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Settlement Cities

A place-based study of Australia's major refugee settlement destinations

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The Edmund Rice Centre

This report was produced by the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education (ERC). The ERC is a non-governmental research and advocacy organisation founded by the Christian Brothers in 1996. The ERC conducts rights-based programs including people-centred research, community education, community empowerment and advocacy by focusing on three areas: the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the rights of refugees and people seeking asylum; and the rights of the peoples of the Pacific, especially those struggling for climate justice. The ERC's aim is to raise awareness that leads to social action and policy change in favour of the poor and excluded in Australia and internationally.

Acknowledgement of Country

Settlement takes place on Aboriginal country. The Edmund Rice Centre acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands discussed in this report.

Organisational partners

The Settlement City Project was designed and carried out in collaboration with representatives from the following organisations:

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The Edmund Rice Centre operates on the principle of 'nothing about us without us,' meaning that all projects are undertaken with the meaningful participation of the communities who are its envisaged beneficiaries. For the Settlement Cities project this participation was provided by the members of the Community Advisory Committee who were drawn from the refugee communities living in the 7 settlement cities that are the subject of this report. We would like to thank them for generously offering their time and the wisdom of their lived experience.

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Contents

Glossary

Community association	Although the term 'community association' may refer to many kinds of entities and NGOs, in this context it is used to refer to ethno-specific, national or religious organisations that have significant involvement with refugees.
jobactive	Jobactive was the Commonwealth government's program intended to assist job seekers to find employment. It was replaced by the Workforce Australia program on 1 July 2022.
Mainstream service providers	Services that are aimed at the entire population but are also accessed by refugees.
Refugees	Recent arrivals to Australia who have left their home countries due to conflict or fear of persecution, regardless of the type of visa they arrived on.
Settlement city	'Settlement city' refers to the Local Government Areas (LGAs) which settle a large share of refugees during their first years of life in Australia.
Settlement city 'model'	Not a formal model but instead the qualities many settlement cities have come to share that facilitate refugee resettlement.
Settlement service providers	Organisations that are accessed primarily or largely by refugees and targeted to them specifically.
Sponsorship	Refugees sometimes refer to the 202 humanitarian visa process as 'sponsorship', however, in this report we use the term 'proposer' to refer to the family or community member who nominates humanitarian visa candidates and refer to such candidates as 'proposed entrants.' The term sponsorship more accurately refers to initiatives such as the Community Support Program (CSP) and the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP).

List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CFG	Community Leader Focus Group
CL	Community Leader
CRISP	Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot
CSP	Community Support Program
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
ERC	Edmund Rice Centre
GP	General Practitioner
HSP	Humanitarian Settlement Program
LGA	Local Government Area
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
R	Refugee
SFG	Service Provider Focus Group
SP	Service Provider
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

Executive Summary

The Settlement Cities report is the first detailed investigation of refugee settlement through the lens of Australia's major settlement cities. In this report the term 'settlement cities' refers to the Local Government Areas (LGAs) where most of the people who make up Australia's humanitarian intake begin the process of building a new life in this country. These LGAs settle a very large share of Australian refugees during their first years of settlement. We have called this practice the settlement city 'model' which sees resettlement concentrated in local areas, with refugees usually settling in areas that are already home to people of a shared ethnic, national or linguistic background.

Based on in-depth conversations with refugees, refugee community leaders and local service providers, Settlement Cities asks how well refugees are settling in the places they live. We cover the aspirations and challenges of settlement, how refugees feel about the places they now call home, where they find inclusion and belonging, and how well they are able to access essential services such as healthcare or education.

This is a report as much about the achievements of refugees and those who assist them to settle, as it is about the ongoing challenges faced by refugees and the localities that settle them. The aim is to share knowledge about what works well about settlement in Australia's settlement cities, as well as to draw attention to the ongoing challenges faced there.

A major finding and a theme that recurs throughout the report is the importance of the ethnic and linguistic communities that refugees form in Australia's major settlement cities. These communities offer a source of ongoing support, a place to belong and feel at home, an outlet for aspirations to contribute beyond one's immediate family, and often a connection to services that might be otherwise hard to find or access.

Refugee aspirations and experiences of settlement

Refugees' aspirations for their life in Australia are similar to the aspirations of other Australians. Securing employment that matches their skills and previous experience is a major factor in whether refugees feel they are settling well in Australia. Access to stable, appropriate housing – which for many refugees entails owning a home – is another major aspiration, especially for refugees with families. However, both housing and employment are often challenging to secure in the settlement city. Most settlement cities experience higher unemployment than the national average, while in some places high population densities seem to put additional pressure on the availability of housing.

Younger refugees, in particular, tend also to aspire to realise the opportunities life in Australia presents through pursuing education, though navigating Australia's complex educational landscape can be challenging. Finally, refugees define successful settlement in terms of their ability to contribute to the wellbeing of their family and community, despite the fact that the settlement journey often disrupts familial relationships.

Making a home in the settlement city

Most refugees talk very positively about the places they live. A major factor in making settlement cities attractive is the presence of vibrant and familiar ethnic and linguistic communities. These communities complement formal settlement services in assisting with settlement support and orientation in the early days after arrival, offer a sense of familiarity, early opportunities for belonging and inclusion, and sustain ethnic businesses that provide familiar goods and services. The presence of a multitude of different ethnic communities, moreover, imbues settlement cities with a strongly multicultural character which refugees value and which helps them to not feel out of place.

There are also some disadvantages to living in the settlement city, however. A few community leaders expressed concern that some refugees remain largely within their own tight-knit ethnic communities rather than making wider social connections. However, the majority of participants saw this as at most a temporary phenomenon, with refugees initially seeking the comfort of culturally familiar spaces but integrating more broadly as they became more settled in Australia. In fact, refugee participants often expressed a desire to connect beyond their ethnic community. Language and cultural barriers make this a slow process, however, and unfortunately intolerance of cultural differences within the wider Australian society sometimes also presents an obstacle to integration.

Another challenge within the settlement city is that infrastructure provision has not kept up well with population growth and the needs of emerging communities. Public facilities such as libraries, parks, sports grounds, and public transport are often not adequate for local needs. While most refugees feel safe where they live, negative experiences combined with past trauma sometimes impact their sense of safety within the settlement city.

Creating community

While refugees find a sense of community, belonging and support through informal community networks of family and friends, formal ethno-specific community associations play a key role in sustaining community ties and welcoming newcomers. In this report we use the term community associations to speak generally about groups that are ethno-specific, faith-based or organised around a shared linguistic or cultural identity. These community associations perform a wide variety of functions, including offering practical settlement support to individuals, organising community events, and working with governments and service providers to disseminate information about services and advocate for community needs.

However, community associations also face challenges that can limit their effectiveness. A significant issue is lack of access to resources, which is compounded by the informal structure and governance of many such groups, which limit access to funding opportunities. Community associations often struggle due to their reliance on the voluntary efforts of individual community members. Access to facilities such as meeting venues can also be a challenge. Community leaders also often feel that their advice does not have much impact on governments or service organisations, lessening its value.

It also takes time for newly-arriving refugee communities to form robust community associations, and there are issues which even well-established community associations are not well-placed to provide support with. In these contexts, the assistance offered by formal service providers continues to be vital. While community networks and associations are often a first port of call for seeking assistance, both settlement and mainstream service providers play an important role in facilitating settlement and integration.

Accessing formal support

There is a great deal of expertise in Australia's settlement cities about making both settlement-specific and mainstream services accessible to refugees. However, such expertise is unevenly distributed, with some mainstream services providing exceptional tailored support and others remaining quite difficult for refugees to access. Some mainstream services are still being delivered in ways that impose physical, digital and cultural barriers to access for refugees, with the former jobactive services (recently renamed to Workforce Australia) standing out as especially problematic in these respects. Even when mainstream services are accessible, moreover, refugees' lack of familiarity with them can reduce confidence to seek help and limit engagement.

Many service providers in Australia's settlement cities have decades of experience mitigating these barriers to access. Over the years successful strategies have been developed, especially by settlement service providers but also many mainstream services, to make their services more inclusive. Amongst the most effective initiatives are: employing bicultural workers to help bridge cultural barriers; place-based hubs to bring services closer to areas where refugees live or congregate; the use of outreach programs to build awareness about services and confidence to engage with them; and collaboration with community associations to disseminate information, deliver assistance and address community needs.

Gaps still exist in service provision, however, often in relation to longer-term needs that develop beyond the initial years of settlement, such as helping younger refugees navigate the passage into adulthood or supporting community associations to be more effective and sustainable.

Summary of findings and recommendations

The recommendations made in the report are briefly listed below. Further detail on each is set out in the Recommendations chapter.

Finding 1 – Settlement cities are helping refugees settle well in Australia

While the settlement city 'model' was not intentionally created by policymakers, settlement cities today share certain characteristics that greatly facilitate settlement. Australia's settlement cities help refugees to quickly feel at home and find community in Australia. Refugees who have this community support find it helps them to settle quickly and relatively easily in their new home. Other LGAs that are starting to attract larger numbers of refugees can learn much from existing settlement cities about how to best support humanitarian entrants, particularly in terms of supporting concentrations of people with shared ethnic backgrounds to settle in the area and create vibrant communities.

However, settlement cities are also struggling to accommodate such large numbers of refugees and place-based investment is urgently needed to help them meet the requirements of their growing refugee communities.

- Recommendation 1.1 –The federal government should maintain and expand existing humanitarian visa policies that support the creation of settlement cities.
- Recommendation 1.2 – Bolster place-based settlement funding at especially federal but also state government level in recognition of the unique role the settlement city plays in settling refugees.
- Recommendation 1.3 – Use the lessons learned in settlement cities as a basis for strategies in other LGAs where there are emerging patterns of settlement.

Finding 2 – Community networks and associations are pivotal to settlement and integration

Community networks and associations play a pivotal role in helping refugees to settle well in Australia. However, they need much more support to be truly effective and meet increasing expectations for consultation and collaboration with services and government. Federal and state governments should create dedicated funding streams for community associations themselves, while also enabling settlement service providers to partner with community associations to develop adequate governance structures in order to administer such funds effectively. Governments and all service providers should more consistently engage with community associations as genuine partners in supporting settlement by establishing dedicated and ongoing forums for this purpose.

- Recommendation 2.1 – Federal and state governments should expand financial and material support for community associations.
- Recommendation 2.2 – Federal government should more effectively deploy SETS funding to assist settlement service providers to bolster the capacity of community associations to manage this funding and provide other organisational training opportunities.
- Recommendation 2.3 – Service providers and governments at all levels should work more consistently and meaningfully with community associations as partners in facilitating settlement, a process that councils and peak bodies can play a vital role in by fostering opportunities for community associations to enter dialogue with government and services.

Finding 3 – Mainstream services are not consistently accessible for refugees

Some mainstream service organisations do an exemplary job in supporting refugees but others struggle to provide inclusive services. Federal or state intervention (depending on what layer of government a service falls under) is necessary to standardise expectations around mainstream service provision in areas with concentrated refugee settlement, and implement monitoring of and accountability for outcomes. Councils can also play a role by establishing inter-agency forums between mainstream and settlement service providers to address structural problems with mainstream service delivery. Mainstream service providers in heavily multicultural areas should also ensure they are recruiting a bicultural workforce that reflects the ethnic composition of the community served. This would be a meaningful first step in addressing accessibility gaps.

- Recommendation 3.1 – Federal and state governments should detail and help implement consistent cultural competency standards for mainstream services operating in areas with significant refugee settlement, including tracking of and accountability for outcomes.
- Recommendation 3.2 - Councils and other levels of government should draw on settlement sector expertise around accessible service provision by fostering place-based opportunities for inter-agency dialogue between mainstream and settlement services to identify structural problems and trial solutions.
- Recommendation 3.3 - Mainstream services operating in settlement cities should improve their capacity to engage with refugee communities by hiring bicultural workers in client-facing roles and involving bicultural workers and community associations in program design and delivery.

Finding 4 – The timing of settlement support often poorly matches settlement journeys

Settlement support is front-loaded in the settlement journey, with an overwhelming amount of information provided on arrival, largely to meet government-mandated milestones rather than with the needs of individual families in mind. On the other hand, limited support is available to help with long-term issues. This poorly matches the needs of many individuals and most communities. Service providers need more flexibility to support refugees needing assistance beyond the 5-year settlement period and address information overload in the early months.

- Recommendation 4.1 – The federal government should create flexibility for service providers around cut-offs for settlement support eligibility.
- Recommendation 4.2 – The federal government should review the structure of initial on-arrival support to mitigate information overload and better tailor assistance to the needs of individual families.

1

Introduction

Introduction

Most refugees who come to Australia settle in a relatively small number of places. Between 2009 and 2020, over 70% of refugees admitted to Australia under the humanitarian stream settled in just 25 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and over 40% are today found in just 8 LGAs. This is not just a recent phenomenon: taking into account the last 3 decades of settlement data, the same 7 or 8 LGAs feature as Australia's most common refugee destinations.[1]

Despite this concentration of refugees in a small handful of LGAs, we know relatively little about what these settlement patterns have meant on the ground in those specific places, or what the implications are for settlement policy. Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia, a recent Commonwealth Government review of settlement outcomes in Australia, drew attention to this phenomenon and called for more attention to place-based strategies for facilitating settlement.[2]

Settlement Cities is a response to this call to look at settlement through a more place-based lens. It is, to our knowledge, the first detailed investigation of refugee settlement from the perspective of Australia's major settlement cities – the LGAs where most of Australia's humanitarian intake begins the process a building a new life in this country.[3]

This report is about the ways refugees feel in and about the places they have settled, and details the achievements and challenges experienced by both refugees and the communities that welcome them. We sought to understand such issues as what settling well and feeling at home in a place means for refugees, whether and where they are able to find social inclusion and belonging within the settlement city, and how well they feel able to access essential services. We have tried to strike a balance between highlighting problems that still need resolving and celebrating the considerable successes of Australia's leading settlement cities. It is our hope that this report will be as useful to those seeking to advocate for the communities involved in this project as for those seeking best-practice models for how to facilitate thriving settlement communities.

A major theme that runs through this report is the importance of community to the settlement journey. Refugees are increasingly drawn to Australia's major settlement cities by the presence of ethno-linguistic communities formed by earlier waves of arrivals. These culturally familiar communities are a large part of what makes their settlement successful. They facilitate the settlement journey in myriad ways, help the settlement city feel like home, create readily accessible forms of belonging and even facilitate access to services, in part due to the widespread practice of employing members of ethnic communities in service organisations. We argue here that they constitute a key, though often overlooked, contributor to successful settlement in Australia.

1.1 The settlement cities

This report is based on a study of 7 LGAs, all of which are in the list of the top 8 destinations for humanitarian arrivals in Australia over the last decade. The LGAs included in the study are: Fairfield and Liverpool in Sydney's south-west; Hume, Greater Dandenong and Casey in Melbourne's north-west and south-east; Logan, which covers the area between Brisbane city and the Gold Coast; and Salisbury in Adelaide's north.

The eighth LGA in the top 8 settlement destinations for refugees is Brisbane City, which is the fourth-most popular destination for refugees in the last decade and the third-most popular going back to 1991. The main reason Brisbane City is not included in the study is that its size (it has a population of over a million people) means it isn't a locality in quite the same sense as the other LGAs where refugees settle in large numbers. Even the largest of the other LGAs in this study are not even a third of the size of Brisbane in population terms, and the smallest LGAs in the study are 7 or eight times smaller than Brisbane. We therefore decided to exclude it from the study.

As we shall see in greater detail in chapter two, these LGAs attract very distinct communities of refugees. In the last decade, Liverpool, Fairfield and Hume have been dominated by arrivals from the Middle East, including Iraqis, Syrians, Assyrians and Chaldeans, who together with other Arabic-speakers constitute between two thirds and four fifths of recent humanitarian arrivals to these LGAs. Similarly, Greater Dandenong and neighbouring Casey have attracted a large population of refugees from Central Asia, dominated by a large Hazara population from Afghanistan which accounts for about half the recent arrivals to these two LGAs. Salisbury and Logan are also home to large Hazara communities but also various Burmese and African communities. These last two LGAs are altogether much more diverse in the ethnic profile of the refugees they attract, with no single ethnic group accounting for more than 25% of recent arrivals.[4]

Of course, LGA boundaries are fairly arbitrary and often impermanent political constructs that only imprecisely match the geographic contours of refugee places of settlement. The spatial distribution of any particular refugee community, and the place of settlement with which it most strongly identifies, can be both smaller and larger than the boundaries of any given LGA. Particularly in adjoining LGAs (Casey and Dandenong in Melbourne, Fairfield and Liverpool in Sydney) members of the same ethnic community are clearly spread across multiple LGAs, and settlement service providers often work fairly fluidly across these geopolitical boundaries. None the less, LGAs constitute a useful shorthand for the settlement city in that they often – due to the presence of a local government Council – serve as a nexus for certain kinds of political and civic activity. Statistical data is also often available at the LGA level, which helps reflect on the nature of settlement cities.

Australia's major settlement cities are all unique places with their own peculiar issues and concerns. However, they also have a great deal in common and it is these commonalities in how settlement is experienced and managed in Australia's largest settlement regions that constitute the bulk of this report. Australia's settlement cities are thriving in many ways – particularly in terms of the vibrant and supportive ethnic communities refugees have created in each area. However, they also need more support to facilitate better settlement outcomes, particularly in terms of infrastructure support and targeted assistance to make services more consistently accessible for refugee communities.

1.2 Methodology

While quantitative data (chiefly the DHA settlement database and the 2016 and 2021 census[5]) was drawn on to form an initial impression of these settlement cities and the major refugee communities who inhabit them, this study is based in the main on qualitative interviews and focus groups. We conducted 62 one hour interviews and 9 two hour focus groups across the 7 LGAs.[6] Interviews and the vast majority of focus groups were conducted via Zoom. Interviews and focus groups were conducted from October 2021 through February 2022. In the case of many LGAs, this was towards the end of two long years of COVID lockdowns. The average number of participants in focus groups was around 12, so in all more than 150 people participated in the study, drawn more or less equally from the 7 LGAs.

In both interviews and focus groups, questions were organised around four major topic areas: 1) what it meant for refugees to settle well and make a home for themselves in the settlement city, 2) where refugees found community and belonging, 3) how well refugees were able to access essential services, and 4) what the major challenges and achievements of settlement were in each of the LGAs.

The research this report is based on was carried out in partnership with a variety of local stakeholders, including the Council of each LGA, major settlement service providers and refugee community groups active in each LGA, as well as peak settlement bodies

and the Australian Catholic University. Details about project partners are given in more detail in the acknowledgements. Project partners participated in two steering groups (one for refugees, one for other stakeholders) that had major input on project design and the contents of this report, and also assisted with recruitment of participants and, in the case of ACU, the carrying out of this research and drafting of the report.

Three groups were interviewed and invited to participate in focus groups: recently arrived refugees, refugee community leaders, and local service providers with pertinent settlement expertise.

Thirty-two interviews were conducted with recently arrived refugee participants (those who had been in Australia for 5 years or less). These interviews were conducted through an interpreter in the many cases where participants did not yet have a functional command of English.

The second group of participants were refugee community leaders, with whom we conducted 3 focus groups (in South Australia and NSW) and 23 interviews (mainly in Victoria and Queensland). The original intention was to conduct focus groups in each LGA but COVID-related disruptions meant in-person focus groups had to be cancelled in Victorian LGAs and Logan, so additional interviews were conducted with community leaders in these LGAs instead. These participants had been in Australia for a longer time, generally between 10 and 20 years, and tended to be involved in a community organisation of some sort, usually one with an ethnic, linguistic or religious orientation. These participants were all confident English speakers and were selected on the basis of having a wide acquaintance with one or more refugee communities, and for their capacity to speak about the longer-term refugee experience from more than just a personal perspective.

The final group of participants in the study were service providers who could speak knowledgeably about both local circumstances and settlement issues more generally. Most service providers participated by attending one of 6 LGA-based focus groups. Two neighbouring LGAs opted to share a focus group as most participants worked across both areas. A handful of interviews were also conducted with providers who were unable to participate in a focus group due to scheduling conflicts.

Our focus on in-depth qualitative data weighted towards refugee participants reflects our presumption that refugees themselves are expert authorities regarding the experience of settlement and the settlement city. Interviews were conducted, analysed and are presented below in a manner that, as much as possible, reflects refugees' own perspectives.

Our approach to collecting data and working with the interview transcripts was accordingly influenced by methodologies such as grounded theory, with an emphasis on allowing themes and issues to emerge from the data in an open-ended way, rather than imposing a pre-determined research agenda. While interview questionnaires were loosely structured around the themes of refugees' experience of place and belonging, the challenges and achievements of settlement, and access to services, questions were broad and open-ended to allow respondents to reflect on their own experiences. The themes we focus on below are ones which occurred across a wide range of interviews. Where significant disagreement exists amongst refugees, we note these contrasting perspectives as well.

1.3 Recruitment and selection of participants

We took a fairly broad view of the term refugee, meaning that we selected participants on the basis of their having left their home countries due to conflict or fear of persecution, rather than on the basis of their having entered Australia on a humanitarian visa. Most participants did in fact enter through the humanitarian stream but we also spoke to people who held family reunion and bridging visas. While

we made no firm distinction between those granted permanent and temporary asylum in Australia, the report largely focuses on those who are permitted to stay in Australia permanently, whatever the nature of their original visa.

As far as possible, refugee and community leader participants were recruited to reflect the ethnic composition of the recent refugee intake for their LGAs. For example, we sought to recruit a mix of Assyrian and Iraqi refugees in Liverpool and Fairfield and a mix of Hazara and Burmese in Salisbury. Participants were otherwise selected to ensure demographic diversity in terms of age, gender, family status and English-speaking ability. Many community leader participants belonged to ethnic groups who had arrived in Australia before the 2010s and here we sought to ensure a broad representation of groups known to have settled in those particular settlement cities in prior decades[7] as well as some diversity in gender and age profile. All participants were adults at the time of their interviews. Although some attempt was made to recruit participants who had come to Australia as children, the perspective of child refugees is not well captured in the report. Due to the small number of participants in any given LGA, no attempt was made to ensure our sample reflected the demographics of the area precisely – we prioritised diversity over strict representativeness.

Service provider participants were drawn from organisations that are accessed primarily or largely by refugees and targeted to them specifically (termed settlement service providers) as well as services that are aimed at the entire population but are also accessed by refugees (termed mainstream services). The settlement service provider category included such entities as the Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), organisations that deliver the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), English language schools delivering the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), and the various state-based Refugee Health Services. Mainstream services are a much broader group and include such entities as the local council, public libraries, local schools, TAFEs, GPs, hospitals, as well as Centrelink, the police, the legal system, and so on.

For all that we treated service providers and refugee community leaders as distinct groups for the purposes of our research, there was in practice a great deal of overlap between the two categories. Many community leaders worked in service provision of one kind or another – as teachers, community liaison officers, caseworkers or case managers in settlement service organisations, health professionals or council staff, to name just some examples. On the other hand, perhaps as many as half of the people we spoke to as service providers were in fact themselves from refugee backgrounds. Naturally, these people drew on both their own experience as refugees and their personal knowledge of their community and their professional knowledge in answering our questions. This phenomenon speaks to the close co-operation of services of various kinds with community associations and representatives in delivering accessible and appropriate services to refugee populations which, as we shall see, is one of the great strengths of service provision in the settlement cities we studied.

1.4 Limitations of the sample

Refugee participants were recruited in part with the assistance of settlement service providers. This was done in such a way to protect the anonymity of participants and allow them to speak freely to researchers, including about the organisations that helped recruit them.[8] However, the fact that many participants were referred to us by service providers does introduce a kind of bias into the sample. Service providers referred us to refugee clients who had a history of engaging closely with them and such people may not be typical or representative of the broader refugee community. In fact, many participants, refugee and otherwise, alluded to a large cohort of refugees who are disengaged from

and perhaps mistrustful of service providers. This disengaged cohort tends to be much harder to reach and is less likely to want to participate in this kind of research even when contacted, and their perspective is therefore not well reflected in our research.

To mitigate this kind of selection bias, about a third of refugee participants were also recruited through the Edmund Rice Centre's networks in refugee communities and with the assistance of community leaders. All of these were identified and recruited directly by the Edmund Rice Centre. This group of participants were not necessarily in the habit of engaging with service providers and they (especially the community leaders amongst them) often took a more critical stance in relation to service providers of various kinds, balancing to some extent the aforementioned limitation. However, as mentioned above, many community leaders themselves work in service provision and, being few in number, are often far more readily identifiable. They may, for this reason, have been somewhat reluctant to criticise current, past or former employers and this may, again, have muted criticism of service providers.

With respect to service providers themselves, the main limitation is that the perspective of settlement service providers tends to be more prominent in our sample than that of mainstream service providers. While we sought to recruit from both groups, in practice settlement service providers are more invested in this kind of research and tended therefore to form the majority in most focus groups. Some mainstream services were reliably represented in focus groups, however. Local councils and libraries participated in most groups, and TAFEs were often also involved. Mainstream providers tended, however, to participate mainly when their ties to the settlement services sector were quite deep, as is the case for local TAFEs in many of the LGAs, or when they were themselves project partners, as was the case with local councils.

1.5 Contents of the report

While most of this report is thematically organised and draws on material from across all 7 settlement city LGAs, we begin in Chapter 2 by individually highlighting each of the localities that participated in the study. Each LGA profile describes the demographic makeup of recent refugee arrivals, the broader population, the settlement history of the area and includes some comments by participants about each settlement city.

Chapter 3 examines the personal experiences of individual refugees within the settlement city through the lens of the aspirations, achievements and challenges which characterise their settlement journeys. Familiar themes, such as employment and housing, are considered from a place-based perspective, and the importance and challenges of family and community life stand out as central.

Chapter 4 is concerned with refugees' experience of settlement cities as places. It emphasises that refugees overwhelmingly have positive feelings about the places they live, and that the presence of ethnically, culturally and linguistically familiar communities is a key aspect of life in the settlement cities that confers many advantages and also some disadvantages.

Chapter 5 takes a closer look at the community networks and community associations whose importance is a recurring theme in previous chapters. We examine both the diversity of activities through which community groups work to support settlement and the obstacles they face to being more effective, the absence of financial support for their activities being a major theme.

Chapter 6 is a detailed examination of how refugees experience access to services in the settlement city. While settlement service providers are, on the whole, quite well regarded for the quality and accessibility of the support they provide, mainstream service providers have a more mixed record of providing

accessible services. We examine barriers to access and also highlight best practice approaches, illustrated by exemplary case studies drawn from across the settlement cities.

Chapter 7 contains a summary of our main findings and the recommendations that stem from them. Our research concludes that settlement cities help refugees settle well; that community networks and associations play a key role in refugee settlement and integration; that mainstream service providers need better support to provide inclusive services to refugee clients; and that the timing of the delivery of settlement services is often poorly matched to the needs of refugee families and communities.

2

Settlement City Profiles

Settlement City Profiles

Australia's major settlement cities and the refugee communities that have settled there have many similarities, which are discussed in the other chapters of this report. Each settlement city, however, is also unique – home to a particular set of migrant and refugee communities, a place with distinct geographic, demographic and historical characteristics. This chapter is about those unique qualities of each settlement city. It therefore consists of individual profiles of each of the 7 LGAs that were involved in this research project.

