



*Refugees and  
regional settlement*  
Balancing priorities

Janet Taylor & Dayane Stanovic  
May 2005

Brotherhood of St Laurence  
67 Brunswick St  
Fitzroy Vic. 3065  
ABN 24 603 467 024

Ph: (03) 9483 1183

Internet: [www.bsl.org.au](http://www.bsl.org.au)

**National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:**

Taylor, Janet, 1945–  
Refugees and regional settlement: balancing priorities.

Bibliography.

ISBN 1 876250 62 3

1. Refugees — Services for — Victoria — Evaluation.  
2. Refugees — Victoria.  
I. Stanovic, Dayane. II. Brotherhood of St. Laurence.  
III. Title.

362.87809945

© Brotherhood of St Laurence 2005

Apart from fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

## **Foreword**

Refugees have become one distinctive face of social exclusion at the beginning of the 21st century. Australia's response to people seeking refuge is an indicator of progress made towards the inclusive and compassionate society which is the vision of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Part of the Brotherhood's research has been to explore different ways of thinking about the definitions and measurement of disadvantage and to draw attention to the experience of groups who are unable to participate fully in Australian society. The research informing this report develops our work in applying a social exclusion framework (examining resources, relationships and rights)—in this instance to an analysis of the settlement experience of refugees in regional Victoria.

Promoting refugees' inclusion by linking them to the workforce and development needs of various regions in Victoria is a policy solution with considerable appeal to governments. But will the refugees find work and be made welcome in Victoria's country towns? This report examines the refugee settlement experience in Shepparton, Colac and Warrnambool. Taylor and Stanovic's richly layered account shows that policy planners contemplating future settlements need to think not only about the usual range of issues that migrants encounter regarding employment, housing, income and language, but also about concerns specific to refugees.

The report also highlights two other aspects of the Brotherhood's vision of an inclusive society. First, it shows the need for careful planning of joined-up services, with the participation of refugee communities. Governments must act to ensure that the necessary community capacity is in place. Second, it demonstrates the need to invest in social programs in tandem with planning economic development, to ensure the employment and learning opportunities which are ultimately vital to social inclusion.

**Paul Smyth**

General Manager

Social Action and Research

# Contents

Foreword	i
Acknowledgments	iii
Abbreviations and acronyms	iv
<b>Summary</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Regional settlement for refugees: the policy context	1
Inclusion and exclusion in refugee re-settlement	3
The study	4
The refugee settlement context	6
Two refugee groups	8
Structure of the report	12
<b>2 Iraqi settlement in Shepparton</b>	<b>13</b>
Iraqis in Shepparton	13
The Iraqi view	13
The local community workers' view	23
<b>3 Sudanese settlement in Colac</b>	<b>27</b>
Sudanese in Colac	27
The Sudanese view: Colac	27
The local community workers' view	31
<b>4 Sudanese settlement in Warrnambool</b>	<b>34</b>
Warrnambool	34
The Sudanese view: Warrnambool	34
The local community workers' view	38
<b>5 The regional settlement experience</b>	<b>43</b>
What promotes (or hinders) inclusive settlement for refugees in regional areas?	43
Social inclusion and rights	45
Social inclusion and resources	45
Social inclusion and relationships	49
Areas for further research	50
<b>6 Conclusions – implications for policy</b>	<b>52</b>
The refugees	52
Recognising diversity	52
What is the role of policy in promoting social inclusion for refugees in regional areas?	54
The way forward	57
<b>References</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix: Interview guide</b>	<b>61</b>

## **Acknowledgments**

The authors wish to acknowledge the many people who contributed their experiences, aspirations, knowledge and wisdom in the course of this project. We are especially grateful to those who have come to Australia seeking refuge who were willing to share something of their lives with us. Our thanks also to those we consulted in various locations who are trying to assist the settlement of the refugees. Our warm appreciation goes to the members of our Research Advisory Group: Sarina Greco, Ainslie Hannan, Rasika Ramburuth, Trevor Batrouney, Jacki Whitwell, Paul Smyth, Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe, Pascale Allotey and Annette McKail. Ainslie Hannan also took an active role in the field research. Thanks also to Kim Webster and Margaretha Korn for their thoughtful comments on the draft report and to Deborah Patterson for her skilful editing.

## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DIMIA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
ESL	English as a second language
IHSS	Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy
TPV	Temporary Protection Visa

## Summary

A simple equation is sometimes presented, that regional areas need population and workers and that refugees need jobs and therefore the refugees should go to regional areas. Our research suggests the equation is not necessarily simple.

Both the Australian Government and the Victorian State Government have been developing policies to encourage migrants and refugees to settle in regional areas, to assist the newcomers to gain employment and to help build regional economies. This involves both relocation from metropolitan areas and direct settlement from overseas. However, the settlement needs of refugees cannot be assumed to be the same as those of other migrants.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has undertaken a study to explore the settlement experiences of two recent refugee groups (Iraqi and Sudanese) in selected areas of regional Victoria (Shepparton, Colac and Warrnambool) and to examine factors that promote successful settlement in such areas. Interviews and consultations were undertaken in mid 2004 with some 55 Iraqi and Sudanese refugees and 22 community leaders and service providers.

Iraqi settlement in the Shepparton area commenced in the 1990s and by 2004 the Iraqi community was estimated at 3000 people, including some on Temporary Protection Visas. Sudanese settlement commenced in Colac in 2002 and in Warrnambool in 2003, and by mid 2004 there were some 60 to 70 Sudanese refugees in each town, with the local meatworks their major employers.

Most of the refugees in the study had relocated from capital cities to the regional areas; however a few had arrived direct from overseas or (some Iraqis) from Australian detention centres. Their primary reasons for choosing to go to the three regional locations were to seek employment and/or to join relatives and friends. Other considerations included wanting a quiet place, the desire to bring up children in a small town, and a healthier climate.

It was important for the refugees that, on balance, the advantages of the regional location outweighed the disadvantages at that point in time. What they liked best about their regional homes included employment, the quiet and convenience of a smaller place, a welcoming host community, being part of their own ethnic community and some cheaper costs of living including housing (in some locations) and transport. On the other hand some individuals reported difficulties including lack of employment, lack of educational opportunities, some high costs of living, including housing, food and medical care, and some experiences of discrimination (particularly with Muslims being associated with terrorists).

Keys to the refugees' social inclusion in the regional communities included the availability of resources (such as employment, education and training, housing, adequate income support, English classes, interpreting facilities and support services), the quality of relationships with the host community (welcoming or hostile) and the recognition of their rights (particularly an issue for refugees holding only Temporary Protection Visas).

While the refugees in the three locations shared some common experiences, there were differences relating to the local context and to the refugee group. For example, for the Iraqis in Shepparton an important benefit was the number of services which had engaged bilingual workers, something the newer and smaller Sudanese groups did not have. On the other hand, unemployment was a greater problem for the Iraqis in Shepparton than for the Sudanese in Colac and Warrnambool. Other difficulties experienced by the Iraqis but not the Sudanese included anti-Muslim discrimination and the stress and limitations of Temporary Protection Visas.

This study suggests that some of the supports needed by refugees settling in regional areas are:

- *specific to refugees* – including recognition of their experience of trauma and loss, their disrupted education and employment, their special health needs, their anxiety about family still in danger overseas, and recognition of the uncertainty and limitations for those granted only temporary protection visas
- *specific to refugees and other immigrants as newcomers* – including the provision of language services, understanding of their cultural background, and assistance in understanding the Australian system at local, state and national levels
- *specific to refugees and other residents of regional areas* – including access to educational and career opportunities (an issue that causes many young people to leave regional areas for the city) and access to affordable medical care.

Some specific policies that may need to be reviewed in the light of the present study's findings include:

- the delivery of DIMIA refugee settlement services in regional areas across large distances and to areas with small numbers of refugees. This may require specialist targeted programs joined to existing services.
- the provision of English classes and the funding model that underpins them. There is a need to provide for people with different levels of education. Funding per class rather than per head may be more appropriate for regional areas (if not for all areas).
- education and employment services, to allow refugees to develop career pathways. This approach could draw on learnings from the Brotherhood of St Laurence's successful pilot, Given the Chance, a careers, education and employment program for refugees.

If long-term successful regional settlement is the aim, what is needed are policies that:

- provide generous settlement services for refugees in regional areas, meeting their special needs as refugees as well as their wider needs as immigrants
- promote vigorous and sustainable regional economies – which can provide education and employment pathways for both the host communities and refugees
- enhance the host communities' capacity to welcome and include newcomers.

The findings suggest that policies of refugee settlement should aim to promote informed choice for the refugees. Further, they should provide for advance planning and capacity building in settlement destinations, whether urban or regional, in consultation with the refugee communities.



# 1 Introduction

## Regional settlement for refugees: the policy context

A recent review of the literature around refugees in Australia and social exclusion (Taylor 2004) raised location of settlement as an important issue for further exploration, particularly as there is a strong policy push to settle a proportion of new arrivals, including refugees, in regional areas.

Matters of concern include the nature of the refugee experience and the special needs of refugees as distinct from migrants, as well as the availability of and access to employment and support services, and the capacity of regional communities to build ties with newcomers of different backgrounds.

The literature review also highlighted the inequities between various categories of refugees and immigrants and between these groups and the rest of the population, in terms of entitlement to income support, employment and other aspects of social and economic participation in our society (Taylor & Stanovic 2004). The implications of regional 'settlement' for refugees with only Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) were of particular concern.

The debate about the regional settlement of refugees takes place in a number of important and at times conflicting policy arenas:

- humanitarian goals
- population strategy
- economic development of regional areas.

Current Australian Government (and Opposition) policies for both skilled migrants and refugees encourage settlement in regional areas (DIMIA 2003a; Birrell 2003). There have been some proposals that up to 45 per cent of new arrivals should be located in regional areas (Withers & Powall 2003).

The 2003 Review of Settlement Services recommended that the Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) seek further opportunities to settle humanitarian entrants (refugees) in regional Australia, in areas where there are adequate services and opportunities for refugees to achieve early employment. Recommendation 25 states:

That the needs-based planning process support the direction of humanitarian entrants to regional locations offering appropriate employment opportunities and access to specialist and mainstream services. (DIMIA 2003a, p.12)

The Review suggested that regional settlement would assist humanitarian entrants to contribute to and participate in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival and would help to build regional economies (DIMIA 2003a).

In the May 2004 Budget, the Australian Government announced \$12.4 million in funding to support regional settlement over 4 years (Hardgrave 2004). The aim was to double the number of refugees successfully settling in regional Australia by 2005–06. The funding included increased resources under the Community Settlement Services Scheme for initial information and referral services for new arrivals who settle in regional areas. Four regional areas would be selected in 2004–05 for increased 'humanitarian' (refugee) settlement, taking into account factors such as housing affordability, prospects for early employment, levels of community support and access to infrastructure and health and education services. A media release by the Minister for Immigration

(Vanstone 2005) reported that Victoria would benefit from the new migration initiatives and a pilot project to identify one or more areas in regional Victoria to settle a number of refugee families.

States and territories have a variety of programs to encourage regional settlement of migrants of various categories, typically business or skilled migrants rather than refugees. For example, the Victorian Government is providing funding in 2004–07 through a Regional Migration Incentive Fund as part of Victoria's Skilled Migration Strategy for 10 regional areas to attract and retain skilled migrants and to match them with skill shortages (Department for Victorian Communities 2004).

At the local government level, some councils have specific policies to attract migrant workers, to increase population and/or to increase ethnic diversity. They may have more or less support from their constituencies for these policies. Other councils have no such policies.

### *Definitions*

In this paper a broad definition of refugees is used which includes people from a refugee-like background, namely all those who have escaped situations of war, persecution and human rights violations. These include people who have arrived in Australia under the Government's Humanitarian Program, in the Refugee stream or as Special Humanitarian entrants, and those who have been granted permanent protection visas after arrival. They also include people who have arrived as asylum seekers and after assessment have been granted only temporary protection (TPV holders). While refugees are generally distinguished from those who arrived under other migration streams, this study notes that some people from a refugee-like background have arrived under the skilled migration and family reunion categories. Regardless of visa category, these people have much in common in terms of needs for settlement support.

In 2004–05, some 13,000 Refugee and Special Humanitarian entrants are to be accepted, while some 110,000 people are to be accepted as migrants (including skilled migrants and family migrants).

The term 'regional' is used generally to denote all areas classed as non-metropolitan. It should be noted that there are key differences in regional Australia on the basis of remoteness or distance from metropolitan areas and services (Withers & Powell 2003).

Settlement has been defined as 'the process by which an immigrant establishes economic viability and social networks following immigration in order to contribute to, and make full use of, opportunities generally available to the receiving society' (National Population Council 1988, in DIMA 1998).

### *Why regional settlement?*

Australia has a very metropolitan population and the large majority of migrant and refugee arrivals have settled in the cities, especially Sydney and Melbourne, to be with their compatriots, to find employment and to be able to make use of services. However it is regional communities which are often keen to attract residents and workers.

Stilwell (2003) notes that while some parts of regional Australia have a sustainable economic base, many parts are in deep trouble, economically, ecologically and socially. Almost all non-metropolitan areas, including those experiencing overall growth, record net losses of young adults.

Challenges facing regional communities include the shortage of labour, often for seasonal work, such as fruit picking, or in abattoirs, and of professionals such as doctors and dentists. Rural towns have often suffered the loss of services such as banks and loss of steady employment, for example with public utilities. There is also the need to maintain or increase population, for example to stop local schools closing.

Withers and Powall conclude that growing regional inequality is evident. For example, country towns and rural locations have only 25.8 per cent of the Australian population but 39 per cent of all areas in poverty (Withers & Powall 2003, p.10). They quote a National Economics study showing the over-representation of high incomes in the cities, with people aged 15–34 almost three times more likely to earn more than \$55,000 a year in core metropolitan regions than elsewhere (2003, p.10).

At present in Australia there are two processes of regional settlement for refugees: one by which refugees go straight to regional areas on arrival, either because they are directed there by DIMIA or because their sponsors are there; the other ‘secondary migration’ or relocation when refugees who have first settled in a city decide to move to a regional area. The refugees in this study have generally been involved in relocation. Nonetheless, their experience has significant lessons also for those who go directly to regional areas.

Australia has a longstanding and rather mixed tradition of bringing in migrant labour to work in rural areas, from the days of early 19<sup>th</sup> century European settlement (although the migrants often moved on to the cities), to the migrant camps such as Bonegilla after the second world war. From 1947, Bonegilla near Wodonga was a staging camp for new migrants and refugees who had exchanged free or assisted passage to Australia for two years of labour at places of the Australian Government’s choice.

An important aspect of policy for refugees is their right to choose where to settle and to what extent their choice is shaped by encouragement or active ‘recruitment’. Stilwell (2003) asks how refugees can be steered to ‘appropriate’ regions, for example by decentralisation incentives, and how can freedom of movement be protected. Some visas for skilled migrants are easier to acquire if the migrant plans to settle in a regional area (Withers & Powall 2003). However a similar approach for refugees cannot be assumed to be appropriate. DIMIA aims to direct some ‘unattached’ humanitarian entrants (those without friends or relatives here) to regional locations (see DIMIA website). A key factor will be the provision of appropriate services.

## **Inclusion and exclusion in refugee re-settlement**

Social exclusion in refugee re-settlement has been discussed in a number of recent papers (Taylor 2004; Ramburuth & Stanovic 2004; White, M 2004). The notion of social exclusion identifies a dynamic process and encourages the examination of interrelationships across time and place. It also focuses on the way that host societies may exclude refugees from participation, not necessarily intentionally, and how systems (for example schools or hospitals) need to adapt to ensure people are included. Successful settlement of refugees depends on their social inclusion rather than exclusion on a number of dimensions.

One framework for looking at inclusion and exclusion (following de Hann & Maxwell 1998, in Jones & Smyth 1999) identified the three arenas of rights, resources and relationships. Applied to the experience of refugees in Australia, this framework highlights the following (Taylor 2004):

*Rights:* There are selective and deliberate policies of social exclusion in terms of the lack of rights to federally funded settlement support, family reunion, and employment for some categories of refugees, in particular those with Temporary Protection Visas. Mandatory detention of asylum seekers has also been seen as a deprivation of human rights.

*Resources:* Key resources for refugees include employment, income, housing, education, and language. There is continuing evidence of high rates of income poverty for recent refugees associated with inadequate income support, high unemployment or low-wage work and with high settlement expenditure. Many refugees arrive as part of new and emerging communities

characterised by lack of resources. For those without fluent English and adequate education, social exclusion due to lack of resources may continue for many years.

*Relationships:* A sense of connectedness is central to inclusion. Two very different aspects of relationships have been identified as key factors in the exclusion or inclusion of refugees in Australia: the negative impact of the experience of racism and victimisation and the positive impacts of family reunion in enabling refugees to settle.

Acknowledging the importance of location, this paper further explores some of these aspects, asking how social inclusion can be promoted in regional settlement of refugees.

## **The study**

### **Aims and objectives**

This paper reports on an exploratory research study of social inclusion and exclusion for refugees with a focus on regional settlement.

The objectives of the research are:

- to explore settlement issues for refugees in different regional locations
- to explore the experience of social inclusion or exclusion for members of these refugee communities
- to contribute to the debate on regional settlement issues raised in the DIMIA Review of Settlement Services (2003a) for selected newly arrived refugee communities.

The research questions the study addresses include: What are the factors that promote (or hinder) inclusive settlement for refugees in regional areas? What is the role of settlement policy and other policies in promoting social inclusion for refugees in regional areas?

### **Method**

The study was undertaken in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Ecumenical Migration Centre to document issues for newly arrived refugee communities with whom the Centre works as a state-wide service. The research focuses on two specific ethnic groups (Iraqi and south Sudanese) in three different regional locations to allow some of the complexities of their background and post-arrival situations to be explored.

This exploratory research involved a literature review of regional settlement and settlement issues for the selected communities (and a search of the local press); documentation of selected refugee community meetings; consultation with ethno-specific and mainstream service providers and community leaders; interviews with refugee community leaders; and focus groups and individual interviews with members of refugee communities.

The responses of the refugees provide the main focus of the study, with the wider consultations providing important contextual information.

#### *Selection of refugee groups and locations*

Two recent but diverse refugee groups were selected:

- refugees from Iraq (Arabic background, Shia Muslim, including both permanent settlers and some on Temporary Protection Visas)
- refugees from Sudan (southern Sudan, mainly Christian, all granted permanent protection).

In 2002–03 these were the two largest groups of refugees arriving in Australia (the Sudanese comprising 31 per cent and those from Iraq 25 per cent). Both groups had approximately doubled in size since the previous year (DIMIA 2003b).

The settlement issues for these groups were explored in three regional locations: for the Iraqis, the Shepparton area in central Victoria; for the Sudanese, Warrnambool and Colac in western Victoria. These areas ranged from 150 to 260 kilometres from Melbourne; none could be classified as remote.

Greater Shepparton (population approximately 55,000) has a strong and long history of settlement by migrants, including Italian, Greek, Albanian and Turkish communities, in contrast to the more ‘Anglo’ communities of Warrnambool (population 30,000) and Colac (10,000). All three areas are keen to attract workers, although their unemployment rates are higher than the state average (at June 2004 Shepparton had an unemployment rate of 6.2 per cent, Warrnambool 6.6 and Colac 7.2 while the Victorian rate overall was 5.6 per cent) (DEWR 2004).

Iraqi settlement in Shepparton has been considerable since 1996, while the Sudanese settlement in Colac and Warrnambool commenced in 2002 and 2003 respectively. The local estimates in mid 2004 were a community of some 3000 Iraqis in the Shepparton area and 60 to 70 Sudanese refugees in each of Colac and Warrnambool.

