



## Information Paper

December 2013

The Australian public is invited to provide their views on the management, size and composition of Australia's Humanitarian Programme (the programme) for 2014–15 and future years.

Each year, the Australian Government seeks the views of the Australian public on the programme. These views are taken into consideration in planning for and building future years' programmes. The continuing success of the programme can only be achieved if it continues to have the support of the Australian public.

An annual consultation process informs the government's decisions about the size and composition of the programme. This includes:

- consultation with state and territory governments and other government agencies
- consultation with peak refugee and humanitarian bodies
- consideration of the views of the Australian community, and
- consideration of advice from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on global resettlement needs and priorities.

In determining the size of the programme, the government also considers Australia's capacity to facilitate the entry and settlement of humanitarian clients.

This paper provides background information to help inform written submissions. It provides an overview of the international context in which the programme operates and information about the programme's key components and features.

If you would like to make a written submission on Australia's 2014–15 Humanitarian Programme or on the issues raised in the information paper, please send it to:

Humanitarian Programme Submission  
Assistant Secretary, Humanitarian Branch  
Department of Immigration and Border Protection  
PO Box 25  
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Submissions may also be sent by email to:

[humanitarian.submission@immi.gov.au](mailto:humanitarian.submission@immi.gov.au)

All submissions should be received by:

**11.30pm Tuesday 28 January 2014.**

Submissions received after the deadline may not be considered.

For further information please email:

[humanitarian.submission@immi.gov.au](mailto:humanitarian.submission@immi.gov.au)

## International context

The forcible displacement of people due to conflict and persecution is one of the major challenges facing the world today. UNHCR estimates that there were 45.2 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2012. Of these, 15.4 million were refugees (including Palestinian refugees), 28.8 million were internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 937 000 were asylum seekers.<sup>1</sup>

In 2012, an estimated 7.6 million people were newly displaced due to conflict or persecution. This included 1.1 million new refugees, the highest number in one year since 1999. Another 6.5 million people were newly displaced within the borders of their countries — the second highest figure of the past ten years.<sup>2</sup>

UNHCR is the organisation mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee situations.

UNHCR promotes three durable solutions for refugees. These are voluntary return to country of origin in conditions of safety and dignity, local integration in the countries of first asylum and resettlement. For the vast majority of refugees, voluntary return or local integration in the country of first asylum is the preferred option. Resettlement is pursued by UNHCR only if voluntary return or local integration is not feasible. Of the 10.4 million refugees under its care worldwide, UNHCR estimates that close to 95 000 persons will be in need of resettlement in 2014, with only 86 000 places expected to be offered by resettlement countries.

Australia is one of around 27 countries that offer resettlement places. Ten countries have established annual resettlement programmes of 500 or more (UNHCR referred) refugee places. Australia consistently ranks in the top three resettlement countries, along with the United States (US) and Canada, who collectively provide over 80 per cent of global resettlement places.

Australia is an active participant with other countries, UN agencies and international non-government organisations (NGOs) who work together to find solutions to the plight of refugees and displaced persons through the system of international refugee protection. This commitment is most directly expressed through Australia's Humanitarian Programme (the programme), which responds to international humanitarian situations through the resettlement of people to Australia and the protection of people who have arrived in Australia legally and are found to require protection.

## Aims of the Humanitarian Programme

Australia's Humanitarian Programme aims to:

- provide permanent resettlement to those most in need, who are in desperate situations overseas, including in refugee camps and protracted humanitarian situations
- reunite refugees and people who are in refugee-like situations overseas with their family in Australia, and
- use resettlement strategically to help stabilise refugee populations, reduce the prospect of irregular movement from source countries and countries of first asylum, and support broader international protection.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Global Trends 2012* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Global Trends 2012* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2013).

Information about recent outcomes of the Humanitarian Programme is at [Attachment A](#), and a short history of the Humanitarian Programme is at [Attachment B](#).

## Components of the Humanitarian Programme

Each year the government sets the number of visas that may be granted under the programme. The 2013–14 programme has 13 750 places comprising:

- a minimum of 11 000 places offshore (including up to 1000 places for women at risk), and
- the balance of places for permanent Protection visas granted onshore, since September 2013, for people who have arrived in Australia legally.

