to the immigration rate to “ease pressure on infrastructure, house prices, and wages” (Lowy Institute 2018). The 2019 poll (Lowy Institute 2019) does show an improvement on 2018, with 47% feeling that the current intake is too high, but the “balance of attitudes” is shifting to levels more negative than in 2016.

Recent political discourse has tended to polarise public opinion. Refugees have sometimes been portrayed in the media as an economic burden and a drain on social welfare. The Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, for example, has described refugees as “illiterates taking Australian jobs, there’s no question about that, and for many of them that would be unemployed, they would languish in unemployment queues and on Medicare and the rest of it” (Anderson 2016). Given the importance of acceptance and tolerance in the wider Australia community for refugees’ sense of belonging, this polarised public and political discourse around refugees is a barrier to their social integration.

8.4 Implications for Policy

The findings of this chapter provide an understanding of the acceptance of refugees in Australia. Refugee experiences and perspectives show that Australia has a welcoming culture and assumes a sense of responsibility towards providing settlement opportunities for refugees. Refugees show high appreciation of the stable and secure social environment in Australia. Refugees' integration and navigation of the settlement process is abundantly assisted by CBOs and community leaders who play vital roles in their day-to-day life including building and maintaining social networks and connection through a wide range of programs which aim to build social cohesion. As a result, refugees prefer seeking support from CBOs and community leaders, rather than seeking assistance from government service providers.

Given the intense political climate around the topic of refugee settlement, there is a need for innovative approaches to fostering acceptance, receptiveness and integration that involve the wider Australian community, rather than focusing solely on supporting refugees in their adjustment to life in Australia. In order to streamline service delivery and generate efficiency in the refugee sector, the Australian Government is already collaborating with a wide range of CBOs to deliver settlement services to refugees. The importance of linking refugees to CBOs is stated in the National Settlement Services Outcomes Standards developed by the SCOA in partnership with government (SCOA 2015). Two specific indicators of civic participation (Outcome Standard 7) illustrate the importance of linking refugees to CBOs:

Newly arrived communities are linked to community-based organisations and activities of their choice that promote integration and participation in the wider community.

Settlement services include community engagement programs that support preservation of cultural practices as well as opportunities that provide exposure to broader cultural experiences and a sense of belonging within the Australian context.

The 2019–20 Federal Budget announced additional funding for CBOs to strengthen support system for refugees' social integration and cohesion. The government will provide \$27.2 million over four years from 2018–19 for social cohesion initiatives to foster belonging and break down barriers to social and economic participation for Australian immigrants and create stronger communities (RCoA 2019). The government will also provide an additional \$22.6 million over four years from 2019–20 to expand and extend the National Community Hubs Program (NCHP) and establish a National Youth Hubs Program (NYHP) (RCoA 2019). The expanded network of Community and Youth Hubs will provide migrants with access to services, support and learning opportunities which will assist with integrating with the Australian community and in improving employment outcomes (RCoA 2019).

Further innovation will most likely come from the community sector, which has the necessary flexibility and responsiveness. This should be supported by government through a co-production process.

¹⁸ This social cohesion package includes: (i) \$12.6 million over three years from 2019–20 to establish the Community Languages Multicultural Grants Program, to support community language schools and connect young Australians to the language, heritage and culture of their community; (ii) \$7.3 million over three years from 2018–19 to continue the Fostering Integration Grants Program, to support CBOs to assist newly arrived migrants to integrate into Australian society; and (iii) \$1.8 million over two years from 2018–19 for digital engagement initiatives.





9. Building Resilience



Refugees experience many trials prior to arriving in their settlement destinations. Despite these difficulties, they demonstrate enormous resilience as they navigate their settlement journeys. This chapter aims to examine the factors that contribute to the resilience of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. According to our findings, Syrian and Iraqi refugees possess immense strength and spirit to start a new life from scratch without being able to build on anything from before. They have great drive to overcome the adversities of their forced displacement. Most refugees interviewed, while at times emotional when describing their experiences, also clearly articulated their desire to settle well in Australia for the sake of their children and sometimes

for family left behind. They demonstrated strong ability to recover from setbacks, adapt well to change and keep going in search of new opportunities for their families.

This research finds that the protective factors that contribute to refugees' resilience in their settlement journey are: their ability to overcome adversities in their quest for a new life; their level of education; cultural connections and values; and social connections. While these are important for survival, it should also be noted that they are not sufficient to ensure sustainable integration and long-term stabilisation of their lives as refugees. Economic and employment issues, as raised in earlier chapters, must also be addressed.



