



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Process for Establishing New Regional Humanitarian Settlement Locations

Background

An evaluation undertaken in 2003 – the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants (the *Review*) – noted the positive effect that regional settlement can have on decreasing population pressure in metropolitan areas. In addition, regional Australia can provide good settlement prospects for some humanitarian entrants, particularly those who come from a rural background or who have skills suited to finding employment in those areas. Receiving towns can also benefit from an increased population and workforce and greater cultural diversity. In response to the *Review* and interest from a number of state governments, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC, the Department) has developed a new approach for identifying and establishing suitable new regional locations for humanitarian settlement.

Freedom of Movement

It is important to clarify the reasons why humanitarian entrants settle in regional areas. The majority of humanitarian entrants have social links in Australia, such as family, friends or a proposer (someone who sponsored them to come to Australia). These entrants, known as 'linked' entrants, are settled near their social contacts. If their contacts live in regional areas, the entrants will settle in those areas. In addition, as permanent residents, humanitarian entrants have the right to move within the country as they wish. Humanitarian entrants sometimes choose to relocate to a regional area after initial settlement. Often, this is to pursue employment opportunities arising in particular towns or because these entrants feel more comfortable in a small community.

When humanitarian entrants settle in a regional area because they have social contacts there, or move to a regional area after their initial settlement, this is not classified as DIAC-directed regional settlement.

DIAC-Directed Regional Settlement

The Department selects the initial settlement location for a limited number of humanitarian entrants. Only a small percentage of the current Humanitarian Programme intake has no existing social contacts in Australia. It is this group, 'unlinked' entrants, whose initial settlement location can be determined by DIAC. Some are settled directly in regional areas (known as direct regional settlement).

Humanitarian entrants have been settling in regional areas for some time. The Department has settled humanitarian entrants in regional areas of Queensland (Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Cairns, and Townsville), Victoria (Geelong), New South Wales (Goulburn, Wagga Wagga, Coffs Harbour, Wollongong and Newcastle), Tasmania (Launceston and the North Coast) and Western Australia (Mandurah).

The Department's approach to establishing new regional locations for the direct settlement of unlinked humanitarian entrants is outlined below. This approach aims to produce the best outcomes both for new arrivals and for the receiving towns. Through this approach, direct regional settlement commenced in Shepparton, Victoria, in late 2005. Settlement is also planned for Mount Gambier and Murray Bridge in South Australia, and Ballarat in Victoria.

Initial Identification

Regional towns may be identified for further consideration by DIAC through a range of approaches including local community interest, state or territory government requests, or through identification by the Department. Initial identification forms a preliminary step in the process. It aims to ensure that potential locations have the capacity to provide an appropriate level of support to humanitarian arrivals before more detailed discussions are undertaken.

Criteria for initial assessment of towns that may be suitable for humanitarian settlement were developed in 2004 in consultation with state and territory governments and are set out on the following page.

Assessment of a town against these criteria can be flexible, and locations are considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, a town that does not meet the population criteria may be considered if services in the area are considered adequate and the local community is supportive. The capacity to provide a welcoming environment for new arrivals is an important consideration.

Population

Regional locations will be selected on the basis that they are of sufficient size to support new communities, generally with a population of greater than 20,000.¹ Communities should demonstrate willingness to accept and assist humanitarian entrants. Where possible, locations should already have migrant communities, capable of providing some social support to new entrants and a base for further growth. The location's diversity and number of humanitarian entrants settling spontaneously in recent years may provide an indication of the community's ability to accept and assist new entrants.

Employment Opportunities

The location should offer good employment prospects, particularly in unskilled and semi-skilled industries for new arrivals who may have limited capacity for more skilled work (because of limited education and skills, limited English language proficiency, or because they are suffering the effects of torture and trauma). The availability of permanent and stable employment will be particularly important for new entrants with households to support – seasonal work such as fruit picking will not be adequate for all entrants. Locations with higher than average unemployment rates will not generally be selected.

Location

Locations with ARIA² ratings of Highly Accessible or Accessible will generally be preferred, although locations rated Moderately Accessible may be considered if services are available and other conditions are considered to be adequate. Distance from larger centres and accessibility by public and private transport are also important. Locations should be within reasonable proximity to larger centres from which specialist services can be delivered (such as those for survivors of torture and trauma), and allow networks with existing migrant communities to be established.

DIAC-Funded Settlement Services

DIAC-funded settlement services, including the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, the Settlement Grants Programme and the Adult Migrant English Program, should be available or readily set in place.