### Offshore component

The offshore component of the Humanitarian Programme has two categories:

- the Refugee category, and
- the Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) category.

The Refugee category assists people who are subject to persecution in their home country and for whom resettlement in Australia is the best durable solution. Australia works closely with UNHCR which refers most of the successful applicants for resettlement in Australia under this category.

The Refugee category has four subclasses:

- Refugee (subclass 200) — for people who have fled persecution in their home country and are living outside their home country.
- In-country Special Humanitarian Programme (subclass 201) — only a small number of visas are granted under this subclass for people living in their home country who are subject to persecution.
- Emergency Rescue (subclass 203) — only a small number of visas are granted under this subclass for people outside their home country who are in urgent need of protection because there is an imminent threat to their life and security. All applicants for this subclass are referred by UNHCR.
- Woman at Risk (subclass 204) — for women and their dependants who are subject to persecution in their home country or registered as being 'of concern' to UNHCR, are living outside their home country without the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender.

The SHP category (subclass 202) is for people who are subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of their human rights and who are living outside their home country.

Applications for SHP visas must be accompanied by a proposal from an eligible Australian citizen or permanent resident, an eligible New Zealand citizen, or an organisation operating in Australia. If the SHP application is successful, proposers help the applicant pay for their travel to Australia and assist with their accommodation and initial orientation in Australia.

## Onshore component

The onshore component of the programme is (since September 2013) reserved for people who have arrived legally, seek Australia's protection, and who are found to be refugees in line with the Refugees Convention definition or Australia's complementary protection obligations.

People seeking asylum are assessed, on a case-by-case basis, against the Refugees Convention definition with reference to detailed and current information on conditions in their home country. This assessment also takes into account Australia's obligations under other human rights treaties to which Australia is a party, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). They must also satisfy health, character and security criteria before they are granted permanent Protection visas.

People who are found not to be people in respect of whom Australia has protection obligations and who have no lawful basis to remain in Australia are required by law to be removed as soon as practicable.

Australia's fundamental obligation under the Refugees Convention is to not return a person to a country where there is a real risk that they may be killed, tortured or suffer cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Complementary protection may be provided to people who are not refugees as defined by the Refugees Convention but who face a real risk of significant harm if they were to be returned to their home country.

### Refocusing the programme

Beginning in 2013–14, the programme is being refocused to ensure that priority for places is given to people overseas entering as part of a planned process.

In 2013–14, a minimum of 11 000 places has been set aside for the offshore component of the programme. The balance between the Refugee and SHP category places within the offshore component has also been revised. A significant proportion of places have been allocated to the SHP category to begin to restore it to previous levels after the historically low intake in previous years due to an increased number of illegal maritime arrivals. Priority in the SHP is given to the immediate family of people who were themselves resettled through the offshore component of the programme as part of a planned process (see *Special Humanitarian Programme priorities* on page 7).

While a substantial proportion of places remains available in the programme for vulnerable refugees offshore, most of whom are referred by the UNHCR, the refocusing of the offshore component presents greater opportunities for family reunion under the programme through a larger number of places being available for people in humanitarian need overseas who have been waiting, often for many years, to join their family in Australia.

## Features of the Humanitarian Programme

### REFUGEE CATEGORY

#### 1. Working with UNHCR

The Refugee category of the Humanitarian Programme takes into consideration UNHCR's advice on resettlement priorities. UNHCR's assessment of global resettlement needs reflects the multi-dimensional role of resettlement.

Resettlement is used in a number of different refugee situations including as:

- an instrument of protection for individual refugees, particularly those who are in compelling and/or vulnerable situations
- as a durable solution for groups of refugees from intractable refugee situations
- as a strategic tool that can be used to leverage solutions for the remaining refugee population, and
- as one element of a range of strategies to respond to humanitarian crises that result in large outflows, for example, in the case of the current crisis in Syria.

#### **What is the strategic use of resettlement?**

UNHCR and the resettlement community have pursued resettlement as a strategic tool, particularly in protracted refugee situations, where targeted and coordinated resettlement by a number of resettlement countries is a tangible demonstration of burden sharing with host countries.