9.1 A Strengths-Based Approach

The UNHCR explains resilience as the ability of individuals, households, communities, national institutions and systems to prevent, absorb and recover from shocks while continuing to function and adapt in a way that supports long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, and the attainment of human rights (UNHCR 2017, p. 3). For some scholars, resilience is the inferred capacity for adapting to adversity that is derived from observable success in overcoming challenges (Walsh 2016). For others, resilience is often thought of as a process and has been shown to be predicted by higher cognitive ability, positive self-esteem, hopefulness, problem-solving repertoire and flexibility (Siriwardhana et al. 2015). It is seen as a dynamic process that differs according to the cultural, developmental and historical contexts of individuals, varying across age and gender (Siriwardhana et al. 2015).

In examining Syrian and Iraqi refugees' resilience as they traverse their settlement journey in Australia, this chapter focuses on their strengths, capacities, values and empowerment, rather than shortcomings and deficiencies. The research employs a strengths-based practice approach (McCashen 2005). If practitioners and policymakers continue to focus on the trauma aspects of a refugee's life, then the factors for building resilience in them will most likely be ignored. A strengths-based approach has been chosen as it stands in opposition to a deficits approach in that it does not focus on a person's so-called shortcomings, deficits or dysfunction, nor does it label or disempower them. At the core of a strengths perspective is the belief that individuals, families and communities have strengths and capabilities to grow and transform (McCashen 2004). The trauma story, the labelling, the negative stereotyping of refugee people can all impact heavily on a person's sense of self and ultimately their resilience. However, focusing on strengths does not mean ignoring challenges or spinning struggles into strengths.

9.2 The Refugee Experience

The interviews conducted with Syrian and Iraqi refugees aimed to keep the communication focused mostly on the present and future aspects of their settlement. There were circumstances when refugees talked and shared some of their past adverse experiences, but mostly this was discussed within the context of strength – the strength and the sense of urgency they developed when forcibly displaced. The comments of refugees and community leaders also reflect the importance of their cultural heritage and the role of religion in their settlement experience, the high value they place on educational achievement and the support provided by family and social networks.

9.2.1 Capacity to overcome adversities

Iraqi and Syrian refugees have taken perilous journeys, crossing several borders, facing many adversities before they reached transit countries like Jordan and Lebanon, where they were housed in camps for months and even years. They had no intention to leave their home, but were hopeful and waited for normalcy to return. They lost hope in their home country only when they saw explosions, lives lost and violence close to their homes, and it became clear to them that they would be in danger if they did not flee.

Narratives of refugees' experiences are evidence of their endless resilience:

I remember it was Thursday and somebody, ooh, not somebody, they [news] said that ISIS was very close, I heard in the news the ISIS is very close, she heard from her sister who live on the border of Mosul ... right side of the Mosul, where the war start. She heard a big explosion in Mosul and then they heard the Christians leaving. I saw smoke and explosion near my home, people were running. My sister took her basic things in

a baby pram and left, and trying to move to place to place before she arrive my home ... From Mosul we moved to Kurdistan and stay with the Church ... then ... moved to Jordan. (R12)

the terrorists came to the Church during Sunday and they killed them, killed everyone in the Church, priests and people. And I lost two nephews there. So we became very fearful. That Sunday we did have work, we were lucky. We didn't go to the Church that Sunday or we could have been the victim. And then afterwards we start realising that there threat and there's nothing more to stay. I decided to leave, look for place to live and take my family. (R8)

Another refugee added that:

the main things is ... to settle in a country there where there is the peace or the freedom, or we can sleep without thinking about anything from you ... put your head on the bed. You don't think, nothing scare you, nothing fright you, only things ... we thought only about this things, the main things in our life. Because the stage, the temporary stage in Jordan, it is very hard and very difficult. We want to leave the camp for another country. Even it is for me 5 months or 6 months but for the others people, for the others families, they are struggle til now and they are live in this. (R20)

One community leader expressed refugees' relief and satisfaction when they arrived here:

There's kind of satisfaction because they've fled the war, they are more safe here, they are, they are safe, they are not worrying about their children that

they will be target for war or they will be killed, they will be killed in the streets. Now they can build their home and work and study. (CL3)

Some refugees have built determination and a strong sense of agency to engage in advocacy and activism to support other refugees and disadvantaged groups. One community leader, who came to Australia as a refugee, shared his experience:

I came as a refugee and was detained in Curtin. I was very outspoken and I represented the detainees and became a member of the committee that represented detainees, and then even after I was released and moved on with my life, I continued to be involved in the refugee affairs and people seeking asylum and then got involved with Amnesty International, Human Rights Commission, Red Cross and other organisations. I have always been an advocate for human rights, whether refugees or any people who are disadvantaged. I have always been fighting for equality and rights for minorities, and intolerance and acceptance. I started this from the day I entered Australia. (CL1)