Infrastructure and Mainstream Services

The location must offer adequate infrastructure and mainstream services, including doctors, dentists, hospitals and schools. Entrants must be able to access mainstream government services such as Centrelink services and Job Network. The availability and affordability of appropriate housing (particularly for large families) is essential. Given the special needs and pre-arrival experiences of many humanitarian entrants, it is critical that services such as health assessment and torture and trauma counselling and assistance be readily available or easily set in place.

State/territory government support

It is critical that support is gained from a wide range of stakeholders prior to the Department making a final decision on new regional locations. This includes all levels of government, local service providers, and the broader community.

If initial identification and preliminary assessment against the criteria indicates that the town should be further considered, state/territory governments are consulted to seek their views on identified locations and ensure support. Given the importance of state-managed services to successful settlement (including education and health services), regional locations are only considered further with the agreement of the relevant state government.

Local consultation

Once state/territory government support to further consider the town is enlisted, the Department approaches the local council to ensure it is also supportive. Extensive local consultations are then undertaken by the Department in cooperation with state and local governments, including local service providers and community groups, prior to a final decision being made. If the outcomes of consultations are positive, and the local government is supportive, formal agreement to proceed with direct settlement is sought from the relevant state/territory government (generally a letter from the Premier to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship). Once this agreement is proffered, preparation for settlement can commence.

Preparing for Settlement

Following formal agreement from the relevant state/territory government, a local planning committee is established to prepare for settlement (if this has not already occurred during the consultation phase). The committee includes representation from local government, state/territory government, key Commonwealth agencies (such as Centrelink), local service providers (including health and education providers and police), settlement service providers and local community groups.

The planning committee's role is to ensure that service providers are aware of upcoming settlement and that services are coordinated and integrated. The planning committee may consider suitable numbers for referral in the first instance and also whether any characteristics would be particularly desirable for new humanitarian settlement (for example, a town that already has an Afghan community may prefer to settle Afghan refugees if possible).

The Department endeavours to facilitate preferences of this kind, however, it is important to note that it is not always possible. Refugee caseloads are determined by international circumstances and the Australian Government receives referrals for refugees in need of resettlement from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In addition, 'unlinked' refugees form a minority of humanitarian arrivals and therefore the number of entrants who can be considered for settlement in new regional locations is limited.

Once notified that the town is ready for settlement, the Department seeks as far as possible to match new entrants to opportunities in the town, for example, through consideration of previous employment skills. The Department works closely with its overseas posts to identify suitable refugee entrants for settlement in the area and provide advance information to the local planning committee such as family size, ages, language, likely service needs, and any employment or educational experience. In selecting the *initial* arrivals to a new regional settlement location, entrants are identified who have language, employment or leadership skills that will assist their early settlement and enable them to provide support and guidance to later arrivals.

The identification of suitable caseloads and families for new regional locations can take some time, and local communities and service providers may need to be flexible in their planning. However, it is important to note that this process greatly assists the establishment of viable and sustainable communities.

Services for New Arrivals

As a result of many years of displacement and poor living conditions, refugees have a range of needs when they arrive in Australia. In recognition of this, DIAC provides a comprehensive programme of support.

Intensive assistance is provided through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, generally for six months. Services include on-arrival reception and assistance; case coordination, information provision and referral to mainstream and other services; assistance to find appropriate long-term accommodation and the provision of basic household goods; and short term torture and trauma counselling services.

Assistance to learn English is available through the Adult Migrant English Program while the Translating and Interpreting Service helps to facilitate new arrivals' access to government and community services. Towns may also attract funding to provide ongoing practical settlement assistance and integration into the Australian community through projects funded under the Settlement Grants Programme.

In addition, humanitarian entrants can access the same mainstream government services as other Australians including Medicare, job seeker assistance and income support.

¹ Population size of 20,000 is considered to be the minimum size at which all necessary infrastructure to meet the specialised needs of humanitarian entrants is generally available. DIAC may agree with state governments to settle entrants in some smaller locations, providing that it can be shown that the necessary infrastructure, services and opportunities for humanitarian entrants are available.

² The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) was developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and the National Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems. ARIA ratings are used as an indicator of accessibility to services considered 'normal' in urban areas. An area is rated Highly Accessible (HA) if there is relatively unrestricted accessibility to a wide range of goods and services and opportunities for social interaction and Accessible (A) if there are some restrictions to accessibility. A rating of Moderately Accessible (MA) indicates there may be significant restrictions to goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.