

**Australian Red Cross**

**Submission to the Department of Home Affairs**

**NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE AUSTRALIA'S SETTLEMENT AND  
INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES**

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## Acknowledgements

Red Cross pays our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Custodians across this country, and to Elders, past present and emerging. We acknowledge and welcome the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in welcoming refugees in Australia.

We also acknowledge the hundreds of thousands of people who have arrived in Australia since Red Cross was established in Australia in 1914 and those who have spoken to us about their experiences. We acknowledge the millions of people around the world experiencing persecution, conflict or crisis situations that continue to unfold and increase in complexity. We acknowledge our colleagues within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement who are working to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to people impacted by conflicts across the world in countries of origin, the countries people flee and travel through and the countries people arrive in.

We acknowledge local and diaspora communities, especially those with lived experience of forced displacement who have extended their support and assistance to people who have come to Australia to settle. We also acknowledge the policy and operational staff involved with settlement in Australia, across states and territories and including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Department of Home Affairs, state and territory governments, and local councils who have helped to facilitate our important work in Australia and abroad.

## About Red Cross

The Australian Red Cross (Red Cross) is one of 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement)- the world's largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

Worldwide, the Movement is present at every stage of the journey of migrants and people seeking safety – in the places they come from, the places they travel or flee to, and the places they settle in.

In Australia, Red Cross is embedded in communities across Australia through our 27,000 strong membership, staff, and volunteer base. Red Cross plays a critical role in building safe, fair, welcoming, and inclusive communities for migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum by ensuring they are protected from harm, can meet their humanitarian needs and have pathways to safe and dignified work. As a trusted humanitarian organisation, we also support local communities and businesses to meaningfully welcome migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum across the country.

This includes supporting people who have lost contact with family members due to conflict disaster or migration, conducting independent humanitarian monitoring visits to places of immigration detention across Australia, supporting newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants in their settlement journey through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, and southern New South Wales), and by increasing pathways to safe, dignified work for refugees.

We are also engaging with schools, communities, and workplaces across Australia to build their capacities to welcome newly arrived migrants and refugees through a range of initiatives and programs.

As a trusted government partner and in our role as auxiliary to public authorities in the humanitarian field, we work directly with communities and authorities, as advocates and humanitarian diplomats, providing facts and evidence that support decision makers and opinion leaders to act for humanity and in the interests of people facing vulnerability.

As a member of the Movement we guided by and apply at all times and in all places our Seven Fundamental Principles: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, and Universality. These principles are at the very core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

Based on our longstanding experience and insights domestically and internationally and aligned with the Movement's Fundamental Principles, we apply an exclusively humanitarian lens to the remit of this consultation on how to improve Australia's settlement and integration of refugees.

## Submission

Every year, millions of people are forced to flee their homes to find safety. In 2022 the total number of people forcibly displaced has reached 100 million for the first time on record.<sup>i</sup> One third of people displaced are refugees, and almost half of all refugees are children.<sup>ii</sup>

Settlement in Australia is one way for people in the most vulnerable of circumstances to find safety. Governments, businesses, local and refugee communities, service providers and community organisations, families, and individuals all play a part in supporting that journey.

Australia has welcomed over 920,000 refugees since the Second World War and has a longstanding commitment to resettle refugees.<sup>iii</sup> Australia's commitment can also be seen through more recent actions to provide safety and protection through emergency humanitarian intakes and responses for people impacted by the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

The socio-economic contribution of migrants and refugees to Australian society has been vast and this is, in part, because Australia has created opportunities to enable refugees to build on their strengths. Through our work over many decades, Red Cross knows that programs are most effective when they are person-centred and community-led, so that the diversity of experience and local capacity are considered in the design of support structures. This approach responds to individual needs that vary with context, time, and experience.

Settlement works best when barriers people experience, including those in the environment they've settled in, are removed. This can only be achieved when all levels of government, support sectors, businesses, communities and families work together to solve the humanitarian challenges of our times. Red Cross has many examples where people and communities come together to build stronger welcoming communities, and how important these to the settlement and integration of refugees in Australia.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite these achievements and Australia's proud history – including providing safe haven to people in some of the most vulnerable situations, including women at risk - refugee settlement must continue to adapt to contemporary humanitarian challenges faced in Australia. Practical challenges, such as limited housing stock, availability of culturally respectful, inclusive and accessible holistic health and support services, and availability of education and employment services, are best overcome through collaboration.

In addition to these challenges, some policies have particularly significant and compounding humanitarian impacts. These include limits on if and how refugees can reunite with their family members in Australia, uncertainty due to temporary status for people on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas, and the decision to not permit resettlement in Australia for people who registered with the UNHCR in Indonesia after 30 June 2014.

