REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN THE ILLAWARRA

2017

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951), which recognises a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee their country due to persecution and is unable to return.

An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been assessed.

Wollongong has a long history as a place of settlement for refugees, including the European communities who arrived after World War II, the Vietnamese in the 70s and Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian, communities in the 90s; the most recently arrived people are from the Middle East, Burma and African nations. A strong network of local services exists to support their settlement.

Wollongong’s small but growing refugee population is made up of a diverse number of ethnic and language groups. There is also diversity within our refugee communities regarding education levels, literacy and language skills and health status. Many have been born outside their country, usually in a refugee camp.

The intake for Australia’s Humanitarian Programme, which includes both refugees and asylum seekers, fluctuates according to global conflict and government policy. Australia’s annual refugee intake was 13,750 in 2011-12; this increased to 20,000 in 2012-13 and was reduced back to its 2011-12 level in 2013-14. The Humanitarian Programme for 2015-16 is set at 13,750 places or 7.2% of the planned migration program (190,000 places) for the same period. In addition, the Federal Government announced in 2015 an additional 12,000 places for Iraqi and Syrian refugees. *(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Fact Sheet 20 - Migration Programme planning levels)*

There are two main streams of the Federal Government’s Humanitarian Programme:

1 **Offshore Resettlement**: People who come from a country of asylum to Australia; they are permanent residents and are entitled to a full range of settlement services.

Visa sub class 200: Refugee
Visa sub class 201: In-Country Special Humanitarian
Visa sub class 202: Global Special Humanitarian (SHP) – have links to family in Australia who undertake to pay for travel to Australia and support their settlement
Visa sub class 203: Emergency Rescue
Visa sub class 204: Woman at Risk

*In 2015 Wollongong’s intake consisted of 200, 201, 202 and 204

2 **Onshore Resettlement**: Asylum seekers who are already in Australia

Visa sub class 866: Protection; allows person to live and work as a permanent resident; is not open to maritime arrivals; since August 2013, Wollongong has not been referred this visa sub class

Temporary and Permanent Protection Visas: In December 2014, the Australian Parliament passed legislation to introduce Temporary Protection visas (TPVs). TPVs are valid for up to three years. Before a TPV expires individuals can apply for either another TPV or a Safe Haven Enterprise visa (when available).
Community Proposal Pilot (CPP): This program commenced in 2013-14. The first visas granted under this visa were in February 2014.

Key Statistics

Statistics cover the Illawarra (Wollongong, Shellharbour and Shoalhaven); however the majority of refugees settle in Wollongong.

Number of newly arrived humanitarian entrants in Illawarra and main countries of birth (in descending order):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002–2005</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>Liberia, Sudan, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2009</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>Burmese, Congo, Liberia, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Togo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>Burma, Congo (DRC), Liberia, Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>Burma, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>Libya, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Ethiopia, Burundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Libya, Burma, Congo (DRC); 34% are 16 years and under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>Syria, Burma, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Togo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>Iraq, Syria, Burma, Congo, Eritrea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>Syria, Iraq, Burma, Congo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local services data

Current Trends

Significant increase of Visa class 204 – Wollongong is a national priority regional settlement site for women at risk since 2012.

A significant increase in the total number of refugees in 2016, due to the additional 12,000 places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees nationwide. This was announced in 2015.

In 2015-16 Middle Eastern communities continued to represent the largest number of refugee arrivals with the largest portion of clients originating in Syria. Whereas in 2013 Syria was a major country of refuge, it has become a major county of origin for refugees.

As with previous years, a large proportion of the 2016 intake were 25 years or under.

Language

Many refugees are ethnic minorities, who speak a tribal language/s and may speak a mainstream language.

The most highly represented languages since 2011 are Arabic (corresponding to refugees from Syria, Iraq) and Farsi (from Iran, Afghanistan).

The Burmese people in Wollongong are mostly from the Karen, Karenni, Chin and Kachin hill tribes. Each has a unique language and culture. Not all speak the Burmese language.

