

Migration Action

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The Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, works for the development of Australia as a multicultural society through its welfare, educational, project and community work. The centre has been working with migrants since 1962.

EMC's work is diverse, from community service and development to social action and community education.

Within a framework of ensuring equal access and rights for all Australian society, EMC provides counselling services and community development activities to a number of ethnic communities, both established and newly arrived.

EMC also initiates research towards an understanding of a range of issues, and promotes change where necessary.

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	It is not the intention of this journal to reflect the opinions of either the staff or the Board of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. In many matters this would be difficult to ascertain, nor do the editors think it desirable. The aim of the journal is to be informative and stimulating through its various articles, suggestions and comments.
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Progress on the Report of the Review of Settlement Services: Recent changes in settlement planning and policy

COMPILED BY RASIKA RAMBURUTH & LUCY GREENACRE

Overview

In May 2003, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) released the Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants. It was recognised by Australia's settlement sector as a significant policy statement, making 61 recommendations for the improvement of the Federal Government's settlement services and other related services. By July 2004, 20 of these recommendations had been implemented, with timeframes for the implementation of most of the remaining recommendations varying over the next three years (DIMIA 2004). Significantly, the 2004 Federal Budget package of initiatives, funded by an additional \$267.6 million over 4 years, will contribute to enhanced settlement programs that address the increasingly complex needs of incoming entrants, especially those from markedly different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Additionally in 2004, we have seen an increase in the number of places offered under Australia's Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program, with the total number of places increasing from 12,000 to 13,000, of which an additional 2,000 places are being made available for refugee entrants. This is the first real shift in the size of the refugee program over the last decade and its significance cannot be underestimated.

The additional places represent a 50% increase in the size of the component of the program that targets the most vulnerable amongst refugee communities overseas, including Women at Risk. The additional 2000 refugee places also represent DIMIA's recognition of the changing face of Australia's refugee and humanitarian intake. In the 1992-1993 program year, only 7% of Australia's refugee and humanitarian entrants were from Africa. However, by 2002-2003, African entrants made up 48% of the intake and in the 2003-2004 program year, African entrants constituted 71% of the annual refugee and humanitarian intake.

Refugee and humanitarian entrants from Africa, unlike their European or Middle Eastern entrant counterparts, are less likely to join an established community on arrival in Australia and are hence often considered to be 'new and

emerging communities'. As they lack the social and welfare resources that an established community can provide, their reliance on government provided settlement services is significantly more profound. By providing an expanded number of refugee places, the government is recognising the need for more comprehensive settlement assistance for this particular intake, as refugee places entitle an entrant to the complete set of government provided settlement services.

Administrative developments have also occurred in response to the Settlement Services Review recommendations. These include the pre-embarkation cultural orientation classes that commenced in September 2003 and have assisted roughly 1442 entrants in Nairobi, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and Egypt since June 2004 (DIMIA 2004). Recommendations on the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme (IHSS) services (recommendation 32, 33 and 34) have also been implemented. A tenancy training program has been introduced into the accommodation support area of the new IHSS tender and the quantity of general goods included in the household formation support service has been raised. Clarification on the responsibilities of IHSS service providers in terms of assisting entrants with urgent health concerns (recommendation 34) has been included in the current IHSS tender documents. Recommendation 53 has also been implemented, with a pilot program helping those from small and emerging communities to access the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) through funding subsidies. This is intended to contribute towards overcoming translating and interpreting resource concerns in new and emerging communities. Overall, these developments have been made in response to community concerns and the Settlement Services Review findings, and carry the potential to make settlement services operate more effectively and appropriately.