Each area had a different history of initial settlement:

- in Shepparton the arrival of Iraqis was unplanned and spontaneous
- in Warrnambool the initial Sudanese settlement was planned as part of a privately funded humanitarian project
- in Colac the Sudanese settlement was initiated by an employer.

#### *Interviews and consultations*

Interviews and consultations were undertaken with some 55 refugees and 22 community leaders and service providers:

- Iraqi refugees: three focus groups (men 9, women 8, young people 10 – total 27) and additional discussions with two Iraqi community leaders
- Sudanese refugees: two focus groups (men 7, women 9) and three family interviews (men 4, women 2) (total 22) and discussions with four Sudanese community leaders
- regional community leaders and service providers: Shepparton 5; Warrnambool/Colac 6
- Melbourne and Geelong-based service providers 11.

Initially the researchers accompanied Ecumenical Migration Centre staff in their regional work to develop local contacts. The researchers also attended three community meetings in Shepparton with Iraqi and local community leaders and workers, two focusing on issues for TPV holders and one discussing general issues of settlement.

Focus group participants were recruited by refugee community leaders in Shepparton and Colac and the Sudanese families interviewed in Warrnambool were recruited by a local service provider. (It was decided to undertake fewer interviews in Warrnambool than in the other areas as a longer term research project was commencing there which would involve the Sudanese.) Separate focus groups were held for men and women and (for the Iraqis) young people. The focus groups and interviews followed an interview guide of general questions (see Appendix). The Iraqi focus groups were undertaken with Arabic-speaking interpreters and the Sudanese women’s group with a Nuer-speaking interpreter; and other Sudanese interviews were conducted in English. The focus groups

and interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Participants also completed a one-page survey of demographic details. They were paid \$35 to compensate for time and expenses.

Refugee community leaders were consulted both in Melbourne and in the regional locations to obtain an overview of the history of migration to regional areas, the perceived advantages and disadvantages and wider settlement issues for the particular group. As many of the refugees in regional areas had moved from Melbourne, the perspective of Melbourne-based leaders was of interest. Several of the refugee community leaders were also employed as bilingual community workers, for example in migrant resource centres.

Consultations with host community leaders and service providers in Shepparton, Warrnambool and Colac addressed similar topics but with a different view on the needs of the local area and the reactions of the host community. Those consulted were all working closely with or had a special interest in the refugee communities. We also consulted with a number of Melbourne-based service providers involved in policy development or program delivery for refugees, and also some from Geelong.

As part of the research process, the draft chapter for each of the three locations was sent to a local refugee community leader and a key host community service provider for comment on accuracy and omissions. Their feedback was then incorporated in the report.

### *Limitations of the study*

From this small-scale study, the findings cannot be readily generalised to all refugees in regional locations, or even all refugees in the selected locations. The focus of the study is the refugees' experiences based on one-off focus groups or interviews. These produced some vivid glimpses of the participants' lives but findings were necessarily limited by time and language. We did not, for example, specifically explore the refugees' pre-migration trauma. Additional information was gathered in consultations with community workers and leaders, but we did not attempt a wider study of the host communities' attitudes to the refugees, an important aspect of settlement and inclusion.

## **The refugee settlement context**

The main areas of literature reviewed as background for this paper included regional settlement of refugees in Australia, the background of Sudanese and Iraqi refugees, studies of exclusion and inclusion of refugees and the background of the selected regional areas. Little recent research was identified which looked specifically at regional settlement of refugees, a major exception being a study of Afghan refugees in Young, NSW (Stilwell 2003).

While the focus has been on Australia, some Canadian studies were of interest. The study by Simich et al. (2001) highlighted the Canadian experience of 'destining' refugees to particular locations away from the main areas of employment and the costs associated with subsequent secondary migration. It concluded that refugees were unlikely to stay in the community to which they are sent unless conditions for social support and self sufficiency were met, a finding likely to also apply in Australia. There is current debate in Canada about the benefits of encouraging regional settlement, with one report finding little evidence of success and others keen to promote the idea and providing a 'tool box' to assist (VSIP 2003). The Australian literature is referred to below.

### *Refugee settlement*

While refugees face some similar issues to other new migrants settling in Australia, refugees generally also have distinctive issues which are not always taken into account when regional settlement is proposed. These may include the lasting impacts of pre-migration trauma and torture, of long periods in refugee camps, with disrupted education and employment and lack of health

care, and the anxiety of having family still living in situations of high danger. Some also live with their past experience of imprisonment in detention centres in Australia; with the chronic anticipatory stress resulting from the temporary nature of TPVs, not knowing whether they will be sent back to a dangerous homeland; with shattered expectations; and also with limited access to Australian services.

The Refugee Council of Australia (2004) pointed to various characteristics of refugees which would be significant for their settlement in regional areas: their pre-migration and migration experiences, their heterogeneity and their demographics (for example, single men or female-headed families).

The Refugee Council also emphasised the need for:

- sufficient information for refugees to make an informed choice
- inclusion of the receiving communities in the planning process
- recognition of the difficulties of many regional and rural communities (including high unemployment, diminishing services and movement of young people to the city).

An important regional development has been the high-profile network 'Rural Australians for Refugees' which commenced in NSW in October 2001 and by 2004 had 80 groups across Australia. The organisation is active in calls to change government policy (seeking the abolition of TPVs and the doubling of refugee intake) and also in practical support for refugees (RAR 2004).

#### *Research on refugees and regional settlement*

An important earlier study of immigrant settlement in country areas (Gray et al. 1991) examined five different regions in NSW and Queensland and the diverse groups within each. Gray et al. concluded that non-English speaking background immigrants were disadvantaged due to the volatility of the rural economy, the compounding of isolation and diminished opportunities from the lack of accessible services. They found that refugees (a quarter of their sample) encountered considerably more problems than other migrants in rural areas. The study pointed to high unemployment and also to lack of 'critical mass' for provision of services. They also noted the inability of refugees from rural backgrounds (for example, the Hmong refugees who had moved to Innisfail in Queensland) to take up farming in Australia because of the capital costs.

Recent research about refugees has tended to focus on the injustices experienced by asylum seekers and TPV holders rather than on refugee settlement as such. A few recent studies have referred to the issues of refugees in rural areas. Of particular interest for this report, Stilwell (2003) carried out an economic analysis of Afghan refugees in Young, NSW (regional population 11,300). Stilwell concluded that the regional economy benefited significantly from the Afghans' contribution, primarily through their labour at a meatworks and their local expenditure and indirectly through their impact on the dynamism of the economy. In the face of local attempts to stir up opposition, the mayor sought community opinion and found half the responses were critical, half supportive. The abattoir had problems securing an adequate workforce; the production process was labour-intensive, the work hard and somewhat unpleasant and the pay modest. There was a high turnover (average 6 months). Locally contentious issues included wage rates, with the suggestion that refugees were being paid less and thus displacing local workers, although the study found wage rates were uniform. There were also some tensions about the Afghans, with their strong work ethic, being kept on when the night shift closed down and some local workers lost jobs. The refugees in Young were males, most aged 20 to 40, holding TPVs. The study reported strong bonds with some locals, TAFE and volunteers. The question of whether long-term settlement will eventuate in Young is pertinent to the focus of this study.

Some recent Victorian studies of refugees with TPVs have included those living in regional areas, including Iraqis in Shepparton, but location has not been their major focus (Mansouri & Bagdas 2002; Marston 2003).

A recent study (Marshall et al. 2004) of people on low incomes (income support recipients, presumably mostly Australian-born) moving from country to city locations has implications for considering refugees' choices, given they are also a low-income category making decisions about where to live. The study of looked at different reasons for moving to the city and at overall well-being (emphasising that 'well-being' is a multidimensional concept). While job opportunities were a major reason for people moving, full-time work was often not found. The most satisfying aspect of moving was maintaining family ties. Both city and country were seen as good places to live but for different reasons: the cities were favoured for their facilities and services, the non-metropolitan areas for 'a country way of life' and community spirit

Withers and Powall (2003), in a wider review of policies around immigration to regional Australia, support regional settlement but make only limited reference to the situation of refugees. They suggest that two important factors for humanitarian programs are location of facilities and regional preferences for welcoming such new residents.

In summary, while there is little recent research about refugees in regional areas, the existing research highlights both positives (Stilwell 2003) and negatives (Gray et al. 1991).

## **Two refugee groups**

A brief overview of the two refugee groups is provided, outlining the socio-political context they left and their arrival in Australia. Somewhat more information is provided about the Sudanese refugees as newer and lesser known arrivals (for further information on Iraq, see, for example, White 2000).

### **Iraqi refugees**

#### *Iraq and its peoples*

Iraq is in the Middle East on the Persian Gulf and has borders with Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey. The population of Iraq is some 25 million people, with 74 per cent living in urban areas. Much of the country is classified as desert, although the Tigris and Euphrates rivers provide a fertile irrigation region, an area that has been known as 'the cradle of civilization'. Iraq's oilfields provide the major source of wealth. The major ethnic groupings are Arabs (75–80 per cent) and Kurds (15–20 per cent). Most Iraqis are Muslim (53 per cent Shia, 42 per cent Sunni) with small numbers of other religions (DIMIA 2003b). Women have generally been somewhat freer in Iraq than in some neighbouring Gulf countries, but on average are less well-educated than men (AMEP 2002).

#### *History*

Iraq, the site of the great ancient civilisations of Assyria and Babylon, was ruled by the Turkish Ottoman Empire from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the end of World War 1, when a British mandate was established and an independent kingdom was declared. A military revolution in 1958 led to the establishment of a republic. Modern Iraq has a legacy of coups and wanton massacres (White 2000). The Ba'athist party seized power in 1968 and Saddam Hussein became its president in 1979. During an eight-year war with Iran (1980–1988), one million people died and almost three million became refugees. In 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait, leading to the first Gulf War, a counter-attack led by the United States. In addition to the Ba'athist regime's human rights abuses and massacres, in the 1990s the Iraq was devastated by international economic sanctions. Many thousands died due to food and medicinal shortages. An invasion by the United States and allied forces in March 2003 led



to the fall of Saddam Hussein (DIMIA 2003b). At the time of writing, Iraq is in a state of insurgency.

### *Iraqis in Australia*

Many Iraqis came to Australia as refugees following the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent large-scale repression of Kurds and Shias. Refugees also included persecuted non-Muslim groups such as the Assyrians and Chaldeans.

The 2001 Census recorded 24,760 Iraq-born people in Australia (an increase of 77 per cent over 1996). These include Arabic (44 per cent), Assyrian (41 per cent) and Kurdish-speaking groups (4 per cent). Many settled in Sydney (DIMIA 2003b). From 1999 to 2004, over 4000 Iraqis were granted TPVs: they constituted 40 per cent of TPV holders. Most were still waiting for the outcome of applications for permanence at the end of 2004.

Victoria's Iraq-born population increased from 3500 in 1996 to 6773 in 2003, a 93 per cent increase (Webster 2003). Some 77 per cent of arrivals since 1996 have been humanitarian entrants (refugees). Others have come as family or skilled migrants. Some came as unauthorised arrivals by boat, were put in detention centres and were subsequently recognised as refugees, but were only granted temporary protection (TPVs).

In Victoria, most Iraqis settled in Melbourne, particularly in the northern suburbs (municipalities of Hume and Moreland had the greatest numbers in 2001). The two regional areas with largest numbers of Iraq-born in 2001 were Greater Shepparton (265) and Moira Shire (Cobram) (105). The 2001 Census showed an unemployment rate of 38.2 per cent for Iraq-born, compared with 6.8 per cent for the total Victorian population, in spite of lower Iraqi labour force participation. The unemployment rates were highest in Shepparton (75 per cent) and Moira (66 per cent) (Victorian Multicultural Affairs 2003, p.30). Not surprisingly, many were on low incomes: 67 per cent of Iraq-born had a weekly income of less than \$300, compared with 39 per cent of all Victorians) (Victorian Multicultural Affairs 2003, p.42).

## **Sudanese refugees**

### *Sudan and its peoples*

Sudan is the largest country in Africa and has an estimated population of 36 million people (DIMIA 2003b). Its capital, Khartoum, is located in the north. Health facilities and education, including higher education, are also concentrated in the north (Metz 1991). Sudan is a predominantly rural country, with 78 per cent of the population living in rural areas (DIMIA 2003b: 31). Agriculture, livestock and subsistence living are the main sources of livelihood.

There is great cultural, social and linguistic diversity, with more than five hundred ethnic groups living within (and across) Sudan's borders. Approximately 39 per cent of the population are Arab Muslim groups who live in the northern two-thirds of Sudan and 52 per cent are African groups who live mainly in the south and predominantly hold traditional animist beliefs or are Christian (Beswick 2004; DIMIA 2003b; Metz 1991).

In south Sudan, the largest ethnic group is the Dinka, followed by the Nuer and the Shilluk (Metz 1991). These groups have diverse languages and social organisation. Even within an ethnic group such as the Dinka, which is divided into 25 tribes, the dialects can be so different that it is difficult for tribes to understand each other. In the south, Juba (pidgin) Arabic and English are used to communicate across groups, but not everyone is able to speak these in addition to their first language (Metz 1991). Social organisation is also diverse. Most groups are patriarchal and polygamous (Beswick 2004; CAL 2000). Some groups are fully settled, whilst others are semi-sedentary or nomadic. Ownership of cattle is a sign of status and cattle have a significant role in

social life, as marriage payments and as sacrifices to atone for the owner's sins (Beswick 2004; Metz 1991).

### *Colonial history*

Sudan was first colonised from the 1820s. This period of colonisation heightened pre-existing tensions between northern and southern Sudan by setting up separate administrations for each region. In an attempt to curb the slave trade, northerners were forbidden to enter the south. This also inhibited the development of the south, where the British ruled indirectly through tribal chiefs. Christian missionaries also travelled and converted people in the south. In addition to the division between north and south, colonial policy also enforced boundaries between different ethnic groups such as the Dinka and the Nuer peoples who also have a history of conflict (Beswick 2004; Metz 1991).

### *Independence and civil war*

Apart from an interlude between 1972 and 1983, Sudan has been in a state of civil war since independence in 1956 (Metz 1991). Two years after independence a coup brought to power a military regime, which sought to Arabise the south. In 1983 the President introduced harsh Sharia Muslim law to the whole country. Resistance to this in the non-Muslim south saw the formation of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement and Sudan Peoples Liberation Army, and the civil war resumed (Metz 1991). English and Christianity became symbols of resistance to the Muslim government in the north and the insurgency of the 1980s and 1990s had a religiously confrontational character (Metz 1991). In addition to the north–south conflict, there was also fighting between the two major ethnic groups in the south, the Dinka and the Nuer. The war intensified with the discovery of oil fields in the south (DIMIA 2003b). In 2004 peace negotiations took place between the Khartoum government and the leaders in the south and an agreement was put in place in January 2005. Meanwhile violent conflict raged in Darfur in western Sudan.

Sudan is described as in economic ruin, devastated by war, wide-scale drought and famine. It is estimated that since 1983 two million people have died and a further four million people have been internally displaced as a result of the war (Webster 2003). The government tactic of creating militia to exploit ethnic and resource rivalries has meant that atrocities such as systematic attacks on civilian populations, executions, torture, abductions, sexual violence, the conscription of child soldiers and slavery occur with state sanction (Amnesty International 1997; DIMIA 2003b). One million people have fled to refugee camps in neighbouring countries (NCDA 2004). Many people have lived in and out of refugee camps for much of their lives, and some children have grown up there, not necessarily having passed cultural initiation rites or lived with their family. Camps often have limited food, water and health care facilities, and do not guarantee safe accommodation and protection from abuse (Beattie & Ward 1997). Educational opportunities are limited.

### *Sudanese in Australia*

Humanitarian migration of Africans to Australia commenced in the early 1980s and included small numbers of Sudanese. The 2001 Census recorded 4911 Sudan-born people living in Australia (DIMIA 2003b, p. 31).

The number of Sudanese-born in Victoria in 2003 was 1922, an increase of 81 per cent since 1996 (Webster 2003). Over 99 per cent of those who arrived in Victoria since 1996 have been humanitarian entrants (refugees). The most common language spoken by the Sudanese refugees in Victoria was Arabic (60 per cent). The majority were Christian. They predominantly settled in the Melbourne local government areas of Dandenong and Monash in the south-east and Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley in the west (Webster 2003). The Nuer and the Shilluk have generally settled in the south-east, the Dinka in the western suburbs, as new arrivals chose to live with people of the same group.

### *Research on African Australians*

Some Sudanese have been included in wider studies of Africans in Australia, including the first major study of black Africans in Australia, which was undertaken by Batrouney (1991) for the Ecumenical Migration Centre, funded by the Bureau of Immigration Research. Subsequent studies (Cox et al. 1999; Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock 2000) have confirmed Batrouney's findings about unemployment, perceptions of racism in the workplace and housing as persistent difficulties. Cox et al. (1999) noted that the majority of African arrivals had been well-educated and in the prime of life, with much to offer Australia, and that life was even harder for those who arrived as refugees, especially those with less education.

Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock's major study of African settlement in Australia (2000) included 30 focus groups and some 293 people including 2 Sudanese groups. It identified settlement problems including education and English language issues, intergenerational conflict and cultural gaps, unemployment, access to employment services and benefit payments, accommodation problems, understanding the system, isolation and alienation. In terms of regional settlement, Nsubuga-Kyobe (2003) noted that African community members expressed little interest in settling in rural Victoria, although a few would like to move to earn money for a short time.

An interesting issue is the choice of a wider African category in which to place Sudan. Some studies categorise Sudan as part of the Horn of Africa, seeing it as having similar problems as Ethiopia and Somalia (Batrouney 1991), others see it as part of Central and Equatorial Africa (Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock 2000), others as North Africa, and it has strong associations with East Africa. This classification may be a sensitive issue for service provision in Australia, for example if south Sudanese refugees are grouped with others from the predominantly Muslim Horn of Africa.

### *Sudanese in Melbourne*

As part of this study four south Sudanese community leaders in Melbourne were interviewed about regional settlement and general issues for their communities. The main reason the leaders saw Sudanese moving to regional areas was employment. They were being recruited by councils, employment agencies and employers, mainly to work in abattoirs (Warrnambool, Colac and Wonthaggi) and some were going directly from refugee camps to regional Victoria, being sponsored as humanitarian entrants by family or friends. A main concern about moving to a regional area was isolation from the rest of the south Sudanese community. One leader suggested that this some people could see this as a good thing, getting away from the pressures of the community and forcing people to interact with the Australian community and increasing cross-cultural learning.

Many Sudanese had been unable to obtain employment in Melbourne, or if employed were underemployed. Proficiency in English was a problem and many with overseas work experience had worked using only Arabic. Some found temporary work, but being let go was considered shameful, reflecting badly on the worker in a community of people who pride themselves as hard workers. There was considerable loss of status for some. One leader commented, 'I am a beggar here'.

Lack of money was a problem with many Sudanese in Melbourne struggling to live on Centrelink benefits. The leaders spoke of people accumulating debts and having nothing in the fridge to eat. Debts ranged from money borrowed for airfares to fines for failing to pay Citylink tolls or for driving without a proper licence. The Sudanese also needed to send money back to help family in Africa. This was described as an integral part of their culture which is communal, rather than individualistic like the Australian culture: 'We love one another. Your cousin, nephew, niece, they are part of your family.' They would support family members to come to Australia even if this meant crowding and difficulties for themselves: 'They must come.' Financial difficulties were affecting relationships: for example, men were paying household expenses and arguments would arise over the women's use of the telephone and heating. One leader quoted the women saying,

'We always at home from morning to night. It is very boring watching television. It is good when you call your sister, your friend, then you chat so you feel happy'. Isolation and boredom were also problems for unemployed men and young people.