These profiles draw on the qualitative data relied on throughout this report, supplemented by two other key sources. All information about the size and ethnic composition of each LGAs recent refugee intake are drawn from the Settlement Database compiled by the Department of Home Affairs.[9] Other statistical information about the various LGAs is drawn from the 2021 Census.[10]

Many of the settlement cities profiled in this study have very long histories of welcoming diverse cohorts of migrants and refugees, often stretching back to the mass migrations to Australia from Europe that followed the end of the second world war. In each LGA, a higher proportion of the population was born overseas than the national average (which in 2021 stood at 27.7%) and in all but one LGA the percentage of people who spoke a language other than English at home was higher than the national average (22.3%.)

Beyond those basic similarities there is a huge amount of variety. Some settlement cities, such as Fairfield in NSW and Greater Dandenong in Victoria, are hugely multicultural places where substantial majorities of the population speak a language other than English at home. Others, like Logan in Queensland and Salisbury in South Australia, are places where multicultural groups form smaller minorities within a largely Anglo-Celtic community.

In some settlement cities – such as Fairfield, Liverpool and Hume – the recent refugee intake is drawn from one particular geographic region who share a common language. In other places, such as Salisbury and Logan, recent refugee arrivals come from a much more diverse array of places and speak many different languages. These distinctions, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, have considerable implications for accessible service delivery.

All 7 LGAs are within the metropolitan boundaries of their respective state capitals but they vary considerably in their proximity to the city centre, the size of the geographic footprint they cover and the general character of the built environment. Some LGAs are relatively compact and have a largely urbanised character. Others, such as Liverpool and Casey, cover a larger area of land on the outskirts of metropolitan settlement and still retain pockets of rural land use.

Neighbouring settlement cities often have intertwined histories and yet each also has a unique story about how it came to be a home to the refugee communities that live there, and how those communities have reshaped it in turn. Below, we briefly document those unique stories in order to highlight the individual character of the 7 settlement cities this study is based on.

Casey

The City of Casey adjoins the City of Greater Dandenong on the south-east fringe of Melbourne and lies in the traditional lands of the Bunurong/ Boonwurrung peoples. It is the most recently established of the 7 settlement cities in our study in the sense that the majority of its refugee population settled in the area quite recently. More than half of the LGA's total humanitarian settlement intake since the early 1990s arrived in the last decade.

Although in some parts it is still a fairly rural area, Casey has increasingly been subdivided to accommodate urban sprawl from Melbourne. Its settlement history is quite closely intertwined with that of Greater Dandenong. For many of its residents, the area's cultural and social centre of gravity is in Dandenong but they are increasingly drawn to Casey in search for more affordable and family-suitable housing. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the ethnic profile of the area's humanitarian settlement is very similar to that of Greater Dandenong, being dominated by the Hazara community but also including a huge diversity of smaller communities.

Table 1: Key Casey Statistics	
Population	365,239
Humanitarian entrants 2009-2020	7,393
% born overseas	42.1
% speaking a language other than English at home	41.8

Due to their more recent arrival to the area, refugee and multicultural communities do not define Casey quite as strongly as they do some of the other settlement cities, though the area is none the less well above the national averages both for persons born overseas and those speaking a language other than English at home.

Ethnicity of Humanitarian Entrants to Casey, 2009-2020

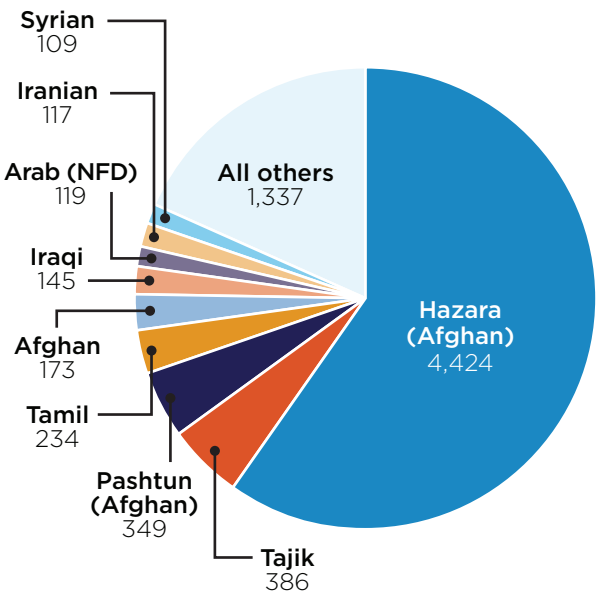

Figure 1 Source: DHA Settlement Database

The price and availability of housing stock able to accommodate larger families seems to be the key factors driving refugee settlement in Casey at the present moment.

> *When they get permanent residency, and then their families come, they sort of need a bigger house. So, then they move to Casey because Casey's a newly established area, newer houses and bigger houses, so families mainly live in Casey. Still the single men or those who are newly arrived and can't afford the rent in Casey for bigger houses, they live in Greater Dandenong. So, for a few years, usually, people live in City of Greater Dandenong and -when they're more established and can afford a bigger house, they move to Casey. And also buying, because many of them when they buy a house they buy in City of Casey.*
>
> **CL7 (Dandenong)**

> *The price is the most important for them. The area in let's say Casey … is a little bit cheaper for them than Dandenong north or Dandenong.*
>
> **CL14 (Casey)**

Participants noted that the Casey area has a less rich multicultural history than Dandenong but that local institutions are quickly catching up with the changing profile of the area. Service providers and community leaders both commented favourably on the transformations of the cultural and service landscape of the LGA, which has become much more inclusive and CALD-conscious in recent years. In this way, Casey is exemplary of an emerging settlement city, adapting its practices to the needs of a new and growing community of refugee residents.

> *Casey's not so much culturally inclusive than Dandenong, a similar level to Dandenong yet. But Casey Council, and then Casey … even when I was starting 2019, it was not much culturally inclusive, CALD inclusive, but we can see now that is that great enthusiasm and attitudes towards Council spaces and programs to be inclusive of cultural diversity, which also helps.*
>
> **SP6 (Casey)**

> *And now, I see the same change coming to Casey, which was initially considered very westernised and very discriminatory in its approach. But now, we see acceptance.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

Fairfield

Fairfield LGA is located in western Sydney, centred on the localities of Fairfield and Cabramatta, of which the Darug people are the traditional owners. It is one of the oldest and largest of Australia's settlement cities, having been a prominent refugee destination since the 1970s when Cabramatta became a settlement destination for the Vietnamese refugee community. Fairfield has continued to be a major settlement area. Since 1991 the LGA has settled over 38,000 refugees, almost twice as many as Australia's next largest settlement city, neighbouring Liverpool.

The area experienced a particularly sudden influx of humanitarian entrants in 2016 and 2017 as a result of the creation of 12,000 additional places in the Humanitarian Settlement Program in response to conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Many of these new entrants were drawn to Fairfield through connections to the then-small middle eastern communities residing in the area. Over the course of 2016-2019, 11,836 humanitarian entrants came to Fairfield, accounting for 41% of the entire NSW intake.[11] Partly as a result, the ethnic profile of the area's more recent refugee arrivals is dominated by middle eastern ethnicities. Iraqi, Syrian, Assyrian and Chaldean refugees account for more than 80% of recent humanitarian entrants.

Table 2: Key Fairfield Statistics	
Population	208,475
Humanitarian entrants 2009-2020	20,637
% born overseas	56.0
% speaking a language other than English at home	69.7

Ethnicity of Humanitarian Entrants to Fairfield, 2009-2020

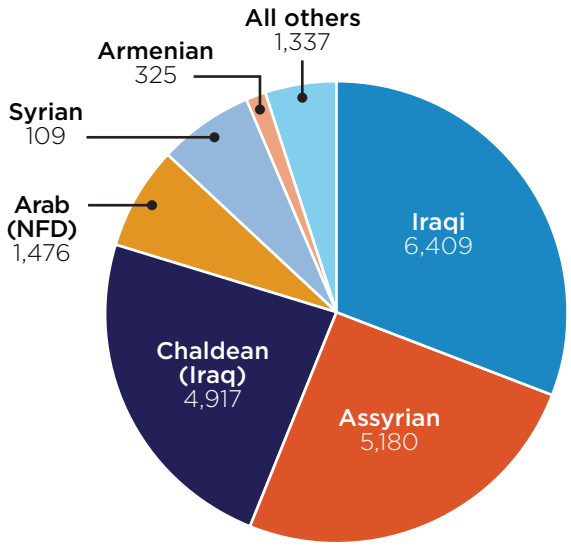

Figure 2 Source: DHA Settlement Database

One of the legacies of Fairfield's long history as a destination for humanitarian migrants is its extraordinarily multicultural character, even by the standards of the other settlement cities profiled in this study. In the 2021 census, over 60% of residents were born overseas and over 75% of residents spoke a language other than English at home, with Vietnamese (21.1%), Arabic (9.3%), Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (7.8%), Chaldean Neo-Aramaic (4.0%) and Cantonese (3.7%) the most frequently spoken languages.

As one of Australia's oldest settlement cities, Fairfield has a rich legacy of community institutions created by previous waves of migrants and is well supported by local government, itself staffed by many people from refugee backgrounds.

> *Now, what has been happening in Fairfield … is that when communities settle, the first thing they do is to get together as a group and establish a social club or an association. And those who arrived in the 80s and the 90s – you know, settlement policy was different – were able to access land grants from the government and so, you had lots of worship places built. So, if you go to Fairfield, you have all sorts of temples, mosques, and churches that have been put up by migrants who have come mainly as refugees … So, all these institutions, actually, make Fairfield feel like a place, like home, because everybody created these institutions … to feel at home where they are.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

> *The local council has been a better champion for refugees and migrants and their local areas and highlighting need. I think local council also, like, if you look at my equivalent agency in Fairfield, they're in Council-built facilities. Fairfield Community Resource Centre, or Fairfield First Step is also in Council-built facilities.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

The fact that it is one of the most diverse localities in Australia has also created a very welcoming and multicultural atmosphere where no-one feels out of place simply by virtue of the incredible diversity of the population.

> *You've got a thriving community and thriving culture in Fairfield. You walk in Fairfield, the CBD, you know, food, cafes, clothing stores, they represent a true multicultural Australia.*
>
> **SP7 (Fairfield)**

> *Fairfield generally is a place where no one feel as a stranger. So like Fairfield Cabramatta area is offering to the members of the community that everyone belongs. So like you're not being labelled, like as a stranger. So the'vast majority of people living In Fairfield, you say 80%, are all migrants, so totally like everyone feels at home.*
>
> **SFG5 (Fairfield)**

Less obviously a long history of meeting the complex needs of refugee clients ha¬s led service providers to develop sophisticated ways of working together. The service provision landscape today is characterised by thriving and active inter-agency networks that coordinate services and collaborate to advocate for local needs.

> *One thing that has made settlement successful in Fairfield is a partnership with NGOs and government services. We do have two major networks in Fairfield that brings virtually every organisation, government and non-government, together within Fairfield, to look at issues affecting migrants and refugees and advocate for those.*
>
> **SP7 (Fairfield)**

Fairfield was one of the areas in Sydney very negatively affected by the NSW government's localised approach to lockdown policing during the COVID pandemic.

> *During COVID, Fairfield has been put in the spotlight by the government and the media and people have been treated in a very appalling way, in my view.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

> *Living at Fairfield during this time is just annoying. Everywhere you go, people ask you "where are you from?" "From Fairfield". Then they start saying stuff. Even for work, I tell them I am from Fairfield and they tell me "you can't come to work". ... everyone else was allowed to go to work. All of this because you live in this area.*
>
> **R2 (Fairfield)**

> *Southwestern Sydney— Fairfield and Liverpool and Bankstown ... in the recent lock down ... we were targeted to the point where everyone within those local government areas, regardless of their background, felt that they were being segregated and targeted by the rest of Sydney.*
>
> **SP7 (Fairfield)**

Greater Dandenong

Greater Dandenong is situated on the south-east edge of Melbourne, on the traditional lands and seas of the Bunurong peoples. Its history of settling diverse communities dates to the post-war era when the town (not then yet part of Melbourne but a growing industrial centre) began to attract Italian and Greek migrants. Diversity has been a continuing feature of migration into the area, which also became home to sizeable communities from South-East Asia in the 1980s. More recently, in the 1990s, it began to attract Hazara refugees from Afghanistan, who today comprise a very visible and vibrant community in the area.

Hazaras and other Afghan groups continue to account for more than half of the area's humanitarian intake but Dandenong also hosts a diverse variety of other smaller refugee communities, including several communities from Myanmar (Burma,) Sri Lanka and Africa.

Owing to its long history of highly diverse settlement, Dandenong stands out for its multicultural character even amongst the 7 settlement cities in this study. It has the highest proportion of people not born in Australia and the second highest proportion of people speaking a language other than English at home, including Vietnamese (11.9%), Khmer (6.1%), Punjabi (3.4%), Mandarin (3.9%) and Cantonese (2.8%).

Table 3: Key Dandenong Statistics	
Population	158,208
Humanitarian entrants 2009-2020	5,591
% born overseas	58.2
% speaking a language other than English at home	64.4

Ethnicity of Humanitarian Entrants to Dandenong, 2009-2020

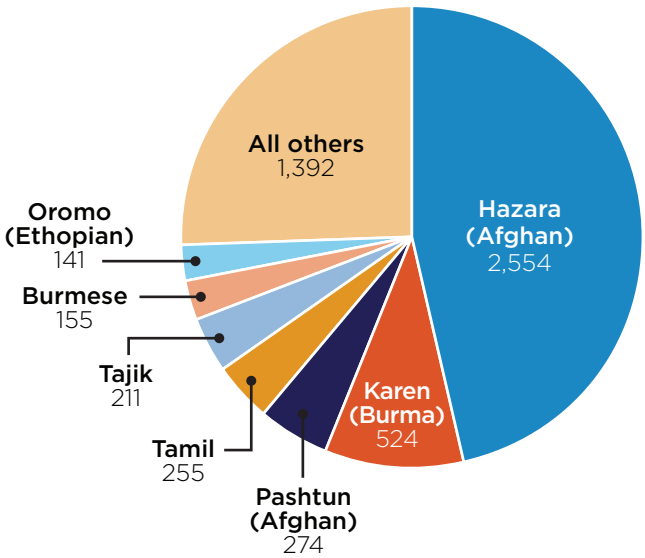

Figure 3 Source: DHA Settlement Database

Long-time residents of Dandenong remarked on the ways the arrival of the Afghan community led to the revitalisation of the shopping strip along Thomas Street, a revitalisation that was supported and celebrated by local government and media.

> *I remember when we first arrived in Dandenong, it was a ghost town … But since refugees started settling there with families, Dandenong is now considered one of the most attractive multicultural suburbs in Victoria because of the food, the businesses, and the shopping.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

> *When I think of the successes in Dandenong, you look at Thomas Street, which is all Afghan bazars … after the 80s, there was a bit of economic collapse there, and that street kind of died. Then, Afghan community had the opportunity to start business, and revive the whole region. And the Council actually promoted and supported it and put out positive news stories, so that people from across Melbourne go, "Hey, you know you can get great Afghan food in Dandenong?"*
>
> **SFG6 (Casey/Dandenong)**

The high concentration of Afghan refugees in Greater Dandenong has made it a centre for that community, which has now spread to the neighbouring LGA of Casey.

> *One Afghan woman who is illiterate and not so much knows about Australia, someone asked where was the capital of Australia? She said, Dandenong. Yeah, so for many of them. Dandenong is sort of like the centre of the community, where everything happens there. Although people live in Casey but because of Dandenong market and all the shops and services that are in Dandenong, Dandenong is still the centre for the Casey residents too. They come to Dandenong for all their services, for the groceries, shopping. So that Dandenong for Afghan community feels like that's their hometown.*
>
> **CL7 (Dandenong)**

For the many smaller refugee groups that also call it home, Greater Dandenong stands out as a highly multicultural place where visible signs of cultural difference (such as hijab) have been substantially normalised and do not attract any negative attention.

> *We are multicultural, and we have different backgrounds, and it doesn't matter if we have a different religion. Because back in the refugee camp, I experienced that if you're Muslim, you have no space. And then, I experienced that in Perth, too. If you're Muslim, and you go out like this [in hijab], they will react very badly. But in Melbourne, in the community where I live now, they will respect you.*
>
> **R23 (Dandenong)**

Hume

The Hume City Council is on the northern fringe of suburban Melbourne, 15km from the CBD, and extends to include areas that are more rural in character. It was created in 1994 as part of a state-wide amalgamation of local councils. The traditional owners of the land of Hume are the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, and includes the Gunung-Willam-Balluk clan. The main areas of settlement in Hume are the established suburbs of Broadmeadows, Tullamarine and Gladstone Park in the south, the newer suburbs of Craigieburn, Greenvale, Mickleham, Kalkallo and Roxburgh Park in the north-east, and the Sunbury township in the north-west.

Large areas of public housing in the Broadmeadows area were developed in the early 1950s. Industrial and manufacturing development began at this time and included the Ford factory (1956-2016) which was a key employer of migrant workers. Melbourne's international airport is in Hume, and the area retains an industrial and manufacturing sector.

The Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) facility (immigration detention centre) first opened in 2008 on Commonwealth land and is a controversial institution in the community. MITA is on the grounds of a former migrant hostel of the post-second world war era which operated into the mid-1970s. Historically, this place of initial reception in what is now Hume City Council saw many people resettle in suburbs in the area. Roughly half of Hume's population speaks a language other than English at home, with Arabic, Turkish, Neo-Aramaic and Italian being most common.

Table 4: Key Hume Statistics	
Population	243,901
Humanitarian entrants 2009-2020	13,257
% born overseas	39.9
% speaking a language other than English at home	48.8

Ethnicity of Humanitarian Entrants to Hume, 2009-2020

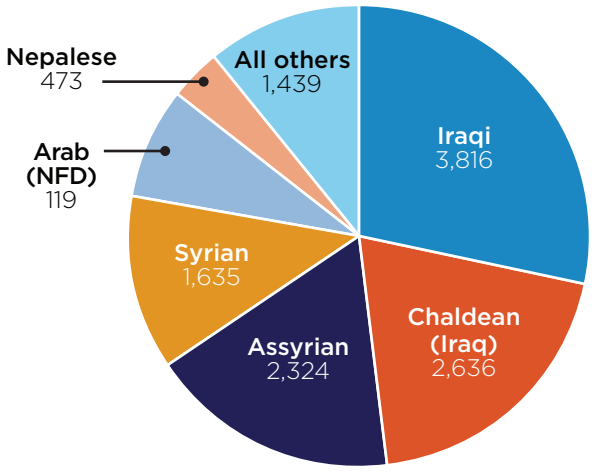

Figure 4 Source: DHA Settlement Database

Hume LGA is second only to Fairfield in the number of refugee arrivals it has accommodated in the last decade. This intake predominantly consists of refugees from the middle east arriving as a result of conflicts in Syria and Iraq: Iraqi, Chaldean, Assyrian and Syrian refugees account for over three quarters of refugees settling in Hume since 2009.

Several refugee participants commented favourably on the natural beauty of the Hume area and the high quality of Council-run amenities such public parks and libraries.

> *There is some beautiful parks. Definitely. There's amazing parks. .... So the Hume, they doing their best, there are some changes, there are two beautiful, the nicest two libraries in the in the area in Hume. But you see, at the same time, they are not utilizing those things.*
>
> **CL4 (Hume)**

> *So there's a lot of park, beautiful parks. There's a lot of— there's Malcolm Creek in Craigieburn, there's a few beautiful lakes and it's increased a lot in the recent year, like, you know, local council have been doing a lot of work, you know, they've been doing clean up. They've been installing, you know, you know, sport, outdoor sporty stuff. Basketball rings, you know, a tennis court, you know, that we have a beautiful tennis court in Craigieburn.*
>
> **CL8 (Hume)**

A settlement city of long standing, Hume was also praised for high levels of cross-sector collaboration and co-ordination (including co-location) and, increasingly, active consultation with its diverse communities.

> *There are many, many settlement [organisations] in Hume ... the good part in Hume and in the area, there's a building of six floors, all the settlements, all in one building.*
>
> **CL4 (Hume)**

> *In recent year, we see a lot of consultation has been happening, especially last year, I think last year, we in the past, I haven't seen anything like that. And it could be because we had the first time a mayor who is from cultural linguistic background, but also a young person, and had a different vision.*
>
> **CL8 (Hume)**

> *In Hume service providers have to work together, because there are so many of us in the region, and clients are just confused when they're getting phone calls from six different workers. So for the worker to be able to refer to the other and explain how they all fit together in the puzzle is critical. So, in these heavy settlement locations, you have to work together.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

The high proportion of refugees from Arabic-speaking backgrounds in Hume makes it in some ways easier to cater to their specific linguistic and cultural needs but does raise the risk that refugees from different backgrounds may be neglected or less well-catered for. This applies not only to Hume but to other areas where settlement patterns are dominated by one language group.

> *They are from a whole range of different ethnic and language groups, but most speak Arabic, as well as other languages. There are benefits of having a sort of concentration of people from similar backgrounds, but there can also be downsides. I think that people who aren't from those communities, and who can't speak Arabic can be left behind in areas like Hume, as opposed to the West, which is a far more diverse area, with lots of different groups.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

Liverpool

Like Fairfield, which it borders to its north, the City of Liverpool is located in western Sydney and is part of the traditional lands of the Darug people. It has in recent decades been one of Australia's largest settlement cities, over 20,000 refugees having settled there over the last three decades.

For most of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Liverpool was mainly an agricultural area supplying produce to Sydney's growing population, and the western-most part of the LGA still retains some of this rural character. After the second world war, however, mass European migration to Australia and the building of the Green Valley public housing estate reshaped Liverpool into a far more urban and far more diverse area.

Liverpool has seen a large influx of refugees in the last decade as a result of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The ethnic profile of recent arrivals is as a consequence dominated by Iraqi, Syrian, Assyrian and Chaldean entrants who account for over two thirds of the humanitarian intake.

Table 5: Key Liverpool Statistics	
Population	233,446
Humanitarian entrants 2009-2020	9,621
% born overseas	43.2
% speaking a language other than English at home	53.8

Liverpool's long history as a destination for both humanitarian and other migrants makes it today one of the most multicultural cities in Australia. Almost half of the population was born overseas, and a language other than English is spoken in almost two thirds of households, with Arabic (13.1%), Vietnamese (5.3%), Hindi (3.4%), Spanish (2.1%) and Serbian (2.3%) the most common languages other than English.

Ethnicity of Humanitarian Entrants to Liverpool, 2009-2020

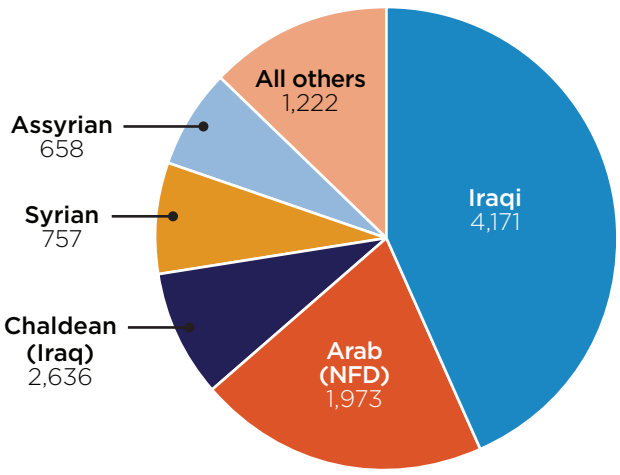

Figure 5 Source: DHA Settlement Database

Liverpool was often praised by residents for its welcoming, multicultural character. This is partly a legacy of its history as a settlement city, but also an identity officially embraced by organisations such as the local council. Some participants also highlighted the harmonious nature of this settlement history, in contrast to other areas where the arrival of high numbers of newcomers had sometimes led to friction.

> *Liverpool, by and large (though Council officially declared it that, but in reality, it is largely so) is a refugee welcoming community or immigrant welcoming community, probably because most people or certainly a substantial proportion of people, are people who either migrated directly from overseas or whose parents migrated from overseas. So I think there is that migrant-friendly attitude in Liverpool-Fairfield area...that general attitude of where migrant community are welcome... Certainly, I've not experienced any form of racism in the Liverpool area, not even subtle one. So I think that there is that feeling of this is a city of migrants largely.*
>
> **CL5 (Liverpool)**

> *I think what I like about the area is that it is very multicultural. Also, everything's local and accessible. Like... I can access our [ethnic] food. We have a lot of specialty shops, also take-away and things like that. And we also have a big ... population here in the southwest.*
>
> **CL2 (Liverpool)**

> *I would say that we have been fortunate enough that Liverpool has been a fairly harmonious place. We haven't had, in some areas, some of the frictions in Liverpool that we've had in other areas ... It's been relatively cohesive community.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

Liverpool was one of the areas of Sydney negatively affected by heavy-handed NSW government intervention during COVID lockdowns. This involved a heavy police presence in affected LGAs across south western Sydney and was experienced by many participants as discriminatory, stigmatising and traumatic.

> *But recently that government approach towards the community in general in south western Sydney area, and especially in Fairfield or Liverpool, during the lockdown, the policing there is let them not feel secure. ... policing in every street, helicopters over their heads. The police try to be polite, to be honest. But this scared the community. Especially if you understand that this community is already traumatized. ... So seeing the police scare the kids, you know that the kids, teenagers, just seeing some of them the police, they scared ... I hope the government will understand this and will treat all LGAs in the same way.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

> *Some of them felt like they were stigmatised, because some government agencies mentioned that in south western Sydney, there were very high numbers of COVID-19 … so, we need to be very careful.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

Logan

The City of Logan is located in south-east Queensland, to the south of the City of Brisbane and north of the Gold Coast, within the lands of the Yuggera Ugarapul and Yugambeh language speaking peoples.. Like many Queensland LGAs, Logan is much bigger in both geographic area and population than LGAs elsewhere in the country and is in fact the most populous LGA included in this report.

While in absolute terms Logan's refugee population is quite substantial – it has the 7th largest intake of refugees of any LGA in Australia over the last decade – refugees constitute a relatively small proportion of the population of the LGA taken as a whole. Whereas most of the rest of the settlement cities we've looked at in this study are examples of refugees settling in cities that are already highly multicultural and often already home to sizeable ethnic communities, Logan is an example of refugee settlement in a predominantly Anglo-heritage community. While diverse in comparison to other localities in Queensland, Logan was the only LGA in our study where a language other than English was spoken at home in *fewer* households than the national average.

Table 6: Key Logan Statistics	
Population	345,098
Humanitarian entrants 2009-2020	7,016
% born overseas	27.9
% speaking a language other than English at home	18.1

Logan's humanitarian intake is also unusual in being incredibly diverse. Unlike other LGAs, which are clearly dominated by a handful of large communities that often share a common language, no single ethnicity accounts for even 20% of Logan's humanitarian intake over the last decade. Those small communities that call Logan home, moreover, are quite different to one another, there being minimal overlap even in terms of language spoken.