Current context

Perhaps the most interesting and significant aspect to the implementation of the recommendations of the Settlement Services Review is the context in which it is occurring. Issues pertaining to refugees have traditionally been unpopular with the current government and thus little public or media

attention has been focused on the government's settlement program. Despite this, over the last few years we have seen significant movement and development in the settlement sector, signifying a quantum leap forward by those people driving developments at both bureaucratic and political levels. This reflects the vision and hard work of the DIMIA staff responsible for the Settlement Services Review, which developed the arguments for enhancing settlement services and set out the framework for the changes that we saw reflected in the Federal Budget announcements. A large amount of work and strategic effort has been undertaken by many to push these developments through complex economic, political and social obstacles, and it is important to recognise that the Budget announcements were made in the context of an election year regardless of the fact that spending initiatives for settlement services would certainly not amount to a vote-winner. On the contrary, the range of commendable actions announced in the Budget, which have increased the capacity of both settlement services and the humanitarian program, went relatively unnoticed.

Strengthening participation in the settlement process

It is important to recognise that there still exists a fair amount of uncertainty, both within and outside of affected communities, regarding how the refugee and humanitarian program operates and the context in which decisions are made about who is chosen for resettlement. Education and dialogue continue to be vital methods of assisting with people's understanding of the protection system within which the Refugee and Humanitarian Program operates. The Settlement Services Review has been a pivotal document in the refugee and humanitarian settlement sector, however, its potential benefits and the implementation of its recommendations need to be carried out in communication with sector players to ensure that this occurs coherently, adequately and appropriately. The importance of community dialogue, information exchange and ongoing training is vital to the future of the IHSS program. Similarly, community dialogue will help to ensure the successful settlement of incoming entrants and must therefore be considered by all government and non-government departments involved in the implementation of the recommendations.

Breaking down of silos

Federal Government

The appointment of a high-level Task Force within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to oversee the implementation of the Settlement Services Review recommendations is highly significant and commendable and has ensured that the process was initiated as a whole-of-

government initiative. This approach recognises that DIMIA funding is most appropriately targeted at new and emerging communities and has required relevant government agencies, such as the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), and the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), to take responsibility for areas that relate to settlement but fall within their mandates. Previously, the view within government departments has been that clients from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds were the responsibility of DIMIA, regardless of the length of time they had spent in Australia. However, under an access and equity human rights based framework, as first outlined by the Galbally report in 1973, clients from CALD communities have a right to access Commonwealth department services. In response to this, mainstream services need to be constantly ensuring that their policies adequately encompass the needs of those from CALD backgrounds, particularly those that have been settled in Australia for a significant period of time. Accepting their responsibility towards CALD communities is essential if government services are to truly reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society.

A positive example of the Review's interdepartmental focus is the Refugee and Humanitarian Job Seeker Pilot Project recently completed by DEWR. In recognition of the difficulties that refugee and humanitarian entrants face in finding adequate and meaningful employment, DEWR has acted on recommendation 10, and endeavoured to develop services assisting entrants to gain work experience in the initial stages of their job search. The pilot was conducted in five different national locations and included a fifteen week intervention program aimed at improving the understanding of entrants about the Australian job market and reducing their long term dependency on Centrelink. Two of the key objectives identified by DEWR for the pilot were to establish better integration of refugee and humanitarian entrants both in the labour market and the wider Australian community, and to develop more positive perceptions of entrant job seekers in the eyes of service deliverers and employers. Both objectives reflect the Review's emphasis on government departments, other than DIMIA, taking responsibility for easing entrants into mainstream services and aiding their gradual integration into the wider Australian community. The pilot has been well documented and well communicated to community sector players, and a full report will be available in February 2005.

Despite the success indicated above, it is important for sector players to monitor the efforts of government bodies to implement the recommendations appropriate to their department. With the development of the new Department of Human Services, the JPET (Job Placement, Education and

Training) and Reconnect services for young people at risk, which were previously the responsibility of FACS, have been divided and the JPET service is now being administered by DEWR. The \$8 million dedicated to the development of new JPET outlets in the May Budget, as a response to the Settlement Services Review, had been allocated before this rearrangement of departmental responsibility. It is important for community sector players to monitor the allocation and enactment of this funding to ensure that the initial objectives are implemented. This monitoring is necessary to prevent the initial intentions outlined in the Review from becoming obscured by interdepartmental infrastructure realignment and responsibility shifting. In this sense, it is the responsibility of settlement sector workers to remain abreast of government changes and, concurrently, the responsibility of DIMIA and other departments to ensure that the community sector is adequately advised and briefed on developments.