The response taken by many governments, including Australia, to the COVID-19 pandemic halted most pathways to durable solutions for refugees for almost two years. The crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine further added to the complexity of the management of migratory movement of refugees and humanitarian entrants who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 also resulted in secondary impacts on the capacity of the settlement sector overall. This can be mitigated in the future through redesign of settlement tenders and contracts to ensure settlement services can adapt to emergency situations.

Further improvements can be made to ways in which refugees and humanitarian entrants are able to settle and integrate into their new communities in Australia and to the ways many people are able to find safety here. We know that communities in Australia are ready to do more to meet global resettlement needs.<sup>v</sup> Moreover, recent research has demonstrated that an increased

humanitarian intake,<sup>vi</sup> as well as transitioning refugees from temporary to permanent visas, will positively contribute to the Australian economy.<sup>vii</sup>

Based on our experience and insights domestically and internationally, we recommend that this review also needs to consider the broader resettlement system, including complementary pathways to safety for refugees, and the social determinants of health which impact on settlement, including availability of housing, jobs, and local services.

There is an opportunity to evaluate outcomes through the lens of the anchors for settlement – in particular employment, community connections and support, family, and settlement support (including through the HSP) - with a view to creating a more integrated system that can be more flexibly tailored to individual needs and incorporate the best of all approaches to good settlement.

Finally, we note and welcome that Australia has adopted the Global Compact on Refugees and highlight that the 2019 – 2022 Three Year Strategy for implementing the Global Compact on Refugees aims to: (1) grow resettlement; (2) advance complementary pathways; and (3) build the foundation through promoting welcoming and inclusive societies.<sup>viii</sup>

In recognition of Australia’s engagement in the Global Compact on Refugees, we highlight three high level recommendations aligned with the three categories of this strategy, which themselves also align with the Compact’s Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.<sup>ix</sup>

### High Level Recommendations

To further improve Australia’s settlement and integration of refugees, Red Cross recommends the Government of Australia, the Department of Home Affairs, and other relevant federal and State/Territory departments:

<p>Recommendation A</p>	<p><b>Strengthen resettlement systems by:</b></p> <p>Implementing a paced increase to the annual humanitarian intake (without any boundaries or limitations on countries that people are resettled from) and improve capacity for additional humanitarian intakes in response to crises and emergencies.</p>
<p>Recommendation B</p>	<p><b>Advance complementary pathways by:</b></p> <p>Strengthening complementary pathways to protection through community, employment and education sponsorship, in addition to the humanitarian intake.</p>
<p>Recommendation C</p>	<p><b>Build a strong foundation for settlement through promoting welcoming and inclusive societies by:</b></p> <p>Increasing focus and effort on building and strengthening welcoming communities, where the economic and social contributions of newly arrived migrants, including refugees, are recognised, and valued.</p> <p>Providing certainty for refugees through increased pathways and expedited processing timeframes for family reunion processes, and through providing pathways to permanency for people on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas.</p>

### Recommendations in response to the Home Affairs consultation questions:

To ensure coordination between settlement services, English learning, employment, and health services, to ensure an end-to-end approach to service delivery, Red Cross recommends:

1. Inter-agency planning is strengthened by providing more reliable advanced notice of and flexibility in responding to an increase in the number of people intending to settle, particularly in regional areas, so that public, private and non-government services can adequately plan and make informed investment decisions.
2. Systems for improved sharing of client information both before and after arrival are developed and supported (where appropriate and in line with privacy requirements and structural trends across services).
3. A collaborative and cooperative settlement governance model is established across all government touch points, with targets that support and encourage collaboration, including a method to enhance the voice of communities with lived experience, including refugee-led organisations into the design of settlement service, including the HSP.

To improve access to safe, affordable, appropriate, and sustainable housing, Red Cross recommends:

4. Structural, whole of government changes to housing which increase coordination between and within Departments are undertaken with a particular focus on affordability, infrastructure and availability, and planning for future need.
5. Home Affairs creates changes to the HSP to better support housing needs by:
  - a) increasing the duration and funding of short-term accommodation, on a case-by-case basis accounting for local rental market conditions;
  - b) creating a new structural adjustment payment to better support people from the time of arrival until employment outcomes can be achieved;
  - c) developing solutions to reduce the negative impact of a lack of Australian rental history;
  - d) increasing funding for housing support services in areas of housing shortage;
  - e) investing in systems to create efficiencies in housing support such as a tenancy database management system;
  - f) pacing arrivals where possible;
  - g) working with state and territory governments to consider alternative accommodation options for use in emergencies as a surge capacity; and
  - h) considering wider housing needs for people experiencing vulnerabilities and identify areas of collaboration and joint-opportunity.
6. Home Affairs considers commissioning the Constellation Project to develop different ways to unlock housing challenges for newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants in Australia.

To create opportunities for all refugees to build deeper relationships and friendships with the wider Australian community, Red Cross recommends:

7. Opportunities for refugees and the wider Australian community to build deeper relationships and friendships are created through further investing in co-designed refugee and community led initiatives with demonstrable impact.

