

REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN THE ILLAWARRA 2022

According to the *Migration Act 1958* a **refugee** is someone who is outside their home country and cannot return because they have a well-founded fear of persecution due to their:

- Race
- Religion
- Political opinion
- Nationality
- Membership of a particular social group.

As a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention (1951) Australia is obliged to provide protection to refugees and to ensure they are not returned to any place where they are likely to face persecution.

An **asylum seeker** is someone who is seeking protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been assessed.

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 Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian communities in the 90s; the most recently arrived people are from the Middle East, Myanmar, African nations and Ukraine. A strong network of local services supports their settlement.

Wollongong's small but growing refugee population is made up of a diverse number of ethnic and language groups. There is also diversity within our refugee communities regarding education levels, literacy and language skills and health status. Many have been born outside their country, often in a refugee camp or an urban refugee setting.

Australia's intake of refugees and asylum seekers fluctuates according to global conflict and government policy. There have been **13,750** places allocated to the **Refugee and Humanitarian Program** for **2022-2023**. An additional **16,500** places for Afghan nationals will be delivered over the next four years. The total humanitarian intake represents **11.2% of the planned migration program** (160,000 places) for **2022-23**. (Source: Department of Home Affairs, 2022-23 Migration Program FAQ)

- 1 **Offshore Resettlement:** People who come from a country of asylum to Australia; they are permanent residents and are entitled to a full range of settlement services.
 - a. **Refugee Visa** (sub class 200)
Majority identified by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and referred to Australian Government for resettlement.
 - b. **In-Country Special Humanitarian Programme Visa** (sub class 201)
For those living in their home country, unable to leave and subject to persecution.
 - c. **Global Special Humanitarian Visa** (sub class 202)
Not refugees but subject to substantial discrimination; have links to family in Australia who undertake to pay for travel to Australia and support their settlement.
 - d. **Emergency Rescue Visa** (sub class 203)
Refugees who need urgent resettlement.
 - e. **Woman at Risk Visa** (sub class 204)
Women in danger due to their gender; majority are identified by UNHCR and referred to Australian Government.

*In 2022 Wollongong's intake consisted of 200, 202 and 204.

Community Support Programme (CSP): Operating since July 2017, delivered locally by Illawarra Multicultural Services. CSP enables communities, businesses, families and individuals to propose Humanitarian Visa applicants and support them on arrival. Proposers under the CSP must provide adequate support to enable the proposed entrant to achieve financial self-sufficiency within the first year of arrival in Australia.

If you hold a visa from the above categories, you may also be able to reunite your split family by bringing your immediate family members to Australia.

2 **Onshore Resettlement:** Asylum seekers who are already in Australia.

a. **Protection Visa** (sub class 866)

Allows person to live and work as a permanent resident; have access to Centrelink and Medicare services; is not open to maritime arrivals.

b. **Temporary Protection Visa (TPV)**

Valid for up to three years; allows person to work and study.

c. **Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV)**

A temporary protection visa valid for five years. It encourages people to work and study in regional Australia.

Those who have entered illegally, according to the Department of Home Affairs (arrived by boat, without a valid visa or without immigration clearance) may be able to apply for a TPV or SHEV.

Key Statistics

Statistics cover the Illawarra (Wollongong, Shellharbour and Shoalhaven) however the majority of refugees settle in the Wollongong area.

Table 1.0 total number of humanitarian entrants arriving in the Illawarra by country of birth from 2006-2022
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2006–2009	467	Myanmar, Congo, Liberia, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Togo.
2010	107	Myanmar, Congo (DRC), Liberia, Ethiopia.
2011	119	Myanmar, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Ghana.
2012	238	Libya, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Myanmar, 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	103	Iraq, Syria, Myanmar, Congo, Eritrea.
2016	463	Syria Iraq, Myanmar, Congo.
2017	78	Syria, Iraq, Myanmar.
2018	224	Syria, Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Myanmar (countries of citizenship)
2019	331	Congo, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Burundi, Iran
2020 - 2021	69	Iraq, Myanmar, Iran, Syria, one stateless person
2022 Jan - Sept	193	Syria, Iraq, Congo, Myanmar, Ukraine

Data source: Navitas English 2010-2017 Red Cross from Nov 2017

*majority, not all, are from the countries listed.

Current Trends

- Covid 19 halted the Humanitarian Entrants program in March 2020, arrivals were restricted until end of 2021.
- Wollongong has been a national priority regional settlement site for women at risk (Visa sub class 204) since 2012.
- 202-visa subclass has significantly increased 2018 - 2020 to nearly half of all places, with a proportionate decrease in 204 visa holders.
- Significant increase in the total number of refugees in 2016 due to the additional 12,000 places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees nationwide.
- A large proportion between 2013 and 2016 were 25 years or under.

