



Australian Government

# Measures to Improve Settlement Outcomes for Humanitarian Entrants

Discussion Paper  
October 2006



**people** our business

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## The Interdepartmental Committee on Humanitarian Settlement

An Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) of Australian Government agency heads was convened in April 2006 to develop a whole-of-government strategy to improve settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants.

The guiding philosophy of the IDC is that the most critical factors in successful settlement are learning English, getting a job, committing to Australian values and participating in mainstream activities. In line with this philosophy, the IDC has developed a wide range of policy recommendations to achieve better settlement outcomes in 14 critical areas:

1. Strengthening requirements for Special Humanitarian Program<sup>1</sup> (SHP) proposers
2. Increasing settlement in locations with employment opportunities
3. Expanding offshore orientation, focussing on Australian law, culture and the expectation that entrants will learn English and find a job
4. Expanding offshore health screening arrangements
5. Tailoring strategies to achieve sustainable employment
6. Improving English language support and interpreting services
7. Strengthening the case management framework
8. Improving financial support and budgeting training
9. Expanding information provision that recognises low literacy levels and promote community understanding of the Humanitarian Programme
10. Improving access to appropriate health care
11. Expanding programmes to support resilient families
12. Targeting support to assist at risk youth
13. Expanding initiatives to improve understanding of legal rights and responsibilities
14. Improving data collection and evaluation of programmes

Proposals are being developed across a number of departments to improve support for new arrivals in these critical areas.

<sup>1</sup> In Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs publications, programme is spelt with 'mme'. However, Special Humanitarian Program is spelt with one 'm' due to legislative requirements.

## **The consultation process**

This discussion paper seeks your views on three key areas that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) is progressing:

1. the development of a Complex Case Support Network (CCSN)
2. the expansion of the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Programme and
3. strengthened requirements for Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) proposers

Your input will enable us to formulate specific policy recommendations for government that takes community and stakeholder views into account.

### **1. Complex Case Support Network (CCSN)**

We are seeking community feedback on a Complex Case Support Network (CCSN). This new initiative seeks to provide specialised case support to refugee and humanitarian entrants over and above the assistance available through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS). The main aim of the CCSN will be to provide early intervention strategies for clients with complex needs to assist in their settlement process. It is envisaged that the key functions of the CCSN would include providing specialised case management assistance, offering advice and support to settlement service providers and service delivery agencies dealing with humanitarian entrants, supporting and assisting clients in crisis situations, strengthening integration of services across agencies and monitoring access and appropriateness of services available to humanitarian entrants. The CCSN would work with all three spheres of government.

### **2. Australian Offshore Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Programme**

The second key area where we are seeking community feedback relates to proposed changes to the AUSCO programme. This programme provides humanitarian entrants with an initial introduction to aspects of Australian life which enhances entrants' settlement prospects, creates realistic expectations for their life in Australia and helps entrants acquire information concerning Australian culture prior to arrival. We seek to strengthen this critical programme, emphasising its importance in achieving positive settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants. The proposed changes include revising and extending the AUSCO programme to focus on practical preparation for life in Australia.

### 3. The Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)

Third, we are seeking community feedback on proposed changes that seek to improve the settlement outcomes of SHP entrants by minimising the risk of proposers not being able to provide the level of support and guidance required. These include the introduction of stronger objective minimum requirements for a person to be a proposer; the introduction of a prioritised system of processing for applicants supported by proposers with certain characteristics; and improvements to the information and support provided to proposers and humanitarian entrants.

## Making a submission

You are invited to make written submissions responding to this discussion paper until **17 November 2006**.

DIMA would prefer to receive submissions in electronic format using the on-line submission form at

**[www.immi.gov.au/living-in-Australia/delivery-assistance](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-Australia/delivery-assistance)**.

Alternatively, you can post written comments to:

The Settlement Policy and Coordination Section  
Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs  
P.O. Box 25  
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

**In the interests of informed public debate, submissions which are not clearly marked as confidential will be treated as public and made available to any person or organisation upon request.**

Confidential submissions may contain sensitive information (such as information relating to individuals) or simply involve a wish to retain privacy. Any request for access to a confidential submission is determined in accordance with the Commonwealth *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, which has provisions to protect sensitive information given in confidence. Where these provisions apply, documents can be exempted from release.

