

How Australia helps refugees



Australia is one of only 10 countries which resettle refugees and people in humanitarian need each year.

After the United States, Australia has resettled the second highest number of humanitarian entrants for the past two years. As the table below shows, Australia helps a lot of refugees and for a relatively small nation this is something we can all be proud of.

Main Countries of Resettlement of Refugees

COUNTRY	HUMANITARIAN PLACES
United States	28 420
Australia	11 860
Canada	10 730
Norway	1 630
Sweden	940
New Zealand	650
Finland	560
Denmark	510
Netherlands	170
Ireland	50

Source: *UNHCR Refugees by Numbers*, published January 2004

Australia's large commitment was demonstrated between January and April 2005. We welcomed around 750 Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees from Guinea. They had fled civil war in Liberia to the Ivory Coast, before rebel attacks again forced them to flee, this time to Guinea.

Many of the refugees who were referred to Australia by the UNHCR were families headed by women, whose husbands had been killed or had gone missing. They came to Australia under the *Woman at Risk* visa program, having lived through horrifying experiences in Liberia. They saw many cruelties and the destruction of their homes.

Most of the group had lived in refugee camps since the 1990s. Many of the children had been in camps all their life. They had a very low standard of living in Africa and had never known the safe and comfortable lives we take for granted in Australia.

The UNHCR has described Australia as "one of the leading countries in the resettlement of this high-needs group."¹

Aid for needy countries

Because we are a good global citizen, Australia helps refugees and others in need of humanitarian assistance. As well as the Humanitarian Program and onshore protection system, Australia contributes aid to needy countries.

The aid helps resolve the problems that force people to flee their homeland and assists the country in which refugees first seek asylum. In 2003–04 Australia provided \$132.3 million in aid to the Asia Pacific region, Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan.



Photo: UNHCR

Sources:

1. UNHCR News Stories, (19 January, 2005), *A New Home In Australia For Refugees From West Africa's Wars*, <http://www.unhcr.ch>.

Helping refugees settle in to their new lives



The Australian Government offers a wide range of help for refugees and other people who come to Australia under the Humanitarian Program.

We help them soon after they arrive, to reduce anxiety and quickly rebuild their lives. We want to help them become self-sufficient and contribute to Australian society as soon as they are able. This gives them self-confidence and the basic skills needed to build a new life in a new country.

- Before coming to Australia, some refugees attend a training course introducing them to Australian life, culture and geography. This helps them learn about what to expect when settling in Australia.
- Refugees are met at the airport and taken to their accommodation. They are then helped to find a permanent place to rent. People arriving under the 'Special Humanitarian Program' are usually helped to find accommodation by their proposers.
- Depending on their needs, refugees and other entrants may receive:
 - Basics like clothes, linen, some furniture and appliances. Many refugees arrive in Australia with few possessions and little money.
 - Help with making appointments for medical services such as x-rays and immunisation, as well as psychological counselling to help them deal with the many things they may have suffered, such as torture.

- An introduction to government help such as Centrelink for income and job support and Medicare for health care.
 - An introduction to the Adult Migrant English Program so that they can learn English.
 - Help from Translating and Interpreting Services to talk to people such as doctors and bank staff while they are still learning English. They also help refugees get important personal documents translated.
- The UNHCR has praised Australia's settlement services saying we have developed excellent services for resettling refugees over the past five decades.



"When we went to the intensive English Centre the people were almost like parents, they helped us a lot and we loved them."

Wasila from Afghanistan now living in NSW.

Sources:

1. UNHCR Briefing Notes, (18 June 2004), *Liberian Refugees Arrive In Australia*, <http://www.unhcr.ch>.

Volunteers helping refugees



Anyone can help refugees and humanitarian entrants settle in Australia by making their local community a welcoming place.

When people who have lived in frightening conditions overseas experience a warm welcome to Australia, they are more confident about getting the help they need, contributing their skills and sharing their culture.

