

Syrian and Iraqi Refugee Settlement in Australia

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Syrian and Iraqi Refugee Settlement in Australia

Presented at the Public Seminar on Responses to Syrian-Conflict Refugee Settlement in Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden, and the UK, 14 March 2018

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Executive Summary

This is the first background report of a three-year project, which looks at the Syrian and Iraqi refugee settlement outcomes in Australia, with a focus on English language competency, education and employment using a policy network analysis with a place-based focus, locating the family unit at the centre of our analysis. The three-year study of 200 recently arrived refugee families—150 from Syria and Iraq and 50 from Afghanistan (as a control group)—employs a mixed-method approach including face-to-face interviews, a survey, and documentary analysis. In addition to drawing on and placing the SCR families at the centre of our analysis, the project will also draw on the insights of key stakeholders in the field, including policymakers, NGO representatives, employers and educators along with our national and international partner insights in order to shape national and international best practice. The project is funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC)-Linkage Grant and industry partners in Australia including Access Community Services, AMES Australia, Multicultural Development Association (MDA) and Settlement Services International (SSI) who provide valuable input in interviewee recruitment and research outputs. Best practices will be identified through collaboration with these industry partners in Australia and researchers in Canada, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden and the UK. The focus of this first report is on the key characteristics of the recently arrived Syrian-Iraqi conflict refugees, the Afghani refugee control group and the main policy prescriptions employed to assist with their needs post settlement in the three main States of settlement in Australia: New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (Qld) and Victoria (Vic). The aim of this report therefore is to provide a descriptive context for the current study while also detailing the convergence and divergence in policy prescriptions facilitating the settlement of this intake into the aforementioned states.

Research Team

The research team consists of Prof Jock Collins (University of Technology Sydney), Prof Carol Reid (Western Sydney University), Associate Prof Dimitria Groutsis (University of Sydney), and research assistants Dr Katherine Watson (University of Technology Sydney) and Dr Derya Ozkul (University of Sydney). The Australian Research Council (ARC) is funding the project as part of the Linkage Project Scheme for the period of 2017-2020. The project is being conducted in collaboration with Partner Investigators, which are community organisations, including: Access Community Services Ltd, AMES Australia, Multicultural Development Australia (MDA) Ltd and Settlement Services International Ltd. We wish to thank the ARC for their support as well as the families and stakeholders we have spoken with thus far.

1. Syrian and Iraqi Refugees: Resettlement, Visa Sub-class, Demographic Profile¹

Prior to the recent arrival of Syrian and Iraqi refugees (SIRs), there were already established Syrian and Iraqi communities in Australia—respectively around 16,000 and 66,000 (DSS 2017). While Iraqi settlement in Australia dates back to the Gulf War in 1990-1991, Syrian settlement, even though in small numbers, predates the establishment of Federation (1st of January, 1901).

In 2015, the Australian Government announced the resettlement of 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees, targeted as the key groups in the Syrian conflict. This intake is in addition to the existing Humanitarian Program comprised of 13,750 refugees in 2015-2016, 13,750 refugees in 2016-2017, 16,250 refugees in 2017-2018, and 18,750 refugees in 2018-2019 (DIBP 2017, 4).

The Australian Government prioritised ‘those most in need—the women, children and families of persecuted minorities who have sought refuge from the conflict in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey’ (Australian Government 2015). Accordingly, the refugees are selected for settlement in Australia either from the UNHCR camps or directly from urban communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (DSS 2017). Between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017, the number of Syrian and Iraqi refugees rose to 24,926² with the majority settling in the metropolitan areas of New South Wales and Victoria, followed by Queensland (see Table 1).

Table 1: Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani humanitarian entrants to Australia by State, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	TOTAL
Afghanistan	39	638	0	294	581	190	1,214	259	3,217
Iraq	202	7,991	10	839	74	39	4,255	157	13,567
Syria	19	6,105	44	927	853	81	2,952	378	11,359
TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)	221	14,096	54	1,766	927	120	7,207	535	24,926

Source: Settlement Reporting Facility (SRF). Note that only the settler’s latest known residential (or intended residential) address is recorded. Some settlers have no address details recorded. This and the following tables were obtained from reports generated between 18 and 22 January 2018 through the Settlement Reporting Facility.

Gender, Age, Number of Dependents

The percentage of men and women among Syrian and Iraqi refugees are almost equal, while the percentage of women among Afghani humanitarian entrants (our control group) are higher than men (see Table 2). Afghani humanitarian entrants include a higher number of women who entered Australia via the Woman at Risk visa pathway (subclass 204).

Table 2: Gender of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani humanitarian entrants to Australia, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	Female	Male	TOTAL
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¹ Note that the figures on Syrian and Iraqi refugees presented in this report include SIRs as a whole and does not make a distinction between those who arrived through the 12,000 additional visas for Syrian and Iraqi refugees and those who arrived under the Humanitarian Program. There may be some differences between the two groups, in terms of the level of English knowledge, qualifications, work experiences and ethnic and religious backgrounds, which needs further investigation.

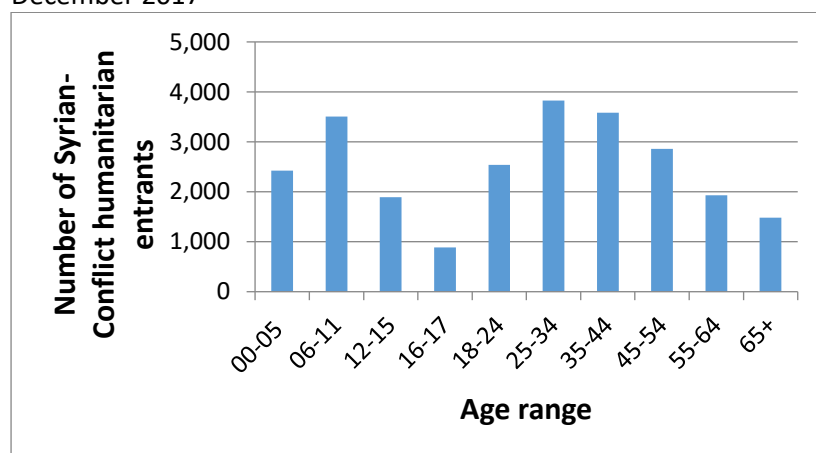
² This figure includes 12,000 additional visas for Syrian and Iraqi refugees as well as those who arrived under the Humanitarian Program between 2015 and 2017 (Department of Home Affairs 2017a).

Afghanistan	1,720	1,497	3,217
Iraq	6,937	6,630	13,567
Syria	5,655	5,704	11,359
TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)	12,592	12,334	24,926

Source: (SRF)

Most Syrian and Iraqi refugees are young: between 18 and 44 years old. Almost a quarter of the accepted SIRs are children up to age 11 years (see Figure 1). The majority of (adult) Syrian conflict refugees are married (see Table 3) and of those with family dependents, this included 3 to 5 dependents (see Figure 3).