Ethnicity of Humanitarian Entrants to Logan, 2009-2020

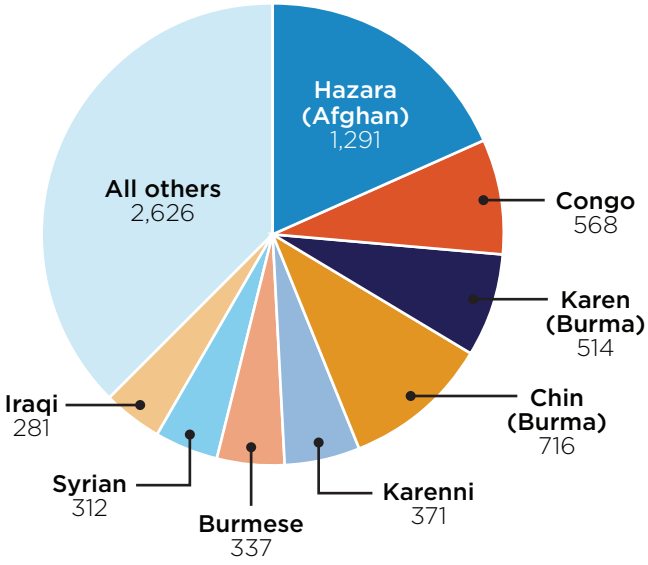

Figure 6 Source: DHA Settlement Database

The diversity of Logan's population was a major theme for refugee and community leader interviewees, with many commenting favourably on the highly multicultural character of the area around Logan Central, where migrant communities are concentrated, which facilitates a great deal of cross-cultural contact.

> *One of the probably the greatest achievements of Logan is that it's an intercultural community slash intercultural city. So as someone who grew up in Melbourne and lived half their life in Melbourne, it was very multicultural, but it's set up as … this suburb has the Vietnamese, this suburb has the Middle Eastern, etc, etc. and Logan is … its extraordinary achievement down here it is very intercultural.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

> *Logan is very multicultural. Very, very multicultural around Logan area.*
>
> **R27 (Logan)**

> *I think before the people didn't know much about each other, about the cultures and everything, and now they're kind of getting a bit more educated and they know about people. They know, like, this is something from their culture of origin. They're respecting each other a lot. At the beginning I think it's hard for them as well to know that people just coming like this from different, you know, backgrounds, cultures, religions.*
>
> **CL17 (Logan)**

> *With Logan, they do have a lot of different people, different backgrounds. With the neighbours, and everyone, it's very different. Yeah. So it's very simple. You just feel like a part of something, because there's always someone from some different place, someone from the same community.*
>
> **R25 (Logan)**

> *Where Logan is probably a better place compared to other areas … the cultural diversity itself. So a lot of people they feel welcome. So nobody would be surprised if you are in Logan, because you find all the nationalities in Logan, all different ethnic group, all different religions and everything. So you feel comfortable and you feel at home.*
>
> **CL13 (Logan)**

This diversity also has some downsides, however, with mainstream service providers commenting more frequently than in other LGAs on the difficulty of catering to the interpreting needs of such a diverse community.

> *We don't have enough interpreters, quality interpreters, who can support patients and doctors. So that, again, makes it more challenging to be able to have equitable access to service.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

Encompassing nearly 100 square km, Logan is also much larger physically than the other LGAs in this study. Multicultural support and settlement service networks are concentrated around the area of Logan Central. However, refugees are increasingly living in distant parts of the far-flung LGA, meaning access is an increasing issue even though nominally services are provided locally within the LGA.

> *Well when we look at it, we talk about Logan, we tend to think about Logan Central. But you know, with the cost of living, everyone is talking about "at least, you can find a place in Logan." But Logan is big. So we've got people moving to Yarrabilba, people are going to Jimboomba. Public transport is nowhere. We have a situation where people can't access care. And the services all concentrated here in Logan Central. So it's essentially a growing issue just is brewing, because access is a problem. People don't have means of getting there, public transport, it's not there. So I think that's a new challenge in the horizon with the growing population, and our community will bear the brunt of that.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

Salisbury

Salisbury LGA encompasses a large area of the northern suburbs of Adelaide, 25 km from the city centre, and closely adjacent to the 1950s-built satellite town of Elizabeth. It stands on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people.

The area has been a destination for migrant settlement since the second world war as a result of the SA government's industrialisation efforts, which included the establishment of the Holden vehicle factory in Elizabeth in 1963. Industrial development was supported by a program of European immigration fostered by the federal and state governments. From the 1950s to the 1970s the South Australian Housing Trust constructed a large number of homes in the area to house the new workers.

In the past two decades there has been a significant increase in the number of Salisbury residents who were born overseas, largely as a result of the arrival of large numbers of refugees. The ethnic makeup of these refugees is very diverse with almost 40 different self-identified ethnicities. However, the three largest groups are Hazara Afghans, Nepalese, and Chin groups from Myanmar, with a smaller but still significant number of arrivals from the Middle East. There has therefore been an increase in the number of Muslims in the Salisbury LGA, from 3094 in 2011 to 6438 in 2016. Muslims represented 4.7% of the population of the area at the time of the 2016 Census, compared to 2.1% in Adelaide as a whole.

Table 7: Key Salisbury Statistics	
Population	145,806
Humanitarian entrants 2009-2020	5,656
% born overseas	34.1
% speaking a language other than English at home	32.5

Ethnicity of Humanitarian Entrants to Salisbury, 2009-2020

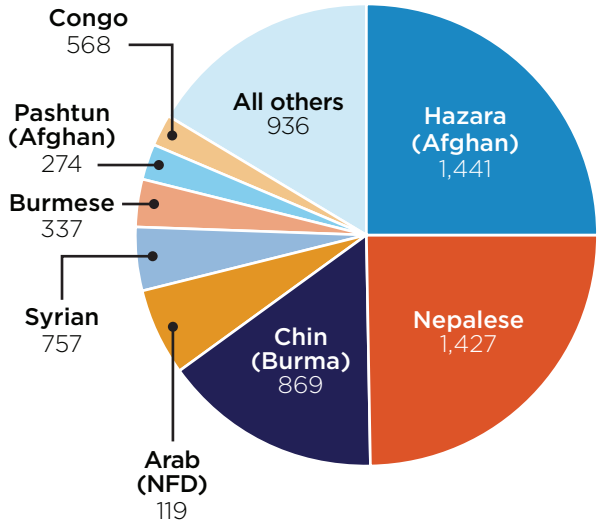

Figure 7 Source: DHA Settlement Database

Inexpensive housing is one of the factors that draws refugees to the area. The northern suburbs around Salisbury and Elizabeth continue to be zones of urban expansion and average house prices are generally well below prices in other parts of Adelaide.[12]

> *So I remember when I was seeking to buy a house, everybody discouraged me to go there. Oh, it's far away, you know. ..... So, the price of the houses was the first, you know, factor that helped encourage people to buy houses there. .... So Salisbury, and, later, Elizabeth, it's a good opportunity, because the prices there were very cheap, you know.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

Other reasons people gave for moving to the area included the presence of their community and access to services and transport.

> *TAFE is in here, Salisbury, and then every office is in here. ... And that's why we try to move to Salisbury Downs. And also we have relatives and friends. Most of them in Salisbury area. So community also in Salisbury area. And also, yeah, like MRC, and train station, transportation. Everything is comfortable in here. So that's why we are trying to move close to Salisbury area.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

> *Salisbury feels like home because it is close to my community, and it's close to life support services. And my Mum was happy to stay in here, and also it has shops which is close to our house, like shopping centre, whatever. It's close to shopping centre where I live. It's good for my Mum, too.*
>
> **R13 (Salisbury)**

> *So I first arrived, when I was arriving in Australia, I was – it was the first day I visited the community centre – Salisbury Library. So the support there, I've got a lot of information and also knowledge. So accessing the services related to the transportation, because the interchange is near these community services, the shopping centre behind it, and a lot of supportive staff there.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

Adelaide has traditionally had a mainly Anglo demographic which makes Salisbury quite different from most other Adelaide suburbs and more like the multicultural settlement areas in Sydney or Melbourne.

> *I've lived in Sydney as well, but I relate Salisbury to, I don't know, Bankstown, possibly Auburn and Blacktown. It's that kind of place. It's so similar, you know, I feel as though I come back into a Sydney mode when I'm driving in this space, whereas the most of Adelaide, it's so different. So, so different.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

While the Salisbury City Council and settlement service organisations have responded well to the increasingly multicultural nature of the community, the relatively short history of refugee settlement in South Australia has meant that mainstream services and the private sector have been slow to adapt to the needs of refugee clients.

> *It's the mainstream, it's the people that aren't around here, where I think the challenges are. So Centrelink's an easy one … but you know, some of the banks, for example, and it's a lot of the organisations that I'm thinking about, the businesses I'm thinking about. They don't reflect the actual community.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

> *When I moved over to South Australia, I was kind of stunned at the lack of support and the lack of colour difference in support services. Because in Sydney, you've got in every office people of different colours, different nationalities, different ethnicities, different religions. And then I came to South Australia, which is completely white.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

3

Settling Well:
Aspirations and realities of refugees in the settlement city

Settling Well:
Aspirations and realities of refugees in the settlement city

The way refugees feel about life in the settlement city is profoundly shaped by their expectations and aspirations about what their lives in Australia ought to be like, and the extent to which they are able to realise these hopes in their day-to-day experience. To understand these factors, we spoke to refugee participants at length about what it meant for them to settle successfully and truly feel at home in their new places of residence. We also asked them to reflect on how well they felt the reality of their life in the settlement city matched their aspirations.

Naturally, refugees come to Australia with quite diverse aspirations and expectations, and the extent to which they are able realise these also varies a great deal. However, their accounts of both achievements and challenges associated with settlement tended to fall into several broad thematic categories that often recurred, whether as achieved or frustrated hopes. These aspirations are in fact broadly similar to the hopes many Australians hold for their own lives, but they take on a different character in a settlement context.

The ability to secure desired employment is a major factor in whether refugees feel they are settling well in Australia. Securing stable, appropriate housing – and for many refugees this really means entering into home ownership – is another major aspiration, especially for somewhat older refugees with families. Younger refugees, in particular, tend also to aspire to realise the opportunities life in Australia presents through pursuing education. Finally, refugees define successful settlement in terms of their ability to contribute to the wellbeing of their family and community, for all that the settlement journey often presents challenges for those familial relationships. In all these areas of life, refugees confront challenges that sometimes frustrate their aspirations.

3.1 Finding employment

Finding secure ongoing employment which draws on their skills and qualifications, whether acquired overseas or in Australia, is a major aspiration for most refugees. Employment is highly valued both as a sign of successful settlement and for the financial security associated with it. Refugees generally are not content to remain on Centrelink benefits. Unfortunately, many refugees struggle to find employment for a variety of reasons which include age, language difficulties and complications with leveraging pre-existing qualifications to secure employment in Australia. These kinds of issues were often mentioned as challenges and disappointments by people who otherwise had a very positive attitude to their settlement experience.

> *There are not enough job opportunities available. When my husband and I came, we were both old. So, when we apply for a job in some factories, no one takes us. But my husband and I need to work … I want to collect money for the future of my daughter. I hope I can find a job.*
>
> **R17 (Hume)**

> *I want to have a good job but difficulty to achieve that, because of the language you know?*
>
> **R3 (Fairfield)**

> *Of course, here in Australia, they don't believe on your experience in other countries. So, it's not easy for me to find a job. Even though I did the depression support [certificate], I did the aged care and disability [certificate], I am now doing Child Care Certificate 3, it's not easy to find a job. And I think they don't believe on what experience we have in our countries; they never even try us to start the job and then see what we can do. And then if it's not good, within the probationary period of three months, they can tell if we are fit or not [for the job]. So, it might be my age, I do not know. I do not know why. I do not know why. But still, I couldn't find any job.*
>
> **R15 (Hume)**

> *I went to study English. I got a certificate in health. And I worked [as a chemist in Iraq]. I got an experience of two weeks in the pharmacy. And I need to work in Australia, but I have not found work.*
>
> **R14 (Fairfield)**

Conversely, those refugees who did succeed in finding desirable employment or start their own businesses counted this as a major achievement and spoke very proudly of it as an important aspect of their success in settling well in Australia.

> *I studied [she got a diploma in childcare], and I learned English. I need more in technology, in computers, and things like that. But my English better than before. I got a certificate and I started to work in childcare for a short time, and this year, I started to work in a different thing.*
>
> **R16 (Fairfield)**

> *For me, as a person who came as a refugee, I'm actually very proud of what I have done and achieved. I learned the language, I started working in the community sector, and I've been working in the community sector for the last 21 years.*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

> *If you go to Melbourne and Dandenong … now you can see hundreds of Afghan businesses and they're very successful.*
>
> **CL10 (Logan)**

While employment was perhaps the most frequently mentioned settlement aspiration (whether realised or frustrated), refugee employment is a well-studied subject and the Edmund Rice Centre itself has recently published an extensive qualitative study of refugee job seeking, the findings of which were largely confirmed by the interviews conducted for this project.[13] Therefore we are only touching lightly on this crucial issue and direct the reader to those other, more extensive analyses for further details.

It is worth mentioning, however, that refugees' struggles with employment have a place-based dimension that is often overlooked in discussions of this issue. As shown in Figure 8, unemployment rates at the last available census were higher in all 7 of the settlement city LGAs than the national average, and sometimes considerably higher. (Data from the 2016 census is used here as 2021 census employment data had not been released at the time of writing and monthly Labour Force surveys do not report data at the LGA level.)

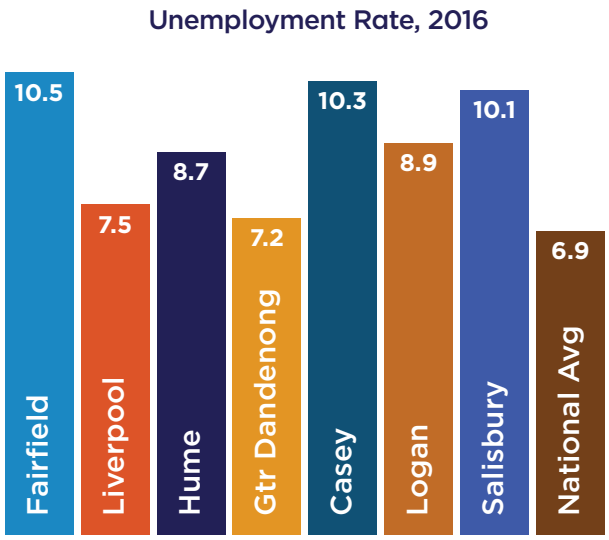

Figure 8 Source: 2016 Census

The unemployment rate only counts unemployed people who are actively looking for work. It does not, therefore, count discouraged jobseekers who have withdrawn from active engagement with the labour market altogether. A different indicator, the percentage of working-age people who were not in the labour force (the NILF rate), can give some idea of the size of this disengaged cohort. Of course, working-age people also elect not to participate in the labour market for other reasons such as educational pursuits or caring responsibilities, but an elevated NILF none the less often suggests labour market issues that are not captured by the unemployment rate. The NILF rate was also much higher than the national average in most settlement city LGAs, suggesting a higher rate of disengagement from paid employment altogether in these areas.

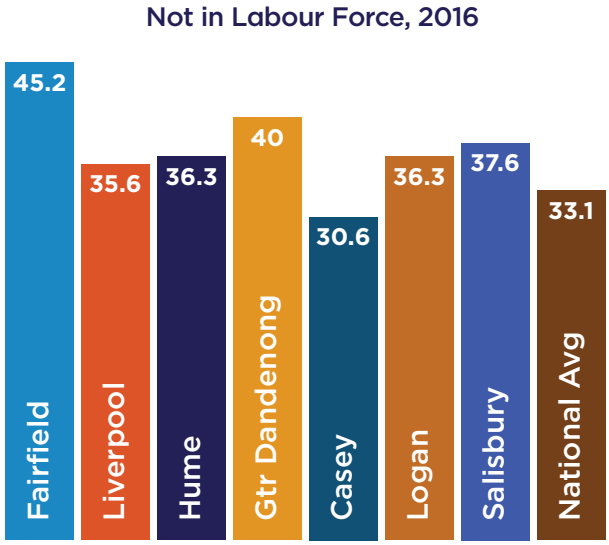

Figure 9 Source: 2016 Census

These statistics include the whole population of the area rather than just refugees, who generally constitute a fairly small proportion of the whole (see figures in chapter 2). There is no reason, therefore, to believe that refugees by themselves account for the higher unemployment rate in these areas. While refugees do experience higher unemployment rates than persons born in Australia, and even other kinds of migrants, these differences are not sizeable enough, given the proportion of refugees in each LGA, to account for these unemployment figures.[14] The figures instead imply that employment opportunities are often scarcer in most settlement cities and help place the struggles of refugees to find work in a broader context.

3.2 Securing housing

For many refugees, feeling at home and settling successfully in Australia is intimately connected to securing a home that adequately meets their needs and holds out the promise of stability – a goal that for many is synonymous with home ownership. This is an aspiration particularly keenly felt by older refugees who often lost their own homes in the process of leaving their native countries behind, and who see securing stable housing as the first step towards rebuilding their lives. Unfortunately, as with their struggles to secure employment, and in large part because of resulting financial pressures, stable housing proves elusive for many refugee families in their first years in the settlement city.

> *This house belongs to the government, and it's not mine. So, I can't consider it as successful.*
>
> **R5 (Logan)**

> *My mom was trying to buy our own house. So that's why she just put some pressure on my father to get some money … because she was just thinking that we should have our own home.*
>
> **R8 (Salisbury)**

> *I'm scared about my house, because some people who got [permanent residency] and citizenship, they can go and buy the house. We can't because we have just visa, that's why I'm scared, I'm worried about this one… we are renting nearly nine years.*
>
> **R20 (Dandenong)**

> *We applied for housing. I want them to help me in that. We pay 1060 AUD fortnightly. We hope the government gives us a house. We cannot keep moving from house to house.*
>
> **R11 (Liverpool)**

> *Proper housing is very important for families to have that feeling of security and belongingness.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

> *I know my culture, and … this is what we believe, if you want a good life, you have to have a house. Your own house … But yeah, our people just saving money, you know, to buy a house, this is their goal.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

As the above quotes suggest, all from refugees who had been in Australia several years, securing stable long-term housing often takes many years, with most refugee participants describing having to move house several times in their first years in Australia. For those who manage to secure long-term housing which meets their needs, however, this becomes a powerful symbol of having made a good life for themselves in Australia.

In terms of house, in Iran we used to live in a 50 square meter basement. The house I am living now is like a castle or some sort of resort accommodation compared to the one that I had in Iran. R10 (Salisbury)

People are buying houses, not young people, but you know, as they grow up. I just think, in general, people are just realising that they can strive for more. This is

a place for opportunities, and if you grab them, you can literally do anything. CL20 (Salisbury)

A lot of people in our community have bought a house. In that way, I think they're kind of settled because to buy a house is a big deal. CFG7 (Salisbury)

Housing affordability and accessibility is, of course, a large and growing problem across Australia as rapidly rising prices and rents put stable and appropriate housing out of reach of an ever-increasing proportion of lower income persons and families.[15] As previous research has shown, moreover, recent refugees are particularly vulnerable in the housing market due to their reliance on inadequate social security payments, the limited supply of housing appropriate to large families, their lack of rental history, limited ability to navigate the housing system and often the discrimination they face from real estate agents and landlords.[16]

The housing challenges of refugees also have a distinctly place-based dimension. As we've seen, the arrival of refugees to a settlement area is concentrated both over time and geographically – thousands of refugees can arrive from a given conflict area within the span of a decade and will often try to live close to others of a similar background with little reference to the availability of housing stock in that area.

The places refugees choose to settle are, however, in most cases already very densely populated. Settlement cities tend to have much higher population densities than is typical of the metropolitan regions they form part of, as can be seen from the table below. The Fairfield statistical region, for example, has a population density in 2020 of 2077 people per km^2 compared to an average for the Greater Sydney region of 434. Neighbouring Liverpool, with significant areas of rural land, still has a density of 756 people per km^2. Similarly, Dandenong (1299), Casey (890) and Salisbury (906) have relatively high levels of population density compared to other urban areas.

Table 8: Population Density (ABS 2020)

Urban Areas	Population per km^2
Fairfield	**2077**
Liverpool	**756**
Greater Sydney	*434*
Dandenong	**1299**
Casey	**890**
Hume	**478**
Greater Melbourne	*516*
Salisbury	**906**
Greater Adelaide	*422*
Logan	**356**
Greater Brisbane	*161*

The experience of Fairfield is a particularly dramatic illustration of some of the problems that can result from refugees moving to high-density areas where housing infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth. A recent report from the UNSW Centre for Health Equity, in conjunction with the Fairfield Housing Taskforce, discusses the difficulties that can result with securing housing in this context.[17] As discussed previously, Fairfield experienced a particularly large influx of refugees in 2016-2019: over 12,000 refugees arrived from the Middle East in just those four years. Unfortunately, housing in Fairfield consists predominantly of low-density family home dwellings. In 2016, only a quarter of dwelling were medium or high-density, as compared with 44% in Greater Sydney. A highly localised housing crisis ensued as fierce competition for limited housing stock caused rents to rise and pushed refugees on low incomes and those on income support into poverty, with some spending upwards of 80% of their incomes on rent.

Although Fairfield has been a particularly dramatic example of the issue in recent years, the concern with overcrowding and competition for housing driving up rental prices is widely shared across the settlement cities. While median incomes tended to fall below the state average in most settlement cities, median rents quite closely tracked state averages, suggesting rents are higher in proportion to household incomes than elsewhere in the state.[18]

Median incomes and rents, 2021

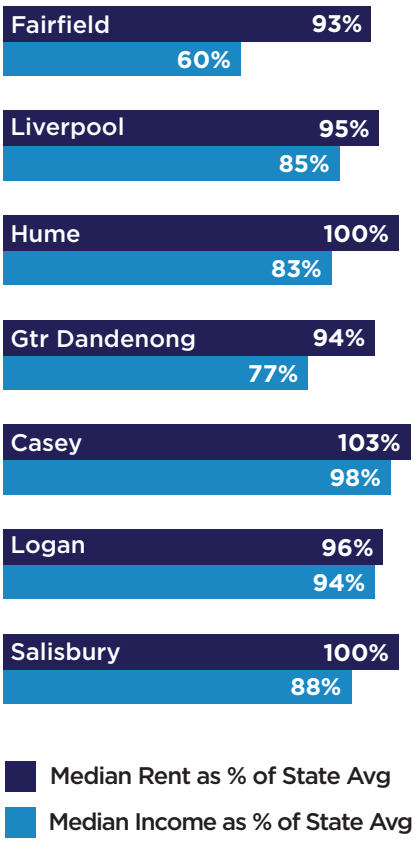

Figure 10 Source: 2021 Census

Many service providers and community leaders remarked on the impact of competition for housing on rising rents.

> *I still remember that the housing was a big problem in Hume and still is. There's always competition … because you know, like, we still settling refugees, you know, it hasn't stopped … So since then, and until now it's the same, we still see a lot of competition when applying for private housing, rental housing.*
>
> **CL8 (Hume)**

> *There's been a continuous driving of housing in the area, I mean, quite clearly, refugees have pushed up the rental properties' prices in the area.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

> *Dandenong is now kind of oversaturated. And then the, the property prices are also very high, especially the housing, the renting, starting from renting, it's higher.*
>
> **SP6 (Casey)**

With the notable exception of Fairfield itself, it would be incorrect to say that the arrival of refugees has by itself caused higher rents. In most settlement cities, refugees account for only a small proportion of recent arrivals. However, because they are often less well able to compete in the housing market, and in their first years in Australia are often reluctant to seek housing outside the settlement city, refugees are more vulnerable than other residents to such increases and need more support to secure adequate housing.

3.3 Getting an education

Whereas older refugees usually expressed their aspirations in terms of housing and employment, younger adult refugees (those roughly 20-40 years of age) more often spoke about their educational aspirations as central to their sense of settling well in Australia.

> *I just want to finish this course that I study. Then I want to apply for university to finish my study.*
>
> **R6 (Liverpool)**

> *Just hoping to finish my degree and be a teacher.*
>
> **R2**

Older refugees, and particularly older women, also often articulated their aspirations for their children in terms of their educational attainment, reflecting a shared sense of education as a pathway for younger members of refugee families and communities. Even for people whose own settlement experience has been disappointing, the success of their children through educational attainment vindicates their decision to come to Australia.

Many older refugees say they came to Australia principally for the sake of their children and define settling well largely in terms of the younger generation.

> *I like Australia because my children can go to school and learn writing. Everything is good.*
>
> **R19 (Dandenong)**

> *I'm happy with my kids, because they study, my two oldest daughters work, and they are very happy.*
>
> **R16 (Fairfield)**

> *Myself, I didn't achieve anything positive. But I came to Australia for sake of my children. He said, like, for example, my eldest daughter is doing medicine, the other one business. And the last one is very good at school.*
>
> **R3 (Fairfield)**

Understandably, given all this, successful educational attainment is regarded by refugees of all ages as a major achievement. People often spoke very proudly of the qualifications they had attained and the career paths these had opened.

> *I got to do my diploma. That was a big achievement for me.*
>
> **R25 (Logan)**

> *I educated myself, I've done my diploma in Early Childhood Education, completed my Bachelor of Law; I have worked on several projects with different organisations and service providers... which is in itself a huge achievement for a woman coming from the background where I am coming from, which is very less likely.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

> *The main [achievement] is that I got to study and to graduate, making my parents proud. And I was able to study and to be where I am today because of their support. We grew up in a community where most parents did not allow their daughters to go to the university... I was able to get through that, and my parents very supportive. All they said was, 'You have to be educated, because we were not allowed to have education'.*
>
> **R23 (Dandenong)**

A note of caution was sounded by some community leaders in relation to education, however. While refugees highly value and aspire to provide their children with educational opportunities, some community leaders felt parents and community networks were often poorly equipped to support younger people in identifying the right post-secondary school pathways to pursue. While recent research on refugee access to tertiary education is somewhat scarce, what has been produced does tend to confirm this view in finding that, in the aggregate, young refugees are entering higher education at a lower rate than their non-refugee peers.[19]

> *One of the concerns that I and some of the community members have been not enough young people get into higher education, ones especially who graduate from the schools here. It's either due to quality of schooling ... or due to family, maybe families because they come from non-English backgrounds and not having that background, majority of young people don't get into higher education.*
>
> **CL7 (Dandenong)**

> *many of our families from refugees background don't understand apprenticeship very well. So when the child finishes high school, can't go to uni because they don't have proper background, then this child will just be kind of stagnant.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

Other community leaders also highlighted some of the cultural constraints associated with the range of educational options available to young people. For instance, in many communities, university is associated with a limited range of careers (such as engineering and medicine) and unskilled labour is seen as the only other alternative, thus overlooking a range of career and training options that people should be aware of and supported to consider.

> *As a ... community, we do have an issue where we all follow the path sort of fed by other people before us ... You're always sort of forced to follow the path of a doctor or an engineer or a lawyer or such ... it can be a bit hard to try something new for our kids. So as soon as they face an obstacle or they find themselves not interested in being a doctor or a lawyer or engineer, they sort of resort automatically into "there's nothing else for us at university, so I'll resort to getting maybe into the construction space or labouring space that settles for factory labour jobs" ... So, it is either a doctor or sort of a labourer in a factory. There's a bit of disconnect there.*
>
> **CL2 (Liverpool)**

3.4 The centrality of family and community

As the foregoing discussion of education has already begun to suggest, for many refugees, settling well is not simply a question of their personal wellbeing but encompasses also their ability to contribute to the thriving of their families and the wider community. Just as older refugees define settlement success in part through the achievements of their children, younger refugees often frame their aspirations and achievements around the importance of supporting older generations and the community more broadly.