Language

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

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

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 and 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, the Uthman Mosque, Oak Flats and the Masjid As-Salam Mosque, Berkeley, are Sunni-based communities. There is a Shi'ite Mosque in Cringila (Auburn Parade). Hazara Afghanis are Shia. A considerable number of African, Middle Eastern, Burmese and Ukrainian communities are Christian and are part of local church communities.

Level of Education

There is significant diversity in terms of educational ability and skill, ranging from newly arrived refugees with tertiary qualifications and strong English skills and a sizeable number with little or no English.

Health

The health issues presented by newly arrived refugees are highly complex given the physical and psychological disabilities acquired through conflict-related trauma. A significant proportion also arrives with cognitive, developmental and mobility-related disabilities. This requires complex case coordination from disability specialist services and ongoing social and personal care supports and interventions.

Settlement Services

Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP)

The Federal Department of Social Services (DSS) funds the delivery and coordination of settlement services for humanitarian entrants for up to 18 months after arrival. This includes individual case management, orientation and accommodation. The local provider is the *Australian Red Cross*.

Red Cross volunteers help to meet the initial settlement needs of individuals and/or families, orientation to the community and ongoing individual social support.

Church Resources is contracted to deliver the Basic Household Good package.

Specialised and Intensive Services (SIS)

A DSS funded program that provides services (most often short sharp intervention) for up to 5 years after arrival for those with multiple complex barriers. Referrals from individuals and service providers can be made online to DSS. Clients can include those who are not already part of the HSP. For HSP clients, this support complements their existing case management.

The local provider is *Australian Red Cross*.

Settlement Services Program (SSP)

DSS funds additional settlement support for newly arrived refugees from 6 months to 5 years after arrival. This includes individual case management, information, referral and community capacity building support. The local provider is *Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS)*. IMS is a member of the NSW Settlement Partnership. Led by Settlement Services International, the partnership comprises 22 organisations.

Health

All new arrivals through the HSP are provided with comprehensive health screening services and are referred to a local GP for ongoing care and treatment; *Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District's* Multicultural Health Service coordinates access to public health services and information sessions on accessing the health system. *STARTTS* provides specialist psychiatric and psychological support services for victims of torture and trauma. *NEAMI* provides mental health services. *Transcultural Mental Health Centre* provides counselling in some community languages.

Employment

Newly arrived refugees access Services Australia Newstart Allowance and Workforce Australia Employment Services including Max Solutions, APM, People Plus and MBC.

Services Australia Multicultural Services Officer provides ongoing support and information.

GreenConnect is a community-based organisation that connects refugees and young people at risk with work and training in a range of industries. They place former refugees into organisations on a temporary or permanent basis. [Green Connect Illawarra - More jobs, less waste, fair food \(green-connect.com.au\)](http://green-connect.com.au)

Education

Adults

The federally funded **Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)** provides adults with free English language tuition. The local provider is *Max Solutions* (under contract to Navitas English).

- Classroom tuition through either full-time or part-time study.
- Two streams of tuition: Pre-employment English stream and Social English stream.
- Distance learning through a package of learning material supported by regular telephone or internet contact with an AMEP qualified teacher.
- Home Tutor Scheme which provides language assistance by a trained volunteer.
- Self-paced e-learning as supplementary learning

KU Children's Services provides free childcare for under school-aged children as part of the AMEP program.

Max Solutions is also funded by the Department of Industry to provide the **Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program** which delivers language, literacy and numeracy training.

TAFE NSW (ESOL)

- Wollongong TAFE has English Language classes from beginner level to academic level.
- Enrolments are all year round.

Community-based **English Conversation classes** are offered in numerous locations. More info: [English Language Support | Wollongong City Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/english-language-support).

Children and young people

Children who are between 5 and 11 years of age are enrolled in their local primary school as soon as possible after arrival. Newly arrived students in primary schools receive targeted, intensive English support at the beginning of their Australian schooling. Ongoing English language and wellbeing support is provided across the curriculum throughout the student's schooling journey.

Children who are 12 years of age or older attend *Warrawong Intensive English Centre (IEC)*, located at Warrawong High School, for initial intensive English learning. Following this, the students transition to their local high school, where English language support is provided across the curriculum alongside support for wellbeing and welfare.

Children and young people have been referred to the Catholic school system since 2016, including Good Samaritan (Fairy Meadow), St Frances Assisi (Warrawong) and St Therese (West Wollongong) primary schools.

Housing

Red Cross provides on-arrival accommodation, tenancy support and orientation to secure long-term accommodation as part of the HSP. In 2016 the first families settled in the Shellharbour area.

Upon arrival, clients stay for up to 28 days in short-term accommodation (STA), while long-term accommodation (LTA) is secured. Red Cross utilises head lease properties which are subleased, if the tenants are approved by the real estate agent.

Issues

- Shortage of long-term rental properties.
- Shortage of one-bedroom housing for single clients.
- Shortage of four-bedroom housing for large families.

Church Resources is subcontracted to provide a volunteer service to deliver basic household packages and help in setting up homes.