Another community leader explained how, through his volunteer teaching classes, he tries to build confidence and trust, and infuse a sense of appreciation of the support provided to refugees in Australia:

During lectures [volunteer teaching], I encourage them a lot. I provide lot of advice to them ... I always compare the life here with back home. People have left countries for various reasons, poverty, insecurity, war, etc. Iraqi people have not left their country because of poverty; they left because they

lost the peace ... I explain that life back home is no longer secure, here it's secure, the environment is good compared to home, the weather is good, everything ... In Iraq, people stay under threat. The main thing I focus on ... is there is dignity here. Here no one disrespect you. There we lost everything! So, I make them understand by making comparisons ... and tell people what Australia has. (CL2)

In his networking with refugees, he finds that refugees need constant motivation and encouragement, as there is so much for them to handle and deal with in their settlement process:

We have to encourage them, I always encouragement ... Gradually, people are forgetting their sadness, forgetting gradually what happened at home. Programs will help them better. (CL2)

What often amazed me was that these people had so much resilience to survive the conflict that they came out of, to make the journey of 10s or 20s or 100s of kilometres to get to a safe place, to live in a refugee camp, to win life's lottery and get a visa from somebody, so they've shown extraordinary resilience, optimism and hope for the future. Yet when they arrive in a safe haven, all of that resilience seems to be left behind [and they say] "Okay, what are you going to do for us?" I don't know what's the switch that triggers that can deal with that issue. (KI7)

9.2.2 Cultural & religious connections & values

The Syrian and Iraqi refugees interviewed for this research are proud of their culture and heritage. For them their cultural connections to an ancient civilisation signifies sophistication, progress and development. Cultural values and beliefs are close to their hearts, as they provide a

sense of identity. Community leaders and CBOs are instrumental in helping refugees build their cultural connections through cultural programs that bring Syrian and Iraqi refugees together and engage them in creative arts and performance. As an example, one informant talked about the work of his CBO, which uses the creative arts for social change:

so we try to attract them to use their mother language to come and join us in our artistic activities – musical, choral initiatives and projects. By them being part of a group, this will make them feel more welcome or accepted, will get them to feel that they are not alone. (CL4)

A recent project by this organisation, for example, aimed to empower refugees by providing them with opportunities to act and perform on the stage about their lived experiences. The organisation also partners with CBOs in Baghdad and organises cultural festivals involving diverse groups, which provide a sense of belonging to a community and confidence to overcome the challenges of settlement. Such events provide opportunities for refugees to rekindle their identities, renew connections to their cultures and provide meaning to their lives as Syrians and Iraqis, as they integrate within the broader Australian community, as explained by another community leader:

It gives people a chance and an outlet to come together, participate, have a meet and greet, listen to some music, participate in arts classes, get their kids to participate in homework classes and get to talk to also people who are working in the Australian environment, to bounce off ideas, get advice and network. (CL5)

For refugees from Syrian and Iraqi Christian groups, the combination of Christian and

collectivist values creates a strong sense of community. Involvement and engagement in religious procedures and rituals of the church are fundamental in binding them as a close-knit community. Extended family relationships and family bonds are also seen as a strength for survival, particularly in times of difficulty and hardship. These social bonds and relationships essentially create a sense of belonging and help them overcome challenges:

like our community, they live together. They always help in problems ... the rituals help my mind to think well ... it is difficult for them [refugees] to live far away from each other because, during our religious procedures and a lot of things, we have to live together. I have the father and mother here. And I cannot live far away from them. And our, all of their place, it is like church, our church, what we call in Arabic "Mandea". It is here in Liverpool. We cannot ... difficult for us to live far away from them. (R8)

regardless of this office is called Assyrian Australian Association, Assyrian Resource Centre, I have an open-door policy. So, to me it is about humanity. You know, as a good Christian, in the Bible it teaches us "Love thy neighbour". Our values are about helping the disempowered and disadvantaged groups. (CL7)

However, these collectivist values can sometimes be in conflict with Australian social values where the individual is the centre of every aspect of societal thinking. According to the RCoA (2017c), the individualistic nature of Australian society is not a problem for refugees in itself. However, refugees sometimes find it difficult to socially connect with others in their neighbourhoods because Australians do not interact with their neighbours in the same way that people in a collectivist society connect with those who live

around them (RCoA 2017c). As one community leader explained:

Yes. It [Australian values based on individualism] is one of the problems. Like we used in our communities, the community is more about the group of people, it is not about the individual, it is more about the family relations and building strong bonds. Because family is so big and family relations is so important, and could affect the personal life – someone forced to change their life according to what is the community's need, like in Syria, so it's, here it's different, here it is individual, this is my lifestyle and no one can change it, so there is, there is this sort of difference (CL7).