People from African nations usually speak their tribal languages and often Swahili, Ewe or French (Congo, Togo).
Religion

The majority (though not all) of newly arrived Middle Eastern communities are Muslim; there are two main denominations of Islam - Shi’ite or Shia, and Sunni. The Bilal Mosque, Cringila, the Omar Mosque, Gwynneville, and the Uthman Mosque, Oak Flats, are Sunni. A new mosque, Masjid As-Salam, opened in 2016 in Berkeley. There is a Shi’ite Mosque in Cringila (Auburn Parade). Hazara Afghans are Shia. A significant number of African and Burmese communities are Christian and are part of local church communities.

Level of education

TAFE reported that the 2015 refugee intake were polarised in terms of educational ability and skill ie a significant number with tertiary qualifications and strong English skills, and a significant number with little or no English.

Health

The health issues presented by newly arrived refugees in 2015 were significantly more complex than previous years, given the physical and psychological disabilities acquired through conflict-related trauma. A significant proportion of newly arrived refugees also arrive with other disabilities - cognitive, developmental and mobility related- that require complex case coordination from disability, specialist services and ongoing social and personal care supports and interventions. All newly arrived refugees settling into the Illawarra through the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program receive comprehensive screening services and are referred to a local GP for ongoing care and treatment.

SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS)

Navitas are contracted by Department of Social Services (DSS) to deliver and coordinate settlement services provided to humanitarian entrants for up to 12 months from arrival. Individual case management, orientation and accommodation; average length of client service is 6 months; six (6) office staff and a large pool of bi-lingual case workers (currently 36).

Settlement Services Program

Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS) is contracted by Department of Social Services to provide settlement support for newly arrived refugees from 6 months to 5 years post arrival. IMS is a member of the NSW Settlement Partnership. Led by Settlement Services International, the partnership comprises 22 organisations.

Health

All new arrivals through the HSS are referred to a local General Practitioner for health checks and ongoing health care by local GPs; Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health Districts Multicultural Health Service coordinates access to public health services and information sessions on accessing the health system. STARTTS provide counselling for victims of torture and trauma. NEAMI provide mental health services. Transcultural Mental Health Centre provides counselling in some community languages.

Employment

Centrelink Newstart Allowance and JobActive (Mission Providence, NBS, Max Employment). Centrelink Multicultural Services Officer provides ongoing support and information. GreenConnect is a community-based program auspiced by Port Kembla Community Centre that works exclusively with refugees to connect them with work and training.

Key employment barrier is literacy and language skills.

Education

TAFE contracted by Department of Industry to provide adults 510 hours of English language tuition via the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Key issue – many students require more than the allocated time (510 hours) to learn English well. English classes range from beginner to academic.
Year 6 aged students and above go to Warrawong Intensive English Centre, located in Warrawong High School, until transitioned to mainstream high schools. Warrawong, Keira, Wollongong, Figtree, and Berkeley High Schools have the largest numbers as they provide ESL support. Primary aged students start at mainstream schools straight away; the majority attend Wollongong, Coniston, Cringila, and West Wollongong Public Schools. The Department of Education employ Bilingual Language Aides as support staff.

Mission Australia is funded by Department of Social Services to run volunteer support designed to meet the initial settlement needs of individuals and/or families, including establishing links with the local community. They are also funded by the Department of Industry to provide the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program which delivers language, literacy and numeracy training.

Smith Family Home Tutor Scheme provides weekly English tutoring in the home by a volunteer, especially helpful for those who can’t access TAFE (predominantly women with young children).

**Housing**

Navitas’ housing officers arrange accommodation on arrival.

**Short term properties:**  Berkeley  
Lake Heights  
Wollongong  
Balgownie  
Unanderra  
When required, tourist parks and serviced apartments

**Long term accommodation:**  Mount Keira  
Coniston  
Fairy Meadow  
Wollongong  
North Wollongong  
Cringila  
West Wollongong

**Issues:**  Shortage of long-term rental properties  
Shortage of one-bedroom housing for single clients  
Shortage of four-bedroom housing for large families

**Orientation**

Navitas’ training officer provides supported information and training sessions covering all the above areas, as well as the role of police, water safety, public transport, budgeting, and child protection. TAFE AMEP provides orientation/information sessions with Multicultural Health Service, police and others, as part of class curriculum.