> *I just wanted to be involved in the community, to help the community … once when I went to Services SA and when I was about to come out I saw, like, an Afghan man. He entered here. And he was about to fill a form. Then I just asked him, do you need help? And he was very happy.*
>
> **R8 (Salisbury)**

> *To support other people, other people that are new … helps them, you know, through their difficulty and just keep their culture alive, you know, and help new people that they're here. I think that's a good thing that is important.*
>
> **R27 (Logan)**

> *I do have aspirations for my community because I have volunteered … for five years, and I have gained a lot of experiences from what I did. I have created a lot of networks, and I want to give it back to my own community.*
>
> **CL20 (Salisbury)**

> *I established [a community organisation] and we've been lucky lately to receive a few grants, and that's helping us a lot to assist people who are in the most financial need from our community, especially those who got impacted by COVID. So yeah, these have been my achievements.*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

> *As a … people, serving our parents and serving those elderly in our near proximity is always looked upon as a good thing to do.*
>
> **CL23 (Hume)**

Several community leaders and service providers remarked on the ways such close family and community ties facilitate settlement and allow people to maintain a sense of purpose or to foster resilience over the course of what can often be long and difficult settlement journeys.

> *Arriving within a family unit is often a real protective factor for people, because they're all looking out for children, and there's a lot of support around. And families get linked with a school, so that it gives them at a very least a routine, a reason to get up every morning. It gives them a community, and access to English language.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *When you have your family with you, it takes away all the worries, all these emotional stuff … Financially, it is also helpful because you don't have to send money to family, because they are with you.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

The centrality of the family also presents several challenges in the settlement context, however. One of the major challenges presented by family and community ties is the absence of loved ones left behind. Refugees are often forcibly separated from close families by the very circumstances that brought them to Australia. The pain of such separation is keenly felt, and family reunion was often mentioned as a key aspiration for refugee families, unfortunately often frustrated by the difficulty and expense of the process for sponsoring their relatives to come to Australia.[20]

> *I need all the assistance to bring my next family here.*
>
> **R15 (Hume)**

> *Yeah. For us, it's really difficult because we've got five kids overseas and we are thinking of that. It is really very stressful. They are still there.*
>
> **R1 (Liverpool)**

> *My clients when they come to see the service is usually the family reunion, they want to sponsor their family overseas, so they will feel settled, finally, all the family all together.*
>
> **SFG5 (Fairfield)**

> *If I give you an example about myself, I put myself in their shoes. I came to Australia, and I had half of my family left behind. What would be in my mind apart from my family to get reunited with me?*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

> *Your question about challenges… First of all, … definitely loneliness. I definitely miss my parents, family, friends, and the atmosphere of my country.*
>
> **CL14 (Casey)**

> *One of the things that humanitarian entrants struggle with is family reunion. The federal Government, and it's not about this current government because the previous governments have done the same, makes it very, very difficult. And it's very, very expensive, too. So, it has been an issue that has been talked about for a long time. In Fairfield, currently, a lot of people want to bring family, and it's a struggle, because you get rejection, and nobody actually explains to you what this is about.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

For families already in Australia, the settlement journey can and often does put strains on family relationships in various ways. As younger refugees may face less difficulty in learning English, many of them end up acting as cultural brokers and language interpreters between their parents and the wider society. While, as we saw above, young people from

refugee backgrounds often spoke about the fulfilling aspects of these responsibilities, these obligations can also be experienced as an unwelcome or burdensome pressure to assist with family issues.

> *Kids learn the language faster … and then they have to be used as interpreters, which is really not fair.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

> *The other thing I hear too from high school or teenage students is the pressure on them to support their older family members. Because they start learning English or they know English better than their parents, so they have to read all the official documents that the parent receives. So, this is another pressure on the students in their life here.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

> *A lot of young people have a lot of responsibilities to take care of at home. So, like I said before, they're interpreters for their parents, even when they don't want to be.*
>
> **CL20 (Salisbury)**

> *Most of the young people in our community are the ones handling all these filling out the forms for Centrelink and for any other organization… if you're looking from the outside in, then you like, "Are you being burdened by this?"*
>
> **CL23 (Hume)**

At the same time as these new, unfamiliar responsibilities are thrust on young people, their parents confront a new environment in which gendered familial roles are challenged by the altogether different cultural expectations or economic realities that prevail in Australia. Gendered familial roles, such as the male breadwinner or the female home-maker, are often disrupted by the process of resettlement and this can be destabilising as well as enabling for refugee parents. Refugee women and mothers with caring responsibility for children and family members often face additional challenges as they negotiate opportunities for paid work and/or education while carrying substantial caring responsibilities. Refugee women frequently expressed their desire to get paid work and pursue their education but these ambitions often sat in tension with gendered caring responsibilities.

> *Okay. I have been a mom ever since I was 19 years old, and since I had my first child. And ever since then, my youngest is two now and really, I really want to go back to school. I really want to study something.*
>
> **R1 (Liverpool)**

> *Once my children grow up, I will do the language courses to improve my English skills and to do some courses.*
>
> **R7 (Liverpool)**

> *I used to tell the moms … because the husbands, overseas, they go to work and still here they go to work, no problem. But the wife, or the mum, overseas is more to look after the kids. Is not something that she used to do - work and family.*
>
> **CL4 (Hume)**

In the face of all these quite dramatic changes to family dynamics and the various other stress factors involved in resettlement, relationships within refugee families can often become quite fraught. Many community leaders drew attention to the frequent appearance of intergenerational conflict in refugee families. They also suggested that in many cases, this kind of conflict can be exacerbated by a certain rigidity and lack of appreciation for cultural difference in Australian legal and welfare services when it comes to parenting.

> *Intergenerational conflict. So, when parents arrive here, they think that time stopped at when they left their home country … they try to make their children hold into their culture … And children often get lost in between, trying to please their parents, but also their peers.*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

> *I can see now in some families in my community, the gap is very wide between the children and the parents. Very wide, you know, and this cause sometimes a very serious problem. When the parents say that it's not abuse, this is not controlling the life of their children, their children see that, and the law here in this country say that, No, this is abuse.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

> *And I think there's a sense of system not understanding migrant values, cultural values and the way of doing things and that people feel being judged, particularly when it's come to parents and their children, this feeling that the system is being designed in a way that disempower the parent, not to really play the role as parents and portrayed them in a way that they don't love their children.*
>
> **CL13 (Logan)**

As we shall see in the services chapter, mainstream Australian institutions often fail to respond to these complex family dynamics with understanding and the kind of cultural competence we would hope for. The result is unfortunately that external interventions as often exacerbate existing problems as help to resolve them.

> *I want to touch on a specific cohort, which is fathers, and how they may be impacted on the arrival to the Australian path. Fathers are changing their parenting role … They're shifting their role, as they lost their positioning in their family, or they are adjusting to their teens, and how teenagers are adjusting and responding to a new culture.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *Parenting in a new culture is really difficult. People who come from different cultural backgrounds have different approaches in terms of disciplining their children, and not knowing much about the laws in Australia, often people get trapped in situations with the law, because of the lack of understanding and knowledge.*

CL9 (Hume)

Case Study: Cultural considerations – working with refugee family relationships

Below is an example of a family of refugees becoming involved in legal problems and inadvertently triggering child protection protocols, which in turn only aggravated their domestic situation. The community leader reflecting on this example highlights the role of both the family's own lack of knowledge and the lack of cultural competence of the mainstream service provider in leading to these kinds of undesirable escalations.

> *One of my clients reported to the case manager what was happening at home, and then she involved the Child Protection. But after a while, the husband came back and behaved worse than before. I understand that we need to report these cases to Child Protection, but I see a lot of families, especially people who are new to the country, getting involved with Child Protection without understanding what's happening ..... parents don't love to go to workshops. So, they said, 'How come! I know how to raise my children. Now I have to go to the workshop.'. And this is normal for Australian people to go to parenting workshop, but people from some cultures do not like it. They feel maybe they are stupid. 'Why do I need to go to a workshop.' For myself, if someone saying that I have to go to a workshop for parenting, I don't want to go. I feel offended. And I think we need to change our approach. Workers have to have cultural competence when working with CALD people.*

CL14 (Casey)

Chapter summary

Refugees come to Australia with aspirations that are not unlike those of the people already living here. They want to find good stable employment that matches their skills and interests. They want access to secure, adequate housing, particularly if they are older and trying to recoup to some degree the loss of their former homes and lives. They want to secure opportunities for themselves or their children through access to education. They want to foster the wellbeing of their families, be reunited with loved ones left behind in the process of fleeing danger and to assist others in their communities to settle well in Australia. When they realise these aspirations, they speak with justified pride about their achievements.

However, these same aspirations often meet with challenges in the settlement context. Securing employment is a well-documented challenge for refugees, a fact both contributing to and exacerbated by the fact that the settlement cities in which many end up living often have considerably higher rates of unemployment than elsewhere in the country.

Housing is another major challenge, with access to affordable, secure and appropriate housing often proving elusive for refugees. Housing affordability is, of course, a growing concern across Australia but refugees are often especially disadvantaged in the housing market by low incomes, large families, poor English, lack of rental histories and sometimes outright discrimination. Evidence also suggests that the desire of refugees to live in the settlement city close to friends, family and community sometimes tends to bid up rents in these areas and exacerbate these problems.

Education can also become a challenge, primarily due to educational systems being quite difficult to navigate and parents and community often lacking enough information to guide younger refugees into appropriate educational pathways.

Finally, as validating as it often is, family life can also be quite fraught for refugees. Family roles undergo quite dramatic shifts as part of the settlement journey. Children, learning English more quickly than parents, are thrust into roles of greater responsibility within the family as interpreters and cultural brokers, while traditional parental roles like the male breadwinner and female homemaker are often undermined by a new Australian context. Intergenerational conflict can often result from these and other changes to family dynamics and institutional interventions in family life often lack cultural sensitivity and can add to the problems.

4

Making a home in the settlement city

Making a home in the settlement city

Despite the many challenges of settling in a new country, most refugees talk about the particular area in which they live in very positive terms: in general they love where they live and have no plans to move. They cite many benefits of living in their settlement city, but the main reason they give for liking their local area is the strong community and family networks they have found there and the support these provide in their settlement journey. Community and cultural support plays a very important role in facilitating successful settlement. Some refugees noted that there are also downsides to living in the settlement city, including potential barriers to learning English and engaging with the wider community. The advantages of the settlement city, however, particularly in the early years, far outweigh any disadvantages and other research suggests barriers to wider integration are at most temporary ones.

This chapter describes what refugees and community leaders say about their settlement city, its positive and negative features, and the benefits they gain from living there. It also discusses the factors that encourage the formation and growth of settlement communities, and the important role of settlement city communities in providing an immediate place to belong for refugees.

4.1 Refugees love where they live

Overwhelmingly, the refugees we spoke to are enthusiastic about their local area. Whether this was in western Sydney, the suburbs of Melbourne or Brisbane, or the northern areas of Adelaide, they felt lucky to be living there and listed numerous benefits offered by their location. This enthusiasm was not simply because they are now living in Australia. Most people went further and specifically identified the benefits of their particular suburb or local government area. These included physical features such as access to familiar food and shopping, closeness to services and transport, ease of getting around, the attractiveness of the area and the quality of the housing. Subjective qualities were also often mentioned, in particular the multicultural nature of the people and their friendliness and tolerance. However, the most important reason given for liking where they lived, mentioned by almost everyone, was the fact that they had their community around them.

The importance of community

Refugees choose to live in their settlement city because it gives them access to their community. They want to live close to relatives and other people who speak the same language or follow the same faith.

> *I feel like I'm comfortable in this area maybe because more people like I am is around this area. And, yeah. It's kind of friendly to be around people that I think who go through what we go through and from the same kind of cultural background.*
>
> **R1 (Liverpool)**

> *Oh I love the community. It makes you feel like you home because most of the people speak the same language. You could access so many options. If you want any kind of food from home you just go out and do shopping and stuff.*
>
> **R2 (Fairfield)**

> *I feel really connected. And yeah, I feel trusted, and I feel protected. And that's the home, that's my home where I've lived for the last ten or eleven years.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

> *Why? All my cousins, they are living here. That's why.*
>
> **R18 (Hume)**

The settlement city provides a culturally familiar social space where refugees can speak to people in their own language and have access to places of worship and community associations. Their family and community networks provide essential support, particularly for new arrivals, and are important for facilitating successful settlement.

Convenient access to services and facilities

Apart from the connection to their community, many people described their neighbourhood as a good place to live because it gave them easy access to familiar shops, services, transport and other facilities.

> *Iraqi people and, like, Arab people say, like, when I got to shop, everything there like Iraqi things, like they bring Iraqi food, everything. There's many shops, Arabic shops.*
>
> **R18 (Hume)**

> *So many people, near the market, near the school, near everything. My kids are very happy in this area. My kids are happy, I am happy.*
>
> **R19 (Dandenong)**

> *Liverpool is at the centre of all the services. All the services are available. All the services are very close to my house. We just love it.*
>
> **R11 (Liverpool)**

> *The other thing is because of the living for new arrivals also, because everything so close, if you live close by to the centre you don't need a car to travel places. So, you can get the train and also you can walk to the shops and the plaza.*
>
> **CL7 (Dandenong)**

A multicultural environment

Significantly, the multicultural character of the area was also cited by many people as a positive attraction of their local area. This did not simply refer to the presence of their own ethnic group but the fact that there were multiple cultural and language groups in the neighbourhood and a sense of tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity.

> *I like it. I like it because so many cultures. So you know, multicultural area. … Wherever we go, not only the one people or one country people. You can see many - the Burmese, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Chinese, Cambodia, Vietnamese, Afghanistan, Sudanese, or many, many, so many faces. … In here, whoever we know, very friendly, the white people, black people, whoever.*
>
> **CL16 (Dandenong)**

> *And it's because it's, they do multicultural well, you know. It's quite multicultural, but it's also inviting, like, you know, we see a lot of signs that welcomes people in different languages. There's always this inclusive culture, which is really important when we settling new arrivals.*
>
> **CL8 (Hume)**

> *People are very lovely, they always say hello, even the immigrants, whether they are from Asia, refugees, or Africa. They all say hello, they are lovely. We have a very comfortable social relationship with strangers on the roads. And yeah, the suburb is very safe. I've got no problem with the suburb.*
>
> **R10 (Salisbury)**

4.2 How refugees come to live in the settlement city

As the descriptions in Chapter 2 show, many current day settlement cities have been places of first arrival for migrants and refugees for many decades. This history of migration is reflected today in the demographic profiles of these areas, the number of residents who were born overseas, and the number of people who speak a language other than English at home. Previous migration has also established the basic services required by refugees and created the welcoming multicultural environment that refugees feel comfortable in.

Nevertheless, although a local area may be long established as a place of migrant settlement, each new cohort of refugees builds their own community in their new home. A number of factors bring people to live in a particular area. The most significant in recent times has been the government's visa policy for humanitarian migration. Australia's offshore settlement program consists of two major streams – the 200 subclass visa, mostly used for refugees recommended for resettlement by the UN, and the 202 special humanitarian visas, which require a nomination by someone living in Australia. Over the last decade, 202 visas have accounted for more than half of all off-shore humanitarian admissions. This has had a significant impact on patterns of settlement, as most refugees admitted on such visas tend to settle near their sponsors, who are often close family members.[21]

> *When we apply, we have to put who's the relative or the friend or something who is in this area. So at that time my family did live in Springvale. So that's why so we put in Springvale, we give that address, they tell us this is my family address.*
>
> **CL16 (Dandenong)**

> *Most of the sponsors live in Logan, and if they have the sponsors in Logan, then obviously, they will settle in Logan.*
>
> **CL13 (Logan)**

For those who did not have existing connections in Australia, however, the decision about where they were sent to live may have appeared arbitrary.

> *So, it was not us choosing, but it was directed by the case manager at the detention centre. And not only us, but every family also I should say, we were just pinned in those areas.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

> *The state decided we live here.*
>
> **R11 (Liverpool)**

Once the first refugees in any humanitarian intake have settled, subsequent arrivals are drawn to the area because members of their family are already living there, or because they are aware that it is an area where they can find their ethnic community.

> *Because the first thing they ask, where people from Iraq are living, or people from Syria, they are living? And they are going to, you know, to stay together with them. And that's why we are condensed in a few LGAs rather than spread everywhere else.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

> *Is important for me, as a Muslim, I should look at where I can go safely to pray and come back home without any problems. Those kinds of things they trigger you or make you choose a place.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

> *So you need to find your place for worship. You want to feel that your kids going to a place that they feel welcome.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

Some refugees had in fact originally settled in other locations on arrival in Australia, but had been drawn, ultimately, to the settlement city to be close to their relatives or community.

> *And then we had to move here because, you know, we know more people here. We know the community and there are Arabs here.*
>
> **R2 (Fairfield)**

> *We moved up north because that's where most of the community housing, affordable housing is. And also we're close to the rest of the community and we also have access to the typical food.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

> *We moved to this house because it was near our cousins' house and, as we were newly arrived, our cousins helped us sometimes.*
>
> **R24 (Casey)**

The arrival of large numbers of people from a particular refugee background over time generates shops, businesses, cultural associations and services that cater to the needs of the community, adding to the attractiveness of the area for new arrivals.

> *So people came in together as welfare support groups or associations and started to build institutions such as temples, churches, mosques, and even schools. For example, we have the Assyrian school in Fairfield which is the first ever Assyrian school outside the Middle East. So all these institutions actually make Fairfield feel like a place, like home, because everybody created these institutions to make their life liveable, to feel at home where they are.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

One interviewee described the experience of being among the earliest members of their community to arrive in a newly developing settlement city, seeing themselves as a pioneer, forging the path for others to follow.

> *When I'm looking at me and some of my friends, we were like, you know, the first soldier. The first soldier, you know, to attack the enemy. We sacrifice ourselves to be the first people living in this area, okay. And after that, we started to encourage people. 'Oh, it is cheap here. Okay, it is good. Come here.' And even, you know, those who try to do a new business, you know, we encourage them. 'Oh, there is no Afghani bread here, or there is no middle eastern grocery here, or there is no halal meat here. So just come and do it.' So yeah, the first people who live there, you know, they help, you know, the next number of people who came to the area later and encourage them to live there.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

The process of refugee community formation through family reunion and word of mouth is illustrated by the variations in ethnic composition of the 7 settlement city LGAs shown in chapter 2. Arrivals from Iraq and Syria are by far the largest refugee groups in Fairfield, Liverpool and Hume, but are relatively insignificant in the other four LGAs where Afghan, Burmese and Nepalese groups make up the largest numbers.

4.3 'It's not all heaven!': the challenges of settlement cities

While most refugees are happy where they live, they are also aware that things are not always ideal. As the above comment by a community leader suggests, 'It's not all heaven' (CFG7 Salisbury). Refugees in settlement cities experience the ongoing challenges of learning English, dealing with Centrelink, and finding suitable work and adequate housing that are faced by refugees anywhere in Australia. However, some challenges are specific to their particular place of settlement. As noted in Chapter 3, a large influx of new residents puts pressure on infrastructure, facilities and services. Some places that were once considered attractive because of the availability of jobs and low cost housing are now experiencing high unemployment and housing shortages. Safety and cultural acceptance are also a concern for some people, although the situation appears to vary significantly from place to place and person to person.

Pressure on infrastructure and services

When there is an increased intake of refugees, as for example the additional intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees during 2016 to 2019, additional funding is normally also provided to settlement service organisations by both federal and state governments to accommodate increased caseloads. This funding theoretically 'follows' the refugees to the areas they settle in, though settlement service providers are not necessarily always located close to where refugees end up settling. Some additional funding is often also provided to mainstream services: schools with refugee students, for example, and specialised refugee health services, receive extra support. Local governments, however, usually receive little specific support to respond to the increased demand for council facilities and infrastructure. Their funding is usually heavily reliant on rates meaning that an influx of refugees translates into additional revenue only in a very delayed manner. Other funding for infrastructure, public facilities and transport is dependent on the vagaries of state and federal government budget processes. In the short term, facilities that are particularly important for refugees can be overwhelmed by new arrivals.

> *You have too many people and the infrastructure in Fairfield has not changed. There are no extra roads, there are no extra parks, there is no extra nothing. ..... I will give you a simple example. Four years ago, before the last wave of arrivals from Syria and Iraq, Fairfield library was where you accessed internet, and every time you went, there was a computer accessible to you. But then, suddenly, 10,000 people arrive so, if you go to that library today, you can't find access to a simple computer. How would that make you feel? Obviously, you'll feel bad about these people who have come here and take your place in using the computer. And that has implications on how people relate in the community.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

> *Because lots of people migrated or have chosen Casey as a place to live, the roads are congested actually, quite congested during the school time and after. And then the public transport system is not so rich actually. This is a concern for newly arrived migrants, especially women. So, there is not much transport infrastructure developed adequately to cater.*
>
> **SP6 (Casey)**

> *This area is getting more crowded. That's why the services is coming less, interpreters less, because the community due to the trouble in our country is increasing and keep increasing and the services are shrinking.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

As has been discussed in Chapter 3, overcrowding, congestion and pressure on infrastructure and facilities are indeed major problems in some local government areas, as can be seen from population density data. These problems of congestion and inadequate infrastructure, shortage of affordable housing and lack of employment are not only experienced by refugees but present problems for all residents in these suburbs. Recently arrived refugees, however, are often reluctant to relocate in response to these issues if it means being separated from their family and community.

Safety and security

Safety is an important consideration for refugees and is often a factor in how they feel about the area where they live and in decisions they make about where to live. When asked what they liked about the places they lived, refugees often nominated feeling safe as a major benefit of their neighbourhoods and often also drew attention to the presence of a close-knit ethnic community in the area that contributed to that feeling. Conversely, the few refugees who expressed a desire to move often cited concerns about safety as one of their reasons for wanting to relocate, while those who had moved similarly cited safety concerns as a factor in those decisions.

> *I like this area, because this area is very safe. Because, like, as we were new here and for some of the areas that we were hearing that they have got some thieves or it's not safe. … since we have come here, we haven't noticed any bad things from here … like when we out at night, if you walk or if you drive in the street, so we are safe, nobody's going to harm us … in the previous area that we were living before … people were saying that we cannot keep our things outside … that when it's getting dark, in the evening, then we cannot walk in the streets because it's not safe.*
>
> **R8 (Salisbury)**

> *My neighbours are really friendly. Even, sometimes I'm sleeping with my door open … Sometimes, I forgot to lock it because it's a safe area, and I knew them since I came … [comparing to the apartment she lived in on arrival] Yeah, that one is too crowded, it's not safe.*
>
> **R15 (Hume)**

> *Yeah. It's quite safe. You know, there's always … because everyone knows everyone.*
>
> **CL8 (Hume)**

> *they really don't feel safe because the police … once they enter their house by mistake actually …. They were really fear about that … She said that they apply to settle in another, let's say suburb, but it takes time.*
>
> **R5 (Logan)**

Refugees' concerns with safety and security need to be understood in the context of their past experiences with situations of extreme danger, which often result in trauma and hyper-vigilance around these kinds of issues, making it hard for people to feel safe and magnifying the impact of negative experiences that feel in any way unsafe or threatening. While some refugees remarked that of course anywhere in Australia feels safe in comparison to the extreme situations of danger they fled from, other participants drew attention to the negative ongoing impact past trauma had on refugees' ability to feel safe in their new countries.

> *Very safe because still I didn't see any conflict. I'm not seeing any soldier, because you know in Africa every one meter or two metres someone is using gun. Yeah, you listen a lot of bad word, bad thing. But in here it is safe. I'm not see any soldier.*
>
> **R26 (Logan)**

> *When it comes to the first generation of migrants, I can guarantee you, the majority of them - maybe up to 90%- will never feel safe in their life. First of all, it needs only one thing to trigger the post-traumatic stress disorder that we all carry from the war zones and all the conflict that we faced.*
>
> **CL3 (Fairfield)**

> *People who have a history of trauma have difficulty feeling safe … and if someone doesn't feel safe, then they are not sociable … So, getting them to feel safe so they can connect is a big challenge.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

A wide range of circumstances and experiences can trigger trauma around issues of safety. Refugees who had been victims of crime or even just heard about incidences of crime in the area understandably often noted these experiences made them feel much less safe. Other experiences that compromised participants' feelings of safety included being the target of either overt or implicit discrimination, with some participants also raising a more diffuse sense of not feeling culturally and emotionally safe as a factor.

> *our house got broken into a few years ago, and that has led to trauma … People … from our community that had stones thrown into their house and people have been bullied and harassed when they've been walking on the streets.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

> *I feel safe. But sometimes people say "this happened", "someone got killed", "don't go out", "don't be late" and such stuff. More often when I don't think about it, I feel I'm safe here. If people, like my mom sometimes, would be like, "don't go out" I would start thinking about it.*
>
> **R2 (Fairfield)**

> *I feel very secure, and everyone treats me very nicely nowadays, because we understand each other very well, especially in the community ... sometimes, you might run into some people in the community who don't understand you, or who don't value your religion, and you might be upset. So it's 50-50.*
>
> **R23 (Dandenong)**

> *on the whole, I think the communities feel a degree of physical safety. Cultural safety is a mixed issue. I think people are somewhat sometimes a little bit wary about how they present and what they say.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

> *Yes, I do feel safe. I do feel safe around my community. Secure emotionally? I'm not sure.*
>
> **R1 (Liverpool)**

Particularly for women, aggressive behaviour directed to them in public had a major impact on their sense of safety.

> *Safety wise, it's not that good. Like there's a lot of issues, like when you go out at night ... There's always someone yelling at you, or it's not that safe. So that's the con with the area.*
>
> **R25 (Logan)**

> *As a woman you kind of feel vulnerable and you feel like you can't really do anything. Like I've had experiences myself like in public transport even ... I don't always feel safe, to be very honest. No.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

While perceptions of safety varied quite extensively based on people's individual experiences both in their countries of origin and in Australia, many community leaders stressed that the area they lived in was not any less safe than other urban areas and were quite critical of attempts to stigmatise their neighbourhoods as exceptionally unsafe or prone to social problems.

> *In general, the safety of Hume is similar to any other councils and similar to any other places.*
>
> **CL4 (Hume)**

> *Some people, you know, always spread rumours that the orth is not good. Many crimes, many problems there. People are not good. There's drugs. Something like this. But believe me - in my previous experience in other areas, like even in the city, you know, I had very bad experience there … here in my area … I've been there for more than nine years now. And thank God, you know, fingers crossed, nothing happened.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

> *the way [the area] is portrayed out there In the media, especially more than 10 years ago, it's not what it is locally. So usually, it's described as very insecure place with a lot of social issues and unemployment, drug, alcohol, all of those things … there are those issues … But it's no different from other places.*
>
> **CL13 (Logan)**

4.4 Community facilitates settlement

As discussed above, the main reason people give for living in the settlement city is that it allows them to remain close to their extended family and to people who speak the same language, come from the same culture or practice the same faith. The benefits of these community networks and family connections for successful settlement cannot be over stated. They are an important support for refugees as they start their settlement journey and learn how to make a home in their new country. Many people explained how family and community helped them to navigate education, work, housing and other services, providing an essential link between refugees and government services. Community and family contacts help people make appointments and fill in forms, they provide information and act as interpreters for people who don't know English or don't know the system. These networks thus reduce the burden of settlement on government and non-government agencies by effectively doing some of their work for them.