9.2.3 Education

The Syrian and Iraqi refugees are generally well educated and this contributes to their ability to overcome challenges. The refugees greatly value education, as several community leaders and informants observed:

They [Syrian and Iraqi refugees] are, you may have picked up in your 20 [interviews], but if not, you should know that they are also a very unusual group, in they tend to be predominantly white collar, not trades or agriculture, aspire to white collar jobs, had relatively good degrees of education and very small – high – proportion had been involved in business in some way. Because these were groups who survived pretty well in Syria or Iraq, a lot from Iraq, but like Jews they survived by working around. They are quite distinctive, low levels of English for the majority, but relatively high levels of education. I think [unclear] I can see Syria had a pretty good educational system, until this war broke out, much better than Iraq, for example. (KI16)

There's a heavy focus on higher education, so everybody is pushed to pursue a bachelor's, a master's, a PhD. The family plays an important role in children education. (CL5)

During interviews the refugees expressed pride in their academic achievements and showed a drive to pursue further study:

There is a tradition, especially Christian families, they would have to be either engineers, civil engineers, doctors or lawyers. My son [is] studying civil engineering. My daughters will do medicine, sciences ... Sciences – runs in the family. (R15)

I'm 50 years old, has a bachelor degree of chemistry from Mosul University. I worked in the field of making medicine in the government. (R12)

The result now we are 2018 after 6 years one daughter has graduated with education degree from the Catholic University, the other one did Master of Pharmacy after doing Bachelor of Medical Science. The son is going to graduate very soon to do construction management from the University of Western Sydney. (CL4)

Syrian and Iraqi refugee parents have high expectations about their children's academic success. They put emphasis on university qualifications and push their children to enrol in university rather than TAFE. They see their children as unsuccessful if they obtain qualifications from what they regard as a lesser institute like TAFE. A key informant from an education institute explained:

lot of our Syrian and Iraqi background view, they have to go to university. They are very much focusing on core areas and disciplines. And if they have to go to TAFE

means you don't succeed. Every student has to go to university and that's what they ruled into ... their rote learning is great. (KI4)

One refugee strongly expressed his desire to study and improve his qualifications:

I want [you] to just understand our situation. This is my simple right and I ... it's to study. I'm stressed. I want to study. This is my problem. There is a course of 2 year in the university. No, I am searching from the day I entered until now I am searching who will give me that advice. I want something. I am attending expo at UTS. I go directly to the dean of the pharmacy. They accept me with a conditional acceptance which brings me Australian qualification ... a master's degree. And I also talked with the Dean of the Pharmacy College. My mom studied business administration and economics. He [my father] study mathematics at the university. (R14)

9.2.4 Social connections

Social networks, and the social capital found in these networks, significantly enhance refugees' empowerment and capacity to cope with settlement demands. Refugees report that a social connection builds their capacity to engage with the broader Australian community. They see the social capital in these connections:

I go to Catholic Care at Liverpool, they do those services, but they also have lots of Iraqi employees. We are making those friends, meeting those people. Last month, we go to my ... my friend's birthday. She is Argentinian. Good time. I meet new people at TAFE ... Sometimes at Navitas. (R19)

I receive information from church in

Fairfield. Navitas also informed about the employment services. The church helped with children's school enrolment. From the church members, she [who??] came to know about other refugee community organisation. We find the library very useful. We met lot of Iraqi people there. We go to library to borrow books written in Arabic ... attended beauty training programs, how to write resumes and also attended classes to apply for learners [driving]. (R12)

One refugee explains his partner's involvement in a community program:

she's involved at least in 10 community programs in Fairfield area within her time because she cares of them. She invested in doing community activities for her own wellbeing and other too. So now they are different, which is really something. So this is an absolute real example. (CL4)

Catholic schools attended by refugee children are also actively promoting partnerships between home, parish, school, community and social networks. Students and their families are reliant on these connections for all types of support. One key informant from a Catholic school in Sydney's West articulated his experience and support in building social connections and social capital:

So, we have been connected and building networks through Syrian and Catholic Church. And also through Bishop Nona, the Chaldean Bishop, and through his church. So, through those associations and connections, they have introduced our families to come and to take up enrolment with us. Parents and families look for these networks, they rely on them so much for the education of their children, also for their settlement. My interaction with the community comes

upon enrolment, so when they are seeking enrolment, we start to understand the story, often they are introduced by the priest of the Catholic Church or the Chaldean Church. So we have communication with them about a new family arriving, knowing a little of their story. I try and provide answers to all of their problems. These connections inspire them a great deal, give them courage ...