**Service Coordination**

Navitas convenes a bi-monthly Illawarra Refugee Issues Forum held at Wollongong City Council for all organisations working with newly arrived communities. Current focus areas are employment, mental health and domestic violence.

**Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS)**

- Funded by Federal Department of Social Services for the Settlement Services Programme for migrants, refugee and humanitarian entrants during their first five years of arrival.
- Casework for individuals and families, facilitation of social connections, youth-specific support and programs.
- Settlement support promotes economic and personal wellbeing, independence and community connectedness.
- Facilitates pathways to learning English, education and employment readiness.
- Groups and programs include English Language classes, Girl’s Youth Group, Young Male Youth Group and Women’s Group.
- Two full-time Generalist Settlement Caseworkers in Wollongong, one part-time Generalist Settlement Caseworker in Nowra, one Youth Settlement Caseworker in Wollongong and one Coordinator of Volunteers.
- Volunteer program providing social support, casework assistance, group work activities, event development and involvement and financial community assistance.

Multicultural Communities Council Illawarra (MCCI)

The MCCI’s Multicultural Youth Development Project (MYDP) assists and supports socially isolated and disadvantaged young people (12-24 years) from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, this includes refugees. The project is funded by Multicultural NSW.

Activities and programs include:
- Illawarra Multicultural Youth Conference
- Casual Edge pre-employment program
- Cultural Magazine Project
- Special events including: Refugee Week, Harmony Day and Youth Week
- Friendship Community Garden project
- Multicultural Art Sessions
- MCCI Intergenerational Multicultural Healthy Cook-Off
- School Holiday Sport Clinics
- Multicultural Water Safety and CPR Sessions

The MYDP also provides:
- Facilitation of the Illawarra Multicultural Youth Network
- Cultural awareness training and education
- Information sessions on various topics pertaining to multicultural affairs
- Information and referral to CALD specific and mainstream services
- Individual and group mentoring
- Advocacy and lobbying on behalf of CALD young people
- Research and community consultation
- Cultural expertise to the sector

SCARF – Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families

SCARF is a volunteer-based community organisation that supports humanitarian refugees setting in the Illawarra to lead independent and fulfilling lives. SCARF provides community-based support that promotes friendship, community connection, social engagement and a sense of belonging for refugee children, youth, adults and older people. SCARF programs respond to initial needs on arrival, as well as needs that emerge in the medium and longer term for people from refugee backgrounds.

SCARF ongoing social support services include:
- Family mentoring – matching local volunteers with individuals/families from refugee backgrounds who are seeking support in the form of friendship, cultural orientation, conversational English practice, engagement with local social and community activities, or assistance accessing essential and specialist services
- Learn to drive mentoring program (supporting transition from Learner Drivers Licence to Provisional Licence)
- Homework help for high school students
- Small-group and in-home tutoring for primary school students
- Youth programs including sport and recreation activities, leadership and personal development camps, art/drama/music workshops
- Continuous learning workshops (eg. basic literacy support for adults; citizenship studies, job readiness support, computer literacy classes etc)
- Social inclusion activities and events (eg weekly children’s playgroup; weekly coffee conversations, excursions etc)
- Social enterprise initiatives promoting skills development, work experience and employment opportunities for people from refugee backgrounds

Illawarra Muslim Aid Inc

- A voluntary organisation launched in 2012 with support from local mosques.
- Individual and family support for refugees from a Muslim background, with a focus on material aid.

Wollongong City Council

- Refugee Welcome Zone since 2002.
- Library Services, Youth Services, Lifeguard Services.
- Interpreter Service for government, business and community organisations.
- Wollongong Living Books program.
- Support for Refugee Week events.
- The Illawarra Refugee Challenge, high school education program piloted in 2015.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**


Refugee Council of Australia [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)


STARTTS - Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, provide regular training for service providers [http://www.startts.org.au/training](http://www.startts.org.au/training)