Importantly, resettlement provides a mechanism for UNHCR and the international community to establish a positive dialogue with host countries, facilitate continuing protection, and explore support for access to livelihood opportunities for the remainder of the refugee population. It is envisaged that expanding and maintaining protection opportunities in countries of first asylum may in turn have the effect of reducing pressures which lead to irregular migration and onward movement of people.

UNHCR and resettlement countries have identified a number of refugee situations that would benefit from targeted and coordinated resettlement over a number of years. It is envisaged that using resettlement strategically in these situations would achieve benefits beyond just to the resettled refugees. These designated 'Priority Situations' include:

- Iraqis in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon
- Iraqis and Iranians in Turkey
- Afghans in Pakistan
- Afghans in Iran
- Somalis in Kenya
- Colombians in South America, and
- DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) Congolese in the Great Lakes region.

Australia resettles refugees from all of these priority situations, with the exception of Colombians in South America.

Over a number of years, Australia has also resettled significant numbers of refugees from other protracted refugee situations including Myanmar in Thailand and Malaysia and Bhutanese in Nepal. Recently, Australia has also contributed resettlement places to respond to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

Contact/Core Groups have been established as a mechanism to achieve increased and better coordinated resettlement of refugees in priority situations. Contact/Core Groups allow for collaboration and dialogue between different resettlement countries, UNHCR and the host country. Members of the Groups work collaboratively to ensure greater predictability and sustainability of the resettlement effort, which allows for the strengthening of protection mechanisms and livelihood strategies to benefit the remaining population of refugees in the host countries.

There are currently five Contact/Core Groups:

- Core Group for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal
- Contact Group for Afghan refugees in Iran
- Contact Group for Afghan refugees in Pakistan
- Contact Group for Congolese refugees, and
- Contact Group for Colombian refugees

With the exception of the Group for Colombian refugees, Australia is a participant in all Groups and is also the Chair of the Contact Group for Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

#### **Australia's assistance to Syrian refugees**

The ongoing conflict in Syria has resulted in more than 2 million Syrian refugees, the vast majority of whom are in neighbouring countries, in particular Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 4.25 million people are displaced in Syria as a result of the conflict.

Australia has joined an international effort to respond to UNHCR's call for a coordinated resettlement response for Syrian refugees. Five hundred (500) permanent resettlement places under the Refugee category of the 2013–14 programme have been allocated to Syrian refugees, with provision for more Syrians to enter Australia through the SHP.

The department is working closely with UNHCR to identify those to be offered the resettlement places. They will target highly vulnerable people in the most urgent need of protection.

## **2. Woman at Risk**

Vulnerable women at risk and their dependants are a high priority for resettlement in the 2013–14 programme. In 2013–14, 1000 refugee places have been allocated to the Woman at Risk Programme.

The Woman at Risk visa is for women and their dependants who are subject to persecution or are of concern to UNHCR, are living outside their home country without the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender.

The Woman at Risk visa was introduced in 1989 in response to the concerns of UNHCR about the plight of women and children refugees. This visa subclass recognises the priority given by UNHCR to the protection of refugee women who are in particularly vulnerable circumstances. Since 1989, around 14 000 Woman at

Risk visas have been granted. Australia is one of only a small number of countries that manage dedicated refugee settlement programmes for women at risk and their dependants.

### **3. Resettlement for at risk Afghan employees supporting Australia in Afghanistan**

The government offers resettlement to eligible locally engaged Afghan employees and their direct family members at risk of harm due to their employment in support of Australia's mission in Afghanistan. The visa policy is a whole of government initiative managed across the department, the Department of Defence, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Federal Police.

If certified as eligible by the relevant Australian agency that employed them, the locally engaged Afghan employees may make an application for a visa under Australia's Humanitarian Programme. Applicants are required to meet visa criteria including health, character and security requirements.

Visa places for Afghan employees and their direct family members will be counted in the offshore component of the programme. Resettlement of successful applicants under this policy will align with the withdrawal of Australian troops from Afghanistan.