Comments and submissions received will inform the further development of these policy initiatives for government's consideration.

## Overview

Australia has a long and proud history of resettling people in humanitarian need. Over 675 000 people have been resettled in Australia since the end of World War II in 1945. Today, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are approximately 19.2 million refugees and people of concern to the UNHCR.

Australia is one of only 10 countries in the world with an established annual resettlement programme. 14 122 visas were granted under Australia's Humanitarian Programme during 2005-06. 13 000 new places are available during the 2006-07 programme year, which is comprised of 6000 fully-funded and assisted refugee applicants and 7000 places for the SHP and Onshore Protection component. Australia's annual resettlement programme continually ranks among the three largest resettlement programmes, along with the US and Canada.

The Australian community has in return been enriched by the significant social, cultural and economic contribution that humanitarian entrants have made and continue to make to our society.

## The Humanitarian Programme

Australia's Humanitarian Programme is separate from the Migration Programme, which offers migration opportunities under skilled and family reunion streams. The Humanitarian Programme reflects the Government's commitment to refugees and people in need of humanitarian assistance. The Humanitarian Programme has two components:

- the onshore (asylum or protection) component of the programme offers protection to asylum seekers who have entered Australia, either without a visa or as temporary entrants, and who engage Australia's protection obligations under the *Refugees Convention* and relevant Australian laws
- the offshore (resettlement) component offers resettlement as a means of protection and a durable solution for people overseas who are in need of humanitarian assistance and who have no other option available to them.

The offshore resettlement programme has two categories:

- the Refugee category, which assists people living outside their country who are subject to persecution in their home country and for whom resettlement to Australia is the best durable solution. People coming to Australia under this category are normally referred to the Australian Government by UNHCR. Entrants under this category are fully assisted by the Australian Government and
- the SHP, which assists people who are subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of their human rights in their home country and are living outside the home country. Applications for SHP visas must be supported by a proposer, who is expected to provide initial accommodation, airfares and orientation assistance to the new arrival.

The regional focus of Australia's Humanitarian Programme in 2005-06 was on Africa, followed by the Middle East, and South-West and South-East Asia. The African caseload generally has greater settlement needs than people from previous source regions, reflecting their experiences and circumstances prior to arriving in Australia. Some of these pre-migration experiences include higher levels of poverty, larger families, lower levels of education and English proficiency, lower levels of literacy in their own languages, higher incidence of health issues, longer periods spent in refugee camps, little experience of urban environments, and higher rates of torture and trauma.

### **The Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)**

Until 1981, almost all arrivals under the Humanitarian Programme were refugees. The SHP was introduced in November 1981 reflecting views of the government of the day that many applicants for the Humanitarian Programme did not have strong refugee claims but were nevertheless people who the Australian Government wished to resettle because they had been subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of their human rights.

The SHP broadened entry criteria, so that people were eligible for entry under the Humanitarian Programme if they were living outside their home country, subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of their human rights in their home country, and had been proposed for entry to Australia by an Australian citizen or permanent resident, an eligible New Zealand citizen or a recognised community, ethnic or religious organisation within Australia.

Over 110 000 visas have been granted under the SHP component since 1981. The SHP provides the government increased flexibility in targeting the Humanitarian Programme as the identification of applicants is not dependent on referrals by the UNHCR as is the case with refugee applications. Moreover, the SHP allows the government to respond with more flexibility to a wider range of humanitarian situations of interest to the Australian community because of the broader humanitarian criteria.

All applicants considered under the SHP are supported by a proposer. A key role of proposers is to identify, within approved programme allocations, individuals with links to the Australian community to be considered against programme criteria.

Proposers are also expected to provide SHP entrants with assistance and support, including:

- payment of costs associated with the entrant's travel to Australia
- meeting the entrant at their first point of arrival in Australia
- arranging initial accommodation
- assisting the entrant to find and establish permanent accommodation
- providing information and orientation assistance

The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) does provide services to assist proposers fulfil their role of assisting SHP entrants to settle by providing pre-arrival information resources and a post-arrival 'help' service that offers information and guidance. (IHSS services are discussed in greater detail below).