Service Coordination

Illawarra Refugee Issues Forum (IRIF). is held bi-monthly and is open to organisations working with refugee communities - convenor Wollongong City Council

Illawarra–Southeast Advisory Committee meets quarterly with community and senior government representatives appointed by the Minister - convenor Multicultural NSW on behalf of the Minister for Multiculturalism

CALD Water Safety Committee – convenor Surf Life Saving NSW

Illawarra CALD Disability Working Group – convenor Multicultural Communities Council Illawarra, MCCI

Community-based settlement support

Illawarra Multicultural Services (IMS) [Illawarra Multicultural Services \(ims.org.au\)](https://www.ims.org.au)

Information, support and assistance to CALD communities, migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants.

- *Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS)* for humanitarian entrants and other eligible migrants during their first five years of arrival in Australia. Two service streams: i) Client Services - settlement-related information, advice, advocacy ii) Community Capacity Building

- assists new and emerging organisations and community groups to support specific communities; supports economic and personal wellbeing of community members.
- *Targeted Earlier Intervention* (TEI) program for children, young people, families and communities who are experiencing or are at risk of vulnerability. Includes casework, case management and multicultural playgroups.
- *Community Support Program* (CSP) enables communities, businesses, families and individuals to offer support to offshore refugees with visa applications and later in their settlement pathway in Australia.
- *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS) Support Coordination assists people with a disability and their carers to identify, develop, coordinate and access relevant and approved supports and services or assist individuals and their families to do this on their own.
- *Start Strong Pathways* (SSP) program supports pathways to preschool and promotes the importance of early childhood education to parents and communities.
- *Community Hubs Australia* supports parents and children located in Wollongong, West Wollongong, and Warrawong Primary schools. Four key program areas: Engagement – English – Early years – Vocational pathways.

Multicultural Communities Council Illawarra (MCCI) [Home - MCCI](#)

Regional peak body for multicultural communities. Provides a wide range of services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

Multicultural Youth Development Program includes Illawarra Multicultural Youth Conference, youth leadership activities, school holiday programs, sport clinics, water safety sessions, Illawarra Multicultural Youth Network.

Other MCCI programs include the Burmese Social Support Group, a weekly group for older Burmese people from a refugee background.

SCARF – Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families [SCARF in the Illawarra: Changing refugee families' lives \(scarfsupport.org.au\)](#)

SCARF is now part of MCCI. It provides community-based support that promotes friendship, community connection, social engagement, and a sense of belonging for refugee children, youth, adults, and older people. Programs respond to a range of needs. Services include:

- Befriending program - matches local volunteers with individuals/families from refugee backgrounds who are seeking support in the form of friendship, cultural orientation, and community connection.
- Learn to drive mentoring program.
- Homework help and tutoring for school students.
- Social inclusion activities and events (e.g., weekly children's playgroup, Let's Chat program, excursions).
- Employment support - skills development, work experience and employment opportunities for people from refugee backgrounds.
- Health & wellbeing initiatives

Anglicare [Family Services | Family Support & Assistance | Anglicare](#)

Family Mental Health Support Service provides casework and counselling.

Southern Youth and Family Services [Newly Arrived Youth Specialists \(NAYS\) | Southern Youth and Family Services \(syfs.org.au\)](#)

Support, counselling, case management and crisis intervention for young people aged between 12 to 21 years who are vulnerable, disadvantaged, homeless or those at risk of disadvantage and homelessness and their families, who have migrated to Australia in the last five years. Priority is given to those who have entered Australia on Humanitarian Visas.

Wollongong City Council [Refugee Communities | Wollongong City Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

- Sector support and development.
- Refugee Welcome Zone since 2005.
- Library Services, Youth Services and Lifeguard Services.
- Wollongong Living Books program.
- Illawarra Refugee Challenge - high school education program.

Language Services

- Translation Information Service (TIS National) phone interpreting [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS National\)](#)
- Free Translating Service [Free Translating Service \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](#)
- Language Services Multicultural NSW: fees apply [Language Services | Multicultural NSW](#)
- Wollongong City Council Interpreter Service: face to face onsite interpreting, fees apply [Interpreters | Wollongong City Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

Further Information

Department of Home Affairs [Immigration and citizenship \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](#)

Refugee Council of Australia [Members of our community - Refugee Council of Australia](#)

UNCHR – UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency](#)

Roads to Refuge (teaching resource) [Roads to refuge - refugee information for students, teachers & the community \(roads-to-refuge.com.au\)](#)

Refugee Week [Home - Refugee Week](#)

STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors) - provide regular training for service providers [Training | STARTTS](#)

NSW Refugee Health Service [Refugee Health | Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District \(ISLHD\) \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

Transcultural Mental Health Centre [Transcultural Mental Health Centre \(TMHC\) - Transcultural Mental Health Centre \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

Legal Aid [Refugee Service - Legal Aid NSW](#)

Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law [Kaldor Centre | \(unsw.edu.au\)](#)

SBS Cultural Atlas [Home — Cultural Atlas \(sbs.com.au\)](#)