Figure 1: Age of Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian entrants to Australia, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017



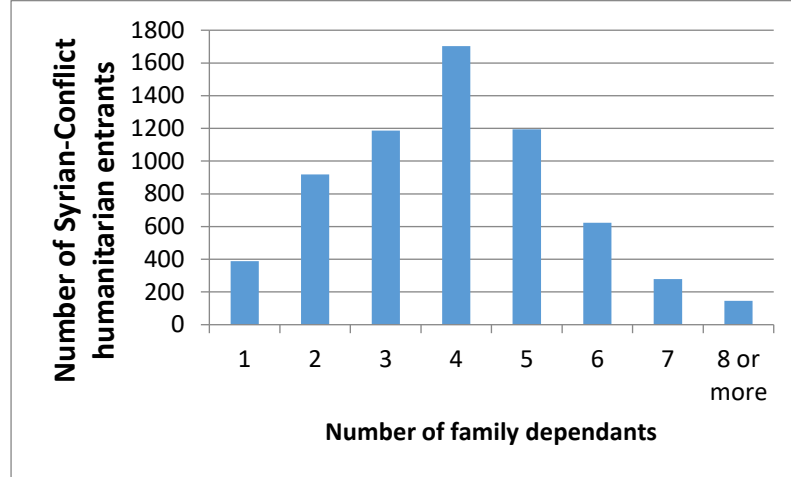
Source: (SRF)

Table 3: Marital status of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani humanitarian entrants to Australia, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	De facto partner	Divorced	Engaged	Married	Never married	Not recorded	Separated	Widowed	TOTAL
Afghanistan	0	16	6	1,137	1,833	4	12	209	3,217
Iraq	1	58	12	5,846	7,040	7	48	555	13,567
Syria	5	37	20	5,067	5,840	15	16	359	11,359
TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)	6	95	32	10,913	12,880	22	64	914	24,926

Source: (SRF)

Figure 2: Number of dependants of each Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian entrant who had family dependants and arrived in Australia between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017



Source: (SRF)

Visa Categories

The refugee and humanitarian visas in Australia are defined by different subclasses, including Refugee visa (subclass 200), In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201), Global Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 202), Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203), and Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) (Department of Home Affairs 2017b).

- Refugee visa (subclass 200) is a permanent residence visa that allows the visa holders to: live, work, study, enrol in Medicare (Australia's national health benefits scheme) indefinitely, attend English language classes, access certain social security payments, apply for citizenship after four years of residence, and propose family members to apply for permanent residence. It can be applied for if the applicant is outside of Australia and outside of his/her home country and is subject to persecution in his/her home country. In order to be able to apply for this visa, one needs to be referred by the UNHCR to the Australian Government. There are no fees for the Refugee visa, and the Australian Government is responsible for paying the travel and associated costs to Australia.
- Global Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 202) has the same requirements and benefits as the 200 visa subclass. However, unlike the 200 visa, 202 visas can be applied for if the applicant is subject to 'substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of [his/her] human rights in [his/her] home country and [is] proposed by a person or organisation in Australia' (DIBP 2017). Importantly to qualify under this visa category, the applicant must be proposed by residents in Australia. Notably, the holders of the Global Special Humanitarian visa are responsible for payment of their own travel costs. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) offers partial financial assistance for the journey of migration and settlement but the applicant must apply for this.
- Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) has the same benefits as 200 and 202 visa sub-classes. A female applicant can apply for this visa if she is outside of Australia and her home country and does not have 'the protection of a male relative and [is] in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of [her] gender' (DIBP 2017). In order to apply for this visa, one typically needs to be referred by UNHCR to the Australian Government. There are no fees for the Woman at Risk visa, and the Australian Government is responsible for paying the travel and associated costs to Australia.

In terms of SCR arrivals to Australia, the vast majority arrive on a Global Special Humanitarian visa (see Table 4), which means that they are proposed by other community members (family or friends) or organisations. Such connections also impact their preferences for settlement locations (see Section 7). Importantly, the cost is borne by the proposer for travel.

Table 4: Visa subclass (202 and 204) entrants to subdivisions of NSW, Qld, and Vic, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	NSW (4 subdivisions of Western Sydney)		Qld (3 subdivisions of Brisbane)		Vic (3 subdivisions of Melbourne)		TOTAL
	Visa subclass 202	Visa subclass 204	Visa subclass 202	Visa subclass 204	Visa subclass 202	Visa subclass 204	
Afghanistan	65	28	33	20	41	68	255
Iraq	5,038	207	30	0	1,604	28	6,907
Syria	4,583	136	48	8	1,775	42	6,592
TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)	9,621	343	78	8	3,379	70	13,499

Source: (SRF)

An examination of the entry visa pathways for SIRs and Afghani refugees shows that the great proportion of SIRs arrives in Sydney on Global Special Humanitarian (202) visas (see Figure 3). In comparison, Afghani humanitarian entrants arrive in Sydney mostly on Refugee (200) visas (see Figure 4). While a comparable proportion of SIRs (3%) and Afghani refugees (6%) enter under the Women at Risk pathway (on 204 visas), the proportion of Global Special Humanitarian (202) visas for SIRs (77%) is far greater than the 14% for Afghani refugees, which suggests that, in comparison with Afghani humanitarian entrants, SIRs in Sydney have greater links with their community members on arrival.

Figure 3: Syrian and Iraqi Humanitarian entrants to four Western Sydney subdivisions, by visa subclass

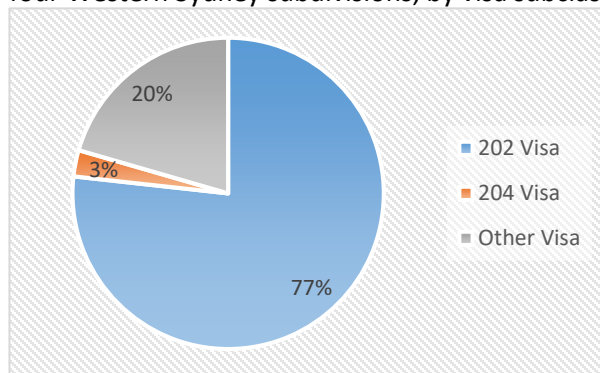
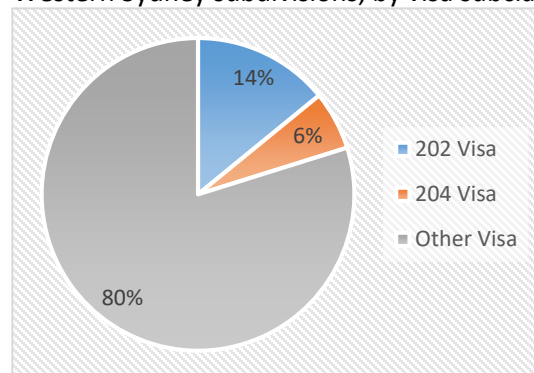
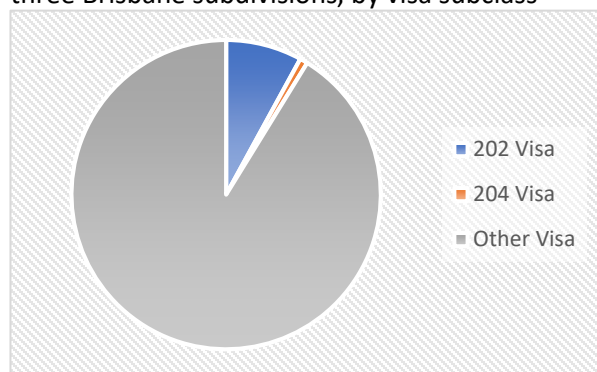


Figure 4: Afghani Humanitarian entrants to four Western Sydney subdivisions, by visa subclass



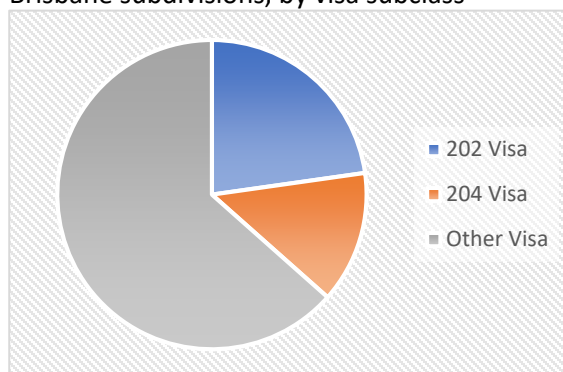
Similar pie charts for refugees entering Melbourne (see Figures 7-8) show that a large proportion of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Melbourne are also 202 visa recipients, while most of those entering the City of Brisbane districts are 200 visa recipients.