I think we have been careful not to create enclave within the school. That is important. They feel ... connect. From the very first day they walked in, we make sure they belong to the school community and feel connected ... So that's where the social capital is actually being build. I understand the concept of social capital, we actually need to give them the capital as graduate so that they are able to navigate life. (KI8)



9.3 Implications for Policy

The research finds that the refugees who participated in this study have immense resilience to overcome the adversities of forced displacement and the challenges of their settlement journey. In examining the resilience of the refugees, the study has employed a strengths-based approach that values the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potential in individuals and communities, not focusing on their shortcomings such as trauma. The research therefore views refugees as resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity. A strengths perspective draws on a 'power with' [clients] approach, rather than a 'power over' [clients] approach, viewing clients as the experts on their own lives and situations (Masten 2014; McCashen 2005; Saleebey 2006). Moreover, when people become the experts about others' issues and "try and fix them, those who are facing the problem are denied the opportunity to participate, take control and learn" (McCashen 2005, p. 10). This research is client-led, with a focus on future outcomes and the strengths that people bring to a problem or crisis.

Those working with new arrivals need to harness these strengths as early as possible in the settlement journey, to avoid growing dependency which weakens their capacity to adapt and can lead to further stigmatisation. In working with refugees in need of support, it is also important to shift the focus from suffering to resilience:

I think you've got to capture the moment. When they come here, they're full of enthusiasm, they've got the [immediate] support and they do want to get on their [unclear] and then they start to realise it's tough. Those first 2 years, there's no ways, are tough. Now the danger is, we start to educate people in being government dependent. We do not mean to, but we do. Inevitably the first group stay linked,

like SSI or like Red Cross, are telling them to make sure that they can get all these government services, to which they're entitled. We absolutely need that. But if you have that on the one hand, but no helping them to actually get them on their own 2 feet on the other, what happens is they start to live those lives where they become dependent. That's why I'm so keen on the Refugee Employment Support Program, RESP, to get them being talked to right from day one. (KI6)

We need to be aware that the refugees themselves have resources, need to listen to them and allow for these resources to come into play. Pulvirenti and Mason's (2011) study revealed that the construction of resilience within refugees was linked to the idea of "moving on" from adversity, rather than the concept of "bouncing back" from it. A study by Panther-Brick et al. (2017) on Syrian refugees' resilience articulated the capacities that reflected experiences of forced displacement. Their study showed that resilience was evidenced through being able to live in the community with good relationships and a good attitude, feeling resettled, still having an ambition or a dream to achieve, believing that learning was still an important thing in life and feeling that traumatic experiences were no longer distressing. This research identifies four key protective factors that contribute to Syrian and Iraqi refugees' resilience. These are the factors within the refugees' environment and the interaction between these that give them the strength, skills and motivation to cope in difficult situations and to re-establish a normal life.

Firstly, the research finds that, despite their perilous journeys, Syrian and Iraqi refugees' confidence and desire to find to a new life elsewhere are sustained. As they escaped to set out on the most difficult journey of their life, hope and desperation to find a safe and secure place,

including their capacity to overcome adverse situations, increased. They have substantial emotional stability and physical robustness as raw materials for resilience. Refugees' experiences of survival demonstrate profound strength and resilience in their survival strategies, coping mechanisms and abilities to adapt within what are often completely unfamiliar environments. Refugees were focused on keeping themselves and others alive and looking after their families. This gave them confidence, because they knew they could handle whatever crises they might face later in life. All participants in our study have managed to adapt to new circumstances despite considerable risks and adversity, and yet have not been severely traumatised by their experiences. This is confirmed by previous studies which illustrate that, although refugees experience conflict and highly traumatic forced migration, they do not develop significant mental disorders (Rosner, Powell & Butollo 2003).

Secondly, cultural and religious connections and values are also important sources of resilience. This group of Syrian and Iraqi refugees are very proud of their culture, which gives them a strong sense of identity. They perceive themselves as having strong cultural values, and these cultural values and strong sense of identity have a significant positive impact on their quest for not only a new life, but an affluent one. For Christian refugees, religion, spirituality and connections to the Church are strongly identified as another major factor contributing to their resilience. Building and maintaining cultural connections to a refugee's culture and values is significantly influenced by community leaders and CBOs, which actively build cultural connections through programs that bring Syrian and Iraqi refugees together. Cultural values are important in managing risks and adversities. Community ideologies, beliefs and value systems give meaning to traumatic events and promote adaptive functioning in everyday life, even under

extreme conditions (Hutchinson & Dorset 2012). Several studies have shown that religion in its various forms is linked to enhancing a person's psychological and physical wellbeing (Green & Elliot 2010). Schweitzer et al. (2007) suggested that a belief in God helped people regain control and meaning in their lives. Another study found some refugee people resigned themselves to the situation and believed fate was out of their hands and in God's hands (Khawaja et al. 2008). Cultural values and spirituality therefore provide refugees with strength and tolerance; whether it is a belief in a "higher power, calling on dead relatives or something deep inside," spirituality assisted refugee people to cope through hard times (Sossou et al. 2008, p. 378). Their religious affiliation was also a significant factor in the decision by many refugees to settle in the Liverpool and Fairfield areas in order to be close to their own church.