Where a proposer is having problems finding appropriate accommodation or providing orientation assistance for a new SHP entrant the IHSS is able to provide additional support.

## **Humanitarian Programme initiatives**

The diverse and complex needs of recently arrived humanitarian entrants present significant challenges to the delivery of programmes and services. A range of initiatives have been introduced in recent years to strengthen the settlement prospects of humanitarian entrants (including those granted visas under the SHP component), including:

### **The Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Programme**

AUSCO is a programme that is currently available to all humanitarian entrants over 12 years of age. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is contracted to deliver this programme on behalf of the Australian Government. The AUSCO programmes are delivered to humanitarian entrants in Africa, the Middle East, South West Asia, South East Asia and other areas as required.

The core goals of the programme are to provide:

- accurate information on departure arrangements from their country of temporary stay
- information on the settlement process
- a realistic picture of life in Australia
- practical information about the services available and how to access them
- encouragement of self sufficiency
- the necessary tools to deal with initial settlement concerns and with the different stages of cultural, social and economic adaptation

The government piloted AUSCO in Kenya in May 2003. IOM was contracted to conduct this pilot and the programme has since been expanded to all major centres. The program currently consists of an intensive 15 hour course conducted over 3 consecutive days.

DIMA, in consultation with IOM, has initiated a trial children's program in Thailand and a five-day class for pre-literate clients based in Tehran.

## **The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)**

In 1997 DIMA developed the IHSS as a national framework for improving humanitarian settlement services. It is the principal programme to assist people settling in Australia under the Humanitarian Programme, with organisations contracted to deliver services on behalf of the government around of Australia.

The IHSS provides initial intensive settlement support, generally for six months after arrival. IHSS is delivered flexibly and clients are supported for up to 12 months where required. A range of services are available including case coordination information and referral services; on arrival reception and assistance; accommodation assistance and short term torture and trauma counselling. IHSS service providers also provide mainstream agencies with an appreciation of issues relating to humanitarian entrants.

These services are delivered through a case management approach which involves an assessment of client needs, preparation of an action plan to meet those needs, and ongoing monitoring of plans and client outcomes. A key function of the IHSS is to facilitate entrants' access to key mainstream service providers such as Centrelink, Job Network and Medicare.

New arrangements for SHP entrants and proposers were incorporated into the new IHSS contracts that commenced in October 2005. These arrangements include a needs assessment for proposers and SHP entrants and the development of a case coordination plan. This provides an opportunity for the service provider to assess the capacity of the proposer to provide the necessary support and assistance to the SHP entrant and to make the necessary arrangements where there are shortcomings.

### **Interest-free travel loans**

Eligible SHP entrants and proposers are able to access assistance with the cost of travelling to Australia through the IOM refugee travel loan fund. IOM provides interest-free loans on a needs basis to help proposers and SHP entrants meet the costs of entrants travelling to Australia. The Australian Government contributed \$2.5 million to the scheme in 2005.

### **More to be done**

Despite the positive impact of these initiatives, there are still significant challenges to be addressed. Meeting these challenges requires the cooperation of a range of Commonwealth, state/territory, and local government agencies. It will also depend on the assistance of a range of community groups and other key stakeholders. How effectively we all work together has a significant impact on new arrivals' ability to participate in the community, attend school, learn English and obtain employment.

The proposals outlined in this paper are designed to strengthen our support for humanitarian entrants.

# PART ONE: COMPLEX CASE SUPPORT NETWORK

## Background

The IHSS provides a valuable service to assist newly arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants settle in the Australian community. Clients undergo a needs assessment on arrival and an individual case management plan is developed to ensure they receive the services they require in a coordinated way.

Assistance under the IHSS concentrates on the initial settlement period for up to 12 months. A key function of the IHSS is to facilitate entrants' access to key mainstream service providers (e.g. Centrelink, Job Network, Medicare etc). IHSS case managers support clients to access these services and help them to become familiar with their local community.

There are occasions, such as the arrival of a highly traumatised family, when a particularly high level of settlement support may be required that goes beyond what service providers under the IHSS are funded to provide.

## Overview of Complex Case Support Network (CCSN)

The proposed CCSN intends to provide specialised case support to humanitarian and refugee entrants over and above the assistance available through the IHSS. The main aim of the CCSN will be to provide early intervention strategies for clients with complex needs to assist in their settlement process.