Figure 5: Syrian and Iraqi Humanitarian entrants to three Brisbane subdivisions, by visa subclass



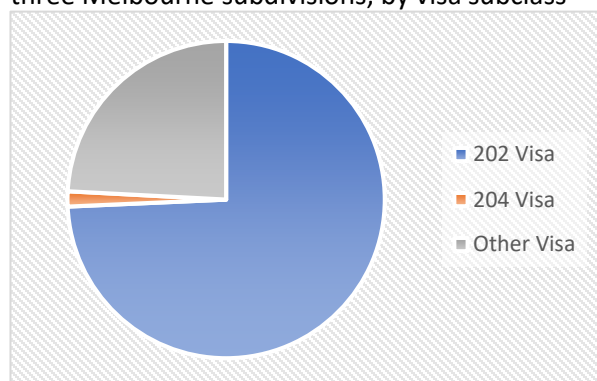
Total number of humanitarian visas for SIRs = 979

Figure 6: Afghani Humanitarian entrants to three Brisbane subdivisions, by visa subclass



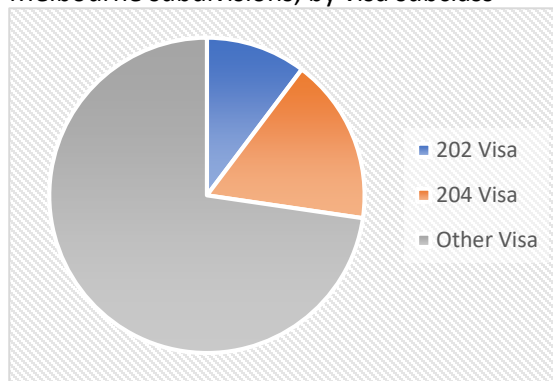
Total number of humanitarian visas for Afghani refugees = 145

Figure 7: Syrian and Iraqi Humanitarian entrants to three Melbourne subdivisions, by visa subclass



Total number of humanitarian visas for SIRs = 4,548

Figure 8: Afghani Humanitarian entrants to three Melbourne subdivisions, by visa subclass



Total number of humanitarian visas for Afghani refugees = 399

2. Characteristics of the Syrian and Iraqi Refugees on Arrival

English Language Competence and Education

The vast majority of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani refugees have reported nil or poor levels of English, and among those who did report, roughly 29% of Afghanis, 24% Iraqis and 27% Syrians have reported poor to very good English, which shows that they already have some level of English language competence (see Table 5).

Table 5: English language proficiency of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani humanitarian entrants to Australia, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	Not recorded	Nil	Poor	Good	Very Good	TOTAL
Afghanistan	132	2,189	726	114	56	3,217
Iraq	217	10,090	2,800	340	120	13,567
Syria	154	8,234	2,441	430	100	11,359
TOTAL	371	18,324	5,241	770	220	24,926

Source: (SRF)

As per the level of education, the majority have not reported any data. Among those who did report, the level of education varies to a great extent, in that there is a broad spectrum of educational attainment. The largest number of Afghani refugees have attained 6+ years tertiary education, followed by 5 and 12 years of schooling, the highest number of Iraqi and Syrian refugees have 6 years of schooling, followed by more advanced levels of education (see Table 6).

Table 6: Level of education of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani humanitarian entrants to Australia, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Years of education	Country of Birth (Settlement)			TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)
	Afghanistan	Iraq	Syria	
1 year schooling	77	246	317	563
2 years schooling	99	295	323	618
3 years schooling	109	309	374	683
4 years schooling	112	396	369	765
5 years schooling	172	537	480	1,017
6 years schooling	127	1283	1355	2,638
7 years schooling	88	469	469	938
8 years schooling	118	591	552	1,143
9 years schooling	58	855	1161	2,016
10 years schooling	60	268	231	499
11 years schooling	48	291	264	555
12 years schooling	163	953	1006	1,959
1 year tertiary	49	173	218	391
2 years tertiary	65	860	808	1,668
3 years tertiary	49	380	290	670
4 years tertiary	54	1064	507	1,571
5 years tertiary	31	323	250	573
6+ years tertiary	178	980	375	1,355
Not Stated	1560	3294	2010	5,304
TOTAL	3,217	13,567	11,359	24,926

Source: (SRF)

Ethnic Background

Syrian and Iraqi refugees come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Refugees from Syria have reported as largely Syrian, followed by Assyrian, Arab, Armenian and Kurdish, while refugees from Iraq are largely Iraqi, followed by Chaldean, Arab, Assyrian and Kurdish backgrounds. Refugees from Afghanistan are relatively more homogeneous, constituted of mostly Hazara backgrounds (see Table 7).

Table 7: Ethnicity of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghani humanitarian entrants to Australia, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Ethnicity	Country of Birth (Settlement)			TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)
	Afghanistan	Iraq	Syria	
Iraqi	0	5376	39	5,415
Syrian	0	285	5120	5,405
Assyrian	0	1405	3840	5,245
Arab (NFD)	0	2863	1377	4,240
Chaldean	5	3192	14	3,206

Hazara (Afghan)	2431	0	0	0
Armenian	0	90	790	880
Kurdish	0	276	128	404
Tajik	287	0	5	5
Pashtun	285	0	0	0
Afghan	169	0	0	0
Palestinian	0	39	0	39
Turkmen	8	7	7	14
No specific	0	6	6	12
Persian/Farsi	13	0	0	0
Hazara (NFD)	9	0	0	0
Chadian	0	8	0	8
Alevi	0	0	7	7
Iranian	0	6	0	6
Middle Eastern	0	0	6	6
Somali	5	0	0	0
Stateless	0	5	0	5
Turkoman	0	0	5	5
Faili Kurd	0	5	0	5
Greek	0	0	5	5
Lebanese	0	0	5	5
TOTAL	3,217	13,563	11,354	24,917

Source: (SRF)

3. Response by Authorities on Arrival

Federal Government

The Australian Government committed a total of AUD\$827 million over four years (2015-16 to 2018-19) to support 12,000 of the refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq, which was an additional group to the Refugee and Humanitarian visa entrants. Of the AUD\$827 million, AUD\$142 million is earmarked for the provision of settlement services (see Australian Government 2016a).

Before arrival, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) is responsible for ensuring all applicants meet the criteria for Refugee and Humanitarian visas. After refugees obtain their visas and arrive in Australia, the Department of Social Services (DSS) becomes responsible for providing settlement guidance and assistance.

All newly arrived refugees, including Syrian and Iraqi refugees, are entitled to receive initial settlement assistance, with a particular focus on their first twelve months. This is provided through the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program, which includes various services in the areas of housing, education and training, language, employment, physical and mental health and well-being, financial management, community participation, family functioning and social support, justice and legal assistance (DSS 2017a).

In each state and territory, HSS are provided by a number of different organisations called Humanitarian Settlement Program Service Providers (see Table 8).