> *That helped a lot. They sort of showed us the ropes, introduced us to their friends, took us to places where we could get help if we needed, signed us up to university. …. So yeah, that definitely helps. Having people around. They're willing to take some time of their days just to help you settle. And then introduce you also to their friends or their connections and network.*
>
> **CL23 (Hume)**

> *Community support is really important, especially when you're trying to – there's day to day activities that are required for families to feel settled, that not necessarily, like, you know, the service provider can actually give or provide. There's a lot of, you know, like letters from Centrelink, and things like that, that's not really the role of a service provider. …. You ask your friend, you ask your family, you know, I'm stuck, what do you think I should do?*
>
> **CL8 (Hume)**

> *And I just like ask community that, this is the problem that I have. And they just like say, yes, this is the service that you can just like find. Or here you can go and get support. I think, mostly, is through community.*
>
> **R27 (Logan)**

It should be noted, however, that when refugees talk about the support they receive from 'their community', they may not see a clear distinction between family members, acquaintances, community associations and formal support services. Some people spoke about the help they received from uncles or cousins, from their religious congregation, from ethnic community associations, or from settlement services, TAFE or the local Migrant Resource Centre, from bilingual staff of mainstream services or from volunteers. All were classified as aspects of their local community.

Settling is much harder without community support

The importance of strong family and community networks for successful settlement and individual wellbeing is underlined by the experiences of the few people we spoke to who feel they do not, for various reasons, have a strong community around them. These people describe feeling lonely, isolated and lacking support, particularly when they first arrive.

> *When I am newly arrived in Perth there is no one to help us. There is a day when we have nothing at home to eat because we don't know how to go to the shop. We don't know how to get to the bus stop. We have caseworkers, but they are not Burmese and they do not speak our language.*
>
> **R23 (Dandenong)**

> *He feels lonely as he don't have many people to know and many people to help him. Just his family and children. So during the church or during the mass in the church, the mass finish, he talked a little bit with some people who he know them for about 10 minutes, 10 to 15 minutes. So he don't meet other community people and he most of the time at home. … He feel lonely and he don't have anyone to help him.*
>
> **R12 (Logan)**

> *So when we come here, is not much, not many people, no many people [from our country], so we can do our self. You know I want to go the shopping, I have to try myself. I want to go to Dandenong from here to there, so I need to catch the bus myself. I need to catch a train myself. I had to try, learn to try. But now it's easy. You know, now is many, many people [from our country] are here.*
>
> **CL16 (Dandenong)**

Places that do not have significant refugee communities also do not usually have the services that refugees, including those on temporary protection visas, need.

> *Only our Burmese is lacking for interpreting … some support service. Because in Melbourne we have a lot of Burmese people. In Adelaide we don't have a lot of Burmese community people, that's why maybe.*
>
> **R13 (Salisbury)**

> *Unfortunately, I should say that I've heard that some of the asylum seekers or detainees were also dropped off at Darwin, where there was no population at all, or at very far suburban areas of Sydney. And they were isolated, there was no sense of community. There was a language barrier with huge challenges and hurdles as newly arrived. …. For example, if I name some of the States or Territories, we don't see asylum seekers surviving there. As soon as they go there, they do not feel they belong, and they would rather migrate from that location to a demographic where they feel safer and have a sense of community.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

Potential downsides to living in a close community

Some refugee community leaders argue that closeness to community may have a downside in terms of limiting contact with and integration into wider Australian society as some people never create social ties beyond their own ethnic communities. A few say they have specifically chosen to distance themselves from settlement communities for this reason. A minority of those we spoke to were in fact quite critical of the settlement city phenomenon for this reason, seeing it as creating communities that are poorly connected to other Australians.

> *I've seen Afghans who arrived here 32 years ago and still they cannot speak English. What a shame. Why? And the reason is obvious. Because they just concentrate in a place where there were other Afghans and they make Afghan friends and they wouldn't touch the wider community and they stick to their own values, and now it's too late for them. …. If you concentrate in one place, it's a personal opinion, I wouldn't live just in one specific location because it doesn't help integration.*
>
> **CL10 (Logan)**

> *Unfortunately, the new arrivals and the refugees, they arrive to Australia, they settle in the same centres and they are left alone. They don't speak the language, they hesitate in speaking English.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

> *Because they want to stay in their area. They don't want to move outside Sydney or other LGA areas far from their community.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

Comments along these lines were relatively rare, however. Most refugees emphasised the positive benefits of living close to their family and community networks and some even overtly challenged the idea that this kind of ethnic clustering is problematic.

> *Some people might think it's like, oh, it's the ghettos or, like, you know, they're all there. But it's not that. It's because people have – in a different time, you know, like some people have been there in the 90s, some people early 2000 let's say, so forth. Because they've done it, it makes it easier for us.*
>
> **CL8 (Hume)**

Refugees want contact with the wider community – but it's not easy

Concern that living in a tight-knit ethnic community limits contact outside that ethnic group appears to be misplaced, both according to the majority of those we spoke to and other recent research.[22] Many refugees had social contact with people from other communities in their local area, or further afield, and those who were studying or who had a job reported having a lot of contact with people outside their family and community. Others were keen to meet people from other communities but felt they faced barriers doing so.

Settlement cities are not mono-ethnic. While refugees may spend a lot of their time with members of their own community, most also have regular contact with other people in their neighbourhood. Their first contacts outside their own ethnic group are most likely to be with people from other ethnically diverse groups. These may be neighbours, fellow students at English classes, other parents at their children's school, or other participants in community or religious activities. There is, for example, a lot of contact between people who share a common language, such as Arabic, or a common religion, but are otherwise culturally diverse. Many people were interested in making contacts and participating in activities outside their immediate community.

> *Most of the housing situation, it's like units mostly. And with the unit, so many different people. Like you can be here, and then the next unit, next door neighbour is like a white person, the other one is from Fiji, is from Burma, so very different. And at times, they do get like, you do get to engage with the neighbours.*
>
> **R25 (Logan)**

> *Because we are working as a volunteer in [settlement service organisation] that's why we met many people [from other countries]. For example, the Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, you know the Indian and Vietnamese, Chinese, got many community we met them.*
>
> **CL16 (Dandenong)**

> *For example, sometimes I go to pray in the mosque, so I saw Afghani, Iraqi, Syrian, sometime African, you know, Muslims, so from different backgrounds, so the religion you know, make them come together and try some time, you know, try a little bit of English between them, you know, to understand each other, which is one of the issues.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

> *Whenever I hear about children activities, for example, I take my children to Christmas carol activities in the big parks and the MRC activities. I don't hesitate to take my children to activities.*
>
> **R7 (Liverpool)**

In general, younger people, who often find it easier to learn English and are more likely to be studying or in the workforce, have a larger range of contacts outside their immediate community. They form friendships when they go to school or start tertiary education, or in their jobs.

> *They all are studying different schools, they are going to different college like, or they are working in different areas. They've got friends there and they gather with them and have, like, my son or my daughter, they've got a lot of friends from other communities, not just [ours], they gather with them, yeah, and, like, go to the beach together or to a party or birthdays.*
>
> **CL15 (Casey)**

> *I mean, my son, ... He has friends. Italian, you know, European, English. Iranian. And even his girlfriend, you know. Very nice girl, you know, from Iran. So he sometime, you know, bring his friends. And his friends, you know, speak to me and try our food and, you know, come to our house, and my children go to their house. So, I told you, the second generation are great.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

> *I have some friends who are from this culture. We talk over the phone. We can meet, maybe. But you feel the people from your country are closer.*
>
> **R9 (Liverpool**

Younger people were also more open to the idea of one day moving away from the place they were living.

> *Actually now, no. But maybe after, yeah, I live in other places. So for me, because now I'm living with my family, that's why they want to be close to my cousins. But after that, I don't mind if I live in other areas.*
>
> **R18 (Hume)**

Refugees face many barriers to communicating with the wider community

Although the refugees we spoke to are quite keen to have contact with people from other communities and with the wider Australian population, they see a number of barriers to achieving this. The main one was the problem of a lack of English language ability. Although many could speak English reasonably well, they did not think it was good enough for forming friendships with English-speaking Australians and did not feel comfortable interacting with other from a different culture. Older people and women who are caring for families find this particularly difficult. This is a circular problem. A lack of English limits contact with English-speakers, and in turn a lack of contact hinders English learning and confidence.

> *Like my mom, she arrived and she's old. She's almost 70. And her English is not very good. So she preferred to speak her own language. Yeah.*
>
> **CL15 (Casey)**

> *So I only communicate with my siblings, um, my Syrian friends and some Iraqi friends, and I don't deal with any other people. ..... The problem is the language. Maybe if I meet them, I can convey my message, you know, but I cannot communicate with them.*
>
> **R3 (Fairfield)**

> *But to be open to other communities, for the first generation it is not an easy process. First of all, how they can communicate because the language is not there. Second, there are cultural misunderstandings, because you don't know the cultural practices, in terms of greeting and other things.*
>
> **CL3 (Fairfield)**

Some people also noted a reluctance on the part of Australians themselves to engage with them in the way they would like. Sometimes there is a definite element of discrimination in this, but in most cases it is more likely due simply to a lack of awareness of cultural differences. This has not been helped by the restrictions on social activities and education during COVID lockdowns over the past few years.

> *When we arrived here, we only lived two or three months during which it wasn't lockdown. After that, we spent most of the time in lockdown. And that's why I don't have much connection with other communities outside of my community. Even for my studies, we study through online classes. And that's why it's hard to create a community and create connections with people.*
>
> **R24 (Casey)**

> *I feel like it's very hard to talk to Australians as related to your skin colour. They look at you in a different way. And some they're so friendly with my kids. I see them walking and some say hello, but some versus walk away.*
>
> **R1 (Liverpool)**

> *I've heard of many stories about not being welcomed into a venue. For example, let's say for young people, they don't want to socialize and they don't want to go to a club. You know, there're some barriers there. You know, some spaces are like, you know, they look at you. And they say, you know, you're not welcome here.*
>
> **CL19 (Dandenong)**

> *The only isolation is like, they try to break in or integrate with the, like, community or with the Australian people, like their neighbours. It is a bit difficult, maybe language barriers, or cultural thing, because our culture is a bit different.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

> *I think we all look for the community … We look for connections. And it's really hard to connect to people from other communities sometimes.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

Local governments work hard to bring people together and develop relationships with the broader community but not always successfully. One community leader suggested that these activities are not always very attractive to the people they are aimed at so attendance is limited to a small number of leaders rather than members of the community.

> *It's not promoted well in among the community, so not many people attend. So also the interest, you need to consider the interest of that community, where if you invite them for something that then they have no interest, then it's not many people are going to attend. … Usually it is a selected number of community leaders or community representatives that they are engaged with other services. It's the same faces or same people that attend but not from the grassroots. Not many people attend those events.*
>
> **CL7 (Dandenong)**

The settlement city and multicultural Australia

Living in a 'settlement city' is an essential stage in the process of making a home in Australia. This pattern of settlement has been established by successive generations of new immigrants. Over time, the need for support from the local ethnic community has declined and the concentration of people in one area has gradually become less obvious. Fairfield, in Sydney, for example, was known until the 1970s as a place of settlement for post-war European migrants before it became synonymous with the Vietnamese refugee community who were followed later by other refugee cohorts. The earliest settlers have

now moved from being new arrivals to form part of Australia's multicultural society and in the process become more geographically dispersed. Refugees from Vietnam have begun to make the same journey.

As the recent refugee settlers create a life for themselves in Australia they will, most likely, if they continue to receive adequate support from their community and from government services, follow the path of previous waves of migrants. As one service provider noted, in due course people from places like Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Africa will also, eventually, overcome barriers of language and cultural strangeness and broaden their horizons beyond the safety and comfort of their immediate community.

> *"And of course, then people start exploring it beyond that. And we've seen, you know, migration outside of Liverpool/Fairfield when people feel a bit comfortable and then start exploring beyond those council areas."*
>
> **SFG5 (Fairfield)**

The association of particular locations with a certain migrant community can, however, endure long after the new arrivals have settled and moved on, often to that community's benefit. In every Australian city, for example, there are suburbs that are widely recognised as the place to go to find good Italian, Greek, Chinese, Portuguese, Lebanese, Korean or Vietnamese cuisine. There are also rural towns and regions that are known for their long established Italian, Malay, Chinese or Sikh communities. Australia's history of migration has created a vibrant multicultural legacy and today's refugee settlement cities continue the process.

Chapter summary

Our interviews with refugees and community leaders reveal that most people feel very positive about living in their settlement city. Although they identified a range of attractive features of their area, including easy access to services, transport and shops, and the multicultural and tolerant nature of the community, the most frequent benefit they mentioned was the fact that they could live close to their families and other people with the same language, religion or culture.

Most of the places refugees settle have previously been home to other waves of migrants and refugees and this has established a network of support services and programs and a welcoming multicultural environment. However, each new cohort of refugee arrivals must establish their own community in their new home. A range of factors draw people to their settlement community. The most important in recent years has been the growing use of 202 visas, which allow people already living in Australia to propose family and community members as humanitarian visa candidates. However, refugees admitted on other visa types also actively seek out the places where they can find people from the same background and enjoy access to culturally familiar shops, businesses and places of worship.

Although there are many attractive aspects of the settlement cities, people also discussed the negative features. In addition to the challenges of language learning, finding work and dealing with Centrelink that face refugees throughout Australia, there are particular issues in some settlement cities largely relating to overcrowding and pressure on infrastructure and facilities due to failure to expand funding and services to match the rapid increase in population. Some people also had concerns about safety, although many also felt they were safe where they lived, and valued this about the area.

The close-knit ethnic community provides essential support to refugees as they negotiate their

settlement in Australia. The services provided by family and community networks supplement the formal assistance available from government and non-government bodies. Successful settlement would be much harder without them.

While some community leaders express concern that living in a close community may isolate refugees from the wider society and inhibit integration, this does not appear to be a long term problem for most people. Older arrivals and some women may find it difficult to build relationships with people outside their community, largely due to language barriers and lack of confidence, but also in part due to a reluctance on the part of other people to engage with them. Younger people and those engaged in the workforce, education or other community activities have extensive contacts with the wider community. The settlement city is not a permanent feature of the lives of refugees but an essential stage in the process of finding a new home.

5

Creating communities:

Community associations, belonging and social cohesion in settlement cities

Creating communities:
Community associations, belonging and social cohesion in settlement cities

The previous two chapters of this report considered what it means for refugees to settle well and how they feel about living in settlement cities. Here we turn attention to community-led associations and networks to show how community associations support people in the settlement cities, and to highlight some of the challenges they face.

There are many different groupings of people that can be called a community. In the context of this research, participants used community in a very broad sense. In this chapter we draw attention specifically to community associations that more formally represent migrant communities. We see these as distinct from but embedded within more diffuse community networks comprised of informal connections between friends and family. Community associations act as representatives of specific cultural, religious, omething and/or ethnic groups and are often an effective gateway for refugees, government agencies and service providers to connect to larger community networks.

Community associations form during the process of establishing lives in new countries. As one leader explained, after people settle 'they start forming their communities associations, and they start serving their own community' CFG8 (Liverpool.) When one's own community is established in a new place, this facilitates belonging and can be a way for people to connect and support each other. As another leader said:

> *So, when you have your own community established you start to feel you belong, you start to feel 'Yes, it's a new beginning for us now.' And also with a strong community, we can provide support for each other.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

Grassroots community associations take many different forms. Some focus on people from a specific national or cultural background, others are more expansive geographically, while others develop around shared languages. Many, but not all, are faith-based groups or connected to faith communities. The community leaders who create and foster these associations do so in relation to the needs that they perceive within their ethno-linguistic communities. Such associations may not necessarily be representative of all of the diversity of people and cultural groups within the settlement city, however. In addition, refugees are not a homogeneous group of people, and we cannot expect that community associations will always reflect the diversity of refugees' beliefs and opinions. None the less, such groups form crucial access points to the wider refugee community.

The community leaders who are the driving force behind community associations often hold multiple roles in the settlement arena, working or volunteering in settlement or mainstream service organisations alongside their role in community associations. Many of these leaders are also refugees themselves and have lived experience, and are able to consider settlement issues from all these different perspectives. This breadth of experience meant they were often key informants in our research.

5.1 Roles community associations play

Community associations take on many roles in settlement cities. Some community associations work closely with individuals who are in the process of settling. Others are more focused on community building and social cohesion through supporting cultural, social and/or religious activities and events. Community associations and leaders are at the interface between refugees and the broader community services and government sector which

supports settlement. It is this position as a conduit of connection which makes community associations vital to support settlement. Community associations make connections to support exchanges in multiple directions, for example, taking ideas and feedback from individuals to government, as well as helping to disseminate information about government programs and initiatives to otherwise hard-to-reach groups. The connections are not always hierarchal but can be within and across various communities.

Providing practical support for individuals

One of the key roles community associations play locally is responding when other services cannot. Because of their independence, community associations can be flexible in addressing what people require.

> *We are doing this as volunteers, we are free to do whatever we like with the group members, according to their needs.*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

Community associations offer support to undertake practical tasks that are essential to access services and institutions. When government services are not available, or people find them difficult to access, community groups step in.

> *We filling forms for them, all the forms: belong to the schools, hospitals, appointment to the doctors, applying for a house, if they having fines.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

> *Sometimes the case manager or social or community guide, they cannot come straight away, we can help them to take to the hospital or a GP or whatever they need.*
>
> **CL16 (Dandenong)**

As chapter 6 of this report shows, refugees face many different challenges when they need to access services. One crucial way for services to be more welcoming and accessible is when support is offered by people with relevant cultural knowledge. Members of community associations provide support in culturally appropriate ways: they understand the context that the refugee is coming from as well as the new systems and services that the person needs to access. This means, for example, they can explain what might be an unfamiliar process in a language that the refugee uses. While this can be done by settlement and other service providers, it is more commonly done by community associations who can be responsive to individuals' needs and provide support in informal ways which make refugees feel more at ease. Some community leaders suggested that the amount of work for community associations in this area was connected to a decline in services to support settlement. One said they found that 'everything's land heavily on the community to assist the refugee'. This, they explained, 'takes a lot of effort, a lot of hard work' to assist people navigate '[an] exhausting system'. CFG9 (Fairfield)

Organising diverse activities to develop communities

Community associations hold a wide range of events, classes and activities in settlement cities to support and develop their communities. They all encourage

social connections and cohesion in distinct ways. Some are skills-based, such as language and conversation classes; some focus on sporting and leisure activities that members are interested in; and others are social events connected to cultural and/or religious activities. Some associations work with people of all ages while others target specific age groups. They are, however, all aware of the diverse range of needs within their communities and have developed activities and approaches to try to address them. Most associations aim to provide activities that are free so that finance is not a barrier to participation.

Most successful groups are based around shared language and cultural understandings. As one community leader said 'people feel comfortable where they can speak the language, people understand the culture'. CRG8 Another leader explained that some groups are for people from shared non-English linguistic backgrounds, but on other occasions, when people with different linguistic backgrounds come together, the shared language is English. 'People are willing to mix with one another because English brings us together.' CL9 (Hume) One community leader reported on the success of an initiative of the Spanish and Latin American Association for Social Assistance (SLASA), which has been operating since 1978. SLASA sought volunteers from their community to support newly arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees with learning English while also engaging in social activities.

> *Although there were language barriers, although there were cultural barriers, people were actually able to sit together, eat, and talk. You could actually see people talking and laughing, which is amazing.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

While being confident in speaking English was noted by many as a key factor that facilitated settlement, it is also important that people can use and share languages that are culturally significant to them in their new home so as to maintain their distinct cultural identities. Activities organised by community associations facilitate the learning, use and celebration of non-English languages. Such language use and maintenance is crucial to successful settlement in that it is connected to wellbeing and community development, and facilitates community languages being passed on to younger generations who often do not have opportunities to learn and use native languages in schools[23] Support and activities in culturally significant languages can be done by service providers, as well as community associations, but it often relies on volunteers and is generated by community leadership.

> *When I moved to the [settlement city], I talked with our community, because we have around 200 something … people living here, and I ask them that if they needed support, I could run a language program. And at that time, I wasn't too busy, so I also ran a… language class for children. And now, all of them can read a little bit … and I am glad this happened.*
>
> **CL14 (Casey)**

As was shown in chapter 4, living in areas where languages other than English are spoken is highly valued by refugees. Community associations and leaders noted this as well and view supporting intergenerational sharing and use of community languages as a key aspect of their role.

Another leader explained how community events can serve multiple purposes. They can be enjoyable activities that improve people's wellbeing while also

being a means to share information about living in the settlement city. One community leader explained that they created art, music and dance groups for people interested in those types of activities and saw the function of these groups to 'pass on a lot of information, the English, the rules here, the respect, for the young generation'. CFG9 (Fairfield) The case study of the community significance of sport shows how sport generally, and football in particular, can promote community development in a range of ways.

Case Study: Community significance of sport

Football (soccer) was noted as a popular and enjoyable activity for people from a range of ethnic communities, and particularly for men. It not only provides connections locally and opportunities to increase skills, but also to connect with members of their own cultural communities in different parts of Australia.

> *It's something to get excited about, something to be engaged in. And I think it helps keep the passion alive and helps them become engaged in learning some skills.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salibsury**

Tournaments such as the African Nations Cup SA, established in 2001, and the Melbourne U Nite Cup, first held in 2013 by the Melbourne Chinese Soccer Association, were provided as examples of successful community events that groups are keen to participate in. Having one's community field a team in a tournament like these was described as 'a big achievement'. CL20 (Salisbury) The problem of needing to travel to games was, however, identified by one community leader as a barrier to being involved for some. CL7 (Dandenong)

Sporting teams support inter-cultural connections between ethnic communities as well as with more established mainstream communities when teams are part of local, well established clubs or are invited to share facilities, as was the case with the Ghan-Kilburn soccer club in Adelaide.[24]

> *Ghan-Kilburn soccer club, which is funded by members of the Afghan community and they have under eights and adult soccer, boys and girls … they're based in the mainstream club and they've got a very, very strong relationship with the club manager who's Anglo.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

Cricket has also been a popular sporting activity in Dandenong where community connections have been developed for asylum seekers and refugees, and with the established cricket club. An asylum seeker-led team, All Nations Social Cricket, was established in 2014 by Abdul Razzaq with the motto 'Don't Give Up, Give Back'. Razzaq's efforts and successes in community engagement have been publicly recognised in many ways, and in 2018 he was invited, along with a fellow All Nations player, to be on the board of the established Buckley Ridges Cricket Club Committee of Management.[25] Razzaq said about Buckley Ridges, 'I am

very happy to be involved with a club that is multicultural and look forward to contributing.'

Participating in sport generally was also seen as a means for expanding networks outside of cultural groups and promoting positive social values and interactions. As one young community leader explained, 'we were heavily engaged in sports, which is something that I find amazing because as refugees that helps connect with other people and picking up language that also helps, which is great.' CL23 (Hume) Another highlighted how shared sporting activities necessitated a 'coming together, accepting each other, having behaviours and having politeness. I mean, this is what the sport is all about, to be honest.' CL6 (Hume)

Bringing people together and developing connections between communities

As with the case of sport, many community events extend beyond one cultural group and are occasions for multiple cultural groups in an area to be publicly celebrated. One community leader explained they didn't want to bring just their own national group together 'No, you're bringing all the other ethnicities … So it is cross-cultural … we share together the food, the music, the culture, the dancing. So that's what we do.' CFG8 (Liverpool) When these events are held locally, in the settlement city, it was seen as easier for people to participate and to showcase the local community to people who attended from outside of the area.

> *And that's why we tried to bring those mainstreams here to Liverpool area through festivals and art and cultural events … If there is something multicultural and inclusive, we definitely participate as well.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

Another community leader spoke about the success they had in holding a film screening about refugees at a city based university which they found to be very supportive of their work. The event was open to all, but driven by the interests of a refugee youth group: 'as a group of young kids got together and said let's bring this movie over'. The documentary film had been well received internationally and was connected to their cultural background. 'So we thought to have the director coming and had that from the US, view the movie and gather donations as well.' CL23 (Hume). The success of this event was a source of pride and an opportunity for this group to share their interests with their own community and more broadly as well.

Working together with service providers and governments

Community associations are positioned at the interface between grass roots communities, service providers and all levels of government. As noted earlier, this positioning, with direct access to communities and in a voluntary capacity, is significant. One service provider explained 'those really community-driven organisations are really very powerful'. SFG2 (Logan) Community leaders often work together, as part of local network, frequently supported by community engagement work of settlement service providers and local government. This collaborative approach was noted as particularly valuable in the context of COVID-19 which is discussed in a separate case study. One explained 'We met together. We having a lot of

connection. We're having a lot of festivals and things. We sharing ideas. We're having friends, and this is a good.' CFG9 (Fairfield)

Community leaders who are involved in creating and running formal associations, as well those who act in this capacity more informally, often work in paid and volunteer roles in settlement service organisations. This enables service organisations direct access to communities, and enhances their capacity for genuine support of both individuals and communities.

Community leaders work very hard to advocate for their communities and local areas. They conveyed the importance of having groups that are connected to their specific cultural backgrounds, as well as broader organisations and networks that can represent issues collectively. Some felt that while they were willing to bring issues to light and be part of local committees, they were not always listened to.

Case Study: Community associations during COVID-19

While a number of studies have shown that refugee communities, in settlement cities and elsewhere, have been disproportionately adversely affected by COVID-19 in medical and social terms, the response to the pandemic positively highlights what can be achieved when community associations are meaningfully involved in service delivery and responses to local challenges.[26] The ultimately successful collaborations between community groups and service providers saw the development of effective and culturally appropriate techniques for health and vaccine information to be taken to refugee and migrant communities.

A significant outcome for community associations has been the mainstream recognition of the vital roles that local community leaders and associations play in times of crisis. As one community leader explained, their work 'became so pronounced that nobody could actually ignore that.' CL22 (Fairfield) The impact of community leaders and associations was substantial and effective because they create and maintain the networks and personal connections that people trust. The standard approach governments took in terms of communication did not work: 'The government couldn't reach to the communities, and they had to go dig deeper into the community leaders in order to get the message through or to receive feedback'. CFG8 (Liverpool)

A key success of community associations, in partnership with service providers in all settlement cities, was in providing accurate and culturally appropriate information about vaccination. There were initial failures of state and federal governments to engage with and provide material and advice in suitable formats and languages for CALD communities.[27] This was particularly significant in supporting people to be vaccinated. Community associations and leaders worked hard and mostly successfully to engage with government and advocate for materials in suitable languages and formats. Ensuring that vaccinations were provided in locations that were trusted proved particularly effective as seen in the community leader's statement below:

> *It helped to encourage people to get vaccinated when there was a hub in mosques or churches. So many people went to get vaccinated at mosques or churches because these places are trusted.*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

Some community leaders, however, reported that their advice on health messaging for particular cultural groups was not taken on board.

But, overall, community associations, service providers and government worked together successfully. Community associations and leaders were uniquely positioned to share information and support people in their local communities. As one service provider stated: 'COVID highlighted that, actually, without those community groups' capacity being built, you don't have the ability to work with communities.' SP2 (Liverpool) Another noted 'They've all been vaccinated. It's fantastic. Because,again, their local community did that.' SP1 (Dandenong)

In NSW settlement cities, the differentiated restrictions placed on people's movement and negative media attention were discussed as a significant barrier to positive engagement with refugee communities. People's past experiences of living through war and conflict was identified as a pre-existing factor which impacted on people's capacity to cope with harsh police-enforced lockdowns. Despite this, some community leaders spoke of increased social cohesion and pride in their settlement city emerging from the response to the pandemic.

> *One thing I see happening is that refugee people in Fairfield feel a lot more connected to Fairfield, after this, because during COVID, Fairfield has been put in the spotlight by the government and the media, and people have been treated in a very appalling way, in my view. So, because of that, people identifying with Fairfield actually became stronger.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

5.2 Challenges facing community associations and limitations of the support they provide

There are several challenges, of differing degrees of complexity, that community associations face. Community associations have concerns about being properly resourced to continue to care for their communities, to improve people's wellbeing and support them to live good lives in Australia. There is an awareness that the needs of communities change over time, new members arrive, and world events have impacts that are experienced locally. Community associations have solid knowledge, experience and skills that they want to bring to local and national conversations about policies that impact on people's lives, and they want to continue to work to foster positive relationships across cultural and ethnic groups within settlement cities which will enhance community life for everyone. The final section of this chapter outlines some of the key difficulties that community associations and leaders currently face.