The key functions of the CCSN would be to:

- provide specialised case management assistance
- provide support and assistance to clients in crisis situations
- provide advice and support to settlement service providers and other service delivery agencies (at every level of government) dealing with humanitarian entrants
- strengthen the integration of services provided to humanitarian entrants across agencies through effective networking and information sharing
- monitor the access and appropriateness of services provided to humanitarian entrants

The CCSN proposes to offer a hotline to respond to inquiries and provide support and advice. For example a school could contact the hotline seeking advice on how to assist a humanitarian entrant student who is facing particular difficulties.

The CCSN will be able to support a range of stakeholders including schools, health service professionals, the police and community organisations by providing a referral point for clients that come to attention requiring specialised settlement support.

The CCSN will incorporate youth coordinators to provide specialised support to refugee youth and connect them to appropriate services. The role of youth coordinators is detailed later in this paper.

**Question:**

**Are there any additional roles that the CCSN could perform?**

**Question:**

**What profile of clients should be helped through the CCSN?**

## **Delivery model options**

Consideration is still being given to the most effective way of delivering these services. It will be important to build the capacity of the settlement services sector to deliver complex case support effectively.

Different service delivery models are being explored. Services may be provided directly by DIMA or by engaging external providers through a tender process.

It is essential the provider/s are able to work effectively with DIMA, IHSS contractors, the wider settlement services sector and other service delivery agencies across every level of government.

## **Target group**

People granted permanent visas offshore under Australia's Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (visa subclass 200, 201, 202, 203 and 204) will be eligible to receive assistance under the CCSN. People released from detention will also be eligible on a needs basis. Services will be provided on a needs basis, however, it is expected that the majority of clients will not require assistance under the CCSN.

## How do clients get complex case support?

All refugee and humanitarian entrants arriving in Australia will continue to be eligible for IHSS services. There will be two main ways to be referred for complex case support (CCS):

- i. All humanitarian entrants will undergo an initial assessment as part of the IHSS process to determine their needs. Most clients' needs will be met through the suite of IHSS services. Those assessed to be particularly vulnerable will be referred to CCSN for **additional** assistance. The assessment tool used will be based on risk indicators such as mental and physical health (including torture and trauma), literacy, English proficiency, the number of children in a family (including the number of children less than five years of age), single parent/mother families, youth issues etc.
- ii. While it is intended to identify clients requiring CCS as early as possible upon arrival in Australia through the IHSS, clients may present with difficulties at any time and can be referred to the CCSN during their first two years in Australia.

## Complex case support manager

CCS managers will be required to have appropriate qualifications and experience and will be a supported professional service. They will be required to:

- identify and respond to individual cases which require intensive assistance as they arise
- develop a professional and trusting relationship with clients
- develop an individualised case plan and coordinate the delivery of services across a range of agencies (in conjunction with IHSS case managers as appropriate)
- monitor a client's progress and review the case plan regularly and address any delays or barriers in the client's progress
- engage a wide range of internal and external service providers and maintain linkages with them.

### Question:

**Are there additional areas where case managers could assist humanitarian entrants?**

## Youth support coordinators

Humanitarian youth form a large proportion of the IHSS clientele. In 2004-05 over half of humanitarian entrants were aged 18 or under and just under a quarter were aged between 15 and 24 years of age. Entrants aged five years and over averaged just 2.4 years of schooling.

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, in particular humanitarian youth, face specific issues which impact on their ability and motivation to participate and engage with the broad community.

Youth support coordinators will become experts in the youth services available in their area. They will work with service providers, community organisations, schools, training providers and social, cultural and sporting organisations to create more attractive pathways and capture entrants who may otherwise be at risk of not accessing the range of services available.

Coordinators will work directly with humanitarian youth and their families to:

- provide assistance and appropriate referrals of youth entrants (and their families as appropriate) to resolve issues affecting their settlement
- prevent young humanitarian entrants from disengaging from education, cultural and social activities
- support and mentor youth to develop social and personal skills for successful community living.

Services will focus on achieving positive social, educational and employment goals with strengthened family and peer relationships.