Thirdly, Syrian and Iraqi refugees are highly educated. This is a strong protective factor that impacts on their resilience. The emphasis on academic achievement is central to their culture and important for navigating the challenges of their settlement. They value education as a fundamental asset which they can take with them wherever they go. It provides them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to build their own future in Australia and an opportunity for them to develop a voice through which other rights can be claimed and protected. Catholic schools are also playing an important role through specific intervention programs to assist refugee children to build their social competence and resilience. The majority of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees are of Christian background and belong to minority groups in Syria and Iraq such as Armenians, Assyrians, Orthodox, Mandeans and Kurds. In their home countries academic qualification and success in white collar employment were the only tickets to survival among the majority groups. Qualifications and

engagement in the workforce acted as protective tools that ensured their minority status did not push them into a disadvantaged position.

Fourthly, social connections and networks are a vital part of refugees' settlement journey, providing endless support and strength. CBOs and leaders embedded in refugees' local communities are playing a pivotal role in facilitating connections through community engagement. Most refugees come from collectivist societies, central to which are social connections which they rely on for various types of support. It is these social connections that individuals draw on to secure their economic, social, physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

This chapter has articulated that Syrian and Iraqi refugees are a unique cohort and have immense resilience which is helping them adapt in a new social environment and cope with the challenges of their settlement process. The key protective factors that significantly contribute to refugees' resilience are their ability to overcome adversities in their quest for a new life, their high level of education, their cultural and religious connections and values, and their social connections. Refugees' resilience therefore is a multidimensional construct. These protective factors give them strength, skills and motivation to cope in difficult situations and to re-establish a normal life. Syrian and Iraqi refugees' resilience is seen as a dynamic process that brings positive changes in their lives. Our challenge is to recognise these strengths and to adapt support and programs to build on them as quickly as possible in the settlement journey.



10. Recommendations



The refugee experience of arriving and settling in Australia documented in this report suggests a number of issues at each stage of the refugee journey that warrant further research and/or policy review.

10.1 Navigating The Visa System

(a) Improve the information available to refugees on visas before they make applications.

Further investigation is needed in order to understand what formal information channels are available and accessible to refugee visa applicants, and how these can be improved. Decisions made by refugees about the visa class they apply for can have adverse consequences for them in terms of waiting times and family unity. The selection and vetting processes of UNHCR and the Australian Government are necessarily complex and slow. Refugees, already suffering the stresses of displacement and fear, find the system opaque and difficult to navigate, and the outcomes sometimes appear unfair. Although there are organisations that help refugees to manage within this system, there is a need for evaluation of the effectiveness of the available sources of information and scope for additional support in this area.

(b) Increase organisation sponsorship capacity.

Given the trend towards increased take-up of sponsored visa subclasses and the decrease in UNHCR-referred refugee subclasses, the range and capacity of community-based organisations approved to sponsor refugees should be immediately expanded, ensuring that all minority and religious groups are adequately catered for. This is in line with experience in other refugee settlement countries such as Canada and has positive benefits for all members of the community (CRSI 2019).

10.2 Improving Settlement Programs & Outcomes

(c) Address the perception of religious bias in awarding of visas.

There is a perception of religious bias in the awarding of visas. This can be addressed through greater transparency in the application vetting process. In addition, there would be value in commissioning independent research and analysis using application and UNHCR referral data as a basis for reflection by the responsible departments and personnel both here in Australia and abroad.

(a) Adopt a refugee-centred model for support services.

Current settlement support, based on the use of case workers, is effective in facilitating access by new arrivals to essential government services. However, it represents a top-down, silo-based approach to government service delivery which does not create capabilities or opportunities for refugees. Refugees need a community-based or local entry point to settlement services which provides a refugee lens on all available support and which maps out a pathway to real opportunities to participate in Australian society and enjoy a life they value.

(b) Give refugees the opportunity to engage effectively in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of programs.

To address the day-to-day challenges of settlement, new initiatives need to be developed using a bottom-up approach in which refugees have the opportunity to engage with government and non-government service providers in the development and implementation of programs. Refugees have firsthand experience of the services provided by government and views about what would help them in addressing barriers to language learning, education and employment. Providing opportunities for refugees to contribute to the design, delivery and evaluation of programs would help the government and service providers understand the needs and expectations of participants.