Availability and access to facilities

The availability of facilities in settlement cities, as well as difficulties in accessing them, were noted by community leaders as two challenges. As one leader explained about their area, 'There is not enough facilities for the newly arrived communities … there is not enough facilities for new migrants to establish like a sporting club or use the grounds'. CL7 (Dandenong)

Another said, 'we have community leaders who are prepared to, in their own time, set up sport activities. But they don't get support from the government or they don't have access to school [grounds]'. SFG2 (Logan)

In addition to this, when spaces are available, the processes for booking are very difficult, particularly 'for people who don't speak English and aren't used to the bureaucracy'. CL7 (Dandenong) So even if facilities are available in the settlement city, there are difficulties in navigating the systems and languages used which hinders community associations in holding events and activities.

Newer settlement communities have less capacity to provide support

It takes time and resources for communities to establish themselves in settlement contexts. Creating formal community groups is one way that, collectively, communities organise and support themselves. Communities with longer histories of settlement in Australia have had more opportunities to do this than those who have arrived recently.

> *In the Latin American community, now we have lots of new families that arrived since the last couple of years. Well, because of that, is that we created a support group, you know, the community created this group to support the new arrivals. Because when we come here, you know, 30 years ago, we didn't have that. We really can identify with them, you know, when – we can see ourselves through them, you know.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

As discussed in chapter 4, many refugees settle in areas where family and community members live because a community is already established. Community associations connected to cultural groups that have longer histories of settlement are in stronger positions to provide support generally to all community members, including newly arrived refugees. Some groups have been able to establish institutions and facilities that their communities desire and need, including schools where languages are taught, religious centres and cemeteries, and social clubs with community facilities.

For other communities who have not been settling in Australia for as long, they have not had as much opportunity to establish themselves. Not only does this mean that their community associations are newer and still developing their skills and capacities, but also that community leaders from more recently arrived groups have additional pressures placed on them because these individuals are often in the process of trying to settle themselves.

> *We have a really good connection with one African youth community, but they also are really bombarded with their own things. Like, they're super, like, excellent kids, but they also have been bombarded with their own education and their work, and then other community problems. So the community leaders are actually inundated.*
>
> **SP6 (Casey)**

> *remember that these groups might be led by new arrivals themselves, or they might be led by those who are just over the 5 years or 6 years or whatever. They might be led by people who are still settling themselves. And so, on a social level, they provide a social net for their people … But on economic participation, on even, you know, educational aspect, on political or civil involvement, they still don't have that much capacity yet. And so, as much as they trying to be effective and providing support to the communities, there are areas' where the capacity is very, very limited.*
>
> **SP7 (Fairfield)**

As this statement above indicates, the lack of time community leaders themselves have had in their settlement journey means they may not always be best placed to provide a wide range of support, a theme that is taken up in more detail below.

Difference and conflict within communities

Community formation is not necessarily straight forward or harmonious. Different understandings, approaches and strategies can impact on how associations operate, as can different cultural beliefs and political ideas. Some differences and divisions exist prior to migration, or new ones can begin in settlement.

Not only does the trauma of displacement and the stresses of settling impact on community capacity, the religious, cultural, and political divisions that exist between people and groups also have ongoing influence.

> *Politics, language, play a very big role in the settlement of any community. For example, in my community, there was a dispute between different groups, in Iraq, and they brought it here, you know, even in their new … the politics play a big role, to divide the people into two groups or three, those against this idea. … It is no surprise if you find, for example, two or three leaders in one community.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

Community leaders were aware of the challenges of division and most reported they wanted to build more cohesive local communities and to reimagine relationships between people in the settlement cities. This can be particularly challenging when there has been, or continues to be, conflict between different groups from a nation or region and people from all sides are living in the settlement city.

> *We do not discriminate against ethnicity or what group you belong to, as long as you are from that country. Our doors are open to everyone.*
>
> **CL10 (Logan)**

In some settlement cities Arabic is a language that many refugees use and know. Focusing on Arabic as a shared language across different cultural groups was one way that new connections and communities are formed. One community leader described their service as being for

> *All the people speaking Arabic. Not for Iraq, for all the countries, the backgrounds speaking. For example, Egyptian they can come, Lebanese, from Jordan, from Syria. That's why in our office, I'm supporting a lot of Iraqi, Syrian people, Jordanian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Sudanese.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

Limitations of community associations in certain settlement contexts

There are some situations where community groups are not necessarily well situated or well equipped to assist refugees. Mental health and domestic violence were identified as two issues that community associations may find it difficult to respond to appropriately; the needs of some groups within the community, particularly women, may not be adequately addressed; and there are concerns that the information provided by community associations to refugees may not always be accurate.

Mental health and the wellbeing of individuals in refugee communities were raised by many participants as an area where support external to community groups could be helpful because of current community understandings. Suicide and mental health were noted by one young community leader who saw that people from their cultural community were grappling to understand the issue and so not well positioned to provide support.

> *The suicide rate has spiked among the young people here in my community … I've come from a culture that sees mental health differently … But if you're feeling unwell, they just continue to just push through … So mental health, I would say, is a huge problem in my community and it hasn't been acknowledged widely.*
>
> **CL19 (Dandenong)**

> *This community leader felt that there were generational differences, with 'young people … who are brave enough to start to discuss it in forums like Facebook—sharing their lived experience and being open about it. But it's gonna take a while'.*
>
> **CL19 (Dandenong)**

Domestic violence is another area where additional external support may be needed. Community leaders working in this area noted the importance of connecting people to existing services.

> *Support new refugees and migrants, especially people seeking asylum, to connect to the available services, to provide them with information sessions and educational programs, and also to build an ongoing connection between them and the government, both via advocating for them to the government, and via bringing government messages to them.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

One service provider suggested that because of the small and interconnected nature of some communities, it is more challenging to support people experiencing domestic violence. People are unwilling to speak out about this and 'there is a fair bit of under-reporting of domestic violence in that community'. SP2 (Liverpool) Despite concerns like this, mainstream services are not always culturally safe for refugees. There is scope for increased cultural competency and more targeted responses.

> *When it comes to domestic violence issues, and the police deals with CALD communities, so many clients complain about that, because they don't want the family to get separated. They want solutions, and I think that the police and service providers need to be trained on how to work with these families... We all know, and we are not going to accept anyone to be in a dangerous situation, and to be victimised because of family violence, power and control. But I think lot needs to be done in this space.*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

As noted here, small and closely connected refugee communities, where people all know each other, can be problematic for individuals. While community associations may offer a type of support that some members value, other individuals may not want their problems to be known within the community and 'would rather go to a third party'. SP7 (Fairfield) More generally, there can be negative impacts on individuals in terms of how communities operate.

> *Because the thing about community, your own community, it can be really positive, but it can also be really constrictive if it doesn't suit you. Because there is a cultural expectation that everyone's going to be the same.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

Another limitation of community associations is the question of how representative they can possibly be, and whose concerns and needs are not being met. One male community leader felt the experiences of women within his community were not always taken as seriously as they should be. He explained that many community associations have male leaders and therefore

> *what you get are the views of men, while the issues that women care about tend not to be talked about, but they tend to be hidden.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

> *[Gender division is] also a very sensitive area, and nobody wants to talk about that. And because it's so sensitive, it's so difficult to really get people to fairly engage with it in a way that actually listens to what women are saying, and to how they actually feel about this issue.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

This may be compounded by the role many women take in being the primary carer for young children and focusing their time on supporting their families in the settlement process (as discussed in chapter 3).

Service providers expressed concern that, at times, community associations and leaders do not always provide accurate information. This was not seen as being done intentionally, but rather accidently because not all community leaders have strong connections with the sector. The community leaders we spoke with were all well connected, and many worked or volunteered in the settlement sector, but this is not always the case. As one service provider noted, it is

> *Not to their fault, but because I think their roots are also not very strong. They have not that very strong knowledge themselves, so they are trying to help you with what they know'.*
>
> **SP5 (Hume)**

So while the social support provided is seen as positive, the advice that may be provided in other areas could create difficulties.

Do governments and service providers listen?

Another issue raised was around how advice, ideas and input from community associations and leaders are used by governments or services. From people's experience, it appears that, while community associations are always willing to respond to requests for input, there is not always the possibility for genuine listening to occur and actions to take place.

One leader lamented, 'when we have our conversations with the government, they actually have to take on board what we're saying and make the message relevant to each community, because not every migrant community is the same.' In addition, it was noted that 'there are a lot of boundaries that are placed on the migrant communities, that we can't actually make them [these talks and initiatives] really relevant to us.' This leader felt that the diversity within migrant and refugees communities was not well responded to: 'We're all different. We have generational traumas, we have different things that we've come from, and I feel like sometimes that's not really addressed, or taken seriously.' CL2 (Liverpool)

The lack of established and regular channels of communication for community associations to share needs and ideas was seen as a challenge. This is not the case across all settlement cities. Some have formal structures in place for communication and feedback. In one LGA where this is not the case, one leader explained, they saw cultural events 'as a way of telling the tiers of government issues about our community … But at the political level, that I don't think there is any formal structure of Council, trying to touch base'. CL5 (Liverpool) Even when structures are in place, the impact of the feedback they provide is not always obvious to the participants. For example, another leader said that while there were ample opportunities to raise issues and inform governments and service providers about their concerns, only 'minor improvements' rather than significant 'major changes' have been seen. CL7 (Dandenong)

Service providers also identified that collaboration and co-design between themselves and community associations could be improved. It was seen as important to build more trusting relationships and support the development of community leaders, in particular 'an engagement back to the communities they work with' was noticed as lacking. SP2 (Liverpool)

Community associations and leaders are not well resourced

The lack of funding and ongoing financial support was identified by many associations and leaders as a

significant issue for small community associations. Service providers noted that a heavy burden of work falls on community leaders without a commensurate level of support, and that community associations may not have well developed structures and governance to be eligible for government grants.

> *You know, really the government or the services really heavily rely on them. Yeah, they have their own jobs and their own family and their own, but they still do their best to work really hard to make sure the community is not struggling, especially at times like COVID, you know, when they were doing a lot of work. So I think they're at their capacity, but there really needs to be more resourcing around that as well. Where they're paid, you know, and more work is given to the communities, more power is given to the community.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

> *Ethnic leadership in [the settlement city] was never developed, never supported. We can take them so far, but if there's not going to be responded to by government, where do they go? There was no housing for them. There was no place to have their offices. There's no infrastructure with Council.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

> *sustainability of [community leaders] engagement has to be looked at. They can't be always volunteering. This is what we can see that they are trying to volunteer, and then it's not sustainable. They burn out.*
>
> **SP6 (Casey)**

The pressures placed on Community leaders in volunteering their time was noted by many across the settlement cities. Leaders explained that they felt misunderstood and described the difficulties they faced to carry out this work, and the personal toll they experience.

> *They think we do it because we love being leaders, they don't know that we have pain, and we don't want to see the people struggle. But if we keep doing this, we will be struggling one day, because you can volunteer certain time of your life, but not all your life! You have your own family, you need to feed your kids.*
>
> **CL3 (Fairfield)**

> *And the rate of depression is high. I tried to run a volunteering program, but I wasn't able to do it because I was alone. I invited some people to support me, but they said they needed money.*
>
> **CL14 (Casey)**

> *The voluntary work that leaders do is needed by local communities, but also not appropriately respected and valued. For example, one leader explained that when people hold paid positions, this can assist not only with career development but also be a real way for people to understand themselves as valued members of a local community workforce. They felt as volunteers they were being taken advantage of and never 'offering them at least casual or part time [paid work], or to climb the ladder to actually to see that they belong.'*
>
> **CL4 (Hume)**

The reliance on community leaders volunteering their time creates pressure for individuals. It is also a risk to the long-term viability of associations as well as the health and wellbeing of community leaders.

> *We've got jobs, and some of us full time. Yeah, others it's part time but at least long term. What we need is, and we always aspire, is when the funding is reached out and granted, they should consider the part of the budget that specifies that we want to employ at one or two people, to at least coordinate or manage the projects … Unfortunately, the funding was chopped off. So we ended up, it ended up us, again, to work as volunteers after working hours. I said: come on, we'll break down eventually! Yeah, we'll break down.*
>
> **CL21 (Casey)**

Chapter summary

Community associations and leaders undertake a range of roles in settlement cities, from facilitating on the ground support for newly arrived refugees, responding to issues and needs as they arise, developing programs to deliver to communities, holding festivals and activities, as well as working with service providers and government to represent their communities. There are differences in what community associations can offer, particularly because some groups are more well established than others. While the independence of community associations is valued, they could be better supported by government, with a commitment of longer-term funding to provide stability and ensure that community leaders who volunteer their time are not burnt out and that they are recognised for what they do.

Community leaders shared with the research team their commitment to working not only for groups closely connected to their own cultural and linguistic heritage, but also for all people who are resettled in Australia. They all appreciated and valued the multicultural nature of the settlement cities where they lived and worked, and many wanted to promote stronger relationships between migrant communities and the broader Australian society. Many noted that government cannot provide all the support refugees need, and that communities and community associations have a role to play. The many successes of community associations and connections were described, particularly in the context of COVID-19. There are challenges as well, and ways that community associations could be strengthened and better supported. The community leaders were all busy people who juggled commitments to make time to participate in this project. The work they do can take its toll. Despite this, community leaders were keen to share their knowledge, experiences, and ideas to support communities in settlement and were all committed to developing their communities in the settlement cities.

6

Services:

Accessing support in the settlement city

Services:
Accessing support in the settlement city

Service providers working in Australia's settlement cities are confronted with a hugely challenging task. Refugee entrants tend to arrive in concentrated waves and are, at the outset and often in ongoing ways as well, a very high need population, requiring assistance with many facets of making a new life in Australia. At the same time, however, refugees face enormous barriers in accessing services that most other Australians, and even most other migrants to Australia, are able to take advantage of with relative ease. Across Australia's settlement cities, a huge amount of work every day goes into bridging these barriers and ensuring refugees are able to meet their needs by engaging with the relevant services. While there are obviously limits to how much service providers are able to accomplish, this chapter is as much about celebrating their very significant achievements as it is about identifying ongoing issues with service provision.

The question of how, and how well, service providers are responding to these challenges is a complex one. In the first instance, it is important to note that not all services nor all settlement cities are alike in this regard. This chapter begins, therefore, with a discussion of some of the important differences between settlement and mainstream service providers, as well as between different settlement cities. We turn next to a discussion of the barriers refugees face in accessing services, considering both structural issues that make services hard to access, as well as more individual barriers such as lack of English language proficiency and knowledge about services. Next, we examine how service providers are working to address these barriers, noting successful strategies and using case studies to highlight programs that embody these approaches. The chapter ends with a discussion of service gaps that were identified across the settlement cities.

6.1 A tale of two cities: Settlement and mainstream services

How refugees fare when they try to get help from a formal organisation within the settlement city tends to vary significantly according to what kind of organisation they're dealing with. Generally speaking, refugees tend to have reasonably good experiences when they engage with settlement services. While settlement service providers are not always able to secure the outcomes refugees desire, organisations with long histories of serving refugees have developed a number of successful engagement strategies that facilitate access and minimise barriers for refugee clients. Their workforces are highly diverse and often include people from refugee or refugee-like backgrounds, language interpreters are readily available and staff have a deep and sophisticated understanding of the challenges refugees face. For these various reasons, which we explore more fully later in this chapter, refugees generally tended to respond quite positively when asked about the kinds of services these organisations provide.

However, the vast majority of services that refugees need to engage with are not services targeted specifically to them but are rather the mainstream services we all access as part of our day-to-day life in Australia, whether it be going to the doctor or sending our children to a local school. When it comes to refugees' ability to access mainstream services, the story is more complex and experiences more uneven.

Some mainstream services located within the settlement city are quite aware of the challenges refugees face in accessing services and responsive to their unique needs. Local councils and libraries stood out as exemplars of thoughtful engagement with refugee and multicultural communities. Even in more recently established settlement cities (such as Casey) and settlement cities where multicultural

communities still represent a relatively small proportion of the overall population (Salisbury, for instance), these kinds of organisations were widely praised for making a genuine effort to engage with refugee populations:

> *[refugee] communities do provide regular feedback that they feel that they are very well supported by the settlement services, and Fairfield City Council.*
>
> **SP7 (Fairfield)**

> *Casey's not so much culturally inclusive [as] Dandenong, a similar level to Dandenong yet. But Casey Council ... we can see now there is that great enthusiasm and attitudes towards Council spaces and programs to be inclusive of cultural diversity, which also helps.*
>
> **SP6 (Casey)**

> *Salisbury Council, you know, realise that and provide some good services to the new arrival, the new community there ... the council, you know, just made it easier for them to establish worship places, so we have a good mosque there ... they meet with the communities' leaders and spoke to them on what they want ... Very good. Very cooperative.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

> *our library's got material in 18 community languages: magazines, books, CDs, and DVDs, as much as we can source ... Our library's open for everyone, you can just come in, sit at the table, and have a conversation, book a room, or meet on regular basis. Community organisation didn't have to pay anything ... the library is free ... we make them feel welcome.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

Importantly, while participants recognised and valued more ceremonial acknowledgements of multiculturalism and of refugees, such as hosting events during refugee week or displaying welcome messages in multiple languages, it was the enactment of these values in everyday practices that really stood out to participants as a key factor in the extent to which such services embodied inclusivity or lacked it.

> *I remember when I came as a refugee, the first sign I saw in the Hume City Council was listed in seven languages, and my language was one of them. And I was like, 'Oh, it's saying welcome in my language!', and I still remember that.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *I've been to different meetings of the council ... they have little things like ... if there's been a South Sudanese speaker, the afternoon tea is South Sudanese. You know, now that to me —to go to that sort of trouble—is a really good sign.*
>
> **SP1 (Dandenong)**

> *At one point with the … council, we're kind of going, well, your swimming pools are not accessible, is not inclusive. While they're open, they're available, but CALD community are not coming to your swimming pool. … You rock up, you wear a certain swimwear, people look at you as you from another planet, what are you doing here?*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

As shown by the last quote, councils did come in for some criticism when the day-to-day experience of their services was seen to fall short of their ostensible commitments to multiculturalism. On the whole, however, they were spoken about quite positively, especially in comparison to mainstream services considered as a whole.

When we turn to other kinds of mainstream services the story is quite complex, however. Some organisations and service areas are obviously actively working to make services accessible while others are facing greater difficulties with accessibility and cultural competence. Centrelink and the former jobactive (now Workforce Australia) agencies came in for particularly ferocious criticism across all the settlement cities, confirming the findings of earlier research focused on Fairfield jobactive providers and suggesting that the recommendations of that report need to be applied more widely.[28]

> *If Centrelink could be a little bit easier on them, especially job agents, because they send generic messages and that causes a lot of stress to people, because they don't understand … 'If you don't attend such appointment, your income will get suspended'. … Come on!! Why do we have to use that language?*
>
> **CL9 (Hume)**

> *Job provider are, from my personal experience, you know, they're not doing their job very well, unfortunately. Especially with migrants. No interpreter. … They just want them to fill out the form and say, I was looking for 10 jobs every fortnight and that's it. Not really helping them.*
>
> **CL12 (Salisbury)**

> *And then when they go to job providers, they get told off, and sometimes, blackmailed … 'If you don't find these many jobs, we will stop your payment'. … I don't think that staff members who work in job service providers are culturally trained. I don't think they're trained to be culturally safe or that they are even trained about cultural awareness.*
>
> **CL20 (Salisbury)**

As these quotes illustrate, what makes Centrelink and the jobactive (now Workforce Australia) agencies so hard to deal with is not so much the formal requirements they impose on welfare recipients but rather the way they interact with refugee clients. The abrasive, culturally insensitive and inflexible attitude refugees encounter from such agencies makes no allowance for the particular challenges refugees face, often including their inability to understand what the servicee provider needs from them due to language barriers.

The transition to Workforce Australia has nominally created the possibility for licenses to be granted to refugee-specialised services. However, refugee licenses have in fact been granted to only three providers across Australia, all located in Melbourne, and Hume LGA is the only one of the 7 settlement cities which falls within an area covered by a specialised service.[29] Unemployed refugees in most settlement cities will therefore continue to be forced to engage with generalist providers who have in the past (under the jobactive system) had appalling track records of assisting them. Although Workforce Australia is a new program, punitive and complex points-based systems, together with a shift to online delivery, will in all likelihood make Workforce Australia even worse for refugees than jobactive was.

More generally, the neglect of cultural competence and sensitivity in how a service is structured, which is so starkly illustrated by the example of jobactive, was also the main problem identified in connection with a wider range of mainstream service providers who often, in fact, rely on settlement service providers to bridge whatever gaps exist in their capacity to accommodate refugee clients.

> *Going back to that Men's Shed, when I wanted to enrol my husband who has dementia, they said they were on Fridays. Well, for a Muslim man who goes to the mosque, Friday does not work … That itself is telling that it was isolationist. We need to foster inclusion, and inclusion means to be open to all races, all genders, all ages, all religions.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

> *we do quite a bit of work in secondary schools in the northern area around racism and inclusion. And quite frankly, that's where the real issues are. Kids don't make, necessarily, a very positive transition … often because schools are intolerant or not dealing with intercultural conflict … They are intolerant of kids who have family situations like oldest girls having to look after younger kids…. The school does not show respect to them. There are lots of unhappy angry young kids of colour in schools.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

> *they're referred to agencies, but then agencies in turn refer back to us … quite often, in more complex situations, our staff are called upon to provide extra support … services, when they find it a bit more difficult and they're migrants, they just refer them to [a settlement] agency.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

While not all mainstream services are characterised by these kinds of problems, it is obviously not an acceptable state of affairs for essential services like education or healthcare to only intermittently be accessible for refugees and other migrants with complex needs. As the quotes above illustrate, there are evidently major shortfalls in cultural competency in many services and settlement services are often relied on to fill the gaps that result. As we'll see in more detail below, too often cultural competency is conceptualised narrowly, as merely a question of in-language support rather than a whole-of-organisation approach to assessing how services are delivered and how they can be tailored to better engage with local communities.

These deficits of accessibility and inclusion are not, however, to be blamed solely on those who oversee the service organisations that are non-inclusive. The underlying issue is not simply that some individual organisations' policies are not inclusive but rather that ensuring accessibility across the system has simply not been enough of a priority for the governments whose funding and policy priorities shape what organisations are and are not able to do.

While funding is provided in a piecemeal way to facilitate access to this or that mainstream service, these programs are limited in scope and duration and evidently not adequate to the task at hand. Responsibility for ensuring equitable access is often devolved to individual organisations that are not consistent in their capacity to identify and address issues. As a result, accessing essential services remains unreasonably difficult for refugees and this is a problem that can only be seriously addressed by providing mainstream service organisations better support with addressing accessibility issues. Running schools, clinics, hospitals or indeed any other social service is difficult in its own right. It isn't reasonable to simply leave mainstream service providers to their own devices in responding to the particular needs of refugee clients when an adequate investment has not been made in their capacity to do so. Many mainstream service providers clearly need to do better at making their services more consistently inclusive and accessible. This, however, will require a greater systemic commitment to inclusivity from state and federal governments, backed by clear guidelines that ensure system-wide accountability for inclusive practice and appropriate funding streams that facilitate capacity building for inclusive practice.

Accessibility issues with mainstream services tended to be raised more frequently in settlement cities where the overall character of the population was less multicultural and the ethnic profile of the refugee cohort more diverse. As we note in the individual profiles of the 7 settlement cities, the diversity profile of the LGAs in this study varies enormously. Compare, for instance, Fairfield, where 75% of the population speak a language other than English at home and the recent refugee intake is dominated by Arabic-speakers from the Middle East, with Logan, where only 18% of people speak a language other than English at home and the recent refugee intake is much more culturally and linguistically diverse. Unsurprisingly, even accommodating the need for an interpreter was an ongoing challenge for mainstream services operating in such contexts.

> *the Syrian … said he didn't understand her English, he was having difficulties with her English, and her response was, Well, I don't, I don't speak Arabic either. So it was a fairly impatient response, and I think we would all have examples of mainstream services in Adelaide, really lacking cultural competencies.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

> *Part of the equity and equitable access is also access to interpreters. We don't have enough interpreters, quality interpreters, who can support patients and doctors. So that again, makes it more challenging to be able to have equitable access to service.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

By contrast, in areas with more ethnically concentrated refugee populations (which tended also to have highly linguistically diverse non-refugee populations), service providers and community leaders took much more for granted that it would be possible, in any given service area, to locate someone who shared a linguistic and cultural background with a refugee trying to access the service, although people did also note that for more specialised services this might greatly reduce people's choices of service provider or result in long delays. Furthermore, these examples of greater accessibility were often the result of local initiative, for example, bilingual doctors choosing to set up practices in the area, or individual schools making a point of recruiting culturally diverse staff, rather than over-arching government policy, meaning they were quite piecemeal.

> *There are many interpreters, many bilingual doctors, you can go to a street full of GP doctors all bilinguals.*
>
> **CL4 (Hume)**

> *They do have many teachers from different backgrounds and they try to really complement the fact that kids are different backgrounds.*
>
> **CL19 (Dandenong)**

> *most of the stories I've heard from the women that they managed to really to see doctors from their background. But the other side of that they kind of had no option but that option.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

> *when the person with disability needs to see a psychologist, an occupational therapist, or a speech pathologist, it's very difficult to get anyone who is bilingual. And it could be months, if not over a year.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

Not too much should be made of this distinction, however. Across all 7 LGAs, many participants flagged issues with access to mainstream services and it is clear this is a widespread concern. Nonetheless, it seems that the presence of large concentrations of people from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds makes it both more pressing and also in some ways easier for mainstream services to make a greater effort to respond to the needs of such communities. More pressing because a greater proportion of clients in such areas are from CALD backgrounds, and easier in the sense that the linguistic and cultural competencies required are more widely distributed in such communities.

6.2 Barriers to access for refugees

A refugee trying to engage with a service, whether it be a settlement or mainstream service, has won half the battle simply by dialling the phone number or walking in the front door. Barriers often simply manifest as refugees never accessing the service in the first place or delaying access until their needs are critical.

Barriers to access do, as we saw above, sometimes take the form of refugees being unable to understand, or even being treated insensitively by, a service provider. This kind of experience is, however, probably fairly uncommon except in the case of mainstream services that refugees are compelled to use – the Workforce Australia system for adults and schooling for children being the most prominent of these. However, for services that refugees are not, in one way or another, coerced into using, non-engagement is actually the main concern. The following section is primarily about addressing non-engagement, as opposed to unsuccessful engagement.

Sometimes this failure to access a service is in fact due to services being delivered in a way that structurally makes them inaccessible for refugees. The remedy is in rethinking how the service is being delivered. Often, however, the problem lies not so much with the service itself as with refugees' lack of confidence to engage with an unfamiliar organisation and is best addressed by engagements which build that confidence.

With respect to structural issues that complicate access, participants identified three main types of barrier: physical, digital and cultural. Physical accessibility is the most obvious of these. If a refugee cannot physically get to a service, they are obviously not going to be able to access it. Physical access is often complicated by recent arrivals' lack of a car, a driver's licence or even the ability to drive, or their limited capacity to navigate the public transport network. These all combine to make the geographic ambit in which refugees feel comfortable fairly narrow compared to Australians who can drive, are more familiar with public transport options, and can more easily access help if they get lost.