Table 8: Humanitarian Settlement Program Service Provider Locations

State	HSP Contract Region (s)	Settlement Locations	HSP Service Provider
ACT / NSW	Canberra and Surrounds	Canberra; Wollongong; Wagga Wagga; Albury	Australian Red Cross Society
WA	Western Australia	Perth	

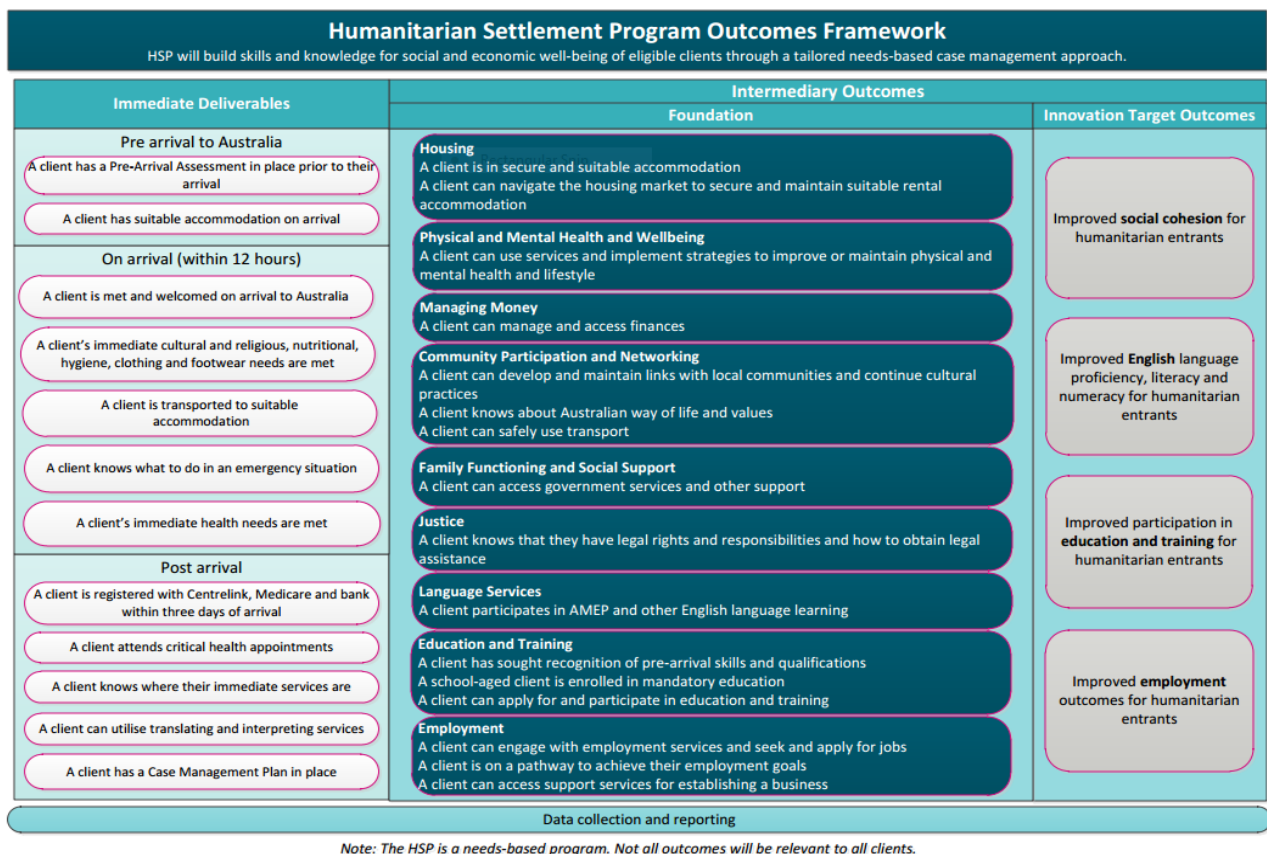
State	HSP Contract Region (s)	Settlement Locations	HSP Service Provider
NSW	Sydney	Sydney	*Settlement Services International Limited
	Regional NSW	Newcastle; Coffs Harbour; Armidale	
QLD	Brisbane and Surrounds	Brisbane; Gold Coast; Logan; Toowoomba	*MDA Ltd
	North Queensland	Cairns; Townsville	
NT	Northern Territory	Darwin	Melaleuca Refugee Centre
SA	South Australia	Adelaide; Mount Gambier	*AMES Australia
TAS	Tasmania	Hobart; Launceston	
VIC	Melbourne	Melbourne	
	Regional Victoria	Mildura; Shepparton; Geelong; Wodonga	

Source: DSS (2018)

(* Partner Investigators (PIs) in this project)

The service providers assist refugees with specialised and targeted services in these areas determined according to their individual needs and circumstances. These services may include, for instance, meeting clients at the airport, property induction (such as for instance, provision of information about tenancy rights and responsibilities, assistance with electricity modes and methods in their homes), provision of an initial food package, assistance with registering and enrolling in institutions such as schools, banks, Medicare, Centrelink, Job Active and other key agencies, assistance with navigating the public transport system as well as connecting them with other community members and recreation programs. The service providers must ensure that newly arrived refugees have found suitable accommodation within their first six months, have registered all school age children with schools and have understood the services available to them. Below is the list of outcomes service providers work to achieve (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Humanitarian Settlement Program Outcomes Framework



Source: DSS (2017b)

HSS providers also link newly arrived humanitarian entrants with the following settlement programs:

1. Settlement Grants: provides settlement services to communities in disadvantaged locations.
2. Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP): provides up to 510 hours of English language training. This program is administered by the Department of Education and Training. Extensions on the hours of tutelage may be undertaken on a case by case basis.
3. Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training (SLPET): provides 200 additional hours to AMEP with the express aim of improving language skills for employment. This program is administered by the Department of Education and Training.
4. Skills for Education and Employment (SEE): provides various training opportunities for job seekers. This program is administered by the Department of Education and Training.
5. Jobactive: assists jobseekers to find a job. This program is administered by the Department of Employment.
6. Disability Employment Services: assists jobseekers with a disability to find a job. This program is administered by the Department of Social Services.
7. Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma: assists and provides services for migrants and refugees who are experiencing mental health difficulties due to previous experiences of torture and trauma. This program is administered by the Department of Health.
8. Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS): provides 7/24 translating and interpreting support. This program is administered by the Department of Home Affairs.

Following their initial phase of settlement (usually lasting between six and twelve months), humanitarian entrants are referred to general settlement services for migrants, including NGOs such as migrant resource centres (MRCs), migrant service agencies and a number of organisations funded under the Settlement Grants Program.

Additionally, the Department of Social Services (DSS) initiated the Career Pathways Pilot (CPP) in order to help refugees find suitable and sustainable employment. To be eligible, refugees should have arrived in Australia in the past five years through the Humanitarian Program and should have a good level of English and qualifications earned overseas. The pilot will be effective for at least three years and will provide employment opportunities for up to 1200 humanitarian entrants in line with their qualifications and career goals (DSS 2016). In the three states hosting the largest number of SIRs, Career Pathway Advisors are located in AMES Australia in Melbourne, Multicultural Development Australia (MDA) in Toowoomba, Queensland and Settlement Services International (SSI) in New South Wales. Improving the employment outcomes for refugees, including SIRs, is a priority for the Australian Federal Government, as it is seen as the most effective way for refugees to become 'self-reliant' while it is also seen as a key to successful integration.

State Government Service Arrangements: New South Wales

New South Wales is the largest recipient of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. As part of the 12,000 places, around 6,570 SIRs arrived in New South Wales during the period November 2015 and July 2017. Notably, there is a clear movement of SIRs into NSW from other states due to higher levels of ethno-cultural specific community links and available employment opportunities. Overall, among all humanitarian arrivals in NSW, more than 9,980 were people displaced by conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

In June 2016, the NSW Government committed AUD\$146 million to develop and ensure the appropriate services for the newly arrived refugees over the course of the following four years. The following new funding sources and some existing programs and services will be providing support to the newly arrived SIRs.