One of the Melbourne-based Sudanese leaders noted that they had not had any problems of discrimination in rural areas. 'They thought we may have a problem but we don't. ... If the community will accept us, we don't have any problem'. However the leader also reported the need to do 'cultural awareness' in Wonthaggi (where some Sudanese had moved), because the local people initially did not trust the newcomers, 'But now they know us'. Also the employer of the abattoir at Wonthaggi had said it was difficult at first to find accommodation for the south Sudanese workers because of their dark skin (NCDA 2004).

Sudanese leaders also spoke of the impact of the ongoing war in Sudan: 'Without peace in Sudan, we will never get settled here.'

### **Structure of the report**

The findings of the study are presented in separate chapters for each of the three locations – the Iraqis in Shepparton, the Sudanese in Colac and the Sudanese in Warrnambool. For each location, the settlement history is outlined briefly, the viewpoint of the refugees is presented and then that of community workers from the host community. While this leads to some repetition, it enables the reader with an interest in a particular location or refugee group to distinguish the responses. The data chapters are followed by chapter 5 which draws together the findings from the three locations, summarising and discussing these. The report concludes by considering implications for policy.

## 2 Iraqi settlement in Shepparton

### Iraqis in Shepparton

Greater Shepparton is a city of some 55,000 people, 180 kilometres north of Melbourne. Local estimates are that the Iraqi community living in the Shepparton area in 2004 numbered about 3000 people, including Australian-born children. There are also some seasonal increases. The refugees have been mainly Shia Muslims from the centre and south of Iraq.

Various accounts are given of the first Iraqis coming to Shepparton. The first few Iraqis apparently came to the fruit and vegetable-producing Goulburn Valley in the early 1990s seeking employment. Larger numbers of Iraqi refugees arrived from 1997, having come from camps in Saudi Arabia and gone first to Sydney and Melbourne, then on to Kyabram, Cobram and Shepparton. These refugees were granted permanent protection. Within a couple of years, most of the Iraqis who had come to Kyabram relocated to Shepparton. From 1999, some Iraqi refugees started arriving in Australia by boat and were placed in detention centres and later released with Temporary Protection Visas. Some settled in Shepparton with the support of the Ethnic Community Council. DIMIA estimated there were some 700 to 800 Iraqis on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) in the Shepparton area in mid 2004, although some locals felt this was an overestimate. Those with only TPVs were living in uncertainty about whether they could remain in Australia, and were meanwhile denied access to many services available to the rest of the Iraqi community.

An 'Iraqi Taskforce' was formed in 1999 as a forum for local service providers. It was followed by the Building Links project (2001–02) which sought a strategy for positive settlement in the longer term for the Arabic-speaking community (Centrelink 2002). By 2004, a number of projects and programs involved Iraqi settlers and there was considerable community support but also difficulties including lack of employment (GVISPC 2004).

### The Iraqi view

We held three focus group interviews with Iraqi refugees in Shepparton in mid 2004: a men's group, a women's group and a group of young people. All were Arabic-speaking and Muslim. The 27 people in the groups were diverse in terms of age, educational background, length of time in Australia, current employment status and visa category. Twelve were on TPVs, the others were permanent residents. While they could not speak for all Iraqis in Shepparton, many of their experiences were likely to be shared by others. The groups were organised by the local Ethnic Community Council. We had additional discussions with local Iraqi community leaders.

The focus groups are described below:

- a group of nine men aged 33 to 53 years, all married with children (2 to 5 children). Most had arrived in Australia in the late 1990s (1995 to 2001) and in Shepparton in the early 2000s (1997 to 2003). Over half had post-school qualifications, including degrees or diplomas in electrical engineering, food technology, agricultural machinery and information technology. Five were currently in paid employment, mostly part-time and typically as community workers; three were unemployed and seeking any kind of work; and one described himself as unfit for work. Two were on TPVs, the remainder had permanent residence.
- a group of eight women, aged 30 to 48 years. All were married, one currently living alone, and all had children (2 to 7 children). The earliest to arrive in Australia came in 1986, three had arrived in 1996 and 1997 and four since 2000. They had arrived in Shepparton between 1996 and 2003. Their length of schooling ranged from 7 to 16 years. Five had no qualifications, one had a degree in statistics, one had been a teacher and one had local child-care training. Five were working in part-time jobs (one working full time in part-time jobs) and three were not

employed but were studying English. Two had husbands working full time, but for four women, their main family income was from Centrelink. Three were on TPVs.

- a group of three young women and seven young men, aged from 15 to 23. Most were at school, one at university in Melbourne, one working in his own business and one unemployed (in spite of having recently completed a computing degree). One was married with a child. Most had arrived in Australia in 2001 and 2002, although one had arrived as a small child in the 1980s, and another in 1997. Most had lived in Shepparton 2 to 3 years. For most of their families, Centrelink was the main source of income. Seven of the more recent arrivals were on TPVs.

### *Background*

Most of the 27 Iraqis we interviewed came from cities in Iraq (including Baghdad), a few came from small towns and two from the countryside. Some had lived as refugees in Iran for some years after leaving Iraq.

Most had lived elsewhere in Australia, typically in Melbourne, but some in other states as well. Some had been imprisoned in detention camps. One woman had come direct to Shepparton from overseas to join her husband. She explained:

I lived in different places because we were refugees. I lived in Iraq. Then I went to Iran and then from Iran to Syria and from Syria to Shepparton.

### *Where would you choose to live if you had a free choice?*

We asked all the groups where they would choose to live if they had a free choice. Some saw themselves very much as refugees who would return home if only it were safe. Others were enjoying settling in Shepparton, while still others, particularly the young people, would prefer to live in a large Australian city.

The most common response from the men about where they would choose to live was 'in my home country', although some qualified this:

At the moment I might not be able to live in my homeland, just because of lack of security and there is no stability so that is why I really prefer to stay here.

Two men gave Australia as their preference; another specified Melbourne and one Shepparton. The women were less likely than the men to want to return to Iraq. Two women specified Shepparton and one Sydney as their preferred places. Two were uncertain about where they would like to live and one said she would like to return to her home country but it would be difficult to take her children. The young people's responses were different again: all named an Australian capital city as where they would choose to live: half named Melbourne, others said Sydney, Adelaide or Perth.

A few had recently visited Iraq (following the US overthrow of Saddam Hussein) and returned to Shepparton with horror tales having been 'scared for their lives at all times':

Most of the people are thinking maybe after five years it will be okay, but not now. So now I think our community are thinking of settling down.

Indications of settlement included that some Iraqis were buying houses in Shepparton and were keen to assist the development of Shepparton to provide jobs for the community.

### *What are the main reasons for coming to Shepparton*

Most of the Iraqis chose to relocate to Shepparton from elsewhere in Australia. The most frequent reasons they gave for coming to Shepparton were work opportunities and joining family or friends. Often there were multiple reasons. Other reasons given included the preference for a small town, a quiet place, the climate and clean air. Some parents felt they would be better able to control their

children in a small town. Three parents mentioned children's asthma. Other reasons for the move included Shepparton's reputation for tolerance, its multicultural population and its special services for Arabic speakers. New arrivals, not wanting to take risks exploring, would come straight to Shepparton. For the young people the decision had generally been their father's.

The following quotes are typical:

The main reason that I decided to move and to skip to Shepparton because I mean all my kids were experiencing asthma. The second reason, the thing in Shepparton that I feel that I am able to control the behaviour of my kids somehow better than living in a metropolitan area. And again ... there is a higher work opportunity than some other places. (Iraqi man)

For me, finding work. When we came here, my husband found work and that's good. And I found a job as well. (Iraqi woman)

It was a small town and we had lots of friends here, so that's why we came. (Iraqi young man)

#### *The best things about living in Shepparton*

The best aspects of living in Shepparton for the people we interviewed often reflected their reasons for coming, such as the climate and the quiet, and for some, finding work. The convenience of having things close by was important. For some, as refugees, 'safety' was the main benefit. Another factor was the presence of services with Arabic-speaking workers, a benefit not available to the first Iraqi settlers. Responses included:

The tolerance of the people in general and specifically the service providers and the organisations ... Here in Shepparton, I mean wherever you go you can find a person who can speak your own language, whether at Centrelink or at the Ethnic Council or elsewhere, and as well that the services are available. (Iraqi man)

For me because my husband has found a job here ... We are happy, very happy, because we are here [in Australia] 18 years and it's just not easy for my husband to find a job. We have been in Queensland, no job for him, in Melbourne ... (Iraqi woman)

I like this area because I've got young children ... The big city is open for the young people and they can do whatever they like, and I don't want that ... and here it's really like in a small area and you can control them. (Iraqi woman)

We feel that the service here, it's more available than in Melbourne. When I talk to my friends in Melbourne and tell them that we've got a bus to pick us up and to bring us to TAFE to learn the language, we've got people who can organise trips for us, we've got some information sessions ... they keep saying 'You are lucky'. And it's actually really we would like to thank you and whoever who make this service available and the interpreters did a lot of things for us by helping to understand everything here ... (Iraqi woman)

The young people, when asked about the best things about living in Shepparton, first responded that it was quiet and uncrowded, although later they compared this unfavourably with the opportunities of a big city.

#### *The difficulties*

When asked about any difficulties of living in Shepparton, the main issues raised were:

- lack of employment opportunities
- cost of living
- discrimination
- lack of tertiary educational opportunities.

All three groups spoke of lack of employment opportunities. The men talked with some distress of their difficulties with finding jobs and their experiences of discrimination. The women were most concerned with lack of opportunities for older children, although some with younger children and some of the young people felt there were no difficulties at present. Another difficulty was the limited access to a female Arabic-speaking doctor (while there was one, she could only see a certain number of patients).

The young people expressed their preference to live in a bigger city: 'Like Shepparton is too small, so it's boring you know'. One young man said of Melbourne:

It's bigger, and there's a lot of work opportunities, and there's venues where you can spend your spare time. For instance, there is not much available here in Shepparton where we are living. It's normal, the city is always nicer and better than small towns. (Iraqi young man)

While the Iraqi community leaders felt there were few difficulties overall, some identified barriers of language and culture. Examples included some negative public reactions to a proposed women-only swimming program, and the fact that shaking hands between men and women was not part of the culture of some Iraqis and had led to misunderstandings with the Australian community.

The Iraqi community leaders also outlined some earlier difficulties that had since been overcome. At first there were problems because 'we looked strange'. There were also initial problems of real estate agents 'not wanting to rent to us, but they found out most Iraqis were good people'.

Isolation was a particular problem for the women until various programs were started through the Ethnic Council and the Multicultural Education Centre at the TAFE, and through Centrelink, the JET program could assist with child-care. One woman had been employed to drive the bus to bring women to English classes and their children to child-care and assisted finding child-care and kindergarten places. Another woman assisted with different programs for women and with interpreting.

### *Employment*

Employment was described as 'a major problem'. Employment opportunities were a main reason for Iraqis coming to Shepparton. Some were highly qualified but had failed to get jobs elsewhere and were desperate. They heard that in Shepparton 'all that you need to be is physically fit' to gain seasonal fruit-picking work.

However interviewees spoke of many employment difficulties. These included: inability to get work, the type of employment available (part-time, seasonal, unskilled), recognition of skills, language, employment for young people, experiences with employment agencies and discrimination, and the limitations of TPVs. With their refugee experience (including detention for some) and the current distress of the continuing war in Iraq, some were unable to work because of their physical and psychological health. Other reasons given for people not getting work were language and skills and 'also a reason you can't mention', namely that 'employers don't want to risk taking on someone they don't know the background, behaviour and attitude of'.

We were told that a number of Iraqis in Shepparton were highly skilled with degrees and advanced diplomas: they included engineers, biologists, teachers, food technicians and doctors. Some had worked in their field, others who had become refugees soon after graduating had no work experience. Some women had qualifications, for example as a microbiologist and a teacher. Some qualifications were not recognised in Australia, but even when recognised there was a barrier of lack of local work experience and knowledge of the Australian work environment. This had not been such a barrier for doctors and there were some Iraqi doctors working in the area, but it was very difficult for teachers and engineers.



One young man had recently completed an Australian degree in computing, but had not been able to find work in Shepparton and expressed his disillusionment:

We are killing ourselves and working hard in order to gain a valuable qualification but at the end of that we end up as jobless people ... In respect to myself, I finalised a degree in computers and then I came here to Shepparton just because my family are settling here, and for sure that I had a hope, but at the moment all my dreams have vanished, and I have spent more than three months looking for work, sending my resumes and as I said the only solution is go back again to the uni. And for sure if you are living in a city automatically you will get a job. (Iraqi young man)

Limited English was raised as a difficulty in employment, but even those with very good English were not necessarily in full-time work:

It's not right to say there is not enough work in the area. But the thing is if you approach the employer he requires at least adequate English. (Iraqi man)

We've been deprived from taking any work opportunity at all. Specifically for those who are highly qualified, the thing is they experience a language barrier and their English is a bit limited. If those people haven't got the opportunity to practise that English, how are they going to improve that English? And in respect to myself, I am more than happy to accept any work opportunity even if it is less pay than the actual pay rate, even if it is half, or even quarter or even free of pay at all. I mean I am happy to stay on the dole for the time of training. (Iraqi man)

A major issue was employment for young people 16 to 25. We were told that no Iraqis in this age group were in full-time employment in Shepparton. An Iraqi leader explained that while the first generation may expect to make sacrifices in terms of their employment, the second generation must have jobs. It was seen as important to build trust between young people and the Job Network, as people had the experience of 'course after course and no job at the end'.

Employment services and employers were felt to sometimes 'show disrespect to the applicant, they ignore your application'. One man gave an example:

The other issues that I experience here with the employment agency, with Job Network. I learnt about a job advertised and he asked me a few questions and I hand him over my resume and he said that's very good and you can match with the job, and they run training at the same time. And I went to him Friday afternoon, and I was told by him everything would be set and be ready for me to commence the work by Monday. And at the Monday morning before they opened the door of the office, I was there. When they open the door I step in and soon as I walk in, despite that I am the first one who approach the office ... he said unfortunately that the job was taken ... We believe if that applicant was an Australian he wouldn't end up with that consequence. (Iraqi man)

The men quoted a number of examples of discrimination, including undertaking intensive training to work at a cannery but getting no work and an Iraqi worker being paid less than his less experienced Australian colleagues.

One man raised the impact of psychological stress on ability to work, referring to the current fighting in Iraq:

And for sure as everyone can imagine we experience a psychological deterioration in connection to the circumstances back home for the moment and that affects us in general. (Iraqi man)

People noted that the local fruit-picking jobs were only available for two months. One woman commented about the unsuitability of the work for some of the men:

Working like picking the fruit or pruning, it's not like a job that will improve their skills. And some of them they are very highly educated and they've got really very high qualifications. But you don't ask the people with very high qualifications to go and work picking fruit or pruning and most of the wintertime there is no job, and even if they will work for the part-time two days a week, it is still a very hard job and there is no benefit from that job. (Iraqi woman)

One man summarised the available jobs for refugees in two categories: the jobs such as interpreting and bilingual work that only they can do; and the jobs that are 'left over' by the 'native' Australian people, 'because the pay rate is very low or they cannot really afford it physically'.

Some women also referred to lack of work opportunities for their husbands, for their unemployed sons and for themselves.

The job is not available, and actually Centrelink requires us to fill a form and seek for a job. And they ask our husbands to go to the Centrelink and to check with the computer if there is any job available. But what happens is that they go every time and they check in the computer and there is no job available for them. They did a lot of courses here just to improve themselves and to find a job, but still like there is no job, even in the factories. (Iraqi woman)

The women felt it was very difficult for both men and women to find work. One woman who was keen but unable to find work either in Shepparton or in Melbourne felt wearing the hijab (scarf) and her English were problems:

I come to school to study English and then when I finish I go back home. But still I've got nothing to do ... I would like to do anything I can do, but that job should be suitable to my age, suitable to my style of wearing [the hijab] because I'm Muslim, as well as suitable to my level of English ... I really would like to work for an Australian factory, to be with Australian people, not with Arabic people.

Temporary Protection Visas provided a further barrier to some jobs and some training:

For my daughter, they're always asking her to look for a job and she always has got appointments, and they did an interview with her here at TAFE and they decided to give her a job. After that we receive a letter saying 'You are on a Temporary Protection Visa, you are not allowed to have that job'. (Iraqi woman)

You know I was studying some course, small business management, I got a ring from Centrelink, they told me 'Because of your visa you are not eligible' and I have to discontinue the course, and many other things. With Temporary Protection Visa we can't study any course full time, uni or other thing, many things, we can't work in many things. There is a big difference between our visa and citizens. (Iraqi young man)

For the TPV holders, the withdrawal of Centrelink income (on a dollar-for-dollar basis) from Special Benefit if they undertook any paid work was a further barrier:

For everyone who can get work and he's a TPV holder the taxation department [Centrelink] will deduct a dollar for every dollar that he can earn and I believe this is unfair and this is just an oppression. For instance my wife worked for a month and she earned \$400, and they deducted \$400. (Iraqi man)

Some men and women questioned the value of working in part-time jobs on low wages. One man commented about his wages:

It is not really worth in respect to my situation that I've got an extra \$150 and I spend it on child-care by putting my little girl there. (Iraqi man)

One woman described the distress of having no work:

We feel that most of the people here they haven't got quality time. They've got a lot of spare time in their daily lives, and they don't do anything, especially our husbands. We would like to have something to amuse ourselves and to keep ourselves busy by doing something valuable and something worthwhile in their life ... They haven't got jobs. (Iraqi woman)

Some noted that the lack of job opportunities was not just a local issue: 'Even in the cities it is still the same'.

### *Cost of living*

Many families faced problems with low income, although these were probably not as severe as in other countries where they had been refugees.

Some of the men emphasised that Centrelink was not the right source of income for them. They wanted work, and also the Centrelink payments were inadequate.

The payment is just enough to rent and to pay the bills, but you can't respond to any requirement from the children, you can't have any fun for them, you can't do anything. The payment, it's very limited. (Iraqi woman)

They noted that costs had increased faster than Centrelink payments. Those who were working were on low wages and found that they could not meet their families' living expenses.

Women mentioned items they could not afford such as medication, including 'good quality' asthma medication for their children and regular child-care to enable irregular part-time work, such as interpreting.

There were diverse opinions about the relative cost of living in Shepparton compared with the city. One man commented that he had been led to believe that the cost of living would be less in Shepparton than in the city but this was not his experience: 'Unfortunately when we discovered that, it was really too late to take further action'.

Costs that seemed higher in Shepparton included food, fruit and vegetables (in spite of its being an agricultural area), petrol and medical expenses (because of lack of bulk billing doctors). The women discussed the high cost of halal meat in Shepparton; some shopped for meat and other food when they visited Melbourne. One woman spoke of the high cost of supporting her children going to Melbourne for tertiary study.

Some felt some prices were less than in the city and that the costs balanced out, because while some costs were higher there were savings in travel costs. For example:

In Melbourne when I used to go to Centrelink, I had to change two buses to arrive to that area and to buy the ticket it's actually costing me money. But here, if I want to go to the Centrelink sometimes I can walk. (Iraqi woman)

One woman felt rents were cheaper in Shepparton than Melbourne.

Some mentioned the stress of trying to support family members in their home country:

We've got some obligation toward family members and we have to support them financially [so they can] survive. Actually we are depriving ourselves from some life necessities in order to save some money to send for those who experience financial difficulties back home. (Iraqi man)

Because of the high cost of living in Shepparton some Iraqi families were reported to be moving back to metropolitan areas, a process they described as 'reverse migration'.

