

REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN THE ILLAWARRA 2020

According to the *Migration Act 1958* a **refugee** is someone who is outside their home country and cannot return because they have a well-founded fear of persecution due to their:

- race
- religion
- political opinion
- nationality
- membership of a particular social group

As a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951) Australia is obliged to provide protection to refugees and to ensure they are not returned to any place where they are likely to face persecution.

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, often in a refugee camp or an urban refugee setting.

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 for 2018-2019 was 18,750. 8.6% of the planned migration program (190,000 places) for the same period. The standard intake before this was 13,730 places. In 2015 an additional 12,000 places were allocated 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.
 - a. **Refugee Visa** (sub class 200)
Majority identified by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and referred to Australian Government for resettlement.
 - b. **In-Country Special Humanitarian Programme Visa** (sub class 201)
For those living in their home country, unable to leave and subject to persecution.
 - c. **Global Special Humanitarian Visa** (sub class 202)
Not refugees but subject to substantial discrimination; have links to family in Australia who undertake to pay for travel to Australia and support their settlement.
 - d. **Emergency Rescue Visa** (sub class 203)
Refugees who need urgent resettlement.
 - e. **Woman at Risk Visa** (sub class 204)
Women in danger due to their gender; majority are identified by UNHCR and referred to Australian Government.

*In 2017 Wollongong's intake consisted of 200, 202 and 204

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

a. **Protection Visa** (sub class 866)

Allows person to live and work as a permanent resident; have access to Centrelink and Medicare services; is not open to maritime arrivals.

b. **Temporary Protection Visa (TPV)**

For those who arrived by boat before October 2017; up to three years; allows person to work and study.

c. **Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV)**

A temporary protection visa valid for five years. It encourages people to work and study in regional Australia.

NB: Those who arrived by boat and did not lodge a TPV/SHEV visa application before 1 October 2017 cannot apply for a visa and must leave the country.

Community Support Programme (CSP): operating since July 2017; 1000 places. The CSP enables communities, businesses, families and individuals to propose Humanitarian Visa applicants and support them on arrival. Proposers under the CSP must provide adequate support to enable the proposed entrant to achieve financial self-sufficiency within the first year of arrival in Australia.

Key Statistics

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

Table 1.0 total number of humanitarian entrants arriving in the Illawarra by country of birth from 2002-2016 *

2006–2009	467	Burmese, Congo, Liberia, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Togo.
2010	107	Burma, Congo (DRC), Liberia, Ethiopia.
2011	119	Burma, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Ghana.
2012	238	Libya, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Ethiopia, Burundi
2013	376	Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Libya, Burma, Congo (DRC); 34% are 16 years and under.
2014	420	Syria, Burma, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Togo.
2015	103	Iraq, Syria, Burma, Congo, Eritrea.
2016	463	Syria Iraq, Burma, Congo.
2017	78	Syria, Iraq, Burma.
2018	224	Syria, Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Burma (countries of citizenship)
2019	331	Congo, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Burma, Ethiopia, Burundi, Iran
2020 Jan-June	54	last arrival March 18 th , due to border restrictions

Data source: Navitas English 2010-2017 Red Cross from Nov 2017

*majority, not all, are from the countries listed

Current Trends

- Wollongong has been a national priority regional settlement site for women at risk (Visa sub class 204) since 2012.
- In the last two years, the 202-visa subclass has significantly increased to nearly half of all places, with a proportionate decrease in 204 visa holders.
- Significant increase in the total number of refugees in 2016 due to the additional 12,000 places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees nationwide. The figure in Table 1.0 for 2016 includes some of this cohort.
- A large proportion between 2013 and 2016 were 25 years or under.
- Covid 19 halted the Humanitarian Entrants program in March 2020.