To improve refugee health outcomes, Red Cross recommends:

8. Health outcomes for refugees are improved by:
  - a) removing barriers to good health that are caused by the Australian processes including uncertainty caused by temporary protection visas and lack of priority for family reunion;
  - b) improving access to the health system and supporting increased cultural safety through structural health equity reform and practical interventions such as funding bi-cultural health workers;
  - c) increasing mental health service availability, in particular, specialised supports such as for survivors of torture and trauma;
  - d) streamlining referral processes;
  - e) increasing access to, awareness and use of interpreters; and
  - f) learning lessons from the COVID-19 response in how to communicate health information effectively with refugee and migrant populations.

To improve opportunities for the wider community to help refugees and humanitarian entrants settle, Red Cross recommends:

9. Government, and Home Affairs as relevant, support the Australian Human Rights Commission's development and implementation of a National Anti-Racism Framework.
10. Government, and Home Affairs as relevant, actively supports and encourages the wider community to value, engage with and amplify the economic and social contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants.

To better design programs to take into account the large differences between settlement locations, Red Cross recommends:

11. The HSP funding structure and settlement outcome is reformed to enable clients to better tailor their services in line with their strengths and needs as well as their life stages, capability, capacity and household composition, and the location in which they settle.
12. Home Affairs reviews anew the Red Cross submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration – Inquiry into migration in regional Australia to inform how regional settlement locations can be strengthened.

To design programs to respond well to people's individual needs and aspirations, to help strengthen their capability and self-agency, Red Cross recommends:

13. Existing and new programs supporting refugees are developed, funded, and regularly reviewed through co-design principles and in close consultation with people with lived experience.

To address the biggest existing barriers to the delivery of good outcomes in current services, Red Cross recommends:

14. The HSP contract is updated with a particular focus on allowing flexibility by providers to respond and flex to current demand; modelling a hybrid funding model including core and fee-for-service elements; ensuring access to core in response to specific incidents such as the housing shortage; and for emergency response situations.
15. The federal government develop, with the sector: an update to the AUSRECEPLAN to formally incorporate the sector in the response; a blueprint for emergency response situations including visa types and eligibility for support services; and a national

communication strategy to ensure people, community groups and other members of the public impacted by HSP understand the HSP and what is available to them.

Red Cross continue to stand ready, as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, to support the ongoing improvement to refugee settlement in Australia.

**Further information**

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## References

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- <sup>ii</sup> Between 2010 and 2020, the number of people displaced from their homes has almost doubled, from 41 million to 82.4 million globally. 30 per cent of people displaced (26.4 million people) are recognised as refugees, almost half of whom are children. (UNHCR, (2020). Global Trends Report <https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/>). Within the Asia Pacific region, there are 9.2 million people of concern to UNHCR, including from two of the world's most complex and protracted humanitarian crises in Myanmar-Bangladesh and Afghanistan (UNHCR, (2022). Asia and the Pacific <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/asia-and-the-pacific.html>).
- <sup>iii</sup> Department of Home Affairs, (2021). The Administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Programs. Eighth edition, October 2021. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/programs-subsite/files/administration-immigration-program-8th-edition.pdf>
- <sup>iv</sup> See details of Red Cross programs including Community Conversations about In Search of Safety - <https://www.redcross.org.au/act/community-conversations/>; Connected Women <https://www.redcross.org.au/stories/2022/connected-women>; and our employment program Connect.Match.Support. here <https://www.redcross.org.au/act/help-refugees/hire-refugees-and-asylum-seekers/> and here <https://portable.com.au/work/employment-for-people-seeking-asylum-in-australia>.
- <sup>v</sup> As an organisation with nationwide presence, we are embedded in local as well as newly arrived and more established migrant communities through our volunteers, members and the people we work alongside. For more than a decade, the Mapping Social Cohesion surveys (Scanlon Foundation) have consistently found a strong level of endorsement of immigration and multiculturalism. In 2021, there has been no significant change in the balance of opinion and there has been an increase in responses that "Multiculturalism has been good for Australia" rising from 80% in 2019 to 86% in 2021. (Scanlon Institute, (2022). Mapping Social Cohesion 2021 Report. [https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2021-11/Mapping\\_Social\\_Cohesion\\_2021\\_Report\\_0.pdf](https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2021-11/Mapping_Social_Cohesion_2021_Report_0.pdf)).
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- <sup>vii</sup> APO, (2021). [Supporting economic growth in uncertain times.](https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-09/apo-nid314128.pdf) <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-09/apo-nid314128.pdf>
- <sup>viii</sup> UN, (2018). Global Compact on Refugees. New York. <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4.pdf>
- <sup>ix</sup> UN, (2016). Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. See <https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html>