- Education: Intensive English Centres to help SIRs, (among other groups of refugees, humanitarian entrants and migrants) to learn English. Some SIRs are also eligible to apply to the NSW Government for educational and vocational training subsidies (NSW Government 2017a).
- Employment: In May 2017, the NSW Government dedicated AUD\$22 million over the course of four years to the Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP). This program is administered by the NSW Department of Industry and delivered Settlement Services International (SSI) in cooperation with a number of corporations (see Section 4) and aims to support up to 6,000 refugees and 1,000 asylum seekers with finding employment in Western Sydney and the Illawarra (NSW Government 2017a). A number of private corporations have committed to developing specialised employment programs for refugees (see examples in Section 4), and the NSW Government has pledged to employ at least 100 refugees across the public sector (NSW Government 2017b).
- Housing: In May 2017, the NSW Government dedicated AUD\$3.9 million to assist refugees to find safe and sustainable housing.
- Health: A team of Refugee Health Nurses under the Refugee Health Nurse Screening Program provides refugees with relevant health education, referrals to relevant public health clinics and information regarding trauma-counselling services (NSW Government 2017c).
- Legal Aid: Funded by the NSW Government, Legal Aid Refugee Service assists refugees to learn about their legal rights and obligations and provides them with legal advice as needed (Legal Aid 2017). Since its inception in 2016, the service based in Bankstown has supported around 700 people (NSW Government 2017a).

State Government Service Arrangements: Victoria

Victoria is the second largest recipient of SIRs expecting to receive around 4,000 of 12,000 (in addition to 4,000 refugees arriving through the Humanitarian Program) (Victoria State Government 2016a). The Victorian Government has dedicated the following new funding schemes to ensure SIRs can successfully settle into their new communities:

- Education: In October 2017, the Minister for Early Childhood Education announced a AUD\$600,000 funding booty to assist kindergarten teachers, maternal and child health nurses and others to gain a better understanding of refugee families, particularly with regards to the refugee's experience of torture and trauma. This funding will help to create professional development programs that will be delivered by Foundation House in partnership with the Hume City Council hosting a large number of SIRs (Victoria State Government 2017).
- Health: The Victorian Government has committed an additional AUD\$11 million to assist refugees with specific physical and mental health-related needs. A number of specialised services and programs, including the Refugee Health Program, the Refugee Health Fellows Program, immigrant and refugee health clinics in a number of hospitals, the new Cabrini Refugee and Asylum Seeker Health Hub, the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, the Refugee Minor Program, and the Victorian Refugee Health Network, will be supporting newly arrived SIRs (Victoria State Government 2016b, 5).

State Government Service Arrangements: Queensland

The Queensland Government (2017) has offered to settle up to 3,500 Syrian and Iraqi refugees and is expecting to receive around 1,400 refugees. The Government has recently dedicated the following additional services to meet the needs of the higher number of refugees:

- Education: Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides extra hours of English tuition. English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) programs are offered in schools as integrated in the curriculum, in addition to intensive English classes available in key sites. TAFE provides the Pathway Gardens hub at Logan and Bracken Ridge—two districts of Brisbane hosting a large number of Syrian conflict refugees—at Levels 3 and 4 with some opportunity for transitioning to a Diploma program.
- Health: In 2016 Refugee Health and Wellbeing: A Strategic Framework for Queensland was launched, and in 2017 Refugee Health Network Queensland (2017) was established. In 2016, the dental fair expanded its reach to include Logan and the Gold Coast to meet the needs of the newly arrived refugees from Syria and Iraq. Around 300 volunteers from the Tzu Chi Foundation, Queensland Health, MDA, Access Community Services, Red Cross, Mater Health Services, Micah Projects Inc, Brisbane South PHN and medical students worked to provide health education and support for dental care in addition to offering coordination services, reception, administrative assistance, childcare and cooking for refugees (Queensland Government 2017, 11).

Local Council Initiatives

In Australia, there are a number of Refugee Welcome Zones—that is a Local Government Areas (LGA) that have committed to welcome refugees and to enhance cultural diversity in the community. This initiative began in June 2002 as part of the Refugee Week celebrations, and currently there are 143 Refugee Welcome Zones throughout the country (RCOA 2017).³

³ See the list of current Refugee Welcome Zones: (RCOA 2015).

Fairfield—one of the Refugee Welcome Zones, in the Western suburbs of Sydney—has a long history of welcoming diverse communities including migrants and refugees. The Fairfield Migrant Interagency hold monthly meetings where service providers from local ethno-specific community groups, government and non-government organisations come together to identify the changing needs of the local community. Recently, Fairfield has witnessed a 500% increase in the average number of refugee settler arrivals to the city with the majority of them having links with communities from Iraq and Syria (Fairfield City 2017). Accordingly, the council has required increased funding to continue to service the needs of the growing community with such program as the Fairfield Emerging Communities Action Partnership (FECAP), which assists newly arriving refugees to build linkages with existing local communities.

Sydney's Inner West Council—has established a Refugee Welcome Centre in Callan Park in Rozelle to provide (limited) short-term accommodation for SIRs (IWC 2015). The Refugee Welcome Centre has since welcomed more than 1,000 refugees, mostly SIRs who live in the outer suburbs of Sydney, offering the new arrivals assistance during their resettlement. The Catholic Archdiocese through its Justice and Peace Office has provided the Council with funding to hire two on-site personnel for the Centre (IWC 2017).

4. Response by Civil Society

A number of NGOs, volunteer groups and corporations including major businesses and small-scale not-for-profit social enterprises have committed to assist SIRs by providing them with work experience, personal goods, recreational activities, mentoring and assistance in schools and/or English language training.

Not-for-profit Organisations and Volunteer Groups

An essential philanthropic organisations assisting SIRs is Community Hubs Australia (CHA), which primarily works to fund and facilitate programs for refugee and migrant families, with a particular focus on women and children, as well as some international students (CHA 2017).⁴ Community Hubs are found to help refugee and migrant children's smooth transition to school, promote a sense of belonging and wellbeing in their new communities, and increase parents' awareness and understanding of the expectations of schools and the education system—more broadly—in Australia. They also help teachers with developing a better understanding of refugee children's diverse linguistic and cultural needs (Centre for Community Child Health 2017, 25-27).

CHAs assist refugees and new migrants to access services and activities in their local communities, including playgroups for pre-school children, English language classes, various community engagement programs such as gardening, sewing groups, coffee circles and also the provision of services targeting vocational pathways.

Currently, there are 59 Community Hubs (CHA) in 3 main states of new arrivals (New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland), in 11 highly diverse Local Government Areas (LGAs) assisting around 8,000 families across Australia (CHA 2017). Each Hub has a designated Hub Leader who has extensive knowledge about their local community and available services. Hub Leaders develop close relationships with service providers, and therefore come to play a critical role in information sharing, network/community building and facilitating access to services.

Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) was incorporated in 2008 as the national peak body for settlement sector. SCoA (2018), currently represents over 80 settlement agencies across Australia and operates as a network of settlement service providers, in addition to providing direct settlement services to those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, sharing innovation and best practices through their

⁴ Community Hub model was piloted in southern Hume under the Supporting Parents—Developing Children (SPDC) program, which Scanlon Foundation contributed over AUD\$1 million. Today Scanlon Foundation (2017) continues to contribute to the funding of National Community Hubs program.

innovation centre and policy hub, and contributing to better settlement policy and program design in collaboration with the Australian Government.

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA 2017), based in Sydney, is the national umbrella body for refugees and asylum seekers with around 200 member organisations. RCOA works on ameliorating Australia's refugee and asylum policies through research, collaboration with member organisations and refugee communities to identify key issues and conduct advocacy work.

Refugee Communities Advocacy Network (RCAN) operates under the RCOA and serves as a network for people from refugee backgrounds to come together to discuss and pursue advocacy work to improve Australia's refugee and asylum policies.