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 and Iraq), Karenni (from Burma) and Farsi (from Iran and 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 and 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, the Uthman Mosque, Oak Flats and the Masjid As-Salam mosque, Berkeley, are Sunni-based communities. There is a Shi'ite Mosque in Cringila (Auburn Parade). Hazara Afghanis are Shia. A significant number of African, Middle Eastern and Burmese communities are Christian and are part of local church communities.

Level of Education

There is significant diversity in terms of educational ability and skill, ranging from newly arrived refugees 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 are highly complex given the physical and psychological disabilities acquired through conflict-related trauma. A significant proportion also arrives with cognitive, developmental and mobility-related disabilities. This requires complex case coordination from disability specialist services and ongoing social and personal care supports and interventions.

Settlement Services

Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP)

The Federal Department of Social Services (DSS) funds the delivery and coordination of settlement services for humanitarian entrants for up to 18 months after arrival. This includes individual case management, orientation and accommodation. The local provider is the *Australian Red Cross*.

Red Cross volunteers help to meet the initial settlement needs of individuals and/or families, orientation to the community and ongoing individual social support.

Specialised and Intensive Services (SIS)

A DSS funded program that provides services (most often short sharp intervention) for up to 5 years after arrival for those with multiple complex barriers. Referrals from individuals and service providers can be made online to DSS. Clients can include those who are not already part of the HSP. For HSP clients, this support complements their existing case management.

The local provider is *Australian Red Cross*.

Settlement Services Program (SSP)

DSS funds additional settlement support for newly arrived refugees from 6 months to 5 years after arrival. This includes individual case management, information and referral and community capacity building support. The local provider is *Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS)*. 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 HSP are provided with comprehensive health screening services and are referred to a local GP for ongoing care and treatment; *Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District's* Multicultural Health Service coordinates access to public health services and information sessions on accessing the health system. *STARTTS* provides specialist psychiatric and psychological support services for victims of torture and trauma. *NEAMI* provides mental health services. Transcultural Mental Health Centre provides counselling in some community languages.

Employment

Newly arrived refugees access 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 that works exclusively with refugees to connect them with work and training.

The Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP) is funded by the NSW government to provide specialist training, support and jobs for refugees. The local provider is Settlement Services International (SSI).

Education

Adults

The federally-funded **Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)** provides adults 510 hours of free English language tuition. The local provider is *Max Solutions* (under contract to Navitas English).

- Classroom tuition through either full-time or part-time study.
- Two streams of tuition: Pre-employment English stream and Social English stream.
- Distance learning through a package of learning material supported by regular telephone or internet contact with an AMEP qualified teacher.
- Home Tutor Scheme which provides language assistance by a trained volunteer.
- Self-paced e-learning as supplementary learning
- Additional 100 hours of tuition if required.

KU Children's Services provides free childcare for under school-aged children as part of the AMEP program.

Max Solutions is also funded by the Department of Industry to provide the **Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program** which delivers language, literacy and numeracy training.

TAFE NSW (ESOL)

- Wollongong TAFE has English Language classes from beginner level to academic level.
- Enrolments are all year round.

Community-based **English Conversation classes** are offered in numerous locations (see Appendix 1).

Children and young people

Year 6 aged students and above go to *Warrawong Intensive English Centre (IEC)* located within the grounds of Warrawong High School. Students then move to the ESL programs at mainstream high schools. Keira, Warrawong, and Wollongong High Schools have the largest ESL student numbers. Illawarra Sports, Corrimal, Figtree High Schools and Five Islands Seniors College also have an ESL cohort. Primary-aged students start at mainstream schools straight away; the majority attend Wollongong, West Wollongong, Warrawong and Cringila Public Schools. The Department of Education employs bilingual Student Liaison Support Officers (SLSO) in both primary and high schools.

Children and young people have been referred to the Catholic school system since 2016, including Good Samaritan (Fairy Meadow), St Frances Assisi (Warrawong) and St Therese (West Wollongong) primary schools.