(c) Reframe outcome frameworks for settlement programs around capabilities and transparently measure and report against them, incorporating a resilience-based development approach which recognises local ownership.

Reframing outcome frameworks around capabilities, and ensuring they are reported against, could be facilitated by an organisation with a track record in this space and demonstrated understanding of multiple perspectives, such as SCOA or RCoA. The design process should adopt a co-production methodology involving refugees who have been in Australia for varying lengths of time. It should also take account of the fact that Syrian and Iraqi refugees are highly resilient groups because they are well educated, have extensive positive self-esteem and are constantly seeking to strive for excellence in Australia. This makes them a distinct refugee community. A resilience development approach would be context-specific, addressing the strengths and challenges of different refugee groups, and would recognise local ownership. It would build on the existing abilities, skills and knowledge of the refugees and communities, and implement measures that will affect the long-term (sometimes decade-long) development prospects of the refugee community.

(d) Adequately resource the delivery of settlement services to conduct regular monitoring and reporting against outcomes and targets, while at the same time avoiding excessive administrative burdens.

The Federal Government relies heavily on private and NGO service providers, religious organisations, charities, and state and local governments to deliver settlement programs such as HSP and AMEP. However, there is limited provision from the government for regular monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of these programs. On the other hand, service providers have expressed concern about high levels of administrative burden that restrict their flexibility and effective delivery of client-focused services. Adequate resourcing is required to ensure that services are transparent and

outcomes are adequately monitored without undermining service delivery. A combination of organisational monitoring and reporting, periodic independent research and outreach surveys through community organisations to refugees themselves could be used to address this.

10.3 Promoting Economic Security

(a) Include recognition of refugees' overseas skills, qualifications and prior experience in settlement programs.

Recognition of overseas qualifications is a difficult, complex, time-consuming and expensive process, but without recognised qualifications many refugees are unable to find work. The Australian system of education, combined with the accreditation role of independent professional bodies, is difficult for refugees to navigate on their own in order to make good, informed choices. Service providers should expand their support to provide career pathway planning, mapping out immediate and longer term options for individuals and taking into account their family circumstances. This approach should be combined with a revised set of protocols and rules for Jobactive in relation to refugees, including resolution of the tension between finding work and gaining language skills.

To achieve sustainable employment outcomes for refugees, the DSS should include overseas skills recognition in the HSP and SETS, requiring contracted service providers to assist new arrivals to get their qualifications recognised by the relevant agencies.

Service providers should also take steps to address any professional skill gaps that may prevent refugees from finding employment after their qualifications have been recognised. This may include referral to relevant education and vocational training options and work experience programs, as well as internships.

Finally, employers should be provided with program support to offer workplace-based language training wherever possible.

(b) Create new government initiatives to help refugees become financially self-sufficient by finding work.

To achieve positive employment outcomes for refugees, they require flexible support and services based on their individual needs. Mainstream programs find it difficult to provide these tailored services. Continuation and expansion of the NSW Government's RESP and the development of other innovative new initiatives is needed to address the specific challenges that are experienced by refugees in finding long-term skilled employment opportunities and reducing welfare dependency.

(c) Broaden the scope of the AMEP to offer language training in other contexts, such as the workplace, and to provide courses that better meet refugees' needs.

AMEP providers should work with refugee participants to assess their specific learning needs, including taking into account their previous education, professional experience and career aspirations, and should provide courses appropriate to their needs. This might include engaging a wider range of providers of language training in delivering these courses and involving more bilingual staff.

(d) Have the AMEP do more to address the need for students to improve their conversation skills.

Refugees report that improving their conversation skills is a major challenge, but many AMEP service providers do not do enough to assist them. The concentration of students from the same linguistic background in classes further undermines their ability to practise conversational English. The DE should ensure that AMEP providers include conversation practice in English classes and introduce effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

10.4 Becoming Part of the Community

(e) Provide government incentives to encourage the use of interpreting services.

To ensure that refugees are able to access everyday services effectively and understand their rights and responsibilities, service providers such as medical practitioners, real estate agents and utility companies should be given tangible financial or non-financial incentives to use available interpreting services and to assign bilingual staff in dealing with refugees and other clients with low or no English proficiency.

(f) Maintain and expand rental assistance programs for refugee families to address the financial stress of housing unaffordability.