### *Housing*

There were conflicting reports about housing. Initially cheap housing had been plentiful (though not in the fruit-picking season), but it became scarcer. Some Iraqis were living in public housing, some renting privately, some buying houses and some buying land and building. One of the women was pleased that the houses and units were bigger than in Melbourne.

The men raised a number of difficulties relating to housing, including poor quality ('the only thing we are eligible for is the shanty houses'), not understanding the system and being exploited by real estate agencies (for example being landed with costs for damage that they did not cause, and being charged more than the advertised rent. One commented that the 'suffering' they experienced through the job market and through the housing agencies was 'equal'.

### *Language*

The women appreciated the assistance of bilingual workers and interpreters with language and understanding the system. They discussed issues around learning English. Some of the women attended an English class together. They clearly valued the social contact, although a couple were critical of their fellow students:

I noticed that the students in the class, don't put energy and effort to learn. They're always busy talking in their own language and they don't like to spend the time and energy to improve themselves. (Iraqi woman)

The women also wanted their children to maintain their first language. One raised the idea of having an Islamic school, another mentioned that there were Saturday Arabic classes for children but a third said her children had not been able to get a place. One explained the difficulty with the children:

Actually we find this problem that they know the English word, but when you ask them about the meaning in Arabic they don't know. (Iraqi woman)

### *School*

Several school students spoke positively of the assistance they received with their studies, including English, and of their social contacts, but a couple mentioned instances of abuse.

In respect to the school I am going to, they give you the choice of the class that you feel comfortable to be appointed to. There is adequate assistance if someone asks for it, especially for students from non-English backgrounds. There is a lot of help available there ... I have problems with the language. I study year 12, it's too hard. They help, but still there are a lot of difficulties. (Iraqi young man, on TPV doing Year 12)

Like the school they are friendly, it is good, but some people ... don't know what's Muslim or something, like when I first come to Australia there was a girl who called me 'Bin Laden junior' so there has to be more explaining about this stuff. *Did you speak to the teachers at school about this?* At that time I wasn't speaking English, I didn't know what to do. (Iraqi young man)

At school some people say 'What's that you put on your head?' *How do you handle that?* Some of them they understand it and some of them don't. (Iraqi young woman)

The uncertainty and restrictions of Temporary Protection Visas were a problem, especially for students in Year 12:

Especially for students they are suffering a lot from TPVs because we can't like plan for the future, we can't get to uni, so I'm going to finish year 12 in three or four months, but my teacher said I can't get to uni anyway because I have to pay full fees and it's too expensive. We can't plan, like if they want to give a permanent visa they should do it early so we can make a decision. (Iraqi young man)

### *Community relations*

The Iraqis felt in general they were welcomed by the local community.

When asked specifically, all the men and the women said they had some social contact with Australian-born people; however there was not much discussion of this. Some of the men mentioned having friends and social visits, though one added that social contact was limited. Some of the women mentioned neighbours, one a language tutor. Only three of the 10 young people said they had Australian friends.

One of the Iraqi community leaders emphasised the importance of the multicultural nature of Shepparton. Earlier Italian and Turkish settlers had 'paved the way':

For example women in traditional dress do not feel nervous in the streets. They are accepted by the society, this is very important.

Iraqi community leaders spoke of positive responses from the host community, for example a local company putting the dates of Ramadan on their annual calendar, and the wider community knowing about the dietary requirements of halal food and no alcohol. Iraqi women launched a food festival as part of Harmony Week and 'dozens of people came to show support'. They had reached out to the host community: 'During our celebrations invite Australian people to come and talk.'

Some of the men reported problems with the police. They felt that, as Iraqis, 'we are a potential deliberate target of the police squad here specifically in Shepparton and every second one of us has been a victim of that mistreatment'. Three men gave personal examples of being fined for traffic offences they said they had not committed, in one case when he had simply stopped to ask the police for directions. They received fines and demerit points and 'In addition to that, their manner—if they stop you, they treat you in very arrogant manner like a slave'.

Nevertheless, community activities with other locals included a soccer match against the police followed by a barbecue at the police station. This was seen as very important because 'in our country the policeman ... means the intelligence service, arrest and prison'. The Ethnic Council had worked with the police to try to solve problems, offering a course for police to understand the religion and culture and some Arabic words.

#### *What would help you feel most at home here in Shepparton?*

Asked what would help them feel 'at home' in Shepparton, the groups produced diverse responses. The two issues raised most often by the men were:

- finding jobs
- reducing discrimination.

While one man emphasised that overall the positive experiences were dominant, the men spoke with considerable intensity about the anti-Muslim abuse they had suffered. An Iraqi community leader commented: 'We don't expect everyone to welcome us. Some people have racial hostility, but if they don't throw it in your face, it's okay'. He felt there had been only isolated incidents. The men were very keen for the Australian community to understand that there are different types of Muslims, that as Shia Muslims 'we are peaceful 100 per cent' and that the Shia have themselves been victimised by the Wahabi Muslims group which supports terrorism. They commented that the media treatment of the Bali bombing (October 2002) had affected their settlement in Shepparton.

Unfortunately it's the influence of the media and unfortunately as well it's the government policy, the government policy would like to stress the point connecting between Muslim and terror. If that is something [you get] from the higher ranking people, what can you expect from the ordinary citizens? (Iraqi man)

We would like this message to cross over to the Australian wider society: not everyone with a beard is a terrorist and not every Muslim is a terrorist. (Iraqi man)

Unfortunately we experience some racial vilification and some violence occasionally, and each one of us has his own experience, whether with himself or with his wife. (Iraqi man)

In contrast to the men, the women when asked about 'feeling at home' in Shepparton emphasised that they were treated equally:

Living here in Australia the law is the same for everyone. It doesn't matter we are Muslim, it doesn't matter we are black skin or people coming from different area around the world. Everyone has to apply the law, it doesn't matter wherever we come from. And you can feel the humanity here. You can feel that the person has got the right to do anything they would like. It's not like in our country. (Iraqi woman)

Here the people ... are treating us in a good way and as well there is equality between the peoples living here. It doesn't matter we are Muslims, it doesn't matter where we come from. There is no discrimination. The safety as well. (Iraqi woman)

In terms of being 'at home' in Shepparton, one woman commented:

I would like to settle here but [can't] because there's no university available for the children. (Iraqi woman)

Among the young people, most of whom were on TPVs, one felt at home because there was a large Iraqi community, but others did not necessarily feel the same. One who had been here just over a year commented 'I don't really feel "at home"'. Some referred to the big differences from their previous way of life in Iraq or Iran. Some also raised their experience of racial abuse in Shepparton, one adding 'It's happened with maybe everyone here'. One boy gave the example:

[It happens] sometimes out with friends, outside like some drunk people or not drunk people swearing 'Arabs' and stuff like that. (Iraqi young man)

His solution was to provide more information:

I'd say write more books about Iraqis, what are they, more information about them, so people can find out about why they came to Australia.

Several young people did not think they would stay very long in Shepparton, at least two expecting to leave at the end of the year, when they finished Year 12. Others spoke of job opportunities, another would go to Sydney where his father wanted to set up a business, yet another reflected her family's uncertainty: 'Maybe in one or two years' time we might go to Sydney or Melbourne'.

One raised the differences in expectations between some young people and their parents, with parents preferring Shepparton:

With all the respect that we can give to the views of our parents ... our parents look at this issue from one perspective which is accommodation and it's a less crowded place than the metropolitan area, but that doesn't really necessarily reflect our opinion because we think from different view. And in respect to ourselves we are doing our study at the moment and we have to think seriously about our future. (Iraqi young man)

Families on TPVs were prevented from feeling ‘at home’ because of the uncertainty of their visa and because of their lack of rights:

Well the problem here is for me and the other families most of them is the Temporary Protection Visa and so they don’t know when they are going to come back to Iraq or whether they are going to stay here and so that’s a problem and I think they should find out soon. (Iraqi young man)

I’m on a Temporary Protection Visa as well. I don’t care what they are going to do about my situation, if they are going to send me back or let me stay here, but I’d like that as long as I am here I have the same rights as what you have ... Before I came here, I was living in Iran, I was a refugee in Iran, but we left Iran because we didn’t have the same rights, like what we don’t have here, we couldn’t go to uni, we couldn’t work and many other things ... And we come here we thought we can have those rights, but after we arrived we were disappointed ... You know, before we came here, my uncle asked me, ‘Why are you going to Australia?’ ... I told him in Australia most of the people are refugees and they came by boat. It’s not an old country. It’s a new country, with most of the population coming from other countries. So I thought, I’d have the same rights as what you have, that’s why I came here. (Iraqi young man)

### *The balance*

The people we spoke to raised various pros and cons about their life in Shepparton, but on balance the experience was positive and people were grateful for the opportunity to live in a safe and welcoming environment:

Actually I would like to thank Australia for everything they’ve made available for us, especially for the preparing everything that can be fun for us, the safety here in Australia, the level of living in Australia, everything it’s really good. We don’t want to say just the bad things about Australia, we would like to mention the good things as well. Because if we want to go back to our country, and if our country has got the same level of living, we will go back, but until now we haven’t got that level of living in our country and that’s why we would like to thank Australia for make everything available for us. (Iraqi woman)

In connection to myself, after my release from the detention centre [I came here because] I’ve got a friend living here in Shepparton and the second reason that I decided to choose Shepparton rather than other places [was] seeking a work opportunity, but unfortunately my health later on deteriorated. I’ve got kids at school and they built up a network of friendship and as well [there is] the excellent treatment of the service providers and the teachers in the area and the officers that we really like and appreciate. And we feel very comfortable here. And you can say in general that we settled down. (Iraqi man TPV not able to find work)

A Melbourne-based Iraqi leader summed up the situation: ‘I have friends living in Shepparton. They are enjoying it, but there are some disadvantages in rural areas, but other advantages.’

## **The local community workers’ view**

We interviewed five local community leaders and service providers about the issues for the Iraqis settling in Shepparton.

A local community leader outlined Shepparton’s need for labour:

We want more people. We want more people because we need workers. We’ve got an agricultural base that needs a constant stream of relatively unskilled labour and that really explains why Shepparton has grown consistently over a long period of time, that there’s always work here for unskilled people. And that explains why we’ve become this multicultural centre because generations of Italians, and Greeks and Macedonians and Turks have come here, worked, saved some money, bought small properties, employed the next lot that come out. Then, on the other hand, we’ve also got a manufacturing and

industrial base that arises out of the primary industry that needs skilled workers. We need food technologists, chemists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, dentists, nurses, teachers—the whole lot. And we're not doing a very good job of attracting Australian-born people to move to regional centres. So now we're looking to attract migrants to fill those positions. [We have] a long tradition of welcoming newcomers.

The local community has welcomed the newcomers in many ways, from public statements to providing a range of services to individual friendships.

### *Services for the refugees*

A range of programs have developed to assist the Iraqi community. These included services based around the Ethnic Community Council and its close association with the TAFE ('there has been a huge effort put into language classes'), the availability of an Arabic interpreter at Centrelink, Arabic teacher aides and English as a second language (ESL) teachers in schools. The Ethnic Community Council played a major role in welcoming people and providing services, for example when TPV holders arrived with nothing. One Iraqi leader noted:

In Melbourne or in Sydney I heard from our friends: 'We are lost in this area. We don't know what to do with our problems—we have many problems.' But here it's a small area and the Ethnic Council is open every day, so if they have any problems they will come straight away.

There was now an Iraqi centre, a mosque with some classrooms for Saturday Arabic classes and for religious education. There were some Iraqi shops, one for meat and vegetables, a fruit shop, a car wash and a mechanical engineer. Some Iraqis were thinking of buying farms. An Iraqi leader referred to the importance of soccer for his community, with about 60 Iraqi players of mixed ages from 10-year-olds to 40-year-olds.

There have been programs to assist local services staff to understand the situation and culture of the Iraqis and also to assist the Iraqis 'learning the system'. One example given was a workshop about emergency services (for example, understanding that ambulances could not be called for transport for doctors' appointments and that firemen do not have to take off their shoes when entering a house for a fire).

The host community held differing perceptions of the Iraqis' financial situation. While one service provider said 'They live very frugally, they send money home, they have a belief in supporting each other and the family', others assumed there were few financial difficulties because they did not 'look poor', were able to visit Iraq and some were buying houses.

One example of difficulty in providing services was an unsuccessful attempt to establish family day care in the Iraqi community. Council restrictions were seen as too difficult because of the level of the women's English required and the cost of fencing.

Other difficulties reported in providing services included:

- some programs had funding for 12 months only
- some services were not available in Shepparton: for example children with disabilities attended the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne
- 'You give resources to one group, others complain.'

Three key issues in settlement were employment, housing and community relations. Comments by local community leaders and services providers are outlined below.



### *Employment and unemployment*

While filling job vacancies was a main reason to encourage new settlers, one local estimate was that 60 to 70 per cent of the Iraqi men in the area were not working. Community workers spoke of difficulties in the Iraqi contact with local employment services. It was suggested that some services did not want Iraqi clients, because they were not always funded for such clients (those on TPVs were not eligible for Intensive Assistance level of service). They also spoke of highly qualified refugees not wanting to pick fruit even though there was a shortage of fruit-pickers last summer: 'The Iraqis are not so keen on manual labour.'

Some service providers reported family tensions for the Iraqis when family members were unemployed.

### *Housing*

Some local resentment was reported when Iraqi arrivals were offered public housing, given the long waiting lists. Public housing was found that had been refused by others a number of times and thus had been rated 'untenantable', to make some short-term accommodation available for people arriving with TPVs. Other difficulties with public housing included houses with only two or three bedrooms when there were large numbers of children; and people not feeling safe in houses with big windows. While private rent would be lower than in Melbourne, public housing rents depend on income and are similar in city and country. Iraqi tenants also had to learn about how to leave a rental property so as to have the bond returned. A few more established families had pooled money to buy houses.

### *Community relations*

There were mixed and changing community attitudes in Shepparton, with strong positive support from groups such as Rural Australians for Refugees, but according to community workers there were also some 'rednecks'.

While the community had generally been very accepting, community workers reported that from 1999 news of refugees arriving 'illegally' by boat affected local attitudes. The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US and the Bali bombing in 2002 also led to some local anti-Muslim incidents, for example some women were having their garments pulled, because 'the community is very visible'. The Iraqis were quoted as saying, 'It is difficult but it will be better for our children'.

The large size of the Iraqi community provided benefits in terms of the viability of services but may also have had disadvantages. To the question of how much the Iraqis have been included in the local community, a comment was made that 'There has been so many of them, there's been no need really to include them'.

One issue was the diversity of religious observance among the Iraqi groups, with some described as very conservative, for example in regard to childrearing and dress. A number of people commented on some Iraqis refraining from any physical contact between men and women, in particular not being able to shake hands. Local attitudes ranged from the belief that when in Australia the newcomers should adopt the Australian custom to the belief that all that was needed was some simple cultural education of the host community. Another issue raised was girls not wearing school uniform because of their hijab, but this had evidently been resolved by including the hijab in a uniform way.

To build understanding, Iraqi community workers had been talking to a range of local groups such as Rotary about Iraq, the refugee experience, religion and culture.

### **Observations about refugee settlement in Shepparton**

This account of the experiences of the Iraqi refugees in Shepparton concludes by considering what are the pressures that are specific to the Iraqis as refugees, what seems to be working well to assist

their settlement and what further help is needed to help them settle. The observations below draw on our relatively limited consultation and do not represent a comprehensive evaluation of the local service system.

*What are the specific refugee issues?*

Factors raised by the refugees relating to their experience as refugees included many moves in other countries, experience of detention, worry about family in danger elsewhere, and the need to provide financial help to relatives overseas.

The focus of the host community had been on increasing population and on helping the Iraqis settle, including supporting those with TPVs. This focus was on the future rather than on the impact of their pre-migration experiences, although there was an awareness of some visiting their war-torn homeland. A torture and trauma counselling pilot program had been funded for 12 months and a counsellor with specialist training continued to work in the local health service.

Those on TPVs faced particular difficulties, including being eligible for some services and not for others. This caused confusion among services providers and resentment among the refugees (for example, not being eligible for the Adult Migrant Education Program including the home tutor program). Resentment was also felt about the dollar-for-dollar income withdrawal of Special Benefit if any paid work was undertaken. Young people on TPVs were unable to plan for future careers because they were not able to study after completing VCE, while they would be competing for employment with people who had done further training.

*What is working well for Iraqi resettlement?*

Factors that seemed to be working well for the Iraqi settlers in Shepparton included:

- the provision of services with bilingual workers and interpreters and the fact that Arabic interpreters had been able to get accreditation in Shepparton
- English classes which provided important social contact with each other for Iraqi women who might otherwise have been very isolated and volunteer English tutors from the local community who provided a good connection with the wider society
- emphasis on agencies working together and pathways between agencies, including a regular committee meeting monthly to look at family and children's issues
- local press 'good news' stories about Iraqi residents.

*What more is needed to assist Iraqi resettlement?*

Suggestions that were made to assist continuing settlement included continuation of programs to educate the Iraqi community and prevent the women being isolated, and working together with the host community to increase their understanding of Iraqi settlers.

To address unemployment, one suggestion was getting businesses, trade teachers and Iraqis together to discuss employment opportunities and skill requirements, because 'Jobs are about relationships'. Other suggestions included bridging courses for those Iraqis with qualifications and helping Iraqi students develop career paths.

Challenges for the host community include maintaining programs for the Iraqis while developing support services for new arrivals expected from Africa.

## 3 Sudanese settlement in Colac

### Sudanese in Colac

Colac is a small town (population around 10,000) in western Victoria, 150 kilometres from Melbourne and 75 kilometres from Geelong. One of Colac's largest businesses, the lamb processing plant, has employed some 20 Sudanese men over the last two to three years. An employment firm was instrumental in bringing the first Sudanese to work in Colac. The men came first alone and women and children started joining them in the later part of 2003. By August 2004 an estimated 60 Sudanese lived in Colac. The Sudanese were Nuer from south Sudan and were said to all be related.

The Colac community welcomed the new arrivals in various ways: the Anglican church provided a venue for services in the Nuer language, there were English classes conducted through the local Adult Community Education centre in partnership with AMES, and volunteers provided practical assistance and social contact. The community had also received two DIMIA Living in Harmony grants to assist building a tolerant community.

### The Sudanese view: Colac

We held two focus group interviews with 16 south Sudanese refugees (all Nuer) in Colac, meeting as a men's group and a women's group. The women's interview was undertaken with a Nuer interpreter, the men's interview in English.

The women's group interview took place in the currently shared home of three of the women, all with new babies. The nine women were aged from 21 to 25; all were married, with one to three children each. They had arrived in Australia since 2000 and in Colac within the last 12 months, the most recent having come straight to Colac from Africa a month earlier. Most had had only one or two years of schooling, one had none, and one had eight years. The last was the only one who spoke English well. None of the women was in paid work. The main source of income for most families was the husband's wage, while two were reliant on Centrelink payments.

The seven men we interviewed in Colac had generally had much more education than the women. Most had completed 12 years of schooling and some had further qualifications including diplomas in science and teaching (the range was one to 15 years of education). All the men were working in meat-processing, except one very recent arrival who was still looking for work. Some emphasised that their work was part-time or casual. The men were aged 21 to 35; all but one were married and most had young children. The first had arrived in Colac in 2002.

#### *Background*

The Nuer families in Colac had mostly come from villages, although some of the men had moved to a town for their education. They had fled the fighting in Sudan, crossing the border to refugee camps in Ethiopia; some had returned to Sudan briefly when fighting broke out in Ethiopia in the early 1990s, some had moved on to camps in Kenya and a few to Egypt. They had typically lived for long periods in refugee camps and some had received their education there. In Australia, some had lived first in Melbourne, Hobart or Alice Springs; the more recent arrivals had come directly to join the relatives who had sponsored their travel in Colac.