> *But then, there are transport issues as well. We shouldn't forget about that, because it's really important especially for newly arrived people who have small children … imagine if children need to attend primary school … and parents also need to be in the classroom themselves at nine o'clock, and don't have transportation! Imagine how much time and effort would that take for the parent to make that happen.*
>
> **CL9(Hume)**

> *And we had no access to mobile phones, we had no car, and there was no way to go there, because we didn't know how to catch a public transport. We had no understanding at all. … we would walk miles and miles and kilometres.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

> *They asked me to interview people about barriers to accessing health services. And one of the things people said to me was that they did not have a car, they had to catch public transport to go to appointments.*
>
> **CL14 (Casey)**

Of course, many services are today accessible online and some mainstream services have moved to digital access as the dominant mode of engagement. This seems to circumvent one set of issues to do with access but in fact simultaneously creates others. Filling out a form online doesn't require leaving the house. However, it does require an internet connection, access to a device that can access the internet, the technical wherewithal to use that device and navigate the relevant website and, of course, often some level of English literacy – any or all of which many refugees may be, and in fact often are, lacking.

> *A number of government services, for example, are now available and offered online. And so, if you are illiterate in your own language, illiterate in English, technology is a new thing to you, how are you expected to create a myGov account or you know, Centrelink account … [this is] a systematic issue whereby systems are not so flexible and so easy to navigate by those individuals.*
>
> **SP7 (Fairfield)**

> *people arrive and they're not really equipped to access devices and Internet, so to be able to access the means to do so. Because they need an Internet connection, but the skills as well.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *in Fairfield, we have one of the lowest wifi and devices uptakes. We have very low numbers, especially amongst cultural communities.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

The final dimension of accessibility, and one we've already touched on, is the cultural dimension. Language issues and interpreter availability are one aspect of this, but cultural accessibility goes well beyond language. Many refugees are from places where accessing social services is not very commonplace and problems are not usually resolved in this way. Even when refugees do have some experience with seeking formal assistance, Australian services are often based on culturally unfamiliar or even uncomfortable ideas, and can be very bureaucratic. Consequently, they can be very difficult to navigate without a lot of additional assistance, which is not always available.

> *In our culture that we're raised that we don't talk much about our problems. And I know some families if they have a child or someone in mental health, they don't mention it, because this is not nice and the other families avoid them.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

> *And a lot of the time, culturally, people find it really difficult to trust and be willing to open up to go into other places to seek help. And so given the waiting list, we find that a lot of people are, by the time that they're due to see someone, they are like – no I'm alright or I don't want to.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

> *Access to services? No, they don't have the same. They don't have the right access to services because there's not the right cultural competency … Yes, we've got the language in house, or we've got the translated information. That's not cultural competency for a deeper engagement. So cultural competency and engagement is really shallow.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

The barriers described above are of a structural nature. Addressing them requires providers to reflect on how they are delivering a service and whether the method of delivery itself is making unreasonable assumptions about the pre-existing competencies of potential refugee clients. Culturally competent service delivery involves not simply access to interpreters, translated material and individual staff trained to navigate cultural difference. It also involves examining the wider assumptions and expectations embedded in how a service is designed or delivered, to assess whether these are inadvertently exclusionary.

Other kinds of barriers are what we might think of as barriers of unfamiliarity. Participants often described to us situations where refugees are unable or reluctant to access services not so much because of anything to do with the service itself but rather due to a lack of knowledge about, familiarity with and therefore confidence in navigating the service landscape. One refugee described this problem very eloquently, drawing on an experience of being reluctant to see the dentist soon after his arrival.

> *I think mostly is because you don't know what happens. Like you don't know how it works… I had one of my teeth had to … pull it off. And I knew that there's support that you just call and make appointment … But I was just like, what can happen if I make an appointment and go there? … Is it something that you might regret going there, you know? And I think it was mainly about the general picture of what happens in there. But now, even if it is a new service that I just like want to go there I might do a bit of research of that was happening there. And when I get the general idea that this is what they gonna do, what they offer.*
>
> **R27 (Logan)**

Obviously, the barrier here was not anything to do with the dental service itself but rather this young man's own general lack of confidence in identifying and accessing the service due to his limited knowledge about it. Clearly, this kind of hesitancy is best surmounted, as he himself notes, by being able to access more information about unfamiliar services – something he noted doing at first with the help of better informed community members and then by himself as his confidence grew. This story of a hesitation to engage with services due to an inadequate knowledge about them, often exacerbated by language issues, was commonly repeated by participants.

> *If we don't have knowledge about health services, how can we access them? People come with ongoing health issues, and when they come here, it is hard for them to follow, and sometimes children have to interpret for them, and they are afraid … you and I don't want our little children being involved in serious stuff.*
>
> **CL14 (Casey)**

As some of the above quotes illustrate, settlement service providers are aware of this issue and attempt to correct for it by disseminating as wide a range of information as possible about how services work in Australia during the first stages of the settlement journey, when their engagement with refugees is at its most intense. Many noted, however, that front-loading this kind of assistance at an intense time in refugee families' settlement journey tends to result in information overload and is therefore relatively ineffective.

> *Not all the people know about the services, especially the people who doesn't speak English language only speak Arabic. Even the young people know a bit of English or has some level of level two or level three of English language, they don't know where they have to go.*
>
> **CFG9 (Fairfield)**

> *For anything to do with settlement, learning has to come in different ways, at different times of your settlement's journey. Because some information might be imparted to you at a certain point in which you weren't ready to engage with that, because you had other priorities.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *their lack of understanding, the language barriers, the knowledge of understanding and education, the background, and that kind of thing, they are blind eyes. They in the middle of nowhere and they don't know who to reach. They only know Centrelink. And Centrelink is one of the toughest social services.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *really map out what are the information that needs to be shared at the initial stages of the settlement, as opposed to share everything when people arrive, and then they probably take in only 5% of what has been shared, because they're overwhelmed with just processing those information.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

> *It's overwhelming. It's a lot of information coming into them from many different people. On a daily basis, they could see a case manager, a housing officer, a BG support worker … so if I'm a refugee … in the first few months, you know, I'm basically going to lose track of where, and who, and how. Because I mean, where I come from, there was none of this. And now all of a sudden, I've become the centre point of attention. And it's too much for me.*
>
> **SFG5 (Fairfield)**

6.3 What works: Lessons and exemplary initiatives from the settlement city

Service providers who have spent decades helping refugees navigate and obtain desired outcomes within their local service landscape have much to teach us about how to design services and programs that work for refugees. In this section, we examine the approaches and strategies that were most frequently mentioned as being essential to exemplary service delivery and offer some case studies to concretely illustrate how these are being enacted around Australia's settlement cities. These include the engagement of bicultural workers to reduce cultural and language barriers, the creation of service 'hubs' to create accessible one-stop shops where refugees can access help and information, outreach programs to build confidence around engaging with services, and collaboration with community associations to disseminate crucial information about services.

Bicultural workers

Probably the most often mentioned strategy for making services more accessible to refugees was the employment of bicultural workers who reflect the ethnic demography of the community. In chapter 4 we saw how the presence of people from similar backgrounds was a key part of what made refugees feel at home in the settlement city. Similarly, the presence within service organisations of people who look like refugee clients, understand their culture and speak their language was a key contributor to refugees being able to easily and successfully engage with services.

Probably much of the difference described earlier between settlement and mainstream organisations (and more and less diverse LGAs) can be explained with reference to the presence or absence of bicultural workers. The practice of employing bicultural staff is commonplace in settlement- or migrant-oriented organisations across all the settlement cities and tends also to be more common, as we saw earlier, in more ethnically diverse LGAs, if for no other reason than that the majority of the population in such places is itself bicultural.

> *I think each organisation needs to have multicultural workers. If they hire multicultural workers, they get a better outcome. A person with similar culture, who understands the language, is important.*
>
> **CL14 (Casey)**

> *we've kind of seen a lot of changes now in services, where the workforce is reflective of the community, to some degree. Not all the service, but majority of the service. Particularly those who are servicing our communities. So that's a good sign because they have a better understanding of the community. And I always say this thing about cultural competence and training, you can train someone, but they will never be the same as the person from that cultural background.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

> *they do so much more than providing language support …. It's a two way exchange, and not just explaining to clients, but actually making sure that the service provider knows what they're doing as well.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *Some schools are doing well. And the schools that are doing well are schools that have a youth liaison officer reflective of the community.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

Our participants also issued some cautions around the increasingly common practice of hiring bicultural workers. Such workers are sometimes employed in tokenistic ways that reduce the positive impact they are able to have. They are concentrated at the frontline of service delivery and kept out of managerial or program design roles, meaning they have limited say in how service delivery actually occurs. There was also a sense from some participants that the informal role such workers play in connecting services and communities is not necessarily well recognised and well supported by the organisations that employ them.

Bicultural workers are not a 'magic bullet' to fix access issues but instead need to be employed as part of a whole-of-organisation cultural competency approach which pairs bicultural workers with institutional self-reflection on culturally inclusive practices, and which empowers bicultural workers to participate in program design in the service of this broader aim.

> *In most of the organisation or agencies, they would sometime just employ front line staff members from CALD communities, not necessarily giving them the opportunity to grow within the organisation and move up the ladder to management roles or executive or board position …*
>
> **CL13 (Logan)**

> *And I've seen that sometimes, when people offer employment to people with refugee backgrounds, they're not legitimate roles. They can be a bit tokenistic. I just think that the more embedded they are at an early program design, the more impactful they are.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

> *They are sitting next to the client on the weekend at their place of worship, while our work is turned off on the weekend. Often, people in those roles are left very exposed … They disclose that they are not supported, they do not even get the formal supervision that the case managers would get. So, this role needs to be really rethought, with a proper structure and support.*
>
> **SFG3 (Hume)**

Case Study: Southwestern Sydney Health District refugee recruitment initiative

Bringing bicultural workers into mainstream services is sometimes a strategy deliberately pursued by mainstream services interested in the benefits such workers bring. Here one Liverpool service provider describes a program that created refugee-identified pathways into employment in the hospital system, in collaboration with settlement providers to support refugees into these positions.

> *We developed a program that focused on pathways for refugees in health, and that partnership allowed us to be able to work with hospitals, to identify … some vacancies, and what type of skills were going to be required. And then from there, we were able to customise some training, and put it out to the refugee community. And then, we had about 30 people going through the program, and the Local Health District then allowed for an alternative recruitment process for those who were interested in employment … seven people were employed through the hospital.*
>
> *Looking at what worked in that partnership, it was that it had all the aspects identified in many reports when it comes to refugees … So, we had the local community organisation that was able to provide that support … and we also had the hospitals that were able to provide that warm welcoming to their workplace, and that alternative recruitment process, as [that] can be really challenging for newly arrived migrants or refugees. And then, we were able to also include some of those employability skills that employers value as part of their courses, as well as to provide some language support in the classroom,*

> *along with some additional support for assessments. So, I think that we looked at the whole holistic approach, that's why we've had success with that project.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

Service Hubs

One very common strategy to ease physical and even informational barriers to accessing services is the creation of place-based hubs in places that refugees tend to congregate or pass through. This effectively creates sites where services can reach out to the refugees themselves, rather than refugees having to seek out far flung services, and has been found to be an effective way to reach otherwise hard-to-reach communities. Service hubs can take the shape of conscious decisions to co-locate services in centralised areas of an LGA, but, while this does happen, many service hubs are more informal in nature. English language schools often serve as informal hubs, as sometimes do libraries, community centres and increasingly, as we see in the case study below, schools.

As well as creating opportunities to access services and programs directly in a convenient place, service hubs play other important settlement functions. They often serve as places where refugees can go to get informal assistance with a wide variety of settlement issues and are also sites of multicultural mixing, where people from many different communities aggregate.

> *We had some workshops for Afghan mothers … we deliberately decided to run them at local primary schools … a lot of women came who we've really struggled to get to come to our school, you know, travel … the women who came like they were absolutely lapping up the information they were getting about the law in Australia and about child protection … it's the point of doing something local, I guess, of actually having things in a local place where they organically orient to already. Their kids go to the primary school.*
>
> **SFG1 (Salisbury)**

> *the service provision to communities is really centred around the MRC and Navitas really. People try and come into our space as service communities.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

> *as a library service … we are the first point of call … Quite often we'll have people coming in who need help to do an online real estate application. We help people retrieve birth certificates for their children, will help them lodge immigration papers, and link their Medicare cards with their Services Victoria app. And we also offer relevant programs like English conversation classes, and citizenship classes. … We will partner up quite often with community organisations. We've had AMES deliver conversation classes at our libraries, and Sequel and Local Community Houses*

SFG6 (Casey/Dandenong)

Case Study: Community Hubs Program (Hume and now national)

Service hubs often arise spontaneously in local settings to meet particular needs but this model can be deliberately rolled out on a larger scale, as is illustrated by the National Community Hubs Program. The hubs are located within primary schools and service both refugee and migrant children and their parents, particularly mothers who otherwise struggle to engage with services.

> *The Community Hubs Program, which is now a national program, started in Hume. So, it was an early Intervention program to support families, especially the newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers in the schools, that started about 10 years ago in 10 of Hume's hubs, and now expanded at the national level, and we are up to 95 hubs. So, obviously the model is working very well, and the work is highly recognised … we moved from an initial part where it was really about playgroups and English classes, an early intervention with kids, to lots and lots of programs. Now, we are exploring some programs about women's empowerment, and including the rest of the community as well. And … the hubs are doing an amazing work in terms of integrating into the wider community. So, we try to avoid having language specific groups, and it is always quite powerful to see, for example, an Indian mom being the facilitator of an Arabic speaking playgroup. Having this mix up really gives courage to anyone from any background who is living in this area which is predominantly Arabic speaking. It really gives them power that they can be amazingly successful, even in a community that doesn't really belong to them.*

SFG3 (Hume)

Building confidence through outreach programs

As discussed in the proceeding section, refugees often hesitate to access services due to either a lack of knowledge about the existence of the service or uncertainty about how to access the service and what will happen when they try to do so. Service providers across our sample settlement cities work to reduce this kind of hesitancy by running outreach programs that seek to familiarise refugees with the issues they can address and how to access the services they offer.

> *[we] start building relationship with the community about the health system, because then if we get to the point where they need access to health system, they have at least some sort of health navigational and health literacy skills … So they have a better confidence. When they do need to access the healthcare, they can access the healthcare.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

> *We did a capacity building about the police and reporting and legal education … they were hugely successful. We weren't looking to try and get people to report extra. The focus was just building their understanding of police.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

> *[We] go and do outreach with them … we have gone into those communities, we've discussed the sort of courses they want, and we've delivered them in their environment. That's with different church groups, or any group, plus the community hubs … we include some transition support as well, whether it's towards the end of the course, we'll travel with them to the local college, and they can get to experience what the college life is about, as well, and just see how easy it is to actually get to TAFE.*
>
> **SFG4 (Liverpool)**

Case Study: Refugee Legal Aid Program – Fairfield mock court days

Below is an innovative example how even a very complicated service like the legal system can be made more accessible through well designed outreach programs.

> *I think there are also lots of agencies that are really working hard to ensure that refugees access services, and I can mention one, which is DCJ, especially in terms of legal aid. They have Refugee Legal Aid Program, and I think that it's a fantastic program, because it really tries to be very innovative in the way it help people to access services. For example, they do mock days at courts. They bring*

> *a group of refugees to the court in Fairfield, and they would have people who would be your magistrates, lawyers, and all that. They'll be sitting there, and they'll be talking about how the process works. And they do that in English, but then someone explains in other languages what this is about, how it works, whose role is what, what you can do, etc. And that's important because when people find themselves in spaces like a court, the way it is set up and run can be really difficult if you have never been there. It can actually be traumatic if you don't know how it works, So, they have tried that, and I think one reason why that works is because you have got people in there who are actually from those communities. And that's important, because it means that they bring the thinking of the community to those spaces.*
>
> **CL22 (Fairfield)**

Working with community groups to share information, build trust, empower and address community needs

A final strategy for making services more accessible and encouraging refugees to access them involves collaborating with community associations to leverage the rich networks they possess in the refugee community and empower them.

As we highlighted in the previous chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic is a very powerful example of the value of involving community groups in disseminating information, combating misinformation and building trust with a broad cross section of diverse communities. This strategy has broader applicability than COVID. In fact, in some instances, it can even extend to arrangements where service providers support community associations in their work, in the process building rich connections to those communities that both empower the community to develop culturally appropriate interventions and create pathways into more traditional services that might otherwise be hard to access. While somewhat limited in how the funding can be directed, community capacity building programs (such as that provided federally through SETS) often offer funding and support for this kind of work.

Case Study: Connecting mental health services to communities by empowering community associations (Salisbury)

The wonderful thing illustrated by this example is how working with a community organisation to help it achieve its goals helps address key settlement outcomes and creates linkages to mental health services which refugees are often reluctant to access due to stigma or cultural understandings about mental health.

> *We were approached a year and a half ago by a community in Salisbury, a community group … who were looking for a whole range of things. They wanted to build resilience … they wanted to start a space, get all the*

> *services, get all the connection and build sustainability past those 5 years of refugee status, but they needed to get some money. So they came to us to auspice them. And we auspiced the program. … So they wanted to link it in with, you know, the trauma, the mental health, suicide, and link it in to resilience programs, wellbeing programs and then volunteering as a pathway … And that was a year and a half. That was great … And through that they've been able to now get another couple of grants, and they've been able to stand on their own. And so that will create sustainability.*
>
> **(SFG1 (Salisbury)**

6.3 Gaps in service provision

In addition to asking participants about what is working well in terms of service delivery, we also asked them to identify areas of ongoing unmet need. The issues identified varied considerably across the settlement cities, and indeed from participant to participant, depending on the service area they were most familiar with. However, two topics were mentioned frequently across the various LGAs. The first related to gaps around ongoing support for youth and families. The second echoes the issue raised in chapter 5 around supporting community associations and developing their capacity to engage with service providers.

In relation to the first issue, there are, of course, a number of programs that are targeted at refugee youth and families. The Community Hubs discussed above is one such initiative. The issue is, however, that the settlement journey of families with young children is necessarily of a very long duration, and many issues arise beyond the 5 years after arrival, which is the time limit at which refugee-specific settlement services currently cease. This leaves refugee families without support at a time when intergenerational conflict due to settlement issues can arise and as young people try to negotiate their passage into adulthood in a society that is in many ways still mysterious to them and their elders.

> *We've got the next generation, I think it's really a next generation that is missed through the settlement process. Because the settlement process have its own time frame that doesn't cater for that need. So you get a group that is left in between mainstream service and not going through settlement support services.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

> *I just wanted to quickly add that it is becoming really difficult for the youth as well because of the peer pressure and all the things that come with being a teenager, and there's been not enough support or mentors to help them through issues.*
>
> **CFG7 (Salisbury)**

> *Services for teenagers, not in regard to school programs, such as homework clubs, but services that actually help them with life. And all those processes of transitioning into adulthood are already difficult, but if you're a young person from refugee background, and you have parents who don't speak proper English, or you don't have that kind of support, it can be really difficult for you, when you're trying to look for work, when you're trying to get your tax file number or things like that, and you might not actually have anyone to look up to or ask to.*
>
> **CL20 (Salisbury)**

While, again, only adult refugees participated in this study, this was the most commonly identified gap. Further discussions with refugee families and young people are needed to flesh out the specific areas of unmet need. However, one area did stand out. As we noted in chapter 3, young refugees and their parents often struggle in particular to identify appropriate post-secondary education pathways into suitable vocations, whether through TAFE, apprenticeships or University. A number of community leaders flagged this as an area where additional assistance from service providers would be welcome.

> *With all the services available, I don't find any … for the parents, or for the families to go and get educated how this [education] system is working.*
>
> **CFG8 (Liverpool)**

> *But when it comes to making decisions regarding my career and further education, I would rely on professionals … rather than relying on my community. But here, I say that not-for-profit associations or NGOs really play an Important role in supporting the newly arrived, as well.*
>
> **CL11 (Casey)**

> *more education for youth, sort of pathways of providing the leadership and guidance to get them into whatever they sort of desire to work in the future. That'd be good, too.*
>
> **CL23 (Hume)**

The other gap very frequently raised by service providers was the minimal funding available to supporting refugee communities and community groups as opposed to offering support to individuals. As we saw in chapter 5, community associations are under-resourced and, as service providers point out, this means they are not well able to respond to service providers' needs for partners in the community to disseminate information, help deliver programs or even participate in consultations about what kinds of programs are needed. This hampers service providers in fulfilling their objectives in helping refugees.

> *A few years ago, we would have had, say 30 to 40% of our funding could have been diverted to community development and group activities. Capacity building as the government likes to call it. Now roughly about 5% of our funding is now dedicated to capacity building, because of the guidelines … that made a big impact and COVID highlighted that actually, that without those community groups capacity being built, you don't have the ability to work with communities.*
>
> **SP2 (Liverpool)**

> *the community leaders are actually inundated. Yeah, I think what I can see is that there is a willingness for the community leaders … to support their community. But then their sustainability, the sustainability of their engagement has to be looked at. They can't be always volunteering. This is what we can see that they are trying to volunteer, and then it's not sustainable. They burn out.*
>
> **SP6 (Casey)**

> *lot of the community leaders and community groups tend to support the community, the newly arrived people. However, they don't get paid. You know, really the government or the services really heavily rely on them. Yeah, they have their own jobs and their own family and their own… So I think they're at their capacity, but there really needs to be more resourcing around that as well.*
>
> **SFG2 (Logan)**

The question of the timing of settlement support also arises in this context. Many communities will not have the capacity to create formal associations in the first few years the community is in Australia. Prominent community leaders are often people who have been in Australia more than a decade. The current focus of settlement service provision on the first 5 years of settlement is an awkward fit for a community space which contains both newly arrived and long established refugees, and whose hidden strength is often the support well-established cohorts are able to supply to refugees.

Chapter summary

Refugees are well supported in the settlement city and often remarked on being grateful for the support they receive, especially from settlement service providers. Many service providers in both settlement and mainstream contexts work hard to ensure their commitment to inclusivity manifests not just in symbolic ways but also in their day-to-day dealings with refugees. However, support is still somewhat uneven, with some mainstream service providers struggling to offer truly culturally inclusive services.

Barriers to accessing services manifest more often in the form of refugees never accessing a service in the first place, rather than through negative experiences

at the point of contact. These barriers are sometimes the result of structural problems with how services are delivered which make them physical, digital or culturally inaccessible. Often, however, it is a lack of familiarity and comfort with services that makes refugees hesitant to seek help through these channels.

Service providers in settlement cities have over the years developed a number of effective strategies to overcome these barriers. Bicultural workers who reflect the ethnic makeup of the community are a key strategy for improving cultural inclusivity. These staff are more effective when they are included in program design and organisational leadership. Conveniently located place-based service hubs help mitigate physical and digital barriers to access, and are effective in engaging otherwise hard-to-reach demographics. Finally, outreach programs and collaboration with community associations help disseminate information about services and reduce hesitancy to access them.

While the service landscape is robust, gaps still remain in settlement support, particularly for issues which extend beyond the five-year limit on settlement service support. Refugees who arrive in Australia as children are one group that often misses out on support with issues that emerge beyond the five-year period. Community associations, which by their nature engage both the recently-arrived and well-established refugee cohorts, are another victim of the short term way settlement support is conceptualised, and are at present highly under-resourced.

7

Findings and recommendations

Findings and recommendations

This chapter outlines the four key findings that emerge from this study, and outlines the recommendations that emerge from each finding.

Finding 1 – Settlement cities are helping refugees settle well in Australia

Australia's major settlement cities are more the result of a series of happy accidents than of conscious design. However, they do bear a resemblance to one another and in this way constitute a kind of informal 'model' for how settlement has in fact been experienced by large numbers of Australian refugees. We might describe this 'model' as the settlement of large numbers of refugees near people from similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, in areas with diverse, multicultural populations and close to specialist settlement support services with long-term experience assisting refugees.

As we have shown throughout this report, while this 'model' does create certain kinds of problems, it has been an overwhelming success in helping refugees settle in Australia. The presence of a large, vibrant ethnically familiar community creates a culturally recognisable microcosm that helps refugees begin to feel at home in a new country. It also offers opportunities for inclusion and belonging from the very first days after arrival, at a time when language and cultural barriers often complicate access to wider Australian society. Furthermore, the presence of both informal community networks and formal settlement services provides a range of ways to access much needed assistance, both in the first stages of settlement and in ongoing ways as needed. The multicultural character of the settlement city, meanwhile, reduces the feeling of standing out and makes it more likely that even mainstream services will have some capacity to respond to refugees' particular needs and circumstances.

The settlement city 'model' is not perfect. A minority of community leaders worry that large concentrations of people with shared ethnicity may form an obstacle to social connections beyond these ethnic communities and hinder wider social integration. The majority of refugees, however, do not share these concerns and both our own data and other research suggests refugees do gradually form connections beyond their ethnic communities as they become more familiar with Australia. Settlement cities are also hard places to find work. The availability of jobs locally often falls well short of the needs of already disadvantaged refugee jobseekers. Finally, infrastructure has not kept up with settlement patterns: appropriate housing is often scarce and limited supply tends to drive up prices, while existing public facilities such as parks, sportsgrounds, halls and libraries are not always sufficient for a growing population needing to access such facilities.

We recommend, therefore, that the settlement city be more consciously embraced as a model for successful settlement and that its deficiencies be remedied with targeted place-based interventions.

Recommendation 1.1 – The federal government should maintain and expand pathways in the humanitarian program that encourage refugee community formation

While refugees and indeed non-refugee migrants have historically tended to settle near other migrants from similar backgrounds, this tendency has in recent years been reinforced by the growing proportion of candidates in Australia's humanitarian intake who are proposed by family or community members. Refugees who arrive through this pathway tend naturally to settle near their proposers, who are often also closely related to them. This has in turn led to a greater concentration of refugees in Australia's largest settlement cities, where their family and community are already living.

This approach to Australia's humanitarian intake has, on the whole, been quite successful in that it has steered refugees to long-standing settlement areas where they find support from their proposers, their wider ethnic community, and service providers with decades of experience of working with people from

their part of the world. We therefore recommend that this policy be maintained and even extended to create additional family reunion pathways which, as we saw earlier, are very much a priority for refugees once they find their feet in Australia.

This, however, should not be at the expense of other humanitarian migration streams as has tended to be the case. Proposed migration through the special humanitarian program should complement and not displace humanitarian entrants from other streams. Newer forms of sponsored humanitarian migration which involve the wider community sponsoring refugees with or without family links to Australia, such as the Community Support Program (CSP) and the new Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP), should also be in addition to the intake of refugees referred by the UNHCR.[30]

Because the settlement destination of 202 visa holders is relatively predictable in that they will generally settle initially near where their proposers live, this stream has the unique advantage of allowing governments and other stakeholders to more clearly anticipate the areas which will attract a significant part of the humanitarian intake in the coming years and plan accordingly. For example, we can already reasonably anticipate the arrival of more refugees from Afghanistan in the coming decade, and equally reasonably anticipate that most will tend to settle in or near already substantial Afghan communities in Dandenong and Casey, Salisbury and Logan. A plan to better support these LGAs to accommodate this intake could be drawn up even before the first visa is issued.

Recommendation 1.2 – Bolster place-based funding, especially at the federal level, but also at state government level, in recognition of the unique role the settlement city plays in settling refugees

If Australia's settlement cities are to continue to flourish, they need much more robust support in recognition of the kinds of communities they are hosting and their particular needs.