Youth support coordinators will also work with schools, service providers and local communities to enhance their ability to respond to the needs of humanitarian youth.

Activities may include:

- developmental activities with young people, community groups, parents and caregivers
- participation in school and community agency capacity building processes including the creation of school/agency partnerships and inter-agency network development and professional development activities with teachers and service providers and
- promotion of structures and activities that enhance humanitarian youth participation in the school and the broader community.

## Indication of ability to function in the Australian community

A client's need for continued assistance under the CCSN will be assessed against their ability to function in the Australian community. A standard set of minimum outcomes and competencies will be developed based on day-to-day functions that all Australian citizens undertake to navigate around the community, for instance travelling on public transport, accessing money through ATMs, making medical appointments or accessing emergency services.

These competencies will be used by IHSS providers in the case management of all clients and by case managers and youth coordinators providing complex case support.

Case managers will evaluate clients' progress regularly according to the complex case support plan and their own assessment of the client's abilities and skills and make any adjustments necessary for the client to function confidently in the community.

It is not proposed to develop a detailed, codified list of indicators as the variables are subjective and would vary considerably from person to person. However, there are objective indicators which are empirically observable over time and therefore useful in making an assessment eg. increasing usage of public transport, increasing attendance at school, reduced number and complexity of queries etc.

These indicators will also be used at the IHSS exit interview to assess a client's capacity to function effectively in the community. If it is determined that the client would benefit from additional support, services may be extended under the IHSS for up to 12 months or, where not referred initially, offered CCS. These clients may not necessarily require a new or intensive complex case support plan. CCS providers will simply continue to monitor the client's progress and provide services as appropriate.

## Service duration

It is proposed that CCS services be available generally for up to two years after the date of arrival, with a possibility of extension in exceptional cases. Within this period services will be provided until it is assessed that the client has the confidence and ability to undertake day-to-day tasks measured by the functionality indicators, or for up to two years from service commencement. At all times the service will be delivered with a focus on the individual becoming increasingly self sufficient, being mindful not to create client dependency.

### **Question:**

**Is testing 'functionality' a reasonable indicator of readiness to exit IHSS/CCS?**

## Tools to support the Complex Case Support Network

In developing the CCSN a number of tools to assist and support CCS managers and youth coordinators will be utilised. These include:

- the initial IHSS assessment based on risk indicators to identify needs and be used as a base upon which to develop a client's case management plan. The assessment tool will also seek to identify any talents or interests that could help clients to connect with local communities for example, participation in a local children's play group, choir or sporting team
- a CCS referral tool to be used if the initial assessment indicates that a client might require CCS. The IHSS manager would complete the CCS referral tool and provide to the CCS manager when making a referral to the CCSN
- an online and written directory in client languages of services available to humanitarian entrants in each state and territory. The directory will be updated and maintained regularly and
- an IT system to facilitate sharing of information between agencies and to support the CCSN as part of DIMA's *Systems for People* programme.

## The role of volunteers

Volunteers make a significant contribution to the successful settlement of humanitarian entrants. The IHSS contract arrangements make specific provision for formal volunteer programmes. Under these arrangements all volunteers are attached to service providers which provide training, coordination and support; links to humanitarian entrants most in need of assistance; match skills, interests and availability to a specific volunteer role and provide insurance and liability cover.

The role of IHSS volunteer coordinators may be broadened to include effective engagement of volunteers within the CCSN.

## Link to current Humanitarian Programme

The Humanitarian caseload currently focuses on entrants coming from Africa, the Middle East and South-West Asia and South-East Asia. The proposed CCSN is designed to be flexible and responsive to changing demographics and needs of the caseload.



## **PART TWO: OFFSHORE CULTURAL ORIENTATION**

### **Background**

AUSCO is a programme that provides classroom based cultural orientation sessions to humanitarian entrants before their arrival in Australia.

The AUSCO sessions cover:

- information about their travel to and arrival in Australia
- settlement services and processes
- a realistic picture of Australia
- encouraging self sufficiency and
- an introduction to Australian institutions, rights and responsibilities.

AUSCO is the beginning of the settlement process. AUSCO courses are available to all humanitarian entrants over 12 years of age. The IOM delivers this program on behalf of the Australian Government. It is delivered to humanitarian entrants in Africa, the Middle East, South-West Asia, South-East Asia and other areas as required.

