



Ethnic Communities
Council of Queensland

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Submission to the Discussion Paper: Australia's Humanitarian Program 2018-19

The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) is the state peak body representing migrants and refugees across Queensland. ECCQ acts as a strategic mechanism for the empowerment of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds through advocacy, policy research and development, sector development, aged care, health education and community education and training.

ECCQ welcomes and appreciates the opportunity to join the national conversation on the 2018-19 Humanitarian Program.

Overview

With world class settlement services and as one of the most successful multicultural countries in the world, Australia has the capacity to do more – increase the offshore component, make the Community Support Program more affordable and a standalone policy initiative outside of the Humanitarian Program and strengthen community-led settlement assistance to support independence and increase participation in the wider community.

The Humanitarian Program - Offshore Composition

The Australian Government has set the number of visas under the 2018-19 Program to 18,750 – the third most generous worldwide. However this expected intake number does not reflect the global refugee crisis. In 2017, the UNHCR estimated 1.2 million refugees are in need of resettlement. Despite this, a huge gap persists between resettlement need and places granted. Australia has capacity to increase resettlement commitments.

Australia has in the past successfully scaled up the humanitarian program in response to mass displacement due to international conflicts. In 1980-81, Australia granted 22,545 places – the Australian

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economy is three times the size it was then. Furthermore, the number of places allocated to UNHCR assisted refugees makes up only 3.2 percent of the total annual migrants intake – a 20 year low.¹

In 2012, the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers (the Houston Panel) recommended to increase the humanitarian intake to 27,000 visas within five years. In 2013, the former Labor Government increased the humanitarian intake to 20,000 in response to the Expert Panel's recommendation, though this decision was overturned after a change of government and the number was decreased to 13,750 visas.²

The Expert Panel identified a number of benefits of increasing the Humanitarian Program. These included:

- it would serve Australian national interests and international engagement;
- enhance the scope of cooperation with regional partners;
- give greater hope and confidence to asylum seekers in the region that regular migration pathways and international protection arrangements provide a practical, realistic, and better alternative to dangerous boat voyages to Australia;
- enable Australia to assist in meeting growing humanitarian needs in the region in a fair and timely way;
- and, contribute to the strengthening of regional cooperation on asylum issues.³

ECCQ submits that the Government act on the Expert Panel's recommendation – an achievable and modest objective.

ECCQ supports any initiative to supplement the annual Humanitarian Program quota with additional visas in response to humanitarian crises. In 2015, the Australian Government implemented a program for 12,000 additional places for people displaced by conflict in Syria and Iraq. In this regard, ECCQ welcomes the flexible approach in which the program operates and emphasises that other groups, particularly Rohingya people fleeing persecution to Bangladesh, be considered in response to conflicts resulting in gross human right violations.

¹ Elibritt Karlsen, Refugee resettlement to Australia: what are the facts?, Parliamentary Library, September 2016, http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/4805035/upload_binary/4805035.pdf;fileType=application/pdf

² Scott Morrison, [Honouring our promise to provide more resettlement places to offshore humanitarian applicants](#), media release, 6 March 2014.

³ Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, *Report of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers* Australian Government, August 2012.



Family reunion is an issue for refugee communities, particularly if family members are in dire conditions or in an unsafe environment. With high demand and only a limited number of Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) places available and the fact that the new Community Support Program potentially takes up 1,000 places from the SHP, family reunion may take years to achieve and in many cases is not always possible. This has a detrimental impact on a refugee's ability to settle in Australia, including mental health. In this regard, ECCQ supports the Refugee Council of Australia's recommendation to create a dedicated Humanitarian Family Reunion Program in consultation with former refugee community members, relevant service providers and organisations and peak bodies and prioritising processing family members at immediate risk.⁴

Community Support Program

ECCQ supports the Community Support Program (CSP) as an innovative way to connect refugees with Australian businesses and the wider community. It's well designed to connect families, communities and service providers together to increase overall capacity to assist with entry and settlement. It's also a creative way to leverage private sector support. With that said, the Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs) were only just announced in March 2018, so at this time it's not possible to evaluate its efficacy. It is possible, however, to evaluate the criteria of this model of entry and the potential risks it poses. Many concerns and suggestions were put forth in last year's submissions, though it would be remiss to not revisit them as the CSP begins to take shape in the 2018-19 Program.