#### *Where would you choose to live if you had a free choice?*

The men were generally quite positive about being in Australia. They wanted to live where they could get education and find work easily and they did not see their futures in Sudan, because of the ongoing war. One said that if there was peace he might visit Sudan, but he would want to return to Australia. Some specified that they liked being in Colac as a rural area where it was easier to get

work than in Sydney or Melbourne. The women, when asked where they would choose to live, were either unsure or specified Melbourne or Geelong.

#### *What are the main reasons for coming to Colac?*

The main reasons for coming to Colac were the availability of jobs and the presence of relatives. Two of the men had come initially to work in the meatworks (privately sponsored by an employment firm) and had been then able to assist others to join them, either from elsewhere in Australia or direct from overseas.

It is very difficult to settle in a place where you don't know anyone. This is why I came here ... two of them came here to Colac and then they settled here. So they were working where they are still working now. Then we rung them, we asked them if there's plenty of jobs, would you give us some information. They give us information. And so as brothers, because we are cousins, and then that's why we come. (Sudanese man)

For the women, coming to Colac presented a rather different experience. They said they were in Colac because of their husbands' jobs. Some had stayed in Melbourne when their husbands first found work, until their husbands had decided they should join them. Some were happy enough with their husbands' choice, others were not. The social support of other women was very important. The men commented on this:

Some women love to stay in the city because there are lots of Sudanese there. Like if there is a party in Melbourne, they really like to see and meet with friends. (Sudanese man)

#### *The best things about living in Colac*

The best things about living in Colac for the men, apart from employment, were the cheaper cost of living, ease of transport and assistance from the local community. Some emphasised the difficulties of living in a big city without a car and the cost of train travel to work, whereas in Colac they could get a lift with a relative, walk or use a bicycle.

It is better here in Colac, because you can walk also or you go by bike and that's for me better. And also the community they are all right with us, like the churches, because they are very good to us. (Sudanese man)

For the women the best things about Colac were their husbands' working, and for some this was the only reason to be there. Others were very positive about help they had received from the community, in particular from the church, which not only had provided sewing classes, assistance with shopping and trips to the beach, but also had given them time for their own church service in the Nuer language.

Colac is the best place for me to live because my husband works. There is nothing good about Colac compared to where I used to live in Melbourne, I like Melbourne more, but the opportunities are not there for me and my husband to get, so we chose to live here, in the future we may move back to Melbourne. (Sudanese woman)

The only reason we are here is because of employment. But the rest of the community, there is nothing wrong, we are getting along with the community and they are very supportive. But the town is so small you cannot get what you want. (Sudanese woman)

#### *The difficulties*

The difficulties that the men raised included the limited further education opportunities and the problem of doing TAFE or university courses and working at the same time (especially with changing shifts). They spoke of the shortage of public and private rental housing, and of emergency housing for new arrivals. Lack of settlement services, especially for newcomers, was also raised, as was lack of access to migration agents to help sponsor relatives. They missed the access to free public health services (hospital emergency or bulk billing GPs) and commented 'When you go the

Emergency department [in the town hospital] they have to call for a doctor who you have to pay' and 'You go to Emergency you have to pay \$60'.

The women raised the same difficulties as the men, and also raised issues around English classes, including access to child-care (local centres were full) and cost of transport, and, importantly, the English classes offered which were too difficult for some who could not read at all. The women also found food was expensive compared with Melbourne or Hobart.

One of the men talked of the overall difficulty of accessing services in this rural town and being told frequently 'Maybe there is an interpreter in Melbourne' or 'If you want to do this you go to Melbourne'.

### *Employment*

While the men were typically employed at the meatworks, they raised issues of discrimination around lack of training opportunities there. Training was necessary to improve their pay levels. The most recent arrivals had not yet found work, which raised the question of how many new arrivals could continue to be employed.

Some were interested in the future in gaining further education to get a better job and felt they might need to move elsewhere to achieve this. One woman explained of the men:

Sometimes they are happy because they have the opportunity to work; sometimes they are not because that is not what they want to do for the rest of their life. So the reason they are doing this job is that they want to do something that will help them do the further education, so like buying a car, so when they pay off their car they may be able to do something else but this is not the lifetime work for them ... We are here for purposes for the short term, so once we get what we want we will move because there are no universities here. (Sudanese woman)

The men wanted to be have their qualifications recognised and gain access to work for which they had trained.

### *Cost of living*

While the men reported that transport and rental housing were cheaper in Colac than Melbourne, the women said the shopping was expensive, a factor the men did not rate as a problem, as the women did the shopping. Cost of health care was another issue. Overall there was little chance of saving money. One woman summed up the women's concerns:

We came from refugee camps, where we were getting rations from UNHCR. We expected that when we came here to Australia our lives would be different, but here is very expensive, like shopping, [and] meat is cut differently. So the life is difficult. We get money because our husbands work, but the money they are getting from their employer is insufficient for life expenses here, it leaves them with nothing really.

### *Housing*

People were concerned about the lack of public housing, difficulty in getting private rental, especially for new arrivals with no work, and the lack of assistance from a Migrant Resource Centre in getting emergency housing, or initial settlement provisions such as a fridge, beds or blankets. Some had received such assistance in Melbourne and missed this for the new arrivals in Colac. The Migrant Resource Centre in Geelong was seen as 'a bit far'.

The women spoke of the shortage of rental housing. One family had applied for public housing in Melbourne and the woman and children would return to Melbourne if a house became available so she could access better educational opportunities while her husband worked in Colac. Three

families with new babies were sharing the one house. While many African households are 'collective', this forced sharing of housing was not appreciated:

What I would like the government to do is to build more public housing here so that we can feel we are at home, so we can have our own house so you can plan for the future, but the way we live now, we don't have plans because we are living together, three families in the one house. (Sudanese woman)

### *Language*

While most of the men interviewed spoke English, only one of the women spoke English well and some spoke no English. The women explained the difficulty of being dependent on their husbands for interpreting, when their husbands are working:

The problem here is language. If we are able to express ourselves we can go to services by ourselves, but because I don't have the capacity, my husband has to interpret every thing for me ... Because I don't have options I have to use him for everything, [even] if I go shopping. (Sudanese woman)

Getting driving licences was another obstacle:

In Melbourne there are Nuer interpreters who can go with you when you are sitting for your learning permit. But here there is no-one and they are afraid to be not able to drive for the rest of their lives here. (Sudanese woman)

While most of the women had attended English classes, some had stopped because they had new babies. As mentioned above, some found the English classes were at too high a level.

The teacher gives us things that are too much, we are beginners. They always give us forms ... We need more intensive support ... But here there is no conversation, we don't know how to read, we need more conversation. (Sudanese woman)

### *Community relations*

Both men and women had found members of the Colac community very helpful and kind, including through the churches ('The majority of us are Christian'). The men also mentioned the City Council, Centrelink and some employment agencies.

Social contact is really going well with the Australian community. (Sudanese woman)

However one man described some areas as 'dangerous for us'. There had been an incident at a club—a fight involving some young local people and the police. This had been discussed with the police and had not recurred: 'I think as time goes by ... they will understand'.

### *What would help you feel most at home here in Colac?*

One man listed the things that made him feel 'at home' in Colac as being able to live in peace, not war, having a job and being able to buy a car. Others also talked of feeling at home there because it was a place where their needs are being met. As an aside, one man noted that 'At home in Sudan you don't have a job'. For the future, some felt they would need to be able to study elsewhere in order to get a better job.

Overall most of the women expressed some positive feelings about Colac, but a couple were clearly not impressed:

For me I'm very happy here in Colac because the church is here. For me to go to church and talk to God in my own language I feel at home, which makes me more comfortable being here. (Sudanese women)

We've got the church here, and the weather here is OK and they treat us well, so we are happy and feel at home. (Sudanese women)

In Colac nothing is good, I am not happy to live here, I prefer my country to here. There is nothing that has changed my life, I'm still the way I was when I came to Australia and I expected to be more educated because I have been here for over one year and I am still the same person, I am not happy. (Sudanese women)

The Sudanese men would like some support for a community association to run some activities.

### *The settlement balance*

In supplying employment for the men, Colac was meeting their key need for the moment. A current major issue was housing; and there were also issues of the women needing interpreters and more suitable English classes. For the future, the continuing availability of work and access to further education would be issues. Some Sudanese have moved or are in the process of moving to Geelong or Warrnambool because of higher education opportunities in those larger towns.

One of the men described the situation of the Sudanese in Colac:

We are now trying to become a community ... [But] there are numerous things that we are finding [difficult] because we are here in regional Australia that we did not find difficult in Melbourne ... But I don't know who we can ask these questions to and do something about it?

## **The local community workers' view**

We had discussions with three local community workers about the issues for the Sudanese settling in their town and also spoke with staff of the Geelong Migrant Resource Centre.

### *Services for the refugees*

One of the main services offered to the Sudanese community has been English classes, including volunteer home tutors along with considerable voluntary assistance associated with a local church. The local Council was not seen as very active in service provision for the new arrivals.

The Migrant Resource Centre in Geelong was responsible for providing DIMIA funded settlement services (IHSS) for newly arrived refugees across all of western Victoria and discussions were underway about how to have a regular presence in Colac, but this was proving difficult.

A DIMIA 'Living in Harmony' grant had enabled a wide range of activities aimed at promoting positive community relations and countering intolerance, including public-speaking engagements, regular positive press articles and a Harmony Day family barbecue.

Community workers commented that there was a huge amount of work 'being there' for the Sudanese families and that, while they tried to be proactive, they tended to be reactive. Diverse issues included financial problems (difficulties repaying airfares, housing costs, Centrelink debts and costs associated with getting driving licences) and domestic violence. One person expressed the view that the Sudanese families with their refugee experience have a 'camp mentality', expecting things to be done for them: 'You want people to take control of their own lives.'

### *Employment*

Community workers described as 'a good vibrant town, but ...'. One noted that 'The top of the crop go off to Melbourne'. While in recent years the Council had 'saved' the meatworks, there had been loss of employment with Telstra, State Electricity Commission and the banks.

The meatworks has been the main employer of the Sudanese refugees in Colac, with a few others employed in timber manufacturing but none in the local dairy industry. In spite of relatively high local unemployment, the meat processing company had sent overseas for workers, with the employment firm sponsoring some people directly. There were evidently plans for new refugee workers to be sponsored to come to the meatworks from other destinations. That raised issues of services needed by different groups, such as there being no halal food available for Muslim refugees. There were limits to the number of people who could work at the meatworks, and it was noted 'work has dropped out a bit because of the drought'.

There were some rumours that the Sudanese were being paid below award wages in the meatworks (as there were in the study of Afghan refugees in Young, NSW (Stilwell 2003)). Irrespective of the truth of this, such talk would likely to be harmful for positive community relations.

### *Housing*

Community workers described housing for the Sudanese as 'a huge problem'—both finding any housing and the cost. The exception was that it could be easier to find four-bedroom houses needed for large families than in the city.

### *Language*

The two key language issues were interpreting and English tuition. The women spoke Nuer and we were told there was only one female Nuer interpreter through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) in Victoria. Interpreters were needed particularly at Centrelink and at health services. The examples were given of women needing help filling out Centrelink forms for new babies, not returning forms, having to declare income, and accumulating big Centrelink debts. Centrelink had tried to help with three-way phones for telephone interpreting. Centrelink on one occasion had brought an interpreter to Colac, only to have none of the Sudanese attend because of their work and child-care commitments.

Workers noted child-care and transport were barriers for English classes for some women. While 510 hours of English lessons through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and child-care are funded for new arrivals, in rural areas people transport is a cost. The Colac community bus cost \$5 per trip. Evidently a program had been funded which covered these costs, but now that had stopped: 'the choices aren't there' in a small town. Home tutoring was developing well, however. For the men, fitting English class time around shift work was difficult, as classes were arranged and then the shifts changed. A Saturday class was tried but had to stop because the men did not attend regularly, for example when there was a special Nuer event in Melbourne. Funding per student for English classes was seen as insufficient to provide the needed service.

None of the Sudanese children was yet of school age, but language support at school was likely to be an issue for the future.

### *Community relations*

A newspaper article (Farouque 2004), concurrent with our research quoted local people saying the Sudanese are good regional workers and relationships are all right:

They are really committed. They come from some pretty horrific backgrounds and they really want to work and they want to support their families back home.

I am not saying every single person here welcomes them with open arms, but I haven't met anyone who doesn't.

Colac was described as a very 'Anglo-Celtic' town in contrast to multicultural Melbourne or Geelong and as 'an Aussie Rules kind of town'. The work funded by the Living in Harmony grant was seen as contributing to a change of local community attitudes from 'standoffish' to 'warm'.



Local people had wanted to know of the Sudanese, ‘Do we talk to them? How do you make contact with them?’ One community worker commented, ‘I’ve been amazed how well Colac is accepting them, but if they were Muslim it would be different’ and at first everyone had assumed they were Muslim.

A community worker had been trying to facilitate the Sudanese men joining a local soccer team.

Cars provided a potential source of conflict. Sudanese had been involved in two recent car accidents and it was feared ‘accidents are going to make locals angry’. There were many issues about facilitating driving practice and safety, including language barriers and cost of driving lessons; but men felt ‘they have to have their licence’.

There had been incidents relating to the treatment of women and to fights. Community workers felt the Sudanese were no different from other groups in this, but were very visible.

## Observations about refugee settlement in Colac

### *What are the specific refugee issues?*

Resettlement for the Sudanese in Colac was clearly influenced by their refugee experience. They needed to adjust after living for years in refugee camps. Their links to family overseas were very strong (‘We all have family overseas’); and they felt the need to send money back to relatives and anxiety about family members still in danger. People had to deal with the vagaries of the immigration system: for example one child had had to be left behind in Africa by his parents because he was born after they submitted their application to come to Australia (he arrived as a two-year-old to join his parents). Compounding the stress, there was no-one qualified to do torture or trauma counselling locally.

### *What is working well for Sudanese resettlement?*

Aspects of settlement that seemed to be working well for the Sudanese in Colac and promoting their social inclusion were the availability of employment for the men, the support from members of the local community and being able to have their own language (Nuer) church service.

### *What more is needed to assist Sudanese resettlement?*

A range of suggestions were made to assist Sudanese settlement in Colac:

- more DIMIA funded settlement services in the town and closer contact with the Geelong Migrant Resource Centre to ensure settlement services were provided
- interpreters to assist with Centrelink, health services and VicRoads driver’s licences
- English classes for women with little or no formal education (with associated child-care and transport) and higher levels of funding to provide English lessons (payment per class not per student)
- increased private or public rental housing so families do not have to share
- support for a local Sudanese community association to run some activities.

For long-term settlement, it was important that the refugees could improve their employment prospects and see some career paths. Suggestions included discussion with employers about training opportunities, recognition of existing qualifications and access to work using these, work-based English lessons, and access to higher education.

## 4 Sudanese settlement in Warrnambool

### Warrnambool

Warrnambool (population 30,000) is a coastal city 260 kilometres south-west of Melbourne. Warrnambool Council has recently been active in recruiting a small number of Sudanese refugees as part of a wider plan to increase the local population. The city's population is growing at a gradual rate and the key industries are seen as having a shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour. The Council is also keen to promote diversity and multiculturalism in a very 'Anglo-Celtic' community. Planning started in 2001 with the Council and a coalition of partners including the South West Action Group for Refugees. They worked on an explicit model of four criteria for successful settlement: welcoming community, access to employment, access to services and ability to reconnect with own community. A 12-month pilot project in 2003–04 aimed to settle some 10 refugee families in Warrnambool. This Migrant Relocation Project was funded by an independent philanthropic grant with a focus on settling refugee families. The project supported a Migrant Liaison Officer to assist with relocation and provided funds to assist with initial rent and other costs. This work won a number of national and state awards for excellence in 2004. VicHealth is currently funding a three-year evaluation by Victoria University of the Warrnambool experience (and also of refugee settlement in Swan Hill).

The Sudanese living in Warrnambool in August 2004 numbered 68 people (mostly Dinka, Shilluk and Equatorian)<sup>1</sup>. These included 11 families relocated by the Migrant Relocation project, two additional families sponsored directly from Cairo by these families and 12 single Sudanese adults who had moved to Warrnambool and gained employment. Some of the single adults had family overseas they aimed to bring to Australia and some of the project families were also sponsoring relatives. Most of the families were Christian and attended the local Catholic churches, one the Anglican and one the Presbyterian church. Three families were Muslim. The families were living in private rental housing (as part of the project), the single people were sharing housing. The main employer was the meatworks, for both men and women. Other jobs included mechanic, hospitality worker and recycling sorter. A number of the women were at home with young children. The families were all receiving some AMEP English tuition, either from a home tutor or in a class.

### The Sudanese view: Warrnambool

We visited three Sudanese families in Warrnambool in August 2004. One family had four children, the others one each. Four men and two women (a single man was visiting one family) took part in the interviews (in English). They were aged between 33 and 41 and had arrived in Australia in 2000 and 2003, and in Warrnambool in 2003 and 2004. Three of the men were working in meat processing, one very recent arrival was looking for work. One woman was about to start work in family day care, the other was not looking for work at present, but was training in hospitality. One couple had previously worked in Melbourne. The men and women all had at least 12 years of schooling, one with a part law degree, one a bachelor of theology, one some architecture qualifications. Most were of the Shilluk kingdom (from the Upper Nile region). They had disrupted backgrounds, with years as refugees in Egypt, Kenya and Lebanon. On arrival in Australia, they had lived in Melbourne and then, having first visited Warrnambool, had chosen to move there to live. They attended local Catholic churches. While these six people cannot be said to be representative of all the Sudanese living in Warrnambool, their experiences illustrate some of the issues faced by the wider group.

---

<sup>1</sup> By November 2004 the number of Sudanese in Warrnambool had increased to about 100.

*Where would you choose to live if you had a free choice?*

When asked where they would live if they had a free choice, their responses were diverse: one couple said their 'home country', another 'Australia' and another responded that 'a small town is better than a big city'.

*What are the main reasons for coming to Warrnambool?*

They all emphasised that one of their main reasons for coming to Warrnambool was that it was a quiet place. One who had not been able to get work in Melbourne hoped it was a better source of work. Some saw it as better for bringing up children than the city. One was also keen to have a rest from the demanding voluntary work he had been doing for his community in Melbourne.

We don't have anything there in Sudan, we lost everything because of war and here we were thinking not to lose our children so looking for a very quiet place to bring them up. Melbourne is very busy ... so for us I was much worried about the future of my kids. Actually a lot of different cultures and behaviour, like in a big city you can't control anyone. I tried to see if we could get a place outside Melbourne—it doesn't mean Melbourne is not a good place, but to me I prefer to live in rural areas. Most of the people who come here they think of getting a good environment, a good atmosphere. (Sudanese man)

Warrnambool is a quiet place. You can do anything you like, you can work and you can read and you can study if you want. (Sudanese man)

When we asked one woman why she wanted to come to Warrnambool, her husband answered that 'she followed me'. She added it was 'a good place, nice weather'. When asked if it was easier for men or women to settle in Warrnambool she responded that it is 'easy for both'.