AUSCO currently comprises an intensive 15-hour course delivered over three days. Recent AUSCO initiatives include a trial children's programme in Thailand and a five-day class for pre-literate clients based in Tehran.

The scope exists to enhance and expand the AUSCO programme to further improve the settlement prospects of humanitarian entrants through targeted curriculum development, increasing the length of the courses and incorporating an introduction English language training as a course module.

#### **Question:**

**How do we encourage humanitarian entrants to engage with the settlement process before they travel to Australia?**

#### **Question:**

**What are the immediate skills and knowledge that humanitarian entrants require to begin the process of resettling in Australia?**

#### **Question:**

**What is the best way to equip humanitarian entrants with these skills and knowledge?**

## **PART THREE: SPECIAL HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM PROPOSERS**

### **Further strengthening settlement outcomes**

Australia's Humanitarian Programme focuses on assisting those in greatest need of resettlement and those with links to Australia. It is critical that new arrivals under the Humanitarian Programme quickly and successfully integrate into Australian society so that they can commence rebuilding their lives after, in many cases, years of persecution, family separation and protracted periods in refugee camps.

Over 50 per cent of all SHP entrants during 2005-06 were from the African region, with entrants coming from countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda and Eritrea. These entrants represent Australia's newest emerging communities.

Many current proposers are relatively newly arrived refugees themselves and may find the undertakings required of proposers a heavy burden, jeopardising the settlement prospects of both the proposer and entrant. The current SHP caseload presents with higher levels of poverty, more complex health conditions, larger families, lower levels of English proficiency and more disrupted education than the caseloads predominantly from the Former Yugoslavia of the late 1990s.

Each year, the number of SHP applicants identified for resettlement by proposers is well in excess of visa places available. For example, during 2005-06, there were 10 applications received for every visa place available. Therefore, while still focussing on assisting those in need of resettlement it is important that the proposer system works in a way that provides the best chance of early, positive settlement outcomes for SHP entrants.

### **Enhancing proposer assistance**

Recent arrivals under the Humanitarian Programme can take time to settle themselves and their family into Australian society. If these people propose new entrants while they are still establishing themselves it is difficult for them to provide the necessary support and guidance to the new arrivals they have proposed.

The capacity of proposers to help meet the settlement needs of humanitarian entrants can be significantly affected by a range of factors including a proposer's own length of time spent in Australia and degree of establishment, English language ability, educational level, personal financial situation and understanding of the workings of Australian society.

The introduction of further minimum objective requirements will reduce the risk of proposers not being able to further provide an adequate level of initial support to new arrivals. These objective minimum requirements for proposers will include:

- a minimum period of employment
- a minimum period of residence
- completion of financial literacy training and
- limits on the frequency of proposals.

A system of prioritised processing for applications supported by certain proposers will also be introduced, giving preference to certain voluntary and community groups with a demonstrated strong track record or potential to assist the settlement of humanitarian entrants.

Under these arrangements, there will be individual proposers who will fail to meet the new minimum requirements. The imperative for newly arrived humanitarian entrants to propose their relatives who will meet Humanitarian Programme criteria is strong, particularly for those needing to reunite with members of their immediate family who remain in difficult circumstances. Proposers unable to meet minimum requirements may be able to propose in conjunction with an appropriate community or voluntary organisation that will assist them in their proposer role.

### **Minimum period of employment**

People who have arrived relatively recently in Australia under the Humanitarian Programme often face financial challenges. In many cases they have limited English and lack other skills required to quickly obtain steady, well-paid employment. The added responsibility of providing initial assistance to another newly-arrived family can be very difficult.

A requirement that proposers have a record of employment of, for example, at least one year will provide some assurance that the proposer has the capacity to provide initial support to new arrivals.

Demonstrated capacity to maintain employment is also an indication of an individual proposer's own level of integration into Australian society.

It is acknowledged, however, that a proposer who is working, especially one engaged in full-time work, may have a reduced capacity to assist an entrant with linking to key services, particularly those operating normal working hours.