The Brisbane Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Network (BRASS 2017) links refugees and asylum seekers with organisations providing services for them. They also work for advocacy and awareness raising as well as enabling neighbourhoods where refugees and asylum seekers live to be more welcoming and inclusive.

Additionally, there have been a number of volunteer groups assisting the newly arrived SIRs among other refugees.

- The charity GIVIT distributes donated goods to assist the 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi arrivals in addition to other Australians in need.
- Volunteers teach English under the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Home Tutor Scheme.
- In Sydney, Bower Reuse and Repair Centre collects personal goods to distribute to newly arrived refugees.
- Dandelion Support Network collects nursery items to distribute to refugee mothers and babies.
- Australian Refugee Volunteers (ARV 2017) is a volunteer-run organisation, based in Sydney providing social outings, recreational activities and school holiday camps for children and young refugees.
- Friends of Refugees (FOR 2017) provides refugees and asylum seekers in Melbourne's south-east with material aid, food aid, education support and employment and training opportunities through various social enterprises.
- Based in Fairfield, Sydney Lost in Books (2017) sells children's books in various languages spoken by migrants and refugees.

Corporations and Peak Professional/Employer Bodies

A number of Australian corporations and peak professional/employer bodies—including Telstra, Harvey Norman, NRMA, Australia Post, First State Super, the Business Council of Australia, Clubs NSW, Crescent Wealth, Henry Davis York, IAG, the Master Builders Association of NSW and TransUrban—have committed to assist the NSW Government's new program of AUD\$27 million (AUD\$6.83 million per year) to hire up to 7,000 refugees and 1,000 asylum seekers over the course of the following four years.

This program includes the AUD\$22 million Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP), which is administered and delivered by Settlement Services International in NSW, to assist refugees to have training and career development programs, internships, scholarships and mentoring programs that will help refugees to find suitable and sustainable employers. The AMP Foundation helped with the development of the program and committed to provide an additional AUD\$500,000. The RESP focuses on Western Sydney and the Illawarra regions that together receive the majority of the refugee intake as part of the humanitarian resettlement program. The RESP aims to assist refugees who have arrived in Australia since 1 December 2011, but particularly targets those who have arrived from 1 December 2015. Refugees and asylum seekers are able to participate in this program through referrals either from their Humanitarian Settlement Services provider, their Career Pathways Provider or other government agencies and

programs. They can also self-refer themselves as long as they do not receive similar benefits from another agency simultaneously (Department of Industry 2016).

Corporations participating in this program provide training and work experience opportunities and some of the other related navigational assistance in the refugees' search for employment. Examples include:

- Driver's licenses help refugees enormously while they look for work and also when they start working. To this end, the National Roads and Motorists' Association is helping refugees to get a driver's license in NSW through two driver education programs in Western Sydney and the Illawarra regions.
- First State Super, a not-for-profit Australian superannuation fund, provides internships for refugees, which assists them with gaining the local work experience that many businesses require. Since the inception of the program, some of the participating refugees have gone on to become full-time workers. Similarly, Australia Post provides refugees with work experience opportunities.
- Together with Western Sydney University, Crescent Wealth (2016), an investment company, funds scholarships for high-achieving students from refugee backgrounds.
- ClubsNSW provides 30 jobs for refugees at registered clubs in the Greater Western Sydney. Refugees gain employment following a series of training programs. As of April 2017, five graduates of the hospitality program have been employed in various Western Sydney clubs (ClubsNSW 2017).
- Telstra is developing community programs to create job opportunities for newly arrived refugees (Patty 2017).⁵

Additionally, Cotton Australia, which is a member of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), has recently signed a Memorandum with the Migration Council of Australia pledging to roll out a refugee resettlement pilot project in rural and regional parts of Australia. The existing Refugee Welcome Zones include Griffith, Dubbo, Gunnedah, Moree and Toowoomba. This pilot project will help coordinating employers in two regional areas that can offer jobs to refugees (CA 2016).

Friendly Nation Initiative, launched by the former head of the Business Council of Australia Tony Shepherd and Director of the Migration Council Carla Wilshire, helps to link businesses looking to hire by connecting them with refugees with appropriate skills and qualifications. Several major companies, including Wesfarmers, Woolworths and Harvey Norman have been participants in this initiative (ABC 2015).

A number of platforms also help to connect refugee job seekers with businesses:

- Jobactive is an employment service at national scale targeting job seekers and employers looking for the right employees. Jobactive providers that have an understanding of labour market demands help job seekers with the skills and attributes the employers need, and some local Jobactive providers encourage employers particularly to look for migrants and refugees (Australian Government 2016b).
- In Victoria, the Jobs Victoria Employment Network aims to help migrants and refugees to find long-term employment. VICSEG New Futures has recently been awarded a AUD\$550,000 funding to place disadvantaged jobseekers into long-term employment. JobsVictoria (2017), together with VICSEG New Futures, organise programs for jobseekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds and some have already been placed in the aged and disability care sector, areas of high labour demand.

⁵ In 2017, Telstra also chose the CEO of Settlement Services International, Violet Roumeliotis, as the Australian Business Woman of the Year (ABC 2017), which demonstrates the importance the company is giving to the subject as well as SSI's important work on refugees' employment.

- Refugee Talent is an essential digital platform that connects refugees, in particular, with corporations offering short or long-term opportunities. It was founded in 2015 by Nirary Dacho who was a refugee himself with IT skills, and Anna Robson who previously worked in the Nauru Detention Centre for an international NGO. The two decided to establish the platform after they met at the Sydney Techfugee Hackathon⁶.

There are also a number of small-scale businesses including, not-for-profit social enterprises, which assist refugees to have training and employment.

- The Bread & Butter Project (2017) in inner-west Sydney (NSW), provides refugees with training, work experience and employment at local bakeries and cafés.
- Catalysr (2017), a start-up incubator based in Parramatta (NSW) offering intensive entrepreneurship programs for migrants and refugees to develop their own businesses.
- Green Connect (2018) helps settled refugees to find work in the Illawarra region in NSW, an area with one of the highest unemployment rates in Australia by recovering waste and growing fair food—ensuring humane working conditions and wages for the workers who are largely former refugees and young people.
- Space2b (2017) is a Melbourne based initiative located in St Kilda. This is an art and design social enterprise founded to assist newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to become financially independent. Space2b helps refugees develop their business and English language skills and to promote and sell their artistic products.
- ASRC Catering (2017) of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Footscray (Melbourne), a not-for-profit social enterprise, offers hospitality training to asylum seekers caters food reflecting their diverse cultures.
- Free to Feed (FTF 2017) employs asylum seekers to organise pop up cooking classes inside Free to Feed's kitchen in Thornbury, North Melbourne or homes, cafés or schools.
- Brewing for Change Inc., Long Street Coffee (2017) in Melbourne offers a 3-month traineeship in hospitality industry with a particular focus on barista training for refugees.
- The Social Studio (2018) in Melbourne operates a training school for migrants and refugees in hospitality, fashion and manufacturing.
- CareerSeekers (2018) which was founded in 2015 works to create employment opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers by facilitating 12-week paid internships for university students and mid-career professionals who had tertiary qualifications in their home countries. These internships provide them with much needed local work experience. Westpac, one of the major supporters of CareerSeekers, provides AUD\$300,000 and employs 10 interns with plans to employ higher numbers in 2018 (White 2017). As of December 2017, CareerSeekers has placed 170 interns in 38 companies including Lendlease, IAG and Ericsson to name but a few (White 2017).