Another potential reason for people to come to a regional area may be the belief that it could make it easier to sponsor family to come to Australia:

They are saying that most of the migrants who are applying in Australian embassies, those who are being a sponsor with the people in the regions, they will get better chance to come to Australia. (Sudanese man)

*The best things about living in Warrnambool*

For the Sudanese refugees to whom we spoke, the best things about being in Warrnambool included having friends around (Sudanese and Australian), the friendly people and being near the ocean:

People of Warrnambool, they helped a lot, they helped us to settle. They helped us in terms of entertaining, sometimes we go to picnics to Port Fairy, to places like Tower Hill, the Grampians, so it's really a good time. A couple of cars, it's really good. (Sudanese man)

People are really good. Even [people] you don't know, they can greet you. That's very nice, different from the city. They are very friendly. (Sudanese man)

*The difficulties*

The three main difficulties they raised about living in Warrnambool were finding housing and its cost, finding work and combining work and study.

Housing was a difficulty mentioned by all, in particular the high cost of rental housing.

One of the difficult things is a huge difference in living in Melbourne and Warrnambool in terms of renting. In Melbourne, I was renting for \$130 per week [for] a very good house, Housing Commission. Now I am paying \$220 per week, it is nearly double ... The rent will discourage others from coming. (Sudanese man)

The main difficulty for the newest arrival (who had already searched unsuccessfully in Melbourne for 6 months) was finding work. In Sudan he had worked as a cashier. While he had applied for various jobs in Warrnambool (at the meatworks, cleaning at the TAFE, at a motel and at the Council), he was still waiting for a response. He felt his lack of a driver's licence and his limited English may be barriers. He was finding unemployment quite distressing:

I want to work because if you stay at home always, it's not good for your health, it's not good for you. Maybe Centrelink sometime can help me, but now I want to work. My wife wants to work also because we have children ... our children are going to grow up. So you have to work now to prepare something for the future. (Sudanese man)

While the meatworks was the main employer, it could not take everyone and other jobs seemed unavailable:

The problem of being a small town, most jobs are family things, so it's really difficult to have someone from outside so the only place is [the meatworks]. At [the meatworks] people come and go. (Sudanese man)

Combining work and study to improve future job prospects was difficult in terms of time to study, cost and availability of appropriate courses:

So the difficulty here is if you want to go to study, because it is not only work, you have to improve your standard also, so if you want to go for study you cannot do it here because by going to study you are not working and if you are not working you cannot afford the living, like the renting ... So you can choose working this year and next year you may go to study. The problem will discourage some from coming to rural areas because this means you have to confine yourself to work only. It will also be hard for us because the most important thing is education. (Sudanese man)

When I came here I was aiming to do my English course (level 4 for academic), but the TAFE don't have it here, they don't have English as a second language. I went to Deakin University here to ask them if they could help me if I want to go for my law studies, but I cannot do it here because of the small numbers. (Sudanese man)

Language issues were not seen as a major problem for two of the families in daily living, although there were some difficulties. One man who felt his English was a problem for him getting work commented:

In my country we start to learn English ... I learn English for three years but when we finish Grade 12 in my county and we go to work, in work there is no English ... we speak Arabic. (Sudanese man)

### *Cost of living*

As mentioned above, the cost of housing was greater than in Melbourne. A major financial pressure on some families was the obligation to support relatives overseas. Wages did not cover such costs.

We've got our own problems. Because we came a long way and we left other people there, some are in refugee camps, some are in Sudan, some are in Egypt, and to us it's our responsibility to help them also. It's one of our values that you can't have anything just for yourself alone, you have to extend to others. And if anyone asks for help you have to help. Sometimes it is really difficult to settle all your bills and everything, because you receive a telephone call from Sudan from one of the relatives that is suffering and needs some help and you have to help. So we are living like that, we don't have anything. [The meatworks] actually they pay well, it can help like me with a very small family [one child], but I have a huge responsibility out of my family. Every Friday you get paid, but you get nothing. (Sudanese man)

### *Services*

The people we interviewed were very appreciative of the assistance they received from the Migrant Liaison Officer. One spoke of how the Warrnambool Council had approached the Dandenong Migrant Resource Centre to see if any of the Sudanese community there wanted to come to the area and that they were able to visit for a day and were shown around and could decide. On arrival the Migrant Liaison Officer had taken them to the meatworks and they had been able to get jobs there. He had also provided a range of other support.

Nevertheless some of the Sudanese felt some immigration information and settlement assistance was not readily available. Some, especially single people who were not part of the relocation project, missed the support of a local Migrant Resource Centre:

The Migrant Centre in Dandenong is helping a lot because those people coming from overseas. They still don't know Australia and they will go there and get information and some of the staff can help them how to get a job, and some of the staff can help them if there is a course which you would like to study. You can get enough information from them, but here not. (Sudanese man)

The Geelong Migrant Resource Centre (which is responsible for settlement services in Warrnambool) was seen as 'too far away' and providing only limited assistance.

They visit sometimes. You leave the problem it accumulates, instead of solving it. You need it straight away. It takes one minute. (Sudanese man)

There were major concerns about how to bring relatives to Australia, including the difficulties of the immigration system. People spoke of the difficulty of getting the correct forms to sponsor friends and relatives from camps overseas.

One of the problems we have is the people still left behind. I have people who are my dependents, a niece and two nephews and my wife's brother and now they are waiting for a year [in Cairo]. ... The Cairo Post is not considering the suffering of the refugees waiting for a year or two to be interviewed—and [of] the sponsors who are eagerly waiting to reunite with their family members. (Sudanese man)

However, people were grateful for the increased numbers of refugees from Sudan being accepted.

Any number is good, because their life there is terrible ... We would like to thank the Australian Government actually for what they do for us, and we will not forget. (Sudanese man)

### *What would help you feel most at home here in Warrnambool?*

Some spoke readily of feeling 'at home' in Warrnambool, because of the friendliness and the safety.

Actually we are feeling at home here, the most important thing is to meet with people and help to socialise with them and go along with them, because this is part of happiness. We are social by nature and we like it here. (Sudanese man)

Because there's no wars, no-one to take you away. (Sudanese man)

Although he had local Sudanese friends, the unemployed man did not feel at home:

Yeah, now, I think I'm not part of Warrnambool because I'm not working ... I don't have friends, Australian friends. When I was in Melbourne, we had some friends. We work together, we play together, we play soccer together. I'm still part of Melbourne. (Sudanese man)

One commented that many of the Sudanese in Warrnambool had known each other as refugees in Cairo before they came to Australia. In addition to having friends in Warrnambool the families we interviewed maintained contact with friends and relatives in Melbourne, visiting and being visited.

One man outlined the large adjustment needed between living in rural Sudan and the western world of earning income, paying bills, time management and future planning:

At home you have everything, you have the land to farm, you have the river [where] you can get fish, you can be without a job, you are OK. But the problem is war that really gave us a hard time ... so now we are still keeping in mind that attitude of being there in Africa, talking politics and doing nothing. But politics is something that can't bring your daily food. It is really something which is not good here in the western world because people are concerned with how to get good income, how to settle bills, planning for the future. There, you don't worry for your future, because tomorrow everything will be there. Here you have to plan for your future, what you will eat tomorrow, so here is time management and you have to stick to that. (Sudanese man)

Rural values were seen as important:

Here the social life is very easy and like they are friendly and, for example, if you go to the church here you get the whole family there in the church, starting from the younger ones, but in Melbourne you get the aged people, the grown up people but you don't see youth or kids going to the church. The rural areas they still keep their values, they keep their respect and because we come from there we want to find the same environment. (Sudanese man)

## **The local community workers' view**

We interviewed two community workers associated with the settlement of the Sudanese families and read reports and newspaper articles about the project. Service providers based in Melbourne also provided comment.

### *Services for the refugees*

The coordinated settlement support provided to the families in the Migrant Relocation Project had been working well, with a focus on early intervention, enabling most families to settle fairly quickly in terms of employment, retraining and studying, the children being established in schools and kindergartens and all the adults having AMEP English tuition. Community partnerships had been developed with a whole of community approach, key agencies being the City Council and the South West College of TAFE. The South West Action for Refugees group was active and there were local Indigenous and migrant members on the advisory committee. There was also a partnership with the Horn of Africa Community Network based in Melbourne.

One person summarised the project:

It's been successful here because people can get work, there's a welcoming community—and not too many dramas.

The project paid for relocation costs (including bond and eight weeks' rent, school uniform and driver's licence in some cases) and arranged a Job Network provider and interview to get a job. The project focused on families, who were seen as integrating into the whole community through the schools and children in a way that single people do not. Difficulties identified for the Sudanese settling included language and transport.

An example of services being developed was a new AMEP English class held at a sports centre to meet the needs of breastfeeding mothers (the TAFE's policy that no children were allowed in the classroom was preventing them from attending classes there). In addition the mothers were being

taught how to get to the centre by public transport to develop their independence ('We don't want to hand feed them'). This was an award-winning program.

As mentioned with reference to Colac, the Geelong Migrant Resource Centre (Geelong Ethnic Community Council) was responsible for DIMIA services in a very large region of Western Victoria. In Warrnambool, both workers and families spoke of the need for new refugee arrivals to see settlement workers as soon as possible. The MRC's location in Geelong meant a huge extra cost to provide services.

With the completion in 2004 of the funded project relocating 10 to 12 families, further funding was needed to continue the Migrant Liaison Officer position. Apart from the ongoing needs of the original families, there are also the needs of the single workers and potentially their relatives and of the families sponsored directly to Warrnambool. The newcomers arriving directly from Africa would need more assistance than the relocating families (including initial settlement services [IHSS] and language tuition for school children).

Community workers assessed the cost of living in Warrnambool as a 'bit dearer' than Melbourne.

### *Employment and unemployment*

One of the main things the refugees were seen to offer Warrnambool was a labour stream that otherwise would not be accessible. There was acknowledgment of some tension between the humanitarian and the economic purposes of the refugee settlement in the Warrnambool experience.

The meatworks was a large local employer with some 400 to 500 staff. The management was reported to be planning expansion, but were also talking of laying off 100 people because the supply of carcasses had been affected by the drought. While the meatworks could offer unskilled work or work with training on the job, community workers did not see it as people's 'employment of choice'.

Most of the Sudanese were working at the meatworks within a week of arrival. A community worker described the 5.40 am line-up:

The Boss comes out and walks around, picks and chooses ... Sudanese are seen as hard working, reliable ... Not many have been put off. Most have stayed there. Some had worked at the Wonthaggi meatworks packing meat, some had no experience. One had worked in the kitchen at the Hilton in Khartoum, so had experience with knives. He's been promoted. [There is] on site training—Certificate 2 in meat handling.

Community workers reported that the meat workers were getting 'reasonable money': they spoke of \$14.50 per hour for 40 hours, and sometimes overtime. (One of the refugees noted that the wages at the meatworks started from \$12.36 per hour.) The majority were on casual rates (not entitled to sick leave or holiday pay): they would be laid off when work was slow and have to go back to Centrelink. They had difficulty filling out Centrelink forms and working out fortnightly earnings because they get a weekly pay sheet and needed help with this.

A few Sudanese were starting to get employment elsewhere but opportunities were limited.

A major question was whether the refugees' 'employment of choice' could be gained in Warrnambool in the future. Community workers suggested that the region has a limited range of jobs. The refugees arrive in Australia with substantial debts and want to work and quickly pay off their debts.

They do unskilled work or [work] where they are trained on the job. The work is secure, and there is as much as you want. The real test will come in five to six years when people are ready to get into their employment of choice ... It is a general issue for the community.

Members of the general community have modified their perception of employment choice by understanding the context.

### *Language*

The community workers felt most of the Sudanese had sufficient English for daily living, although the women were seen as having less English in general. Health care was one area of language difficulty. The recent births of new babies had presented a challenge for the health system, to get the information translated and address cultural issues around birthing.

South West TAFE delivered AMEP English courses and staff identified 'real issues': 'Generally, they are looking for much more than we can supply.' Some of the Sudanese had come with AMEP entitlement (510 hours for some plus 200 hours), while some had already used this up. There were issues of sufficient numbers for classes, and problems with the funding model:

With AMEP you only get funded when the people turn up. If all eight turn up the TAFE is still under-funded for that.

Most English classes were at night to cater for those working. With the meatworks hours (6 am to 5 pm) this made a very long day for the students.

### *Housing*

A couple of years before, there had been a housing shortage in Warrnambool. Then there was a building boom and some older houses came onto the rental market. Still, the refugees would not necessarily get their house of choice and some housing had transport problems if not near the bus route. There was no public housing available because of long waiting lists. Community workers commented that with pressure on housing, rents had gone up.

The Migrant Relocation project had provided early assistance with bond and rent, but this was only available for the original participants and lack of this assistance could be a problem for new families arriving.

### *Transport*

Transport difficulties for the new arrivals include limited public transport and the need to acquire a driver's licence:

They all live nearby, but the bus only runs 8.30 am – 5 pm weekdays and Saturday mornings. It makes getting to the meatworks at 6 am difficult.

Some people linked in with other families, who picked them up. One had a car and a licence so became the group's taxi driver.

### *Community relations*

Warrnambool was described to us as having been 'startlingly monocultural' in the recent past. However the community workers said they were 'not hearing stories of discrimination' against the very visible Sudanese:

Anyone who moves to a place the size of Warrnambool is likely to be visible. The Sudanese are highly visible—big, dark, smiles, bright clothes. At church on Sunday, working, or at the supermarket, they are a novelty. People go up and talk to them. There's no racism. Where there have been issues at [the meatworks] the perpetrators have been removed from the work site—[there's] a zero tolerance policy.

Community workers thought the Sudanese families were becoming a part of their neighbourhoods, schools and church. A lot of people in Warrnambool contributed furniture and household goods for



the newcomers. The schools were seen as very welcoming and supportive. The importance of sport was noted: 'If you're just an Aussie, it's only as your kids get involved in sport that you make connections'. Some contact had been made with local soccer.

Community workers described the Sudanese community:

They pitch in and help one another, they knew each other before, they've got their own network, their own sense of community and helping each other out.

There was no division seen between Muslims and Christians and one of the Muslim Sudanese took a lead role in the community. Through the church network the Christian Sudanese were invited to barbecues and were asked to collect the Muslims as well to come along. The Sudanese were also including the locals in their celebrations (for example, the mayor, CEO and Migrant Liaison Officer had been invited to a birthday party for a little girl and the local community centre hired for the event).

## Observations about refugee settlement in Warrnambool

### *What are the specific refugee issues?*

The community workers said that the special needs of refugees as distinct from other migrants had not been discussed as a major issue. The needs for social connectedness and access to services were seen as similar for all groups. The impact of the refugees' pre-migration experiences had not been a focus:

As a group we haven't spent time talking about their personal histories ... We are more looking forward, rather than considering where they are coming from.

They did note that depending on their visa category, some of the Sudanese refugees were eligible for settlement services through the Geelong Migrant Resource Centre, while some were 'not eligible for anything'.

### *What is working well for Sudanese resettlement in Warrnambool?*

Many aspects of the relocation program seemed to be working well for the refugees, in particular:

- early intervention – the planned provision of employment and housing and other support including training
- the welcoming community, including the South West Action Group for Refugees and the churches
- the development of services partnerships.

One community worker noted that the Sudanese families themselves were very friendly and presented well: 'well-dressed, big smiles, easygoing—everything is no problem to them'.

The local expectation was that more Sudanese families would come as a flow-on effect from the core group. The goal of the philanthropic trust had been to resettle 10 families. That did not happen at first, but then the families talked to friends and sponsored family members. The effect was described as 'dramatic' and there was a rapid growth in numbers. The growth was expected to be self-limiting: 'As soon as people can't get housing or work it will discontinue'.

### *What more is needed to assist Sudanese resettlement in Warrnambool?*

Some factors which would assist continuing settlement of the refugees include:

- a source of continued funding for the Migrant Liaison Officer (or equivalent) who provides an important and visible source of support
- a stronger presence of DIMIA settlement services
- a more workable funding model for English classes
- with families arriving direct from Africa, ESL classes for children before they enter school
- a way of explaining and dealing with different entitlements for different categories of refugees (those on different visa categories as humanitarian entrants and locally those who have been part of the Migrant Relocation Project).

For the longer term future, the factors that are likely to keep the refugees in Warrnambool include:

- affordable housing
- extended study opportunities
- access to wider employment choices.

## 5 The regional settlement experience

### What promotes (or hinders) inclusive settlement for refugees in regional areas?

This section draws together the experiences of the refugees from the three locations—Shepparton, Colac and Warrnambool—to consider the factors that promoted or hindered social inclusion and settlement. These are outlined under the headings of social inclusion and rights, resources and relationships. The refugees to whom we spoke had experiences that could be seen as *refugee* issues and some that could be seen as *regional* issues. Recognising the interaction of these is a key factor for future planning. The report concludes by considering the implications for policy.

The three locations of refugee settlement could be compared as follows:

- Shepparton was already a multicultural community to which Iraqi refugees chose to come, initially to seek work and a quiet place, and later to join those already there and to use the available Arabic services, with refugees on TPVs joining the existing community.
- In Colac Sudanese refugees were first recruited by an employment agency for the local meatworks, and were later joined by relatives from Melbourne and overseas.
- In Warrnambool a small number of Sudanese refugees were actively recruited from Melbourne as part of a privately funded relocation project with humanitarian aims of settling refugees. This was associated with the local government agenda of strengthening the local economy.

### The refugees' experiences

We interviewed some 50 refugees about their experience of settling in the three regional towns. While there are some patterns and commonalities on their responses there is also considerable diversity. In some cases the women gave different responses from the men, the younger people from their parents, and there were marked individual differences—for example, one Sudanese woman was happy to be living in Colac, another, in seemingly very similar circumstances, unhappy.

#### *Choice of location*

There were diverse responses when the refugees were asked if they had a free choice where would they want to live. This diversity needs to be kept in mind when considering settlement outcomes. Some would choose to return to their homeland if it were safe and peaceful; others, especially the young people, would choose a major Australian city for its educational and employment and leisure opportunities; and some were pleased to be where they were, because they had work or felt safe and settled.

Why had the refugees come to the regional centres in which they were living? Most had made a choice to move from Melbourne or another city, mainly to find employment and/or to join relatives or friends. For example, the Sudanese men in Colac came to work in the meatworks and the women and children followed. Other refugees spoke of multiple reasons for their choice. Some placed a positive value on living in a small town as a quiet place, especially to bring up children. A number of parents, both Iraqi and Sudanese, spoke of being better able to control their children growing up in a small town than in a city. For at least one of the Sudanese, the 'quiet' included being away from the demands of his community in the city. The Iraqis also mentioned clean air as a reason for choosing Shepparton (a number had children with asthma), as well as its reputation for tolerance and being multicultural, and its special services for Arabic speakers.

Some of the refugees had come directly from overseas to join friends or relatives who sponsored them and so had not made an active choice of a country town.

### *The experience of regional settlement*

What the refugees identified as the best things about living in their regional location often, but not always, reflected their reasons for coming to the place. For those who had employment, this was a key factor. Some were very positive about the quiet and also the convenience of a smaller place in terms of ease of getting around and not needing transport. Some mentioned a cheaper cost of living. Some valued the assistance from the local community, having friends of their own group around them and, especially in Warrnambool, the friendly local people. Some spoke of being in a place of safety, in contrast to their homeland. The Iraqis emphasised the value of the availability of bilingual workers, a benefit not shared by the Sudanese groups.

What were the difficulties of their location? For some, the lack of employment was the major difficulty. For people in all three locations the limited tertiary educational opportunities were seen as a problem, in spite of the university campuses in Shepparton and Warrnambool. Cost of living was seen as higher than in cities by some people, in particular cost of food and of health services (because of lack of bulk billing GPs). Housing was a problem for some, as were limited settlement services and access to English classes. Discrimination was a difficulty named particularly in Shepparton.

There had been changes over time. In Shepparton, there was some discussion of early difficulties overcome, as services developed and the community became more familiar with the newcomers. But there were also difficulties that arose unexpectedly, for example increased abuse arising from the public linking of Muslims and terrorism after the 2002 Bali bombing.