While ECCQ supports this option for entry, it proposes to allow for 1,000 *additional* places, rather than being allocated within the Offshore Humanitarian Program. The fact that these places are allocated from the SHP, poses a potential risk to further disadvantage to the most vulnerable groups.

ECCQ is also concerned that this model of private sponsorship is perceived as outsourcing the Government's financial cost and responsibility to provide vital refugee support services rather than expanding on them. It's important to note the projected cost savings and estimated revenue this program will generate – an estimated \$6 million per year over four years.⁵ A revenue-raising resettlement program may raise ethical concerns, particularly if it's included within the Humanitarian Program. Refugee

⁴ Refugee Council of Australia, *Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2017-18: Community views on current challenges and directions*, May 2017, http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/RCOA_intake-sub_2017_2018

⁵ Khanh Hoang, "The Risks and Rewards of Private Humanitarian and Refugee Sponsorship", *The Interpreter*, 16 May 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/risks-and-rewards-private-humanitarian-and-refugee-sponsorship>.



resettlement should remain a commitment to assisting the world's most vulnerable people and fulfilling moral and legal obligations to the international community.

Places allocated to refugees for the CSP should be in addition to the 18,750 places in 2018-19. The Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program is internationally renowned and often used as a model of best practice. Private sponsorship places are additional to the Government's Humanitarian Program. In 2018, the Canadian Government announced it will welcome 57,000 private sponsored refugees over the next three years.⁶ This allows the government to keep a ceiling on government places while it can scale its overall resettlement. The principle of additionality ensures that private efforts complement the government's commitment to its humanitarian program, provides opportunity to those capable and willing to do more and does not raise ethical concerns.

While the CSP is similar to the Canadian private sponsorship model in its design, a stark contrast is the cost. The Canadian model is much more affordable as it allows for community sponsors and the government to share the costs. For the CSP, APOs take on the responsibility of assistance with securing employment, managing the visa process and overseeing settlement and an Australian supporter (individuals, communities and businesses) supports the process and applicant financially.

The financial burden an Australian sponsor undertakes may deter organisations and businesses from participating; and, on the other hand, families willing to risk financial burden to help their family members may be taking on a huge debt. The costs incurred may become significant and render only the most financially resourced able to sponsor applicants.

ECCQ recommends a joint assistance program to allow for APOs to propose refugees with Australian sponsors who do not meet the stringent CSP applicant and/or financial criteria. In its current form, it prioritises refugees with good settlement prospects with immediate employment opportunities. This has potential to leave out vulnerable groups, including women at risk who may need more assistance to gain employment skills within an Australian context or may be primary caretakers.

Another reason why Canada's model of private sponsorship is so successful is the fact that there is a relatively high level of public support towards refugee resettlement.⁷ Unfortunately, in Australia, negative rhetoric in the media and on occasion from politicians has reduced support for some components of

⁶Government of Canada, Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/guide-private-sponsorship-refugees-program.html>

⁷ Jennifer Hyndman, William Payne and Shauna Jimenez, "Private refugee sponsorship in Canada", *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 54 February 2017, <http://www.fmreview.org/resettlement/hyndman-payne-jimenez.html>



refugee resettlement, particularly for the resettlement of people from Muslim backgrounds and for refugees who did not arrive through the offshore program. The fact that Australia is geographically unique and that immigration has traditionally been controlled by governments could play into these sentiments. According to the 2017 Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion Survey, the majority (83-86 percent) of the collective sample of 42,000 respondents supports multiculturalism generally and 63 percent agree that immigration makes Australia stronger.⁸ While this is good news, negative sentiments for refugees who do not arrive via the offshore program are on the rise.