**Question:**

**What is a reasonable minimum period of employment that would reduce the risk that a proposer is unable to provide adequate support to an SHP entrant?**

**Question:**

**In what other ways could a proposer objectively demonstrate capacity to provide financial support to entrants?**

### **Minimum period of residence in Australia**

In addition to a minimum period of employment, a minimum period of residence in Australia, for example two years, for individual proposers is another means of increasing the likelihood that a proposer has become sufficiently established in society to be equipped to meet expectations to effectively assist new arrivals.

However, a minimum period of residence alone is not sufficient to indicate a reasonable level of establishment in society and would need to be included with other minimum requirements on proposer eligibility.

It is acknowledged that timely reunion with immediate family members, especially those in vulnerable situations, is important for the well-being and settlement prospects of humanitarian entrants and restricting access to the proposer scheme by way of additional requirements could have an impact on this. Individual proposers who are less well established in Australia could still be permitted to lodge a proposal in relation to their immediate family members in conjunction with a community or voluntary organisation. This would enable proposers to be better prepared before the arrival of the new entrant.

**Question:**

**Are there other ways to test a proposer's degree of establishment in Australia?**

### **Completion of financial literacy training**

Humanitarian entrants generally arrive in Australia with few if any financial resources. They can be confronted with significant financial burdens during the initial settlement period and in most cases do not have any accumulated resources or support networks to call on for assistance. Many also feel obliged to send a significant proportion of their incomes to relatives in difficult circumstances overseas.

Moreover, as many new arrivals have spent protracted periods in refugee camps before coming to Australia they have often had little experience in managing a regular income, using financial institutions or running a household budget.

These financial hardships can often be compounded if they need to pay for the airfare of SHP entrants and assist with their initial settlement costs. Proposers often feel obliged to take out loans to cover these expenses which can contribute to them falling into significant debt, limiting their capacity to support new arrivals. In some cases this debt is transferred to the new arrivals.

It is proposed to improve the financial literacy and budget planning skills of proposers and newly arrived humanitarian entrants by expanding the Commonwealth Financial Counselling Programme (CFCP) to deliver services targeted to the specific needs of humanitarian entrants.

In addition, DIMA and Centrelink could provide improved information and advice on options such as Centrepay to assist in managing bill and rental payments. DIMA could also work with relevant bodies such as the Financial Literacy Foundation to deliver information programmes that assist humanitarian entrants to better manage their money, including a focus on budget planning, regular saving and managing debt.

In introducing this requirement consideration would need to be given to whether completion of the training should be mandatory or strongly recommended and how the completion of such training would be recorded and monitored.

**Question:**

**Are there other ways to help proposers and entrants avoid large initial debts?**

### **Limits on the frequency of proposals**

There is currently no specific legal limit on proposing multiple times under the SHP category, and some concerns have been raised regarding the capacity of those individual proposers who propose multiple times to support entrants.

For newly arrived refugees, there is strong family and community pressure to assist others who remain in refugee camps and in countries of first asylum. The nature of the caseload, high refusal rates and the absence of application fees provide strong incentives for former humanitarian entrants to propose large numbers of family and friends to come to Australia. The benefits to a refugee's own settlement outcomes in being able to be reunited with their family members are also a significant consideration.

In an environment where large numbers of applications are received and only a small number of visa places is available, there is no certainty about how quickly new entrants will be able to support themselves and, consequently, the extent to which a proposer's support will be required is difficult to predict. However, proposers should be encouraged to propose only the number of people to whom they are reasonably able to give initial settlement support.

It is important that proposers make a realistic assessment of their own capacity to provide financial and other support to the entrants they propose. Any proposals under the SHP need to be based on a proposer's genuine intention to fulfil their undertakings in relation to initial settlement assistance. Repeat proposals lodged without changed information or proposals lodged by proposers without a genuine desire or capacity to assist with an entrant's settlement needs create unnecessary administrative burdens and make it more difficult to identify the cases with the most compelling reasons for visa grant.

In some circumstances it is possible that proposers who have some previous experience in performing a proposer role may be in a better position than other, less experienced or first-time proposers to support entrants. Given the financial and other commitment involved in proposer support, this gives weight to further consideration of a preferential system for proposers with more substantial means to draw upon, such as community or voluntary groups.