An important question for exploring the experience of inclusion or exclusion for refugees is what would make them feel 'at home' in their new location. For the Iraqis, the two main things that would help them feel at home were finding work and reducing discrimination. Obstacles that prevented them feeling at home were older children having to go elsewhere for tertiary study, and, for TPV holders, the uncertainty of their futures. Similarly, for the Sudanese, feeling at home was associated with having work and being able to meet their current needs. They also mentioned their enjoyment of friendly relationships with local people and the importance of living somewhere with no war.

### *The balance*

The decisive thing for refugees was the balance between the advantages and the disadvantages of a particular location. Some, overall, were quite happy to be living where they were, in spite of some difficulties. For others, the problems outweighed the benefits and they were likely to move on because of lack of work or the high cost of living or to undertake higher education.

### *The distinctive refugee experience*

Some of the refugees' concerns about living in regional areas are shared by other groups. For example children of many rural parents leave the area to undertake tertiary study and many other immigrants share the difficulties of language and cultural differences and understanding 'the Australian system'. In addition, however, the refugees had to deal with their background experience of trauma, persecution and dislocation, of life in refugee camps and, for some, in detention centres. Some suffered physical and mental health problems associated with their earlier experience. Some were still anxious about the continuing war in their homeland, to which some hoped to return, about relatives suffering overseas and about the mechanisms of bringing family members to join them. Many had disrupted education or employment.

## Social inclusion and rights

The acknowledgment of people's human rights is an important aspect of their experience of being included in a society. Refugees arrive with past experience of having their rights denied. In this study, some of the refugees spoke positively about being treated as equals under the Australian law (in particular Iraqi women) and of safety from war and persecution. Others had experienced some situations where they felt their rights were not being recognised. These ranged from lack of rights as tenants to some contacts with the police. People on TPVs were very aware of being excluded from various aspects of life by Australia's legal and bureaucratic apparatus, with many rights withheld.

## Temporary Protection Visas

A large number of Iraqi refugees who had arrived in Australia by boat from 1999 and had spent time in detention centres were subsequently recognised as refugees by the Australian Government, but were granted only temporary protection, rather than the permanent protection that could be seen as their right. Some hundreds of Iraqis in Shepparton, including some we interviewed, were in this situation. TPV holders could not bring family members to join them in Australia, could not visit family members overseas and return and were not eligible for most settlement services and income support available to other refugees (see Taylor & Stanovic 2004). TPV restrictions hindered settlement, for example by limiting employment and assistance from employment agencies, by subjecting holders to the harsh income tests which apply to Special Benefit and by denying access to tertiary education. Some TPV holders felt angry and humiliated by such exclusion.

## Social inclusion and resources

People can readily be socially excluded because of lack of resources. Refugees typically arrive with very limited material resources and have greater need for support than other immigrants. In turn, regional towns often lack many resources available in the cities, which may compound the issues for refugees. However, some regional areas may well be able to provide the necessary resources for particular refugees. Crucial resources for settlement discussed by refugees in Shepparton, Colac and Warrnambool included employment, income, housing, education, language and other services.

## Employment

Employment was a key aspect of the refugees' lives in regional areas and had been a central reason for many coming to the area. Some of the refugees had already tried unsuccessfully to find work in the city. The regional areas offered some manual work, but with the exception of doctors, it seemed difficult for people with qualifications, such as engineers or teachers, to find work in their field.

Employment was described as 'a major problem' for the Iraqis in Shepparton and a service provider estimated that 60 to 70 per cent of men were unemployed. A number of the Iraqi men, women and young people to whom we spoke had failed to find work and some were quite depressed by their unemployment. Those we interviewed who were employed were typically working in part-time jobs as bilingual community workers. An Iraqi community leader noted that while refugee parents saw themselves as making sacrifices for their children, the Iraqis were particularly upset that no 16 to 25-year-olds were in full-time employment in Shepparton. In Colac and Warrnambool, while most of the Sudanese men we spoke to were working (in the meatworks), some of the newest arrivals were still seeking work.

While local community and industry leaders spoke of the regional need for labour, some refugees found difficulty in getting any work. The type of work available was limited. It was mainly low-skilled, seasonal or casual. For example, fruit picking in the Shepparton area was only available for a couple of months a year, the jobs in the meatworks in Colac and Warrnambool were typically casual and the work available fluctuated and was influenced by factors such as drought. Being laid off when work was slow led to the difficulties of going back and forth to Centrelink to adjust

benefit payments and problems of how to meet commitments such as rent. One Sudanese leader in Melbourne also noted the sense of shame experienced by his compatriots when they were laid off. In any case, fruit picking and jobs at meatworks could be seen as entry work for fit young new arrivals, but were not necessarily the ongoing 'employment of choice' for those with higher qualifications or seeking career advancement. Also some of the refugees had health problems which ruled out manual employment. Some of the Iraqis felt that the employment available to them was either 'left over', what no-one else wanted to do, or what no-one else could do, such as interpreting. Meanwhile some members of the host community were critical of the Iraqis as 'not so keen on manual labour'.

Extra barriers to employment for those with TPVs included lack of access to intensive employment assistance and to training.

While in their relatively early days of settlement the Sudanese were pleased to get work in the meatworks of Warrnambool and Colac, some saw this as a stage on the way to higher education and job prospects.

Other barriers to getting work in regional areas (as in cities) included: English language ability, recognition of skills, unhelpful experiences with employment agencies, physical and mental health, and discrimination (including for Iraqi women who wore the hijab).

### **Income and cost of living**

Refugees arriving in Australia are likely to have very low incomes and high expenditures (Taylor 2004). The refugees we interviewed were typically living on low incomes, either on Centrelink payments (Special Benefit for those on TPVs), or low wages, often in part-time work. (Those working full-time on casual rates of \$14.50 per hour at the meatworks in Warrnambool could theoretically make \$30,000 per annum, but the work was not constant and casual workers had no sick leave or annual leave, and some were earning less.) Not only did they have low incomes, but also they often had high expenditure, for example as humanitarian entrants repaying airfares or trying to sponsor relatives to Australia, or financially assisting large and scattered families in refugee camps or war zones.

Costs reported by the refugees as difficult to meet included medication especially for asthma (Iraqi), child-care while parents worked, obtaining driver's licences and Centrelink debts.

The question of whether cost of living was higher in the regional centres than in the capital cities produced diverse answers. In Shepparton some refugees felt costs were less than in the city, some that they were more and some that they evened out. Shepparton was seen as more expensive for food including fruit and vegetables, petrol and medical expenses, and less expensive for rents and for travel costs because things were close by. Because of high costs some Iraqi families were moving back to Melbourne. Members of the host community were only partially aware of the financial struggle of some families. One community worker noted that the Iraqis tended to live frugally and help each other; another assumed they had few financial difficulties because they did not 'look poor', and because some were able to visit Iraq and had started to buy houses.

In Colac, the Sudanese found medical costs higher than in Melbourne, the men found transport and housing cheaper and the women found the food more expensive. In Warrnambool, the Sudanese found housing cost more than in Melbourne and local workers described the cost of living as a bit dearer than the city.

Many of the refugees to whom we spoke found with the wages they earned they had nothing left over at the end of the week. Low income limited their inclusion in many critical aspects of life from health care to driving lessons and limited their engagement in social activities that cost money.

## Education

Schools provide an important site for the inclusion of refugee children and their parents into the host community and educational opportunities are a key factor in enabling future inclusion.

Educational resources needed for these refugees in regional Victoria included English as a second language (ESL), teaching for children at school, and tertiary training facilities for school leavers and also for those who needed to upgrade their qualifications or develop new careers. Local schools did not necessarily have the resources to deal with children with behavioural issues as a result of their refugee experience.

For the Sudanese, a major challenge was how to combine work and study in order to improve their future prospects. They needed time to study, which changing shift work did not always allow, and they needed appropriate courses to be affordable and available. Opportunities were particularly limited in Colac.

The young Iraqis who were still at school spoke positively of the assistance they received there, but it was still not necessarily enough, for example, to bring their English up to Year 12 level.

Parents wondered whether they would have to move to the city to provide tertiary education for their children or face the costs of setting them up in Melbourne. Other rural parents face the same dilemma, but generally with greater resources and without the multiple disruptions and family separations that the refugee families have already suffered or the potential loss of cultural identity as a community if their children leave.

## Language

Being able to communicate is essential to being included in a society. For refugees arriving in Australia with little or no English the resources needed are twofold:

- interpreting and translating services to enable communication in their own language with the wider community, including Centrelink, employment and medical services
- English tuition to facilitate their development of English language skills.

Both federal and state governments have put considerable resources into language services; however there are always new challenges as new arrivals bring new languages not covered by existing services. Supplying the services in regional areas is a further challenge, especially where numbers of non-English speakers are still relatively small. Some regional service providers found the funding model of being paid to deliver English classes on attendance numbers, rather than by the hour, made classes unsustainable.

English classes provided an important social contact especially for some of the women, as did individual home tutors. Costs of child-care and transport to enable people to attend classes were covered for some refugees but not for others, depending on the delivery model and funding. Provision of English classes for refugees who were working was made difficult by changing shifts.

One particular problem was having classes geared to the appropriate level. For example, among the Sudanese, on the one hand there were women who had had no formal schooling and were unable to read their own language let alone English, and on the other hand there were men who had learned English at school and had some tertiary qualifications but needed high-level English assistance to enable them to undertake further studies. Providing for diverse needs in a small refugee group is quite difficult in regional areas.

The Iraqi community was very appreciative of the assistance available to them in Shepparton from bilingual workers and interpreters, for example in Centrelink and in schools as well as at the Ethnic Council.

In contrast to the more established Iraqis in Shepparton, the Sudanese in Colac and Warrnambool had no locally employed bilingual workers or interpreters, although they had some access to phone interpreting services. Some of the Sudanese, particularly the men, spoke English well and could sometimes interpret for others, but this was not always possible because of work and family commitments, and not necessarily desirable because of privacy and skill issues, for example in dealing with health, domestic violence or legal issues.

## Housing

It is often assumed that housing is cheaper in regional areas than in the city, but this was the case only in some locations. Some refugees spoke positively about the availability of larger houses in regional areas. On the other hand there was a shortage of rental housing in some places and at some times and the housing available was sometimes of poor quality. The high cost of housing was seen as a problem in Warrnambool; shortage of rental housing was a problem in Colac and during the fruit-picking season in Shepparton.

Other issues included the role of real estate agents in access to rental property and the refugees' perception of being discriminated against on various occasions, for example in having bonds withheld when leaving a rental property. For new arrivals, it was difficult to get housing without references and with no employment.

Local community workers suggested that the scarcity of public housing and the long waiting lists for local residents meant that there was likely to be local resentment if newly arrived refugees had access to public housing.

Initial housing assistance for refugees should be provided through DIMIA's IHSS settlement services; however few services were available for the Sudanese refugees arriving directly to regional locations from overseas (not relocating from other parts of Australia). Early assistance with housing, including the bond and a month's rent, had been a valuable part of the Warrnambool Relocation Project but was not available to subsequent arrivals.

## Services

All three regional communities had developed some other services to assist the refugees settling, in addition to the English language classes. For example, the Warrnambool Relocation Project had allowed the local government appointment of a Migrant Liaison Officer as a central contact point, while in Shepparton the Ethnic Community Council in association with the TAFE provided a range of services. In Colac a federal government (DIMIA) Living in Harmony grant funded work to counter intolerance. However community workers had to take on tasks beyond their role (and funding) to try to fill gaps in services and to meet the need for intensive assistance.

Access to health services can be particularly important for refugees because of their special health needs (from post-traumatic stress to (for some Iraqis) possible effects of depleted uranium) and their previous deprivation, for example in refugee camps. Refugees interviewed raised problems of health services, in particular the cost of medical services because of the lack of bulk billing GPs and, for the Iraqi women, the lack of female doctors. Lack of medical interpreters was a further issue.

Access to transport is also important. Diverse approaches to dealing with transport to English classes for women with children ranged from employing a refugee woman as a bus driver and child-care coordinator to collect women (Shepparton) to teaching women how to use public transport (Warrnambool). The availability of housing near public transport was an important issue.



Other positive aspects of services for the refugees included:

- Both Shepparton and Warrnambool developed committees to oversee the refugee settlement with an emphasis on agencies working together.
- The availability of volunteers, particularly as English home tutors, but also for wider activities has been a strength in these communities.

Difficulties included:

- The Migrant Resource Centre in Geelong struggled to provide settlement services at a distance for new arrivals in Colac and Warrnambool.
- Local service providers spoke of the huge amount of work to 'be there' for the newly arrived refugees who had often lived for years in refugee camps and to educate them about the complex Australian system.
- In some communities providing services to a refugee group raised resentments from other groups.
- In Shepparton, Iraqi refugees with TPVs were not eligible for some services available to other Iraqis. This caused confusion and resentment.
- In each location there were programs that had been able to attract only short-term funding, while newcomers continued to need the service.

## Social inclusion and relationships

In considering three dimensions of social inclusion and exclusion of refugees in regional areas (rights, resources and relationships), the relationships arena is perhaps the most complex. Relationships are affected by the diversity within the host community, which can be both welcoming and hostile to the newcomers; by the size and visibility of the refugee group; and by the diversity within the refugee group. From their compatriots, the refugees may experience both support and pressure, and their key relationships may be both local and international.

The refugees we interviewed generally felt welcomed by their local communities. For some refugees being able to live in peace was in itself welcome enough. Some, particularly women with little English, lived fairly contained lives within their ethnic group, while others had considerable and positive social contact with members of the host community. There were some incidents of hostility and discrimination reported, particularly by the Iraqis who experienced abuse, both as 'illegal' boat people and also as Arabs and Muslims associated in the public discourse with the terrorist attacks in the US and Indonesia in 2001 and 2002.

All the refugee groups were very visible in their host communities. Their cultural characteristics affected the community relations: for example the Shia Muslim women's clothing, dietary requirements and social prohibitions (for example against shaking hands) could make this refugee group seem less approachable to the host community.

While Shepparton was seen as welcoming with its long history of multiculturalism, the Sudanese in the more 'Anglo' locations were also experiencing welcome, possibly associated with their novelty. 'People go up and talk to them' was a comment made by service providers in Warrnambool and confirmed by the Sudanese refugees. The work of the Living in Harmony project in Colac was reported to have changed community attitudes from 'standoffish to warm'.

While earlier studies of African Australians emphasised the experience of racial discrimination (Batrouney 1991; Cox et al. 1999; Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock 2000), this was not a major issue

raised by the Sudanese in the present study. Anti-Muslim incidents, however, were widely reported by the Iraqis.

It was suggested by community workers that the Sudanese in Warrnambool were becoming part of the local community through church and schools and contact with their neighbours. The Sudanese in Colac at the time of interviews had young children not yet in the school system.

Having a common language to communicate is clearly an important aspect of social inclusion, but openness to difference and goodwill on both sides are also crucial for successful settlement in regional areas. People spoke of activities such as picnics and soccer matches which encouraged social contact. Soccer offered a potential point of contact with the wider community as well as within their own, for the refugees in all three locations.

Education of the host community was agreed to be a necessary strategy by both community workers and refugees. Young Iraqis who had experienced discrimination spoke of the need to explain the situation of persecution from which they had come. Iraqi community workers were talking to local groups such as Rotary, as well as to service providers, about the situation and culture of the refugees. The Geelong Migrant Resource Centre has run community forums on refugees in both Warrnambool and Colac, since the time of our interviews.

The size of the refugee community can be a crucial element in its settlement and its relationship with the host community. The large size of the Iraqi community has enabled services to be developed, and has provided important cultural support for its members, but at the same time may work against inclusiveness in the host society, as in the comment already quoted that:

There's been so many of them there's been no need really to include them.

In all three locations there were examples of positive press coverage of the refugees settling, although there had been some negative coverage in Shepparton when 'women only' swimming sessions were being planned.

Refugees emphasised the importance of their continuing contact with and responsibility for relatives overseas. The Sudanese explained their strong cultural imperative to care for and support their extended family in Africa and to try to bring them to Australia. Some of the Iraqis had recently visited Iraq and been most distressed by the war-zone conditions in which their relatives were living. For these refugees successful settlement would be very difficult while their families remained in danger.

The refugees in all three regional locations kept contact with friends and relatives in Melbourne, some visiting the city for special events and in turn, receiving visitors. This indicates the advantage for regional settlement of the proximity of the regional area to the larger cultural centre.

Gender issues were significant especially when social activities were segregated along gender lines. Among the Iraqis, the potential isolation of the women at home was seen as a problem by community leaders. Some of the Sudanese women in Colac were missing the cultural support of their larger community in Melbourne. The well-being of the refugee women would in turn affect the well-being of their children.

## **Areas for further research**

This small scale exploratory study raises questions for further research in the following areas:

*Primary or secondary migration.* The study suggests there might be differences in experience between those refugees moving from the city to a regional area (secondary migration) compared

with those who arrive directly in a regional area (primary migration). This deserves closer investigation.

*Maintaining families.* Further research is needed on the impact of regional settlement on family integrity. If the goal is to maintain refugee families together given the previous disruption of their lives, will regional location suit both husbands and wives and also older children? What is the impact of men leaving their families in the city to go and work elsewhere?

*Critical mass.* This study does not attempt to suggest the desirable size of refugee communities settling in regional areas, but notes it is difficult to provide services for very small numbers. Larger numbers can make service provision more viable, but may alter the balance of community relations.

A related question to the size of a refugee group is the number of different refugee groups a host community can support at the one time. For example, what will be the impact on resources available for Arabic-speaking refugees in Shepparton with the proposed arrival of African refugees with different language needs, but similar needs for assistance with employment and housing?

## 6 Conclusions – implications for policy

A simple equation is sometimes presented, that regional areas need population and workers and that refugees need jobs and therefore the refugees should go to regional areas. This study suggests the answer is not necessarily simple. One must ask why regional areas need workers and population. If the answer is because of population decline due to lack of ‘employment of choice’ and educational opportunities and loss of services, these are all factors that could weigh very heavily on refugee settlers. Problems with these—employment, education pathways and services—were all prominent for the refugees in this study. Refugees cannot be the single answer for regional problems, although they can make a contribution if appropriate resources are in place. This paper argues that because of the special humanitarian considerations for accepting refugees into Australia, we as a society have a strong obligation to assist their settlement as much as possible. They should not be seen as merely a source of cheap labour.

This small-scale study can only provide glimpses of the issues of refugee settlement in regional areas. While it has included some discussion with community leaders and service providers in regional communities, the focus has been on the experience of the refugees to whom we talked. Nevertheless, the findings raise some general implications for regional refugee settlement, concerning how to meet the complex needs of the refugees, how to plan for the diversity of both the refugees and the regional host communities and how to ensure informed choice.

### The refugees

This study suggests that some of the supports needed by refugees settling in regional areas are:

- *specific to refugees* – including recognition of their experience of trauma and loss, their disrupted education and employment, their special health needs, their anxiety about family still in danger overseas, and recognition of the uncertainty and limitations for those granted only temporary protection (TPVs).
- *specific to refugees and other immigrants as newcomers* – including the provision of language services, understanding of their cultural background, and assistance in understanding the Australian system at local, state and national levels
- *specific to refugees and other residents of regional areas* – including access to educational and career opportunities (an issue that causes many young people to leave regional areas for the city) and access to affordable medical care.

The kinds of support needed by the refugees as refugees and as immigrants will apply to some extent whether they settle in cities or regional areas, but the resources available to assist them may be very different depending on location. These supports include those of the host community and also those of the refugee communities.