The Australian Government has a unique opportunity to generate positive messaging to increase understanding of the circumstances and participation potential of refugees to generate increased support and cooperation from the private, community and educational sectors. Emphasis should be put on strategies to ensure the CSP becomes a sustainable model for private sponsorship and as such, public support for it is essential. Positive messaging campaigns could include stories of refugee journeys and settlement and examples of how to get involved.

Another way to garner more support from the private sector is public acknowledgement of business sponsors who are actively involved. The Government could also offer incentives to businesses actively engaged in diversifying their workforce, training staff on cultural awareness and businesses that offer additional training and professional development.

Settlement Assistance – Build capacity of community led associations

ECCQ acknowledges that Australia's Humanitarian Program is renowned internationally and that refugee resettlement services are world class. While settlement services including housing, employment assistance, access to health services, etc, are essential to successful outcomes, linking refugees to social supports and community increases wellbeing, participation and independence.

ECCQ understands settlement to be an ongoing process, which may span across a person's lifetime. Settlement cannot be considered solely the responsibility of new arrivals; it is a two-way process which relies on societal understanding and acceptance. Many of ECCQ's members provide settlement services or provide support to the many migrants living in Queensland, often without recognition or funding. The sector has proven to be incredibly innovative, agile and responsive, and has demonstrated a willingness to collaborate and foster partnerships to ensure that outcomes are met and in many cases, exceeded. The

⁸ Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion Surveys Report 2017*, Scanlon Foundation, http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ScanlonFoundation_MappingSocialCohesion_2017.pdf



many organisations and associations in the sector are best-placed to deliver services that are culturally appropriate, responsive and tailored to client needs across a range of different service areas.

Community leaders have an invaluable role and contribute immensely to community members' settlement experiences, often ensuring sustained and positive outcomes. It is a rewarding, often unrecognised and voluntary role, which involves negotiating with institutions, explaining systems and processes, advocating for their community, organising events, encouraging and counselling members of their community, among many other tasks. There is scope to increase funding for projects which build the capacity of community led organisations and associations to deliver positive settlement outcomes.

ECCQ's Community Leadership Program, funded by the Department of Social Services, equips people with the individual leadership skills, knowledge of the services and contacts to better assist their own communities. It involves bringing a group of people from new and emerging communities together once a week for a 10 week intensive leadership training program, individual support and membership to a statewide network of community leaders and community associations.

The style of leadership that is promoted has an emphasis on community building: listening skills, taking responsibility, encouraging others to develop their skills and contribute, making a positive difference and improving things for their community through various forms of advocacy. Programs such as these build the capacity of communities to establish associations, develop critical skills and contacts and in turn, positively contribute to the settlement of new arrivals. These programs importantly recognise that settlement outcomes are best achieved through community participation and ownership.

Conclusion

ECCQ believes that Australia should strive to be responsive to global events, prioritise settlement of vulnerable groups and use its unique position to acknowledge refugee journeys and contributions to our multicultural society.

Recommendations:

- Act on the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers recommendation to increase intake to 27,000 places within five years.
- Set up a dedicated Humanitarian Family Reunion Program.
- Places allocated to refugees for the CSP should be in addition to the 18,750 places in 2018-19.
- Reduce costs and obligations of Australian Sponsors for the CSP to attract more interest in taking part in it.

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- Offer a joint assistance program to allow for APOs to propose refugees with Australian sponsors who do not meet the CSP applicant and/or financial criteria.
- Generate Government led positive messaging to increase understanding of the circumstances and participation potential of refugees to generate increased support and cooperation for the CSP from the private, community and educational sectors.
- Increase funding for projects which build the capacity of community led organisations and associations to deliver positive settlement outcomes.

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