**Question:**

**What is a reasonable number of proposals a proposer can make at any one time? What frequency is reasonable?**

**Prioritised processing for applications supported by certain proposers**

Proposers play an important role in assisting with the initial settlement of an SHP entrant. Individual proposers, who are newly arrived themselves, face settlement challenges of their own. By contrast, certain voluntary and community groups with the capacity to assist humanitarian entrants provide established networks of valuable support to provide enhanced opportunity for effective settlement and integration.

Humanitarian entrants must be given the best opportunity to integrate quickly and successfully into Australian society. While still taking into account the importance of reconnecting families under the SHP, it could be appropriate to give priority processing to applicants where the proposal is from, or supported by, community and volunteer groups who:

- are located in regions of high employment opportunities
- have the support of key service providers such as schools and local council health services
- have access to specialist support services such as English language and other educational support, mental health /trauma counselling facilities and
- have established links with major local employers in significant need for unskilled and semi-skilled labour.

In addition to easing financial pressures, employment is central to fostering understanding and a sense of worth and belonging. Creating the best possible environment for a humanitarian entrant to become employed will have the dual benefit of helping them to integrate quickly, establish financial independence, while at

the same time helping to address some of the labour shortages that currently exist in some regions of Australia.

## Detailed information/training for proposers and entrants

It is important to ensure that humanitarian entrants and their proposers are fully informed about the services that are available to them upon arrival. Providing this information helps foster an environment with the best potential for successful settlement. Proposers should also be made aware of their responsibilities in assisting with the initial settlement of humanitarian entrants, receive clear guidance on ways to provide this support, and know what assistance and support services are available.

There is a range of information that is currently offered to humanitarian entrants and proposers including:

- the AUSCO Programme
- DIMA information such as form 681 *Refugee and Special Humanitarian Proposal* which outlines the type of assistance required of proposers, the DIMA website and the publication *Beginning a Life in Australia* which provides information on the types of settlement services available and advice on where to go for assistance and
- a range of written and oral information provided by IHSS providers to proposers at the time of their initial needs assessment interview.

As written information has only limited value in some emerging communities who have little English, it is important to consider creative ways of distribution such as the use of audio/visual products, ethnic radio and existing information networks within communities. Care must also be taken to ensure that information strategies are culturally and linguistically appropriate and have the capacity to reach people in isolated areas or who are housebound.

DIMA is currently working on a number of improved information products and better ways to disseminate information to humanitarian entrants and proposers. These include:

- a new pamphlet *Potential Proposers: Supporting a refugee or humanitarian entrant to Australia* providing information on AUSCO, the Refugee Travel Loan Fund and a brief overview of the proposer system and expectations of proposers
- a new pamphlet *Helping You Settle* addressing important settlement problems and challenges including those faced by SHP proposers and entrants
- a new DVD for distribution to case workers, service providers and humanitarian entrants to assist in facilitating the onshore orientation of humanitarian entrants from Africa and
- a series of information road shows which will seek to educate various stakeholders about Australia's Humanitarian Programme.

Other possibilities include:

- greater use of ethnic radio
- well-informed and trained community leaders

**Question:**

**How could we inform proposers and entrants of what is expected of them?**

**Question:**

**Are there other ways in which information could be disseminated to proposers and entrants?**

## Greater use of the volunteer sector

The importance of volunteers to the past and present success of Australia's settlement programmes is clear. The needs of humanitarian entrants after arrival are considerable, and volunteers play a significant role in helping entrants gain the basic skills necessary to adjust to their new surroundings. Volunteers contribute to making a real and positive difference to the lives of new arrivals.

Assistance provided by volunteers to a new arrival can take the form of social support and friendship or a more structured type of assistance. Their assistance can reinforce the efforts made by individual proposers and service providers, and can provide important links to the community in terms of friendship and support in a way that service providers are unable to do. As well as having a clear practical benefit, the help provided by volunteers represents the Australian sense of community and goodwill.

It is proposed that volunteer organisations link up with individuals who are unable to meet the new minimum proposer requirements to strengthen their capacity to support the new entrant on arrival. The organisation may assist with raising money for airfares and other on-arrival expenses as well as make arrangements to access services, find accommodation and link the new arrival with the community.

**Question:**

**What role can volunteer organisations play in supporting potential proposers?**