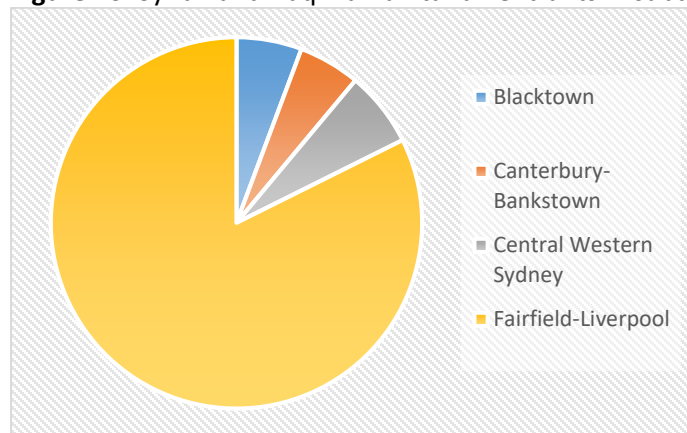
5. Settlement Locations

In Australia, humanitarian entrants receive permanent citizenship and are free to settle and to move. The Department of Social Services (2017c) encourages regional settlement 'as much as possible, in all states and territories' and have chosen a number of regional settlement areas according to work opportunities, availability of affordable housing as well as health, education and employment services, interpreting and translation support, communities' ethnic/cultural and religious characteristics, and the local council and community support.

⁶ Techfugees (2017) is a non-profit organization organizing conferences, workshops and meetups around the world 'in an effort to generate tech solutions for and with refugees'.

As previously noted, humanitarian entrants tend to choose locations where there are already some members of their own community and/or services available for them. Often these are found in outer metropolitan areas that have pre-existing services available for diverse groups. Since their arrival, the Syrian and Iraqi refugees have tended to reside in areas where there are readily available services in their community language. For instance, in Sydney, many SIRs moved to the Fairfield and Liverpool areas (see Figure 10). The relatively sudden intake resulted in Fairfield City Council requesting more support from the NSW Government (Hunter 2017, Brennan 2017), but some SIRs who first arrived in Fairfield are also reported to have moved to other Western Sydney suburbs—primarily for employment reasons but also housing.

Figure 10: Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian entrants in subdivisions of Western Sydney



The regional settlement areas of NSW include Wollongong, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, Albury, Wagga Wagga and Armidale (NSW Government 2017a).⁷ Armidale, situated west of Coffs Harbour, has recently been chosen as a new settlement location, expecting the arrival of at least 200 SIRs from February 2018 onwards (DSS 2017c). In Victoria, the main regional settlement areas have been Geelong and Shepparton, respectively one and two hours drive away from Melbourne city centre. In Melbourne, SIRs have largely settled in the north-western parts of the city, such as Hume, Darebin, Moreland, Whittlesea, Wyndham, Brimbank and Melton, where there are already some established Syrian and Iraqi communities. In Queensland, the main settlement areas have been Logan and Bracken Ridge (suburbs of the City of Brisbane), the Gold Coast and Toowoomba (Roe 2016). Tables 9, 10 and 11 show that Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian entrants settle in particular areas of major cities: largely in Fairfield-Liverpool in Sydney; Logan City in Brisbane; and the Hume City subdivision of Melbourne.

Table 9: Humanitarian entrants to NSW in targeted Statistical Subdivisions, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	Subdivisions of Western Sydney				Regional	TOTAL
	Blacktown	Canterbury-Bankstown	Central Western Sydney	Fairfield-Liverpool	Coffs Harbour	
Afghanistan	40	24	345	52	53	514
Iraq	267	61	180	6,784	112	7,404

⁷ As of mid-2017, at least 47 Ezidi families successfully settled in Wagga Wagga (Kassoua 2017).

Syria	447	613	644	3,541	78	5,323
TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)	714	674	824	10,325	190	12,727

Source: (SRF)

Table 10: Humanitarian entrants to QLD in targeted Statistical Subdivisions, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	Subdivisions of Brisbane			Regional	TOTAL
	Inner Brisbane	Logan City	Northwest Outer Brisbane	Toowoomba	
Afghanistan	15	123	7	62	207
Iraq	80	231	157	192	660
Syria	99	311	101	204	715
TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)	179	542	258	396	1,375

Source: (SRF)

Table 11: Humanitarian entrants to VIC in targeted Statistical Subdivisions, arriving between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2017

Country of Birth (Settlement)	Subdivisions of Melbourne			Regional	TOTAL
	Hume City	Moreland City	Greater Dandenong	Shepparton	
Afghanistan	13	0	386	96	495
Iraq	2382	89	38	4	2,513
Syria	1719	258	62	73	2,112
TOTAL (Iraq + Syria)	4,101	347	100	77	4,625

Source: (SRF)

6. Post-arrival Programs and Policies

Settlement

A number programs and services are available for humanitarian entrants prior to their departure to Australia and in their first phase of settlement to assist them with 'successful' settlement, 'to participate in Australian society as quickly as possible... [and] ... to integrate as peacefully and harmoniously as possible' (Spinks 2009: 4).

Prior to departure: The Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO) is provided to humanitarian entrants over the age of five years. This five-day program gives participants practical information about the journey to Australia, the post-arrival settlement services and general information about Australian laws and norms (DSS 2017d).

Post-arrival: According to the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), all humanitarian entrants, including SIRs, are entitled to receive initial settlement assistance during their first six to twelve months through the following programs and services:

1. Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program—including case coordination/management, information and referrals to relevant agencies.

2. Complex Case Support Program—in cases where needs cannot be met by the HSS and the Settlement Grants Program, such as services related to some physical and mental health problems, domestic violence intervention, grief or relationship counselling.
3. Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)—including a two-week settlement course, English language training for up to 510 hours, which in some cases can be extended to 700 hours, as well as 200 hours of vocational English and an orientation with Australian workplace culture and practices⁸.
4. Settlement Grants Program—building on HSS and including community development projects from either a casework or community-based approach.
5. Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)—available 24/7 for more than 160 language and dialect groups, free of charge for non-English speaking humanitarian entrants when they need to access federal, state and local government authorities and medical practitioners among other such services (RCOA 2013).

Education

Legally all young (school aged) refugees in Australia have access to free public education like all other migrants who have permanent residency. They are provided with intensive language support with a focus on the families as a whole particularly in the early years of settlement (first 1-5 years). Research shows that support for refugee students requires a coordinated whole-school approach. Schools are also encouraged to work on activities related to raising awareness particularly during World Refugee Week. This section will provide a brief overview of the education policies in the three major states, as education policies are largely defined at the level of state governments who are responsible for the education budget and distribution of financial resources.

New South Wales

The NSW Government has committed AUD\$93 million to support school-aged young people to successfully settle. The funding will meet core-schooling costs including intensive English language classes and transition support. AUD\$2.5 million will be provided for a School Liaison Program run by the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). AUD\$720,000 will be provided for Community Hubs designated to migrant, refugee women and their pre-school children. AUD\$2.7 million will be provided for education-related expenses for refugee students in non-government schools. AUD\$2.2 million of this will be allocated to NSW Catholic schools to fund the provision of intensive English language classes for newly arrived refugee students from Syria and Iraq (Catholic Education Commission 2017).

Funding supports refugee students who have been enrolled in an Australian school for less than three years and can be used to provide a safe, welcoming school environment and orientation to school, bilingual learning support, counsellor support, assistance to teachers to differentiate teaching and learning, provision of additional English language learning and literacy support, tutorial support to assist refugee students to complete homework and assessment tasks, peer support to assist refugee students to participate actively in the school community and mentoring to support refugee students in their transition to work or further education. While welcoming the funding, some schools have admitted that the funding available does not cover all of their expenses. For example, Holy Saviour Catholic School in Sydney's southwest says the extra funds only cover about a third of what it spends with financial resources therefore falling short (see Robinson 2017).