## **SPECIAL HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME**

### **4. Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) priorities**

The 2013–14 programme includes more places for SHP entrants than in recent years. Priorities within the SHP have been amended to reflect the refocusing of the programme towards family reunification and planned entry for overseas refugees (see *Refocusing the programme* on page 4).

In certain circumstances, permanent humanitarian visa holders who were themselves resettled through the offshore component of the programme as part of a planned process may propose their immediate family members for entry to Australia through the offshore component of the programme. 'Split family' is the colloquial term for these applications. Top priority in the SHP is given to these 'split family' applicants.

To meet split family requirements, the family members must have been declared and a proposal application must be made within five years of the grant of a humanitarian visa to the proposer. Split family provisions are not available to illegal maritime arrivals.

Next priority in the SHP is given to close family overseas of others in Australia who have fled their home country and are subject to substantial discrimination in that country.

Lowest priority in the SHP is given to family members, including immediate family members, of people who have been granted permanent Protection visas in Australia through the onshore component of the programme. This includes family members of illegal maritime arrivals who arrived in Australia before 13 August 2012 as well as family members of others who are granted protection after arrival in Australia.

People who arrived as illegal maritime arrivals on or after 13 August 2012 are not eligible to propose family members under the SHP.



## COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME

A community sponsorship programme, formally known as the Community Proposal Pilot (the Pilot), commenced on 1 June 2013. The Pilot provides for up to 500 places within the offshore component of the 2013–14 programme.

The Pilot aims to test the capacity of the Australian community to provide a substantial financial contribution towards the costs of humanitarian settlement and practical support to assist humanitarian entrants to settle successfully. It is also an opportunity to determine whether such a model provides for an additional pathway for people in humanitarian situations overseas to be proposed by Australian communities for entry to Australia. Following an evaluation of this Pilot, the government will consider developing this into a fully-fledged programme.

The Pilot draws on the experience and lessons learned from the Canadian Government's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Programme, which has operated since 1978. More than 200 000 people have migrated to Canada under the PSR Programme, with the Canadian Government setting an admissions target of 6300 under the PSR Programme in 2014.<sup>3</sup>

In the Pilot, organisations approved by the department, known as Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs), work with community organisations and families to:

- propose the applicant
- ensure all costs associated with the application are paid, and
- provide practical support to assist humanitarian entrants to settle in the community, similar to support currently provided to humanitarian entrants under the Humanitarian Settlement Services Programme.

To date, five APOs have been approved by the department. They are AMES and Brotherhood of St Laurence (Victoria), Illawarra Multicultural Services and Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre (New South Wales), and the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (South Australia).

Applicants under the Pilot are required to meet the normal criteria for a humanitarian visa, including health, character and security requirements.

## Pre-departure and settlement services

The resettlement of refugees and others in humanitarian need to Australia is supported by a range of comprehensive pre-departure and settlement services provided by the government. These services are critical for supporting new arrivals toward inclusion and active participation in Australian society.

In September 2013, responsibility for administering the government's pre-departure and settlement services was transferred to the Department of Social Services and the Department of Industry.

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<sup>3</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Notice – Supplementary Information to the 2014 immigration levels plan* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013), [www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/notices/2013-11-01.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/notices/2013-11-01.asp).



## Further information on the Humanitarian Programme

Department of Immigration and Border Protection website

[www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian.htm)

Fact Sheet 60 – Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program

[www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm)

Department of Immigration and Citizenship Annual Report 2012–13

[www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2012-13/pdf/index.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2012-13/pdf/index.htm)

*A significant contribution: economic, social and civic contributions of first and second generation humanitarian entrants. Summary of findings (June 2011)*

[www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/pdf/economic-social-civic-contributions-booklet2011.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/pdf/economic-social-civic-contributions-booklet2011.pdf)

The Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP)

[www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/shp-client-info-sheet.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/shp-client-info-sheet.pdf)

Community Proposal Pilot information sheet

[www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/\\_pdf/comm-proposal-pilot-info-sheet.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/_pdf/comm-proposal-pilot-info-sheet.pdf)

## Recent Humanitarian Programme outcomes

### Outcomes of the 2012–13 Humanitarian Programme

In 2012–13, a total of 20 019 visas were granted under the Humanitarian Programme (the programme). This included 7504 grants under the onshore component and 12 515 grants under the offshore component. In the offshore component, 12 012 (95.9 per cent) grants were Refugee visas and 503 (4.0 per cent) were SHP visas.