Other developments

Special Humanitarian Program

The increase in refugee places means that there is more scope for people who may have been considered for Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) Visas (visa class 202) to be considered for a Refugee Visa (visa class 200), which would entitle them to the complete package of assistance provided to offshore refugees. This reduces their dependence on a 'proposer', that is the person/s proposing to provide support on arrival. There exists a strong desire amongst new arrivals to bring their family to Australia. The opportunity for family reunion is vital to people's settlement processes as it lessens their anxiety levels, increases their connection with Australia and reduces the financial burden of supporting family overseas. Recent developments have also meant that the capacity of a proposer is now assessed before the humanitarian entrant's arrival and, if it found that the proposer cannot meet the needs of the entrant, the entrant is referred to those IHSS services that are required. This creates a safety net for both the humanitarian entrant and their proposer and reduces the risk of entrants failing in their settlement efforts as a result of an under resourced proposer. The recent Budget also provides seed funding to enable the establishment of a no interest loans scheme to assist with the payment of airfares for humanitarian entrants, who will now also have all medical costs covered by the government. Both of these significant changes will markedly decrease the pressure placed on proposers.

Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme

The previous IHSS model consisted of separate agencies providing services to newly arrived entrants during their first six months of arrival across seven different areas.

These IHSS providers were bound by contractual privacy clauses that hindered communication between agencies within the sector and, subsequently, the smooth transition of clients and client information to post IHSS services. Thus, the old model was integrated in name but not in practice. The new IHSS structure, which is currently out to tender, has the potential to break down silos that have existed in settlement service provision. It is based on a consortium model or subcontracting model, which holds more potential for integration as clients deal with a single body that provides all of the IHSS services rather than engaging with four or five agencies that each provide a separate service. Under the new model, consortiums will consist of a number of players carrying equal responsibility and risk, or lead agencies that will be responsible for subcontracting services out to other agencies. It is likely that we will see a variety of models emerge around the country that will vary according to the players involved, the location of future entrants and the new geographical constraints imposed by the re-zoning of IHSS contract divisions within states.

The new IHSS model aims to create a more integrated IHSS program with fewer players providing more consistent services. Whilst the implications of these changes may mean a period of uncertainty for workers in the sector, the demand for skilled workers will remain strong, and may in fact rise with the increased numbers of refugee and humanitarian entrants. This process of change, therefore, should not be seen as disempowering or threatening but rather as an opportunity to rethink how programs can be most appropriately delivered. It is hoped that the upcoming tender round will run according to schedule to avoid unnecessary uncertainty for staff, service providers and entrants.

Migrant Resource Centres

The Settlement Services Review also recommended substantial changes to the way in which Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) are funded. However, with recommendations about MRC funding now delayed for 12 months, this issue will be addressed in a future Migration Action article.

Where to from here?

The Settlement Services Review identified 61 recommendations. Some have been implemented since the Report's release in May 2003, but the complex interdepartmental changes required by many of the recommendations means that implementation will be an ongoing process. However, we have seen a strong commitment by the Federal Government to implementing recommended changes in the May 2004 Budget. The Budget offered a concerted and practical response from a range of government departments and a process of logical prioritisation for implementing

the recommendations. The government's demonstrated commitment shows the Report of the Review of Settlement Services Review to be a living, breathing document and it is hoped that this initial momentum will continue and progress within the current post-election environment.

This article is based on an interview with the Executive Director of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), Margaret Piper, and the RCOA 2003 - 2004 Annual Report. It has been compiled by the Research and Policy Officer at the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), Rasika Ramburuth (rramburuth@bsl.org.au), and the Settlement Policy Officer at the Refugee Council of Australia, Lucy Greenacre (lucy@refugeecouncil.org.au).

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