One of the major challenges that refugees encounter in the early stages of their settlement is the unaffordability of housing and the high level of rents, compounded by the need to find housing suitable for large families. Recent NSW Government initiatives to assist refugee families to secure adequate housing will provide some assistance and should be maintained. The adequacy of the level of rental assistance relative to housing costs should be reviewed. In the medium term, governments should invest in providing public and social housing in those urban areas that receive significant numbers of refugees. Expanding government investment in public housing will not only address the housing unaffordability of low-income refugee families, but also decrease housing stress for other low-income families. .

(a) Expand the AUSCO program to include a post-arrival program on civic and legal education.

Issues relating to the legal system, rules and legal and civil rights were identified as gaps in the information about life in Australia presented through AUSCO. A post-arrival component would make up for this deficit and also address the cultural orientation needs of those who may not, for various reasons, have been receptive to the pre-arrival program. A non-government, not-for-profit organisation should be funded and contracted to deliver this program and its availability notified to all refugees.

(b) Encourage community support networks, including faith-based organisations, to extend their reach beyond areas of refugee concentration.

The preponderance of sponsored entrants contributes to their geographical concentration in a limited number of areas of Sydney. While this has some positive benefits, it also has impacts on the availability of settlement services, the ability of refugees to learn English and find adequate affordable housing, and their long-term integration in the wider Australian community. However, simply attaching conditions to visas requiring refugees to live in different areas would not provide a sustainable solution. A better approach would be to ensure that support networks, including faith-based organisations, are able to broaden their geographical reach, and to provide incentives to refugees and organisations to encourage them to move to other areas. Solutions should be co-produced with the refugee community and need to include measures to address housing affordability and language services.

(c) Utilise social capital within faith-based communities.

The religion of refugee entrants should be taken into account at the time of their arrival and initial placement and necessary support provided to their faith-based community. For Syrian and Iraqi refugees who belong to minority faith-based communities, their religion provides an essential source of social connection and support. The importance of these organisations in the settlement process needs to be recognised. However, this also contributes to high concentrations of refugees from minority religious groups in particular areas. Minority faith-based communities and their representatives should be encouraged to expand their support beyond their current geographical base. These communities should also be encouraged to undertake inter-faith activity in order to provide refugees with social interaction beyond their faith community. This may take the form of working together on shared or other civic projects with assistance in appropriate coordination.

(d) Evaluate Catholic schools' intervention programs for refugee children and consider these for implementation in public schools.

Catholic schools' intervention programs aim to promote hope, social competence and resilience. Some private schools in western Sydney, including Catholic schools, have also developed alternative approaches to learning and teaching English and have designed their own subject-specific English learning programs. The findings of this research suggest the need for evaluation of these initiatives with a view to implementing similar programs in public schools to help build refugee children's competencies.



11. Conclusion



For Iraqi and Syrian refugees, the journey towards 'feeling settled' in Australia is a long one. For most, it begins well before they first encounter Australian government migration and settlement services, and may involve significant trauma and loss. The sample group of recent refugees interviewed for this research shared with us their perspectives on the settlement experience and identified the issues that are the greatest challenges for them. The observations of community leaders and other key informants have added to the picture of the settlement process as it is experienced by refugees.

Some positive findings have emerged from this data. Refugees find the Australian community generally accepting and welcoming, and Australia is seen as a safe, secure and law-abiding environment to settle in. Many aspects of formal settlement programs, particularly immediate post-arrival services, appear to be working reasonably well and are appreciated by refugees, although they find support from family networks and CBOs more helpful over the longer term. The refugees themselves demonstrate significant resilience derived from their experience overcoming the challenges of displacement, the cultural values they bring with them and the community and family support they receive in Australia.

However, refugees also face ongoing challenges along the settlement journey, both before and after arrival. The visa application and approval process, as they experience it, is complex and lacks transparency. The separation of extended family members is a significant source of stress and guilt, and an obstacle to

feeling settled. Developing language skills, finding suitable employment and escaping financial hardship and welfare dependency are significant obstacles after arrival. And the geographical concentration of Iraqi and Syrian refugees in certain areas has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it means that new arrivals have ready access to familiar cultural and religious community networks; however, it also places pressure on service providers and may present obstacles to language learning and long-term, sustainable integration with the wider Australian community.

CBOs, including cultural and religious organisations, play significant roles in all aspects of the settlement journey. The research finds that community groups have a good understanding of refugees' needs and challenges, and assist them in a wide range of areas in their own languages. The support provided by CBOs is immensely appreciated by refugees and has a profound impact on their day-to-day lives. However, government funding for these organisations is project-based, short term and insecure. A more refugee-centred approach, in terms of both design and delivery of support, would place a higher value on the role of these organisations and resource them appropriately.

A number of recommendations have emerged from this research. They identify issues that warrant further review and/or investigation, and identify ways in which current refugee services could be enhanced in order to ensure that refugees achieve the life they aspire to in Australia.

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