Australia's culturally diverse society gets stronger when volunteers and others in the community build friendships and offer support to refugees, who have very different life experiences and cultures.

Those adults who want to find out about becoming a volunteer should visit their local DIMIA office.

The Australian Government also provides funding to Migrant Resource Centres and other community organisations. These bodies provide longer term settlement support for refugees, migrants and other entrants.

They are a first-contact point for refugees, offering settlement information, orientation and referral services.

To find the Migrant Resource Centre closest to your school, visit: www.immi.gov.au/grants/mrc_msa_b.htm or ring **131 881**.

Welcoming refugees can be as simple as providing information. Useful resources are available for schools, doctors, employment agencies, community groups and anyone else who engages with refugees. To find these visit: www.immi.gov.au/settle/providers

"It's very confusing for people when they arrive in a new country, and the practical help of volunteers can make a big difference, even in little things like showing mothers what to pack for their children's school lunch."

Mary, a volunteer from Melbourne.

"We learn of other people's situations which helps us appreciate what we've got in life. I give a lot as a volunteer, but I get three times as much love and friendship back."

Noeline, a volunteer from the Northern Territory.

Refugee profile

The Lamin family, Sierra Leone

The Lamin Family have received such a warm welcome since they arrived in Australia as refugees that they have all but forgotten the hatred that almost cost them their lives in Sierra Leone.

The family were considered political enemies of the ruling government after their father Peter had campaigned strongly for a different party.

“So I became a target, the last day we left the country we were nearly killed,” said Peter.

“The Government was pushing the rebel army out of Freetown and when they reached our house they set it alight with everyone still inside—we were just saved by God.

The family spent two years in the Kountaya Refugee Camp in Guinea. Peter made good use of this time by providing homes for children who had become separated from their families due to war while searches were made for their parents.

“When I put our family’s case to the UNHCR it was accepted and so we were referred to Australia,” Peter said.

The Lamin family arrived in Australia in July 2003. Peter said the family was welcomed at the airport, shown around the city, helped with bank accounts and Centrelink allowance.

“All our immediate necessities were taken care of,” Peter said.

In Australia the Lamin family are not only safe, they have opportunities that they did not have in Sierra Leone according to Peter.

“The whole family is at school now. My wife is at TAFE, I study nursing at university, two of the children are at high school and one is at primary school.



“The children are all happy in their schools, they have African and Australian friends. Anything is possible for them here—things they would never have the opportunity for back home.”

Community support in Australia has been so strong that the Lamins have found it easier to overcome the fears and trauma of the past.

“The Church and community members have been kind morally, financially and in many other ways. It has given me the courage to leave our children in the school,” Peter said.

“My boy Philip is very good at soccer—the team even called me to say they depend on him for their success. He plays striker and last year was selected to play in the regional titles in the under 12s.”

A lack of family financial resources threatened to prevent him from making the trip until the soccer club, church, school and community raised well over \$1000 for Philip to play.

“I find Australians to be nice and very helpful, there is always someone who will come around and give you a hand,” Peter said.

“Australia has helped our family and helped me realise my dream of working in the medical field, so I want to work for Australia—I feel it’s my obligation.

“It is now my hope that employers in this country give refugees the opportunity to give something back so they too will contribute to the development of Australia,” said Peter.



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Classroom activity 3

Brainstorming about refugees

There are many ways Australia helps refugees and people in need of humanitarian assistance.

1. Read the *A New Life for Refugees* kit and list some of the ways Australia provides support for refugees and people who face serious human rights abuses.
2. What could you personally do to help:
 - Refugees to resettle in your neighbourhood?
 - Refugees overseas?

Short story

Write a short story or piece of creative writing on one of the following topics:

1. What is a refugee?
2. Why do people become refugees?
3. My refugee survival kit.
4. Compare the experience of a refugee with someone displaced by a natural disaster.
5. Where do refugees come from?
6. How does Australia help refugees?
7. A day in the life of a refugee—in Africa / in Australia.



