

Fact Sheet – Refugee Communities

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country due to persecution, because of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion. They may face unfair imprisonment, torture or death.

Wollongong has a long history as a place of settlement for refugees, including the **European** communities who arrived after World War II, the **Vietnamese** in the 70s and **Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian** communities in the 90s; the most recently arrived people are from **the Middle East, Burma and African nations**.

Number of newly arrived entrants in Illawarra and main countries of birth (in descending order):

2002–2005	154	Liberia, Sudan, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Ethiopia
2006–2009	467	Burmese, Congo, Liberia, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Togo
2010	107	Burma, Congo (DRC), Liberia, Ethiopia
2011	119	Burma, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Ghana
2012	238	Libya, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Ethiopia, Burundi
2013	376	Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Libya, Burma, Congo (DRC) ; 34% are 16 years and under
2014	420	Syria, Myanmar, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Togo
2015	109	Syria, Burma, Iran, Congo, Iraq
2016 Jan-May	242	Iraq, Syria, Burma, Congo, Eritrea

Wollongong Local Services Data

Refugees are permanent residents; they have access to Medicare and Centrelink benefits as any other Australian citizen or permanent resident. The government funds local services (Navitas and Illawarra Multicultural Services) to link newly arrived refugees with housing, schools, TAFE, Health, and Centrelink. Volunteers also play an important role in providing support.

Wollongong’s current intake of refugees mostly come from **Syria and Iraq**. They are from refugee camps and urban areas of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. They have been selected through the usual and thorough process by the UN refugee agency –

UNCHR. A large number, approx. 40%, are 18 years or under. Refugees from Burma and Congo are also continuing to settle in Wollongong.

Language

The most highly represented languages since 2011 are Arabic (corresponding to refugees from Syria, Iraq) and Farsi (from Iran, Afghanistan).

Many refugees are ethnic minorities, who speak a tribal language/s and may speak a mainstream language.

The Burmese people in Wollongong are mostly from the Karen, Karenni, Chin and Kachin hill tribes. Each has a unique language and culture. Not all speak the Burmese language.

People from African nations usually speak their tribal languages and often Swahili, Ewe or French (Congo, Togo).

Religion

The majority (though not all) of newly arrived Middle Eastern communities are Muslim. There are two main denominations of Islam - Shi'ite or Shia, and Sunni. The Bilal Mosque, Cringila, the Omar Mosque, Gwynneville and the Uthman Mosque, Oak Flats, are Sunni. There is a Shi'ite Mosque in Cringila (Auburn Parade). Hazara Afghans are Shia.

A significant number of African and Burmese communities are Christian and are part of local church communities.

(Taken from the WCC Refugee Communities in the Illawarra 2015 (WCC website))

UNHCR Global Trends report finds **65.3 million people**, or one person in 113, were **displaced** from their homes by conflict and persecution in 2015.

Australia's annual refugee intake for 2016 is 13 750 places. This is **7.2%** of planned migration (190,000 places) for the same year.

In addition to the above intake, Australia has offered a further 12,000 places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Wollongong can expect 620 refugees to settle here over the next 12-18 months.

There are 2.5 million refugees in Turkey, 600,000 in Jordan and more than 1 million in Lebanon.

An **asylum seeker** is someone who is seeking protection, and is waiting for their refugee status to be assessed.

As at November 2015, there were **1,469 asylum seekers** in Australia detention centres at Nauru and Manus Island, PNG. (Department Social Services website).

Currently, asylum seekers who arrive by boat are not allowed to apply for a refugee visa to Australia.