The highest number of visas granted in 2012–13 under the offshore component was in the Middle East region (55.7 per cent), followed by the Asia region (34.1 per cent) and the Africa region (9.9 per cent).

Under the Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP), more than half the visas in this category (67.6 per cent) were granted in the Middle East region, followed by the Africa region (17.9 per cent) and the Asia region (12.7 per cent).

In 2012–13, 1673 Woman at Risk visas were granted, which represented 13.9 per cent of the total Refugee category.

**Table 1 — Humanitarian Programme outcomes by component and category 2012–13**

| Component                             | Visa category          | Visa grants   |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Offshore                              | Refugee                | 12 012        |
|                                       | SHP                    | 503           |
|                                       | Sub-total              | 12 515        |
| Onshore                               | Protection (permanent) | 7504          |
|                                       | Sub-total              | 7504          |
| <b>Total programme grants 2012–13</b> |                        | <b>20 019</b> |

For more information on the 2012–13 Humanitarian Programme see the department's publication *Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Programme: 2012–13* available at [www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics)

### The current programme: 2013–14

The programme for 2013–14 is 13 750 places which includes:

- a minimum of 11 000 offshore, shared between the Refugee and SHP categories, and including up to 1000 places from within the Refugee category allocated to Woman at Risk visas, and
- the balance of places, since September 2013, for permanent Protection visas granted onshore for people who have arrived in Australia legally.

## A flexible programme

As outlined at Attachment B, Australia's Humanitarian Programme is characterised by its flexibility. This allows it to respond to evolving humanitarian situations and global resettlement needs, for example, the conflict in Syria (see *Australia's assistance to Syrian refugees* on page 6).

The table and figure below illustrate the shifting composition of the programme over past years.

**Table 2 — Top ten nationalities within the offshore component between 2003–04 and 2012–13**

| Offshore Humanitarian Programme* |                   |              |              |              |              |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Rank                             | 2003–04           | 2004–05      | 2005–06      | 2006–07      | 2007–08      |
| 1                                | Sudan             | Sudan        | Sudan        | Sudan        | Burma        |
| 2                                | Iraq              | Iraq         | Iraq         | Burma        | Iraq         |
| 3                                | Afghanistan       | Afghanistan  | Afghanistan  | Iraq         | Afghanistan  |
| 4                                | Ethiopia          | Liberia      | Burma        | Afghanistan  | Sudan        |
| 5                                | Iran              | Sierra Leone | Liberia      | Burundi      | Liberia      |
| 6                                | Liberia           | Burundi      | Burundi      | Congo (DRC)  | Congo (DRC)  |
| 7                                | Former Yugoslavia | Burma        | Sierra Leone | Liberia      | Burundi      |
| 8                                | Sierra Leone      | Iran         | Congo (DRC)  | Sierra Leone | Iran         |
| 9                                | Congo             | Congo        | Eritrea      | Eritrea      | Sierra Leone |
| 10                               | Somalia           | Ethiopia     | Iran         | Iran         | Sri Lanka    |
| Rank                             | 2008–09           | 2009–10      | 2010–11      | 2011–12      | 2012–13      |
| 1                                | Iraq              | Burma        | Iraq         | Burma        | Iraq         |
| 2                                | Burma             | Iraq         | Burma        | Iraq         | Afghanistan  |
| 3                                | Afghanistan       | Bhutan       | Afghanistan  | Afghanistan  | Myanmar      |
| 4                                | Bhutan            | Afghanistan  | Bhutan       | Bhutan       | Bhutan       |
| 5                                | Sudan             | Congo (DRC)  | Congo (DRC)  | Ethiopia     | Congo (DRC)  |
| 6                                | Ethiopia          | Ethiopia     | Ethiopia     | Congo (DRC)  | Iran         |
| 7                                | Congo (DRC)       | Somalia      | Sri Lanka    | Eritrea      | Somalia      |
| 8                                | Somalia           | Sudan        | Iran         | Iran         | Sudan        |
| 9                                | Liberia           | Liberia      | Sudan        | Somalia      | Eritrea      |
| 10                               | Sierra Leone      | Sierra Leone | Somalia      | Congo (ROC)  | Ethiopia     |

\* Notes:

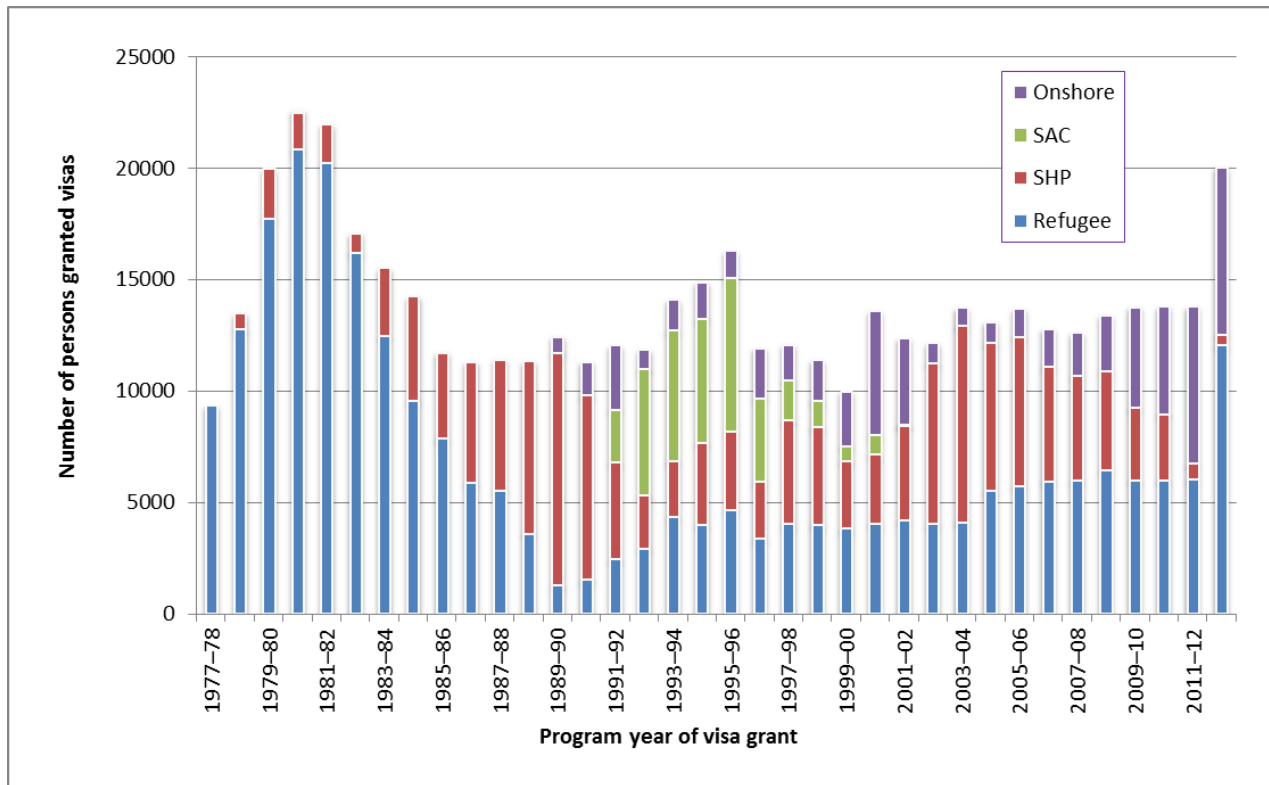
- Nationality is based on country of birth. The country of birth of principal visa applicants is applied to secondary visa applicants

- 'Sudan' refers to people from both Sudan and South Sudan

- 'Congo DRC' refers to the Democratic Republic of Congo

- In 2012 reference to 'Burma' was replaced with 'Myanmar'

Figure 1 — programme outcomes by component since 1977–78



\* Note: In 1991, the Special Assistance Category (SAC) was introduced to help groups with close links to Australia who, while subject to severe hardship, did not fit the traditional humanitarian categories. This category was gradually closed between 1996 and 2001

## A short history of the Humanitarian Programme

Australia has a proud record of resettling refugees and people in humanitarian need from around the world. Humanitarian resettlement programmes in Australia began in 1947, with the resettlement of people who had been displaced by World War II.

Since this time Australia has welcomed over 800 000 people from different countries under the Humanitarian Programme (the programme), in response to changing global resettlement and humanitarian needs. They include:

- around 170 000 Eastern Europeans between 1947 and 1954 who had been displaced during World War II
- thousands of refugees from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s from crises throughout Europe, including the Hungarian uprising and the Warsaw Pact military intervention in Czechoslovakia
- more than 16 000 people from Central and South America following political turmoil in their countries in the early 1970s
- around 18 000 Lebanese who had been displaced by civil war since 1975
- over 150 000 Indochinese refugees since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the conflicts in Laos and Cambodia
- over 65 000 refugees from the Middle East and South West Asia region since the late 1970s, and
- around 60 000 refugees from the Africa region since the late 1990s.

In 1977 the Indochinese refugee crisis prompted the government of the time to introduce a new national refugee policy and administrative machinery. Previously, Australia's approach to refugee resettlement had been primarily to respond to specific international events as they occurred.

The key components of the new refugee policy included placing responsibility for deciding to accept refugees with the Australian Government, establishing a regular and planned programme, engaging with the international community to resolve refugee situations, and establishing an efficient and fair mechanism for refugee status determination onshore. These principles have remained fundamental to Australia's refugee policy for more than 30 years.

Until late 1981 almost all arrivals under the programme were refugees. The Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) was introduced in that year to provide resettlement in Australia for people who, while not identified as refugees, were living outside their home country, were subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights in their home country and had family or community ties to Australia.

By the mid-1980s the programme had a global focus, with priority given to applicants who had family or other close links to Australia. By this stage, the programme had diversified to include up to 40 nationalities, including people from Eastern Europe, Latin/Central America and the Middle East.

The programme continued to evolve over the next two decades to meet the resettlement needs of particular people. The Woman at Risk and Emergency Rescue visa provisions were introduced in the late 1980s, followed by the Special Assistance Category (SAC) in 1991.

The SAC was introduced for groups of people with close links to Australia who were in vulnerable situations but whose circumstances did not fit into the traditional humanitarian resettlement criteria. SACs were introduced for groups such as Soviet minorities, East Timorese, citizens of former Yugoslavia, Burmese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Sri Lankans and Sudanese.

At the end of the 1990s Europe was the largest source region for the programme with around half of all those resettled between 1998 and 2001 coming from the former Yugoslavia. During the same period, the proportion of resettlement from Africa increased from around 16 per cent in 1998 to a peak of 70 per cent between 2003 and 2005. The main countries of birth for these entrants included Sudan, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Sierra Leone. Resettlement from this region has been reduced in recent years, owing to improvements in the situation of some African conflict areas and a shifting focus of the programme.

Since 2004 Asia has been a key focus of the programme, with the resettlement of some 17 500 refugees from Myanmar including those in protracted refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, in Malaysia and in India. In addition, Australia has resettled some 4500 Bhutanese refugees from Nepal since 2007–08. In recent years, Australia has also resettled smaller numbers of refugees in Indonesia referred by UNHCR who have fled from countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka.

The Middle East and South West Asia has also been a key focus region of the programme in recent years. Significant numbers of people from these regions continue to be in need of humanitarian assistance due to conflicts, primarily in Afghanistan and Iraq, and more recently in Syria. Resettlement from this region has increased from an average of around a third of the programme from 1998 to 2009 to over half of the programme in 2012–13.

The fundamentals of the programme that were established over 30 years ago have assisted many thousands of refugees to find safety and rebuild their lives in Australia. Importantly, the programme has also been able to evolve over time to respond to changing domestic and international environments and to accommodate changes in government objectives. Into the future, Australia will continue to work with other resettlement countries to support international efforts to resolve priority refugee situations and the programme will continue to adapt to respond to the changing international environment.