Housing

Red Cross provides on-arrival accommodation, tenancy support and orientation to secure long-term accommodation as part of the HSP. In 2016 the first families settled in the Shellharbour area.

10 fully furnished properties are head leased for short term accommodation in the following suburbs:

Corrimal, Wollongong, Port Kembla, Cringila, Warrawong, Oak Flats

On average, clients spend up to 28 days in short term accommodation.

Issues

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

Church Resources is subcontracted to provide a volunteer service to deliver basic household packages and help in setting up homes.

Service Coordination

Illawarra Refugee Issues Forum (IRIF). is held bi-monthly and is open to organisations working with refugee communities - convenor Wollongong City Council

Illawarra–South East Advisory Committee meets quarterly with community and senior government representatives appointed by the Minister - convenor Multicultural NSW on behalf of the Minister for Multiculturalism

CALD Water Safety Committee – convenor Department of Sport and Recreation

Illawarra CALD Disability Working Group – convenor MCCI

Community-based settlement support

Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS)

- Settlement Services Programme for humanitarian entrants during their first five years of arrival: casework for individuals and families, facilitation of social connections, youth-specific support and programs.
- Community capacity building project.
- Multicultural supported playgroups.
- *Community Hubs Australia* supports parents and children located in Wollongong, West Wollongong, and Warrawong Primary schools.

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 with a focus on those with a refugee background. Funded by Multicultural NSW.

Activities and programs include:

- Illawarra Multicultural Youth Conference.
- Special events including Refugee Week, Harmony Day and Youth Week.
- MCCI Intergenerational Multicultural Healthy Cook-Off.
- School Holiday Sport Clinics.
- Multicultural Water Safety and CPR Sessions.
- Facilitation of the Illawarra Multicultural Youth Network.
- Cultural awareness training and education.
- Advocacy and lobbying on behalf of CALD young people.

Other MCCI programs include the Burmese Social Support Group; a weekly group for older Burmese people from a refugee background.

SCARF – Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families

SCARF is a volunteer-based community organisation that supports humanitarian refugees settling 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. Ongoing social support services include:

- Befriending program; 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 and computer literacy classes).
- Social inclusion activities and events (eg weekly children's playgroup, weekly coffee conversations, excursions).

- 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.

Anglicare

Family Mental Health Support Service provides casework and counselling.

Southern Youth and Family Services

Newly Arrived Youth Specialist position provides support, counselling, case management and crisis intervention for young people aged between 12 to 21 years who are vulnerable, disadvantaged, homeless or those at risk of disadvantage and homelessness and their families, who have migrated to Australia in the last five years. Priority is given to those who have entered Australia on Humanitarian Visas.

Wollongong City Council

- Sector support and development.
- Refugee Welcome Zone since 2005.
- Library Services, Youth Services and Lifeguard Services.
- Wollongong Living Books program.
- Support for Refugee Week events.
- Illawarra Refugee Challenge; high school education program.

Language Services

- Translation Information Service (TIS National) phone interpreting.
- Free Translating Service <https://translating.dss.gov.au/en>.
- Document Translation Services Multicultural NSW; fees apply, Service NSW offices.
- Wollongong City Council Interpreter Service; face to face onsite interpreting, fees apply.
- Multicultural NSW face to face interpreting, fees apply.

Further Information

Department of Social Services <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs>

Department of Home Affairs <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/Trav/Refu>

Refugee Council of Australia www.refugeecouncil.org.au

UNCHR – UN Refugee Agency www.unhcr.org.au

Roads to Refuge (teaching resource) www.roads-to-refuge.com.au

Refugee Week Resource Kit www.refugeeweek.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>

NSW Refugee Health Service <https://www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/refugee/>

Transcultural Mental Health Centre <http://www.dhi.health.nsw.gov.au/Transcultural-Mental-Health-Centre/Transcultural-Mental-Health-Centre-Home/default.aspx>

Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au

SBS Cultural Atlas <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/>