Photo: UNHCR

A scenario for discussion

Who should we help and why?

Consider this: You are at school and two friends have forgotten to bring their lunch and want to share yours.

- One person has no money and the other has money.
- Which friend would you share your lunch with?
- Would sharing your lunch with the person with no lunch money make you a good friend?

Is this a bit like how the UNHCR and the Government chooses who to help under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program? We think we should help the people who need help the most—those who are not able to help themselves.

Questions and answers

How many refugees have resettled in Australia?

- Since World War II Australia has resettled more than 645 000 refugees and displaced people.
- Australia is one of only 10 countries to operate a dedicated annual resettlement program.
- For the past two years Australia has offered the world's second highest number of places, after the United States, for the resettlement of refugees and people of humanitarian concern.

How does Australia select refugees?

- Most people who come to Australia as refugees are referred by the UNHCR.
- These people have their claims assessed and then go through health and security checks to make sure they don't have a criminal record.
- Australia's immigration staff at overseas offices interview and process people for whom resettlement in Australia is most favourable.

How many refugees do we help each year?

- In 2004–05, Australia will welcome 6000 refugees—the largest number of resettled refugees for nearly 20 years.

- In 2004–05 Australia's Humanitarian Program will help 13 000 people, up from an average of 12 000 in recent years.

Does Australia help those most in need?

- Australia's Humanitarian Program is adjusted each year to help people in greatest need of resettlement. It takes into account the priorities of the UNHCR, the views of the Australian community, major Australian refugee and humanitarian bodies and government agencies.
- In the past 10 years the Australian Government's focus has moved from South-East Asia and Central America to the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East and South-West Asia. The current priority is Africa and the Middle East.

How do we help refugees settle in Australia?

- Refugees are helped to set up a new life in Australia through one of the world's most generous settlement programs.
- Before coming to Australia, some refugees and Special Humanitarian entrants attend a training course introducing them to Australian life. Presented in their local language, the course provides information about Australia's lifestyle and culture.
- Refugees' travel costs are paid by the Australian Government. Other entrants are generally helped by their proposers, who must be Australian residents.
- Once they arrive in Australia, entrants receive support to settle in Australia through Australian Government services.
- The Australian Government arranges for them to be greeted when they arrive at the airport and taken to their on-arrival accommodation. Special Humanitarian Program entrants are usually taken to accommodation by their proposers.



Photo: UNHCR

- Many refugees receive a range of other services, including help finding long-term housing and household goods to set up their home. Health and psychological services are available, including torture and trauma counselling.
- The Government also helps refugees contact and use other agencies such as Centrelink for income and job assistance and Medicare for health care. Refugees attend the Adult Migrant English Program so that they can learn English. They also use Translating and Interpreting Services.
- Refugees develop social networks and build friendships with the assistance of community groups and volunteers.

What does the UNHCR say about Australia's Humanitarian Program?

- The UNHCR is currently directing international efforts to protect refugees in Africa and says that Australia is, "one of the leading countries in the resettlement of this high-needs group"¹.
- The UNHCR has also said that, "Australia has developed excellent services for resettled refugees over the past five decades"².

How can people help?

- We can help refugees and humanitarian entrants by making their local community and schools a more welcoming place.
- Adults can register as volunteers with an organisation that provides settlement services including Migrant Resource Centres plus many other community organisations.
- To find a local service provider visit <http://www.immi.gov.au> or call **131 881**.
- More useful resources for making our communities open to people of different backgrounds and skills are available at www.immi.gov.au/settle/providers



Photo: UNHCR

Sources:

1. UNHCR News Stories, (19 January 2005), *A New Home In Australia For Refugees From West Africa's Wars*, <http://www.unhcr.ch>.
2. UNHCR Briefing Notes, (18 June 2004), *Liberian Refugees Arrive In Australia*, <http://www.unhcr.ch>.



Photo: UNHCR



Photo: UNHCR



Australian Government

**Department of Immigration and
Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs**