



# Settlement services for refugees

## What do refugees get when they arrive in Australia?

The Australian Government provides settlement support to about 13 750 refugees and others in humanitarian need who arrive under the Humanitarian Program each year. This support could include meeting them when they arrive, help finding suitable accommodation, initial orientation and a package of basic household goods such as simple furnishings, linen, some white goods and kitchen equipment.

Refugees are helped to gain access to Centrelink, Medicare and banking, helped to understand Australian laws and culture, and to gain employment. They are provided with English language classes through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and may be referred, if required, to torture and trauma counselling services

Many of these services are delivered under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), for about six months, but can be extended for up to 12 months for particularly vulnerable people. This program is funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

After IHSS, refugees can be referred to migrant resource centres and other organisations funded under the Settlement Grants Program (SGP), also funded by DIAC. These programs help newly arrived refugees become self-reliant and participate in the Australian community as soon as possible.

The government allocated \$316 million in 2009-10 towards these direct settlement programs.

## What do they NOT get?

There have been a number of concerns raised within parts of the Australian community that more assistance is provided to refugee entrants than to other Australians, such as pensioners. There is *no* truth to these claims.

Refugees do not receive higher benefits than other social security recipients. They have the same entitlements as all other Australian permanent residents. Refugees do not have their rental bonds automatically paid for by the government, nor do they receive a lump sum payment from the government upon arrival.

## What income support do they receive?

When they arrive in Australia through the Humanitarian Program, refugees can immediately gain access to income support payments under the same eligibility criteria as any other Australian.

At present, the maximum fortnightly rate for Age Pension, Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment is \$644.20 for a single person. The maximum fortnightly rate for Newstart Allowance and Special Benefit is \$462.80 for a single person with no children.\*

## Where do they settle?

Refugees are often located close to family members or their proposers living in Australia. If they do not have links in Australia they are settled where possible in regional locations that often provide the best access to reasonable housing and work prospects.

Locations are carefully chosen to take into account employment opportunities and affordable housing that is reasonably close to key facilities such as retail shops, medical facilities, schools, public transport and community services.

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\* As at March 2010, excluding Rent Assistance. For further information go to [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au).

## **Do they get priority for public housing?**

Humanitarian entrants must also meet the same requirements as other Australians to be eligible for public housing. They are not given preferential treatment and must remain on waiting lists, as do other Australians in need of public housing.

## **Are they taught English?**

Adult migrants and refugees are entitled to up to 510 hours of tuition under the AMEP. This helps them settle more effectively in Australia by giving them skills to engage with the community at large, and to find work.

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) provides free interpreting services to non-English speaking Australian citizens and permanent residents communicating with approved groups and individuals including doctors in private practice and pharmacies.

## **Why do we bring them here?**

Many refugees arriving in Australia have been traumatised by the experiences that have caused them to leave their home countries. As a member of the international community, we share responsibility for protecting such vulnerable people.

Our help does not end at providing them with a new life in Australia. The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that people settling here have the help they need to rebuild their lives and become fully functioning members of the community.

## **What about refugees who arrive by boat?**

Some people confuse asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat, currently mainly at Christmas Island, with those refugees who are resettled in Australia under the Humanitarian Program. There is a difference.

Australia accepts about 13 750 refugees and others in humanitarian need each year under the Humanitarian Program. The majority are selected for resettlement from tens of thousands of overseas applicants, who have fled persecution from their country of origin and waited years in refugee camps for a solution to their plight.

Boat arrivals who are found to be owed protection are also accepted under the Humanitarian Program and are provided with the same entitlements as any other newly arrived refugee.

It is important to note the number of refugees arriving in Australia to seek asylum remains low by world standards. Our share has averaged about 1.5 per cent over the past two decades. The overwhelming majority of asylum seekers still head towards Europe.

## **What do asylum seekers get?**

Asylum seekers who have not yet had their protection claims decided have no access to Centrelink benefits. The Australian Government established the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme, administered by the Australian Red Cross. This provides financial help to those unable to meet their most basic needs for food, accommodation and health care, as well as meeting torture and trauma counselling costs.

## **Are they given health checks?**

All refugees resettled in Australia are subject to strict health, character and national security requirements, which all Australian permanent visa applicants must meet.

## **What do refugees contribute?**

Refugees arriving in Australia face challenges in adjusting to the Australian way of life. Despite these challenges, most refugees and their families settle successfully and make a positive contribution to the Australian community.

Some of Australia's more prominent former refugees include research biologist Sir Gustav Nossal, stand-up comedian Anh Do and his filmmaker brother Khoa Do, artist Judy Cassab and 2009 Victoria Australian of the Year African-Australian community leader, Dr Berhan Ahmed.

For more information visit: [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)