⁸ Humanitarian entrants are eligible for participation in the AMEP only during the first five years of settlement and they must commence participation within their first year of arrival in Australia.

In addition to the services implemented with this funding arrangement, there are also a number of programs and services available for refugee students studying in NSW. They can attend the Beginning School Well program to ease their transition to the school system in Australia. Those who are in Years 8 to 12 can also attend the Multicultural Playwright Program to develop their creative writing skills and build friendships. The NSW Government Education Department also established refugee teacher networks in Holroyd and Fairfield, and Refugee Support Leader positions and Refugee Student Support teams to offer psychological expertise to schools and as such assist refugee students and their families. Finally, as of 2016 the work readiness program: Ready Arrive Work has helped 200 refugee students in 14 different schools (NSW Government Department of Education 2016). Intensive English Centres that are attached to high schools and specialist refugee support teachers have a great role in enhancing education outcomes for SIRs.

Victoria

In Victoria, the Refugee Education Support Program (RESP) is a Department funded initiative in partnership with Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and Foundation House in collaboration with Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV) and Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) (Victoria State Government 2017).

RESP works with schools in order to identify the gaps and implement solutions to support the education outcomes of students from refugee backgrounds. In this context, professional learning and consultation are provided to build the capacity of school staff, out-of-school hours care providers and volunteers. Community engagement programs and activities are implemented to provide support for recently arrived families from refugee backgrounds. Partnerships between community, business and government organisations are also developed. Schools participating in the RESP are set up as a cluster. Clusters operate for two years and are grouped by geographical region. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Wellbeing Supplement provides funding for the 2017-2020 period to eligible schools to support the wellbeing needs of students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds (Victoria State Government 2017).

Queensland

In Queensland, a Refugee Program is implemented to assist schools with refugee students, especially those with complex learning, social and psychological needs. Funds are allocated to the seven regions of the State based on the number of 'weighted' refugees per region—the weightings are calculated on the number of refugees depending on how many years they have lived in Australia. Students are classified as being either 'New Arrivals', '1st year', '2nd year' or '3rd year' with a greater proportion of the funds allocated for 'New Arrivals'. Funding can be used for language tuition, homework assistance, counselling, interpreter services, job preparation, intensive teaching or teacher aide support development of supporting educational materials that can be used state-wide. In metropolitan areas, AUD\$250 per refugee student is allocated for every term for each school (Queensland Government 2017).

Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) has also been particularly involved in young SIRs as many SIRs are Catholic. A recent study conducted by the Social Justice Commission, Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba (2012) found that the length of intensive language support is not adequate and the curriculum offerings differ markedly from school to school. Some schools apply a whole school ethos, which is welcoming to students from refugee backgrounds, while others withdraw students for a few days per week and mainstream them on other days.

Employment

Syrian and Iraqi refugees can benefit from the existing programs targeting migrants and refugees in general. The Career Pathways Pilot (CPP), delivered by service providers in each state, assists refugees to find employment in line with their previous qualifications and work experience (see Section 4).

New South Wales

Settlement Services International (SSI) administers and delivers the Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP). Established in 2017 to support newly arrived refugees, including SIRs, the program aims to assist refugees in gaining sustainable work particularly in Western Sydney and the Illawarra regions of New South Wales (see Section 4). SSI also delivers the CPP for refugees in New South Wales.

Victoria

In Victoria, AMES Australia is funded to deliver the CPP for refugees in Melbourne.

Queensland

Launched in late 2015 and through the help of committed companies, Multicultural Development Australia (MDA) offers the Work & Welcome 500 initiative, which sees participating companies funding 12-week job placements specifically designed for SIRs in Queensland (MDA 2017). MDA is also funded to deliver the CPP for refugees in Toowoomba.

7. Public and Political Discourses and Responses

The intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees has occurred at a time when the public and political discourses around the arrival of refugees in Australia are polarised. In the political realm, a dehumanising discourse around refugees and particularly asylum seekers claims that ‘boat people’ are ‘queue jumping’, resulting in their representation as being dishonest and illegitimate (Clark 2013, Nicholson and Dodd 2012, Bickers 2017, Rowe and O’Brien 2014). This more general discourse has implications for all refugees regardless of how they arrive. In their analysis of recent parliamentary debates, Rowe and O’Brien (2014) argue that ‘[p]arliamentarians apply the label of legitimacy based on implicit criteria concerning the mode of arrival of asylum seekers, their respect for the so-called ‘queue’, and their ability to pay to travel to Australia’. Also, often politicians emphasise refugees’ and asylum seekers’ presumed ‘cost’ to the Australian nation (Every 2008). These political discourses are accompanied by the racial profiling and stereotyping, particularly of male refugees in the popular media, the overwhelming message being that they are dangerous and violent (MacDonald 2017, Walker Rettberg, and Gajjala 2016). They are also presented as suffering from torture and trauma and as dependent on social welfare, implicit in which is the burden on the financial coffers – presenting them as an economic burden and a burden to the health sector (Reid and Al Khalil 2013). More broadly, refugees and asylum seekers are presented as comprising large numbers when the reality is that the humanitarian intake makes up the lowest proportion of the broader migration program.

Taken together the political and popular media discourse has enhanced the polarised opinions in the public realm: while some groups have vehemently opposed the acceptance of refugees and asylum seekers, others have criticised Australia’s mandatory detention and offshore processing system for asylum seekers who arrived without permission (see Phillips and Spinks 2011). In 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on migrant human rights also condemned these practices (OCHR 2016). Opinion polls regarding the acceptance of refugees and asylum seekers are also divided: while a recent study suggested most survey respondents believed that mandatory offshore detention was cruel (TAI 2016), another online poll conducted showed the majority opposing the acceptance of refugees despite increasing numbers of people in need of protection (Phillips 2016). Overall, a number of studies conducted on asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat found that most respondents considered them as illegitimate and not ‘genuine refugees’ (McKay et al 2016). For instance, some believed that asylum seekers received lump sum payments and preferential treatment for services like public housing (Hasham 2016). Finally, in line with political and mediated discourses, people smugglers were often associated with threats to national

security, adding another layer to the negative discourse surrounding refugees and asylum seekers (Suhnan et al 2012).

The discourse surrounding the recently arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees has also been divisive, where at times it has revolved around selecting those from particular religious groups; others have placed an emphasis on the positive net contribution in terms of financial and human capital that the families and individuals will make. This discursive context is important to understand as it shapes the experiences of families in our project. The dominant message from the government perspective has been one of engaging in a process of careful refugee selection and administration as a way of creating equal access, 'avoiding queue jumpers', and protecting Australia's borders (Doherty 2015, Medhora 2015). While a moot point, it is important to note that evidence throughout Australia's history has shown that both migrants and refugees have made a positive net contribution to the Australian economy (Groutsis, et al. 2016). There is, therefore, little dispute that there will be economic and social gains (Connaughton 2015, Australian Productivity Commission 2015).

8. Concluding Remarks

This background paper describes some of the available services and programs for the recently arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees, the discursive context and their characteristics based on visa categories, ethnicity, age, gender, self-reported English capability and education level. At our first international meeting in March (13th-15th March 2018) with national partner investigators and international partner organisations we drew comparative insights regarding these background matters. We will have another meeting at the International Metropolis Conference, which will be held in Sydney, 29th October-2nd November 2018. This three-year longitudinal study will involve extensive and deep fieldwork in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, the states that are receiving large numbers of Afghani and SIRs. The next report will present findings of the first stage of our fieldwork, and will be released by the end of 2018.

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