Access to adequate, affordable and secure housing, in particular, has been a long-standing problem for refugees that is exacerbated in some settlement cities by the number of new arrivals clustering together geographically, in the process bidding up rents in the local area. While targeted rent subsidies can play a part in easing the pressures this creates, a more meaningful intervention would be a return to the once-common practice of providing an adequate stock of public housing in anticipated areas of concentrated refugee settlement. Many refugees are understandably not able to compete with other Australians in the housing market in the first years after their arrival and the availability of public housing in areas of their initial settlement would greatly facilitate settlement outcomes.

Housing is not the only infrastructure need currently being neglected in Australia's settlement cities. Refugees and refugee communities rely very heavily on access to affordable public spaces such as parks, community halls and sporting fields and venues where the rich social life of their communities can flourish. Similarly, many rely on public services such as libraries where access to digital technologies and print resources in their language are available at no or low cost. Communities arriving with health issues or poor health literacy will similarly put pressure on health services and hospitals.

The presence of large refugee communities also places unique demands on local services, which must go to extra lengths to establish and maintain culturally competent service delivery. This, as we saw above, is not a matter of simply ensuring translated material and interpreter services are available but demands a whole-of-organisation commitment to culturally competent practices, which often entail additional expense for local organisations and services. Overseas jurisdictions (the UK, for example) offer a per-refugee subsidy to local government areas in recognition of the additional demands placed on local services by refugee resettlement.[31]

Recommendation 1.3 – Use the experience of settlement cities as a basis for strategies in other LGAs where large numbers of refugees are settling

While many refugees settle in the well-established settlement cities discussed in this report, many also settle in areas with fewer refugees, and new settlement cities are always emerging. While emerging settlement areas will face unique challenges due to their lack of established multicultural communities, the lessons learned in Australia's long-standing settlement cities can be put to good use in these emerging settlement areas, including in those regional areas that have sought to attract a greater share of Australia's humanitarian intake.

The key insights of this report, particularly as they pertain to the importance of ethnic community support networks for successful settlement, can be consciously adopted in areas seeking to make themselves more attractive to humanitarian entrants or to respond to growing populations of refugees. Strategies such as fostering concentrations of refugees with ethnic and linguistic commonalities, working with emerging ethnic community associations and community-oriented businesses to support settlement, and actively recruiting from these ethnic communities into key service roles can readily be adopted elsewhere to great effect. Beyond actions focused on ethnic communities, strategies such as hub-based service provision and a commitment to embedding inclusion into everyday organisational practice can also enhance service delivery in emerging settlement areas.

Finding 2 – Community networks and associations are pivotal to settlement and integration

The key role ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities play in supporting refugee settlement and integration is a major theme of this report. Informal community networks and formal or semi-formal community associations provide individual support to newly-arrived refugees in ways that mirror and overlap the work of settlement service case managers and caseworkers. They also create spaces of culturally familiar inclusion and sociability where newly settled refugees can easily form their first social ties in Australia. Finally, they provide essential support to a variety of service organisations through formal collaboration, advocacy and information sharing about community needs and as bicultural workers within these organisations. As illustrated during Australia's COVID-19 vaccination campaign, such community associations are often better able to reach otherwise disengaged and mistrustful sections of the community than formal service providers. Robust and active communities and community groups are therefore a crucial, if often overlooked, component of helping refugees settle well in the settlement city.

Despite their importance, community networks are not funded appropriately, rely heavily on voluntarism and are therefore often limited in their capacity to offer support. While they have limitations and do not replace settlement service provision, community associations are a vital complement to existing services, and could function more effectively if given appropriate support.

Recommendation 2.1 – Federal and state governments should expand financial and material support for formal community associations

Community associations receive little to no funding from any level of government and rely almost entirely on the voluntary energies of civic minded members of the refugee communities. Given the tremendous amount of work these associations and individuals do in supporting newly arrived refugees, fostering social inclusion more broadly, and providing advice to all levels of government and service providers through consultations, this is both unfair and inefficient. Even relatively small injections of funding into these associations would yield enormous benefit.

We therefore recommend that settlement expenditure be expanded to include support specifically for community associations. This is a key recommendation on which many of the below suggestions are dependant. If community associations continue to have to depend almost entirely on voluntarism, their capacity to participate in improving settlement outcomes in the ways outlined below will be severely curtailed and the problems we have identified will continue.

Funding has been allocated to supporting these associations in the past through mechanisms such as the federal government's Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Community Capacity Building program, administered by the Department of Home Affairs, or equivalent state programs such as Victoria's Capacity Building and Participation Program. These kinds of programs, however, are not really fit for purpose, as they only fund community associations on a one-off basis with no ongoing investment.

While skill development and one-off program support are invaluable (as discussed below) they do little to address the fundamental over reliance on the voluntary efforts of a small handful of individuals, with attendant problems of limited capacity and burn-out. To the contrary, participation in such programs itself requires an additional investment of time and energy from already over-stretched community volunteers. If we are serious about developing the capacity and long-term viability of community associations, they need to be financially supported in an ongoing way that is adequate to the hiring of dedicated office space and staff to perform the work undertaken.

At the federal and state level, the question of supporting community associations is largely one of allocating and distributing funding specifically earmarked for this purpose. This kind of assistance should be accompanied by simplified reporting requirements that recognise the nature and limitations of small community associations. At the local government level, material support for community associations may instead involve local councils working with these groups to provide easier access to their existing facilities and being conscious of possible obstacles to access, such as lack of information, overly bureaucratic processes or cost.

Recommendation 2.2 - Federal government should more effectively deploy SETS funding to assist settlement service providers in bolstering the organisational capacity of community associations to manage funding streams and to provide other relevant training opportunities

There are some complexities and risks associated with increased funding to community associations. One problem is how to identify which groups are most fully representative of their community, and how to track the impact of funding without imposing conditions which bureaucratise these associations and rob them of the flexibility and responsiveness that are part of their strength.

Identifying suitable community groups for government support and designing flexible reporting mechanisms is an area where established settlement organisations with existing ties to the community, such as MRCs or other place-based settlement service providers, can be useful partners.

Community associations also vary considerably in their governance and administrative capacities. Some are run by skilled professionals who are perfectly capable of administering and accounting for government funding, but many others lack the administrative, operational and governance infrastructure to deal with the requirements of funding bodies or effectively advocate for their communities.

Again, if they are themselves suitably funded for this purpose, settlement service organisations could assist community associations in understanding and navigating reporting requirements associated with government funding, and developing the organisational infrastructure to effectively manage

and administer funding. They could also provide training in other areas to do with advocacy and leadership as required.

As noted above, programs such as the SETS Community Capacity Building program already recognise this need in an ad-hoc way. However, community capacity building activities tend to be seen (by funding bodies and therefore by settlement service providers) as secondary to the core activity of providing one-on-one casework or small group activities and programs for refugee clients. If our first recommendation about creating long-term funding streams for community associations is taken up, settlement service organisations need to play a much bigger role in supporting community associations to apply for and administer such funding sources. To allow them to develop their capacities to do so, a part of SETS funding should be permanently earmarked for community capacity building, and settlement service providers encouraged to view this work as a fundamental and ongoing aspect of their responsibilities.

Recommendation 2.3 – All service providers and levels of government should engage more consistently and meaningfully with community associations as partners in facilitating settlement, a process that councils and peak bodies can play a vital role in by creating opportunities for community associations to enter dialogue with government and services

Community associations are included to some extent in the conversation around settlement issues. Community associations intermittently participate in consultations at various levels of government (such as government inquiries, for example), and settlement service providers are also increasingly working in collaboration with community groups to develop and deliver programs. Furthermore, as noted above, there is often some overlap of personnel, with community associations often run by people who also work as service providers of one kind or another.

However, the community leaders we spoke to felt, on the whole, fairly marginalised in settlement policy discussions. Consultations do take place, yes, but they often don't have a meaningful impact on policy. Connections to peak bodies exist but are not well maintained, and those bodies often have out of date information, even on for example who the current contact person is for a given community association. Collaborations with settlement services and local governments do take place, but can sometimes be quite fraught and impose greatly on the time and energies of community leaders.

This state of affairs is in part a product of the limited capacity of volunteer-run community groups discussed in the previous recommendation, and that issue must be addressed first before progress can be made on this one. However, there is also a question of the prevailing attitude towards community groups. Community associations are often seen as marginal figures in settlement: simply just another 'stakeholder' rather than as the central players they often are in supporting refugees to settle well. The logic of funding arrangements often positions refugees as individualised clients needing assistance rather than as groups that organise collectively and proactively to try to meet their own needs.

Councils can play a key role at the local level in creating opportunities for service providers to engage with local community associations. Councils often already help convene place-based inter-agency forums for settlement service providers and it is not hard to imagine either expanding these to include community associations or creating equivalent bodies that engage with community associations specifically. Indeed, in some LGAs, permanent community advisory bodies have already been established by Councils (Greater Dandenong's Multicultural and People Seeking Asylum Advisory Committee, for instance) which in effect serve as forums to engage with community leaders, albeit currently mainly around issues pertaining to local government.

Settlement or mainstream service organisations

could participate in such forums by invitation or on a more permanent basis, depending on the nature of their engagement with refugee communities and the priorities of refugee community associations themselves, to help foster connections and partnerships with community associations. It has been the experience of many settlement city LGAs that inter-agency forums have in time fostered rich traditions of cross-agency collaboration and there is every possibility that similar relationships could be built with community associations to the benefit of both service providers and refugee communities.

While place-based forums are probably the place to trial such initiatives, in time peak bodies such as state multicultural agencies or federal settlement peak bodies such as SCOA could also convene similar kinds of groups to meaningfully allow community associations to speak to state level concerns.

Finding 3 – Mainstream services are not consistently accessible for refugees

Outcomes for refugees trying to access mainstream services such as education, healthcare and welfare systems vary enormously, not just across the various service types and settlement cities but even from one school or general practice to another. Some providers make exceptional efforts to facilitate access for refugees and other CALD users, while others engage in practices that are perceived by refugees as outright discriminatory. Greater consistency in the application of best practice models is obviously necessary, and in many cases mainstream providers already struggling to provide their core service will need assistance with identifying problem areas and implementing solutions.

Recommendation 3.1 - Federal and state governments should detail and help implement consistent cultural competency standards for mainstream services operating in areas with significant refugee settlement, including tracking of and accountability for outcomes

The inconsistent nature of mainstream service provision speaks to decades-long trends in privatisation of services and devolution of responsibility. While this kind of devolution has led, in many cases, to innovative and effective approaches to service delivery at the local level, it has also created an unacceptable level of variation in how able mainstream services are to deliver services to diverse communities. It is time for governments at both a federal and state level to take an active role in designing and implementing more consistent standards in cultural competency across the service sectors for which they have responsibility.

Cultural competency and inclusivity are already embraced as a principle at all levels of government so this is a matter of articulating what this entails in specific service contexts, and providing adequate resources to implement relevant changes and monitor outcomes. What exactly this entails will necessarily vary from service to service. Cultural competency will look very different in schools compared to hospitals, for example. However, as identified above, at a very minimum cultural competency needs to go beyond simply the provision of interpreters or translated material and include assistance with such broader issues as digital access. Further service specific guidelines should be designed by relevant government departments, with the assistance of a combination of mainstream service providers, settlement service providers and community associations with relevant experience. There is also a wealth of existing research on specific service contexts than can be drawn upon.

Once consultations have identified structural issues and best practices, it will also be the role of government to design ways to track outcomes and ensure service provider accountability for these. Data about outcomes is not consistently collected and aggregated across service areas and state boundaries, and that often means we lack a clear picture of how refugees and CALD communities are actually doing when they try to access a particular service. Consistent federal and state reporting standards,

with public access to this data, would do much to improve this picture and give stakeholders a clearer sense of where improvements are needed. Obviously, this needs to be implemented in a way that does not impose unreasonable additional workload requirements on services that are often already stretched quite thinly.

Recommendation 3.2 - Councils and other levels of government should draw on settlement sector expertise around accessible service provision by fostering place-based inter-agency dialogue between mainstream and settlement services to identify structural problems and trial solutions

A major aspect of the day-to-day work of settlement service case workers is assisting refugees who are trying to resolve issues caused by mainstream providers not offering adequately accessible services. This means settlement service organisations have a wealth of experience to draw on in identifying problems with mainstream service provision and offering solutions to common problems.

Even in the absence of the kind of broad-based implementation of cultural competency standards described in the previous recommendation, much can be achieved through place-based interventions to bring settlement services together with mainstream services to address systemic issues with culturally competent service provision.

Councils potentially have an important role to play here. As mentioned above, councils often already convene place-based inter-agency forums on settlement issues and serve as a connector between local service providers (for example, Liverpool LGA's Liverpool Refugee and Migrant Interagency, convened by the Council and the local MRC.) With some notable exceptions, however, (TAFEs are a particular standout) mainstream services are not consistently involved in such forums.

Councils could work with settlement services to identify particular issues with local mainstream service provision and advocate for mainstream providers in relevant areas of service-delivery to engage in dialogue with the settlement sector around these issues. In fact, this kind of activity already happens somewhat intermittently and in an ad-hoc fashion.

One example is the establishment of the Employment and Community Services Forum, which was convened in Fairfield LGA to bring together jobactive providers (as they were then) and settlement service providers to address criticisms of local employment services identified in the *Not Working* report.[32] This forum was established in response to a particularly dramatic failure of employment services in the area of culturally competent service delivery. It could, however, serve more generally as a model for bringing settlement service providers together with mainstream service providers to address structural issues in some particular area of service provision, with the local Council acting as a connector (a role it already tends to play in various contexts, as noted above.) As mentioned in Recommendation 2.3, for certain kinds of issues where service providers do not have a local presence or the issue transcends local concerns, state-level multicultural peak bodies or federal organisations such as SCOA can play a similar mediating role.

Recommendation 3.3 – Mainstream services should improve their capacity to engage with refugee communities by hiring bicultural workers in client-facing roles and involving bicultural workers and community associations in program design and delivery

The simplest and quickest way for a mainstream service provider to independently begin to work towards more accessible service delivery without fundamentally changing anything else about how the service is delivered is simply to ensure its staff demographic profile reflects the community that accesses the service. The presence of service providers who share the linguistic and ethno-cultural background of clients was far and away the

most commonly recommended mechanism to ensure greater accessibility across all service areas.

Obviously, such workers need to be employed in client-facing roles. However, they need to be present at all levels of an organisation so their perspectives are embedded in decision-making and program design as well as in front line work. This is already common practice in settlement service organisations, and many mainstream service providers in Australia's most diverse settlement cities are now following suit by creating identified positions and working with the settlement sector to recruit into these. Often these kinds of programs recruit into a position on the basis of a person's ability to connect with relevant sections of the community and then offer training and upskilling as part of the role, as opposed to requiring previous experience in a similar role, which tends to exclude many refugee candidates. Such programs would also have the benefit of improving employment outcomes for a cohort that is highly disadvantaged in the labour market.

As noted earlier, however, bicultural workers are not a "magic bullet" and deeper improvements to outcomes for diverse clients ultimately require a whole-of-organisation approach to thinking about how services and programs are delivered and the extent to which they are accessible to refugees.

Finding 4 – The timing of settlement support often poorly matches community needs and individual settlement journeys

Settlement is a complex journey that takes place at a different pace for each refugee individual and family. Settlement service support, however, is only available to those who have been resident in Australia for less than 5 years and is front loaded in the first months when intensive case management is available. This intensive early support is, moreover, organised around meeting standardised government-mandated milestones rather than being tailored to the immediate needs and concerns of refugees themselves. This, along with the sheer volume of information being communicated in these early months, tends to mean a lot of it is not taken in properly and refugees continue to be poorly informed as to what services are available and how to seek help.

This creates many suboptimal outcomes. For example, a refugee who arrives in Australia at the age of 11 ceases to be eligible for support at the age of 16, at the point when some will need targeted guidance on educational and vocational choices, and similar issues around the transition to adulthood. A parent who arrives as a primary caregiver to very young children might only really start to engage with services in the fourth or fifth year of settlement, as their children start to attend school. One of these individuals was too young, and the other was too preoccupied with caring responsibilities to take advantage of services when they were available, and both drop out of eligibility just as they are ready to engage with providers. Meanwhile, community associations who support refugees through various stages of settlement find that some community members are eligible for funded support while othersare not, complicating their work in supporting the community as a whole.

Recommendation 4.1 – The federal Government should create more flexibility for service providers around the 5-year 'cut-off' for settlement support eligibility

Most refugees don't wish to or need to engage extensively with settlement support services beyond the first few months in Australia. The small minority who find themselves needing support beyond the 5 year mark could relatively easily be catered for without any great additional expenditure in the settlement budget. The AMEP has already been made more flexible in this way by the previous government without a consequent budget blow-out and it only makes sense to apply the same logic to other settlement support services. What is needed, above all, is flexibility for service providers who should be

able to direct at least a portion of the funding they receive to supporting refugee clients who fall outside the 5 year settlement period. This kind of flexibility would also allow settlement services to more confidently and productively run programs aimed at issues that tend to emerge only some time into the settlement journey, or which refugees are better able to engage with once they've had some time in Australia. These might include, for example, problems of inter-generational conflict and the challenge of creating connections with the broader Australian community, which is easier once some language and cultural competencies have been acquired.

Recommendation 4.2 – Federal government should review the structure of initial on-arrival support to mitigate information overload and better tailor assistance to needs of individual families

Just as settlement services sometimes need to be delivered over a longer time frame, refugees also need to be introduced to these services more gradually. Refugees are bombarded with a lot of information about services in the first few weeks and months after their arrival in Australia, at a time when they are still getting their bearings and when the relevance of this information is often unclear to them. The result can be information overload and insufficient awareness later on of the pathways available to seek help.

Service providers recognise this problem and do take on the ongoing task of informing refugee communities about the services available to them. A number of innovative programs exist to familiarise refugees with the services that can help them and how to access that help. However, much of this is opt-in and requires proactive engagement on the part of refugees. Many still miss out on what can be vital information.

Better co-ordination across services in the initial months, and more flexibility around tailoring on-arrival support to the needs of individual refugee clients and families, would help service providers to introduce refugees to services more gradually and lessen the information overload. Ideally, HSP case managers would be able to tailor this staggered approach to match refugees with services based on their immediate and less urgent needs. So, for example, refugees with urgent health issues would be provided with information about healthcare and introduced to their local refugee health service as a priority, whereas for refugees in better health this can happen later in the process. Currently, the need to meet federally mandated milestones inhibits this kind of flexible approach and the federal government should look at revising the guidelines on HSP delivery to allow greater flexibility and more tailored assistance.

Notes

[1] These figures are derived from the Settlement Database, which contains records of people granted humanitarian visas since 1991, compiled by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). The database is not available to the public and records only the current last known location of the humanitarian visa holders. Some historical data on places of first settlement is publicly available, however, in the form of periodic settlement reports (https://www.data.gov.au/data/dataset/settlement-reports).

[2] Shergold, P., Benson K., Piper M. for the Commonwealth of Australia, *Investing in Refugees; Investing in Australia: The Findings of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia,* 2019.

[3] Several settlement areas have recently been profiled individually. See for example James, P., Magee, L., Mann, J., Partoredjo, S., Soldatic, K., *Circles of Social Life, Liverpool: Settling Strangers; Supporting Disability Needs,* 2018; and Radford, David; Krivokapic-Skoko, Branka; Hetz, Heidi; Soong, Hannah; Roberts, Rosie; Tan, George, *Refugees Rejuvenating and Connecting Communities: An analysis of the social, cultural and economic contributions of Hazara humanitarian migrants in the Port Adelaide-Enfield area of Adelaide, South Australia* (Full Report), University of South Australia, Adelaide, 2021. The Welcoming Cities initiative has also done important work on settlement strategies and standards at the local level. See Welcoming Cities, *Putting out the welcome mat: A guide for creating welcoming cities*, 2021.

[4] This data is described in more detail in chapter 2, and is again derived from the Settlement Database (see note 1).

[5] Some results of the 2021 census were released while this report was being drafted and this data has been included where possible. Otherwise, data from the 2016 census has been used.

[6] The intention was originally to conduct 2 focus groups in each LGA, one with refugee community leaders and another with settlement service providers. The plan to conduct focus groups with refugee community leaders was disrupted by the need to move the research online due to COVID-19. It proved difficult to organise and facilitate focus groups with community leaders, and therefore only three focus groups were conducted with refugee community leaders. Additional interviews were conducted in LGAs where community leader focus groups could not be arranged. All 7 LGA service provider groups went ahead, however, with the Greater Dandenong and Casey focus group being combined at the request of local service providers, as there is a high degree of overlap between the settlement service provision community within these two LGAs.

[7] This information came largely through historical Settlement Reports (accessed via https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/settlement-reports) covering previous decades though some is also common knowledge in the LGAs under investigation.

[8] Briefly, various settlement service providers gave the Edmund Rice Centre a fairly extensive list of potential refugee participants and the Edmund Rice Centre undertook subsequent recruitment contact with a subset of these participants with service providers not privy to information about who did and did not participate. Refugee participants were also recruited through refugee community networks, meaning it is impossible to say whether any particular participant was someone recommended to us and known by any given service organisation.

[9] See references to this database in chapter 1.

[10] Specifically, the Community Profile data products are the main source of census-based data.

[11] DHA Historical Settlement Reports 2016-2019

[12] Advertiser, 29 January 2022, p22

[13] Edmund Rice Centre, *Refugee Employment Experience: Struggles, Strategies and Solutions*, 2021. See also Hugo, G., for the Department of Social Services, *The economic, social and civic contribution of first and second generation humanitarian migrants*, 2011; Olliff, L. for Refugee Council of Australia, *What Works: Employment strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants,* 2010; Shukufa, T. for Refugee Council of Australia, *Not Working: Experiences of refugees and migrants with Jobactive,* 2017; Centre for Policy Development, *Settling Better Report: Reforming refugee employment and settlement services,* 2017; Deloitte Access Economics, *Seizing the opportunity: Making the most of the skills and experience of migrants and refugees,* A research report for Multicultural Affairs Queensland, 2018; and Shergold, P., Benson K., Piper M. for the Commonwealth of Australia, Investing in Refugees; *Investing in Australia: The findings of a review into integration, employment and settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants in Australia*, 2019.

[14] On refugee employment statistics, see works cited in note 13.

[15] For example, Anglicare Australia, *Rental Affordability Snapshot: National Report*, 2022.

[16] Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *The housing and homelessness journeys of refugees in Australia, AHURI Final Report*, 2015; Refugee Council of Australia, *The Home Stretch: Challenges and alternatives in sustainable housing for refugees and asylum seekers,* 2014; Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Housing outcomes for recently arrived humanitarian migrants (Building a New Life in Australia Research Summary)*, 2017; Ziersch A, Due C, Walsh M. *Belonging begins at home: Housing, social inclusion and health and wellbeing for people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds,* Flinders University Press, 2017.

[17] Haigh, F., El-Roueihib, C., Martinez, G., Atem, A., Datt, B. and Saliba, M., *Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment of Refugee Transitional Housing Support Program.* Centre for Health Equity and Training, Research and Evaluation, 2021.

[18] Median rents and incomes data from the 2016 census.

[19] Terry, Naylor, Nguyen and Rizzo, *Not There Yet: An Investigation into the Access and Participation of Students from Humanitarian Refugee Backgrounds in the Australian Higher Education System,* Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education, 2014.

[20] On this theme, see also Lily Gardener and Conor Costello (Oxfam Australia), *Stronger Together: The impact of family separation on refugees and humanitarian migrants in Australia*, 2019

[21] For recent statistics on the composition of the refugee and humanitarian program, see https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/how-many-refugees-have-come/3/. The practice of favouring the sponsored 202 visa subclass over the 200 subclass has also been criticised as privileging applicants' family connections in Australia over need, or being used to covertly privilege other qualities in applicants unrelated to need, such as education level, English proficiency or religion. See Refugee Council of Australia, *Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program, 2017-18: Community views on current challenges and future directions* (2017), 33-36.

[22] Culos, I., McMahon, T., Khorana, S., Robertson, S., Baganz, E., Magee, L., Agha, Y., *Foundations for Belonging 2022* Insights on Newly Arrived Refugees: Family separation and reunion during the pandemic. Settlement Services International/Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. 2022

[23] Alice Chik, Phil Benson, Nick Parr and Garry Falloon, 'What are languages worth? Community languages for the future of New South Wales.' The Faculty of Medicine, Health and Human Sciences Multilingualism Research Centre, Macquarie University, 2022, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ftJ6ypFWelRAZ3PIukOIVqgAF8F5t4HJ/view

[24] Rahim Zaidi established the Ghan Kilburn City Football Club in 2002 for young Hazara people. Shuba Krishnan, 'New migrants are vital to Australia, but will the budget prioritise them?', SBS News, 8 May 2021 (accessed 1 June 2022) https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/new-migrants-are-vital-to-australia-but-will-the-budget-prioritise-them/cpn80ludv.

[25] Gerry Carman, 'Buckley Embraces All Nations', *Star Journal*, 5 October 2018 (accessed 1 June 2022) https://dandenong.starcommunity.com.au/sport/2018-10-05/buckley-embraces-all-nations/; 'All Nations Cricket Giving Back to the Community', *Asylum Seeker Resource Centre,* 25 July 2018 (accessed 1 June 2022) https://asrc.org.au/2018/07/25/shaber-all-nations-social-cricket/

[26] *Our Voices, Our Struggles, Our Views: Will you choose to hear us? COVID-19 recovery and migrant and refugee communities*, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, October 2021, 4-15 https://eccv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report_COVID-19-recovery-and-migrant-and-refugee-communities_ECCV-Oct2196.pdf. This was particularly the case for people who are seeking asylum, see for example Sarah Dale, 'All in this together? The impact of COVID-19 on refugees and people seeking asylum', Community Legal Centre, NSW https://www.clcnsw.org.au/all-together-impact-covid-19-refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum (accessed 20 May 2022); Australian Red Cross, 'COVID-19 impacts us all: ensuring the safety and well-being of people on temporary visas during COVID-19', 2020, 13-15 https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/corporatecms-migration/publications-research--reports/australian-red-cross-covid-19-tempvisa-report-web.pdf (accessed 20 May 2022); Gemma Carey and Ben O'Mara, 'Australia is failing marginalised people, and it shows in COVID death rates', *The Conversation*, 18 February 2022 https://theconversation.com/australia-is-failing-marginalised-people-and-it-shows-in-covid-death-rates-177224 (accessed 20 May 2022)

[27] Alexandra Grey, 'Multilingual Australia is missing out on vital COVID-19 information. No wonder local councils and businesses are stepping in', *The Conversation*, 29 June 2020. https://theconversation.com/multilingual-australia-is-missing-out-on-vital-covid-19-information-no-wonder-local-councils-and-businesses-are-stepping-in-141362 (accessed 20 May 2022)

[28] Refugee Council, *Not Working*

[29] The list of organisations providing Workforce Australia services is available at https://tenders.employment.gov.au/tenders/b0bb0fc3-23ae-ec11-983f-002248d3b28f

[30] On this point, see Refugee Council of Australia, Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program, 2017-18: Community views on current challenges and future directions (2017), 33-36.

[31] See for example https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-dispersal-grant-funding-instruction

[32] See *Fairfield City Settlement Action Plan Evaluation Report*, 2021, 12-13 FCSAP-evaluation-report-FINAL-WEB-V4.pdf (corecs.org.au)

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