### Recognising diversity

In suggesting that regional settlement of refugees is not a simple solution to either regional needs or refugee needs, the study highlights the diversity that must be considered: the diversity of the refugees and of the regional areas and their resources.

#### *Refugees*

The refugees to whom we spoke were diverse in terms of education, employment experience, language skills, gender and immigration status—even when they come from the same country. For example, the refugees from south Sudan whom we interviewed in Colac (the Nuer) were from the same area and same language group and described themselves as all related; but there were marked

contrasts in education levels and their English language ability, with some of the women, particularly, having little or no formal schooling and not being literate in any language. In Warrnambool, the Sudanese refugees were more diverse in terms of tribal groups and also religion: most were Christian but there were a few Muslim families. In Shepparton, one significant difference affecting the Iraqis' settlement and well-being was their immigration status, whether they had temporary or permanent protection. Another difference was their response to their previous refugee experiences: some were disabled by these, while others showed great resilience.

Such diversity is not surprising, but it can be overlooked in regional planning when the focus is on gaining workers for specific local industries or finding places for a new group of refugees. We cannot assume, for example, that new Sudanese refugees in Shepparton would have the same experience there as the Iraqis.

Another area of diversity is the different types of refugee settlement already outlined: relocation from elsewhere in Australia (spontaneous, locally planned or employer-driven) and direct settlement from overseas (supported by sponsors or directed by DIMIA).

In this study, most refugees saw both advantages and disadvantages in living in a regional area. Some were pleased with where they were living and felt very 'at home', others felt the advantages outweighed the disadvantages and some were not happy and planned to move. It is difficult on balance to summarise these diverse reactions, other than to reiterate that regional settlement seemed to work well for some people we talked to, but not for all.

For these refugees, regional settlement meant at best, welcome, employment, safety and a good place to bring up children and at worst, unemployment, isolation and vilification. For those without employment, finding work was a key to well-being. For those with employment, opportunities for education and career development were often paramount.

### *Regional communities*

There was considerable diversity within and between the different regional locations in the study. Regional communities contain conflicting attitudes to refugee arrivals. How these balance out will have a major impact on settlement. In this study, attitudes included:

- strong humanitarian support for assisting refugees start new lives
- a strong need by certain employers in selected industries for a flexible workforce
- the desire for increased population to maintain facilities such as schools
- some hostility to outsiders, including those from a different 'race' or religion and those who have been associated in public discourse with terrorists, and those who might be seen as taking local jobs, working for less pay or receiving extra services.

This study cannot make a comprehensive comparison of the three locations, but can point to some features. In Shepparton, the first Iraqis had little support, but over the years bilingual workers and a range of helpful support services had become available. Unemployment, however, was a critical current problem. Another important aspect of the Shepparton experience was some deterioration of community relations associated with the anti-Muslim aspects of the War on Terror rhetoric. The Shepparton experience highlights the need for ongoing support for refugees over a period of years.

The Warrnambool Relocation Project was distinctive in proactively seeking refugee settlers, bringing potential settlers to the town and providing planned on-arrival support tying in work, housing, schooling and training. At the time of the interviews, this appeared to be providing a good start for the new settlers, but the question was whether this support would remain available for those who arrived after the initial intake.

In Colac, the recruitment of refugees had been led by local employers, whereas other settlement issues had to be met in a more ad hoc way by the host community in response to the refugees' needs. It was uncertain whether work and housing would continue to be available to the newcomers being sponsored from camps in Africa by the refugees who had settled.

All three locations provided positive examples of refugee settlement, but all three also had some difficulties.

## **What is the role of policy in promoting social inclusion for refugees in regional areas?**

The development and implementation of public policy (social and economic) is critical to the success of regional refugee resettlement. For policy to be an instrument that assists social inclusion it needs to be dynamic and responsive to the resettlement needs of refugees and the host community across time and place (Taylor 2004, Ramburuth & Stanovic 2004; White, M 2004).

Drawing from the experiences of the refugees in this study, the following list outlines some of the key areas which need resourcing to promote social inclusion of refugees settling in regional areas. These areas have been discussed in chapter 5 in terms of resources, relationships and rights. Their interaction in promoting inclusion or exclusion is critical—for example the need for access to both housing and employment, as well as appropriate transport, in regional Victoria.

### *Resources*

Policies promoting settlement of refugees in regional areas need to ensure the following areas are well-resourced:

- **Employment:** Access to jobs is crucial. Refugees need access to more than just seasonal employment. They need active assistance to make contact with employers, as 'jobs are about relationships', especially in regional areas.
- **Education and training:** Education and training are vital both for those with no education and for those already with qualifications who seek career paths 'beyond the meatworks'. Also needed is meaningful activity for those who are unemployed.
- **Housing:** Affordable and available housing for people on low incomes is a central factor: some regional towns had quite high housing costs and little rental housing. Access to public housing needs consideration as some refugee families had surrendered places in public housing when they left Melbourne. Refugees require housing which is close to employment, (sometimes) housing for large families, and assistance with contacting estate agents.
- **Income support:** Adequate income support is needed which acknowledges the high costs of resettlement for refugees and of family reunion, including airfares. Assistance is also needed to prevent debts accumulating to Centrelink.
- **English tuition:** Classes need to be accessible to those with and without work, to cater for different levels of English (this is an even greater challenge in regional areas than in the city), and to provide social contact.
- **Interpreters and bilingual workers:** Access to phone interpreters becomes crucial in regional areas. Also, training refugees locally as interpreters seems a strategy worth pursuing, particularly for new language groups.
- **Settlement services:** Generous settlement services are needed both for those relocating from the city and for those arriving direct from overseas. These should be accessible within the local community and should include some provision to assist with costs (such as rental bonds or driving licences). Assistance is needed with family reunion and sponsoring relatives and with family support or referral regarding sensitive issues such as domestic violence.

### *Relationships*

Relationships are a key area of social inclusion or exclusion in regional settlement. Policies need to support:

- **the host community:** A welcoming and informed host community is needed, with the capacity to build ties with the newcomers. This can be fostered through community awareness building and social activities. Also needed is an effective way of dealing with discrimination if it arises.
- **family ties:** It is important that families are reunited and remain intact: for example, separating adult male workers from their families is undesirable for refugees who have suffered family disruption and loss. Most refugees value social and cultural support from their own community.

### *Rights*

Successful settlement requires that refugees are not denied the rights of other members of society:

- **Immigration status:** A resolution is needed of the untenable situation of refugees on TPVs who cannot plan for their futures in regional areas or elsewhere in Australia and have limited access to necessary services while they risk being returned to their country of origin.

### **Implications for current policy directions**

The Review of Settlement Services (DIMIA 2003a) pointed to the need for regional areas receiving refugees to have adequate initial settlement services and be able to provide early employment. Regional communities wanting to build their population need to be able to offer longer term stable employment to encourage settlers to stay.

If DIMIA policy is to encourage refugees to selected regional areas with plentiful jobs, affordable housing, strong community support and access to infrastructure such as health and education (Hardgrave 2004), this could well provide a good alternative to metropolitan settlement for some refugees.

Regional settlement needs generous resourcing, but not at the expense of refugee communities in metropolitan areas. The selection by DIMIA of four regional areas for extra resourcing for refugees (Hardgrave 2004; see also page 1 of this report) raises the questions of what extra resourcing they will receive and what the implications are for other regional areas with refugee settlers.

Partnerships seem to be a key factor in facilitating inclusive refugee settlement. At the planning level, these include partnerships between federal, state and local government and refugee communities.

Policy options in supporting refugees into regional areas include:

- ignoring relocation
- supporting relocation to a regional area
- promoting relocation to a regional area
- supporting or promoting settlement direct from overseas
- planned settlement direct from overseas.

The present situation includes a mixture of approaches undertaken with varying involvement by federal, state and local governments, and it is too early to compare their impact and effectiveness. One of the effects of planned settlement is likely to be some subsequent unplanned chain migration.

For the refugees, an important aspect of regional settlement is informed choice. Most of the refugees in the study had relocated from a city to the regional town, although a few had come direct

from overseas. Those who relocated were able to make direct comparisons with city life and were generally pleased to have moved. To some extent those who seemed least happy with their move were those who had least choice, for example some women in Colac who had come to join their husbands and some young Iraqis in Shepparton who were there because of their fathers' decisions but saw their futures elsewhere. Some new arrivals who had come straight from Africa to the regional areas were still uncertain about their new homes. In all three regional locations, there was considerable two-way contact with compatriots in the cities. This enabled participation in cultural activities, although at a cost. Such contact might not be possible in more remote regional areas.

The encouragement of skilled migrants (as opposed to or in addition to refugees) as new workers and settlers presents some of the same challenges for regional communities. It should be noted that skilled migrants and their families are entitled to even less income support than refugees, usually having no social security support for the first two years.

Specific policies that may need to be reviewed in the light of the present study's findings include:

- the delivery of DIMIA refugee settlement services in regional areas across large distances and to areas with small numbers of refugees. This may require specialist targeted programs joined to existing services.
- the provision of English classes and the funding model for them. There is a need to provide for people with different levels of education, and funding per class rather than per head may be more appropriate for regional areas (if not for all areas).
- education and employment services, which need to be developed jointly to allow refugees to develop career pathways. This approach could draw on learnings from the Brotherhood of St Laurence's successful pilot, Given the Chance, a careers, education and employment program for refugees (Kyle et al. 2004).

Successful planning for regional refugee settlement requires careful examination of each community's capacity and willingness to understand and meet the needs of refugees (see Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1 Some questions for regional communities planning refugee settlement**

<p><i>Resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the community's capacity to provide sustainable employment?</li> <li>• What is the community's capacity to provide career paths for young people?</li> <li>• What is the community's capacity to provide choice of employment?</li> <li>• What is the community's capacity to provide affordable housing?</li> <li>• How many new arrivals can the community accommodate and at what rate?</li> </ul> <p><i>Relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How keen is the community to welcome newcomers with refugee backgrounds, acknowledging their humanitarian needs?</li> <li>• How keen is the community to welcome newcomers of diverse religious, language and cultural backgrounds?</li> <li>• What capacity does the community have to meet the social support needs of the refugees?</li> <li>• Are refugees welcome as people who may have welfare needs and difficulties, not only as long as they are 'successfully' employed?</li> <li>• Is the community willing to engage in two-way consultation with refugee communities in planning refugee settlement?</li> </ul> <p><i>Rights</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the refugees given sufficient and accurate information about the regional community to make a well informed choice about resettlement?</li> </ul>
---



## The way forward

Regional settlement is likely to suit some refugees but not all and it may suit some only in the short term. What is needed to promote long-term settlement are policies that:

- promote vigorous and sustainable regional economies, which can provide education and employment pathways for both the host communities and refugees
- provide generous settlement services for refugees in regional areas, which can meet their special needs as refugees as well as their wider needs as immigrants, and can assist building sustainable cultural communities
- build on the host communities' capacity to welcome and include newcomers.

The findings suggest that key goals for policies of refugee settlement should be:

- to promote informed choice for the refugees
- to ensure advance planning and capacity building in areas of resettlement whether urban or regional, in consultation with appropriate refugee groups.

The resettlement of refugees is a complex and long-term task, complicated by unresolved conflicts overseas. To repeat the telling comment of one refugee about the impact of the ongoing war in Sudan, 'Without peace in Sudan, we will never get settled here'. The present research indicates, however, that in the meantime Australia can contribute to a more hopeful future by providing the kind of support that helps refugees in regional areas to feel at home.

## References

Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre (AMEP) 2002, *Fact sheet – Iraq*, viewed 26 May 2004, <<http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep>>.

Amnesty International 1997 ‘Sudan: abuse and discrimination’ in *Refuge! Africa. In search of safety: The forcibly displaced and human rights in Africa*, London, pp.13–16.

Batrouney, T 1991, *Selected African communities in Melbourne: their characteristics and settlement needs*, Bureau of Immigration Research, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Beattie, A & Ward, S 1997, *The Horn of Africa: background information for workers with young people*, Ethnic Youth Issues Network, Fitzroy, Vic.

Beswick, S 2004, *Blood memory: the legacy of war, ethnicity, and slavery in early south Sudan*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester, New York.

Birrell, B 2003, ‘Redistributing migrants: the Labor agenda’, *People and Place*, vol.11, no.4, pp.15–26.

Centre for Applied Linguistics (CAL) 2000, *Refugees from Sudan*, viewed 28 July, 2004, <[http://www.culturalorientation.net/fact\\_sudan.html](http://www.culturalorientation.net/fact_sudan.html)>.

Centrelink 2002, *Building links report: exploring multicultural settlement in the Goulburn Valley*, Building Links Reference Group, Commonwealth of Australia.

Cox, D, Cooper, B & Adepoju, M 1999, *The settlement of Black Africans in Australia*, Department of Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Vic.

Department for Victorian Communities 2004, *Regional Migration Incentive Fund: guidelines and expression of interest 2004–2007*, viewed July 2004, <[www.employment.vic.gov.au](http://www.employment.vic.gov.au)>.

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) 2004, *Small area labour markets – June quarter 2004*, viewed 23 November 2004, <<http://www.workplace.gov.au/WP/Content/Files/WP/EmploymentPublications/salm0604b.pdf>>.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) 1998, *National Integrated Settlement Strategy*, Fact Sheet 69, DIMA, Canberra.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) 2003a, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, May, DIMIA, Canberra.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) 2003b, *Australia’s support for humanitarian entrants*, November, viewed 22 April 2004, <[www.immi.gov.au/search\\_for/publications/ashe.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/search_for/publications/ashe.pdf)>.

Farouque, F 2004, ‘Sudan to Colac – worlds apart, but a new chance’, *The Age*, 6 September.

Goulburn Valley Integrated Settlement Planning Committee (GVISPC) 2004, *Goulburn Valley Integrated Settlement Plan 2004–2006*, GVISPC, [Shepparton].

- Gray, I, Dunn, P, Kelly, B & Williams, C 1991, *Immigrant settlement in country areas*, Bureau of Immigration Research, AGPS, Canberra.
- Hardgrave, G (Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs) 2004, *Significant boost for settlement services in Australia*, media release, 11 May, Parliament House, Canberra.
- Jones, A & Smyth, P 1999, 'Social exclusion: a new framework for social policy analysis?' *Just Policy*, no.17, pp.11–20.
- Kyle, L, Macdonald, F, Doughney, J & Pyke, J 2004, *Refugees in the labour market: looking for cost-effective models of assistance*, Ecumenical Migration Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.
- Mansouri, F & Bagdas, M 2002, *Politics of social exclusion: refugees on Temporary Protection Visa in Victoria*, Deakin University, Geelong, Vic.
- Marshall, N, Burnley, I, Murphy, P & Hugo, G 2004, *Migration of income-support recipients from non-metropolitan NSW and SA into Sydney and Adelaide*, Final Report, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, viewed 19 July 2004, <<http://www.ahuri.edu.au>>.
- Marston, G 2003, *Temporary protection, permanent uncertainty: the experience of refugees living on Temporary Protection Visas*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University, Melbourne.
- Metz, H (ed) 1988, *Iraq: a country study*, Federal Research Division Library of Congress, viewed 14 September 2004, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/iqtoc.html#iq0000>>.
- Metz, H (ed.) 1991, *Sudan: A country study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, viewed 25 August 2004, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sdtoc.html>>.
- Nasir Community Development Agency (Aust) Inc. (NCDA) 2004, *NCDA Newsletter*, issue no. 3, Bentleigh, Vic.
- Nsubuga-Kyobe, A 2003, 'Settlement services and African communities', *Migration Action*, vol.25, no.2, pp.20–4.
- Nsubuga-Kyobe, A & Dimock, L 2000, *African communities and settlement services in Victoria: towards best practice service delivery models*, DIMIA, Canberra.
- Ramburuth, R & Stanovic, D 2004, 'Social exclusion frameworks: how well do they capture the refugee experience?', *Migration Action*, vol.26, no.2, pp.36–9.
- Refugee Council of Australia 2004, *Australia's Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program: current issues and future directions – views from the community sector*, Submission to DIMIA (2004–2005), Refugee Council of Australia, Melbourne.
- Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) 2000, website viewed 30 November 2004, < [www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org](http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org)>.
- Simich, L, Beiser, M, Mawani, F & O'Hare, J 2001, *Paved with good intentions: paths of secondary migration of government-assisted refugees in Ontario*, a study for the Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Culture, Community and Health Studies, University of Toronto, viewed 28 February 2005, <[http://atwork.settlement.org/sys/atwork\\_library\\_print.asp?doc\\_id=1002805](http://atwork.settlement.org/sys/atwork_library_print.asp?doc_id=1002805)>.

Stilwell, F 2003, 'Refugees in a region: Afghans in Young, NSW', *Urban Policy and Research*, vol.21, no.3, pp.235–48.

Taylor, J 2004, 'Refugees and social exclusion: what the literature says', *Migration Action*, vol.26, no.2, pp.16–31.

Taylor, J & Stanovic, D 2004, 'Services and entitlements: refugees, migrants and asylum seekers', *Migration Action*, vol.26, no.2, pp.32–5.

Vanstone, A (Minister for Immigration) 2005, *Victoria to benefit from new migration initiatives*, media release 21 February, viewed 28 February 2005, <[http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media\\_releases/media05/v05034.htm](http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media_releases/media05/v05034.htm)>.

Victorian Multicultural Affairs 2003, *Victorian Community Profiles 2001 Census Iraq-born*, Department of Victorian Communities, Melbourne.

Voluntary Sector Initiative Project (VSIP) 2003, 'Strengthening our settlement vision: the Small Centre Strategy, the regional dispersion & retention of immigrants', discussion paper developed for National Settlement Conference II, Calgary, October 2–5, viewed 2 March 2005, <<http://integration-net.cic.gc.ca/inet/english/vsi-isb/conference2/working-travail/p02-00.htm>>.

Webster, A unpublished [2003], 'Who are Victoria's new and emerging communities?', Ecumenical Migration Centre, Melbourne.

White, M 2004, 'Asylum policy in the UK and Australia: a pathway to social exclusion?', *Migration Action*, vol.26, no.1, pp.4–13.

White, P 2000, 'Country profiles supplement', *Migration Action*, vol.22, no.1, pp 17–19.

Withers, G & Powall, M 2003, *Immigration and the regions: taking regional Australia seriously*, prepared for the Chifley Research Centre by Applied Economics, viewed 28 February 2005, <[http://www.chifley.org.au/publications/immigration\\_and\\_the\\_regions\\_25\\_sept\\_03.pdf](http://www.chifley.org.au/publications/immigration_and_the_regions_25_sept_03.pdf)>.

## Appendix: Interview guide

### Group interview question guide –Shepparton example

1. *Background* To begin with can you tell me your first name and
  - where you lived before, in your home country – in a city, town, village, farm?
  - where did you live when you first arrived in Australia?
  - how long have you lived in Shepparton?
2. If you had free choice, where would you really like to live most?
3. What are the main reasons most Iraqis have come to Shepparton?
4. Why did you choose to live in Shepparton?
5. What do you find the best things about living in Shepparton?  
 What do you find the most difficult things about living in Shepparton?
6. What has helped you settle here?  
 What about
  - getting an income, enough money for your needs, Centrelink
  - employment
  - housing
  - schooling
  - training
  - health
  - language
  - transport
  - help with personal or family problems
  - social contacts – relatives, friends, Australians
7. What would help most to make you feel ‘at home’ here? to make you feel part of this place?  
 What help can the government give?  
 What about other people?
8. Are there special problems for you *as refugees* living here?
9. How do you think living here compares with
  - living in a capital city in Australia, say Melbourne or Sydney?
  - living in other regional areas?
10. How long do you think you will live here?  
 Is there anything else you want to say?