

VOLUNTEERS

Humanitarian entrants' on-arrival needs are considerable, and volunteers play a significant role in helping entrants gain the basic skills necessary to adjust to their new surroundings. A warm welcome and practical assistance with unfamiliar tasks can help new arrivals to settle, particularly when they first arrive in Australia.

The majority of on-arrival assistance to humanitarian entrants is provided through IHSS service providers. Depending upon the needs of humanitarian entrants, and the volunteer arrangements put in place by service providers, volunteers may assist in several ways, including:

- › meeting humanitarian entrants at the airport and taking them to their initial accommodation
- › offering companionship and friendship to humanitarian entrants who have few, if any, personal contacts in Australia
- › helping to familiarise humanitarian entrants who are not used to urban environments with amenities such as electrical appliances (for example, toasters and microwaves), gas stoves, telephones, flush toilets, and running water
- › explaining the costs and billing procedures for utilities like electricity, phone and water
- › teaching new arrivals English and providing advice and support through the AMEP Home Tutor Scheme
- › assisting humanitarian entrants to establish a bank account, apply for Medicare, register with Centrelink, and apply for a driver's licence
- › helping humanitarian entrants to use public places like shopping centres, libraries, councils, medical centres, and pharmacies
- › familiarising humanitarian entrants with Australian foods and cooking methods, particularly if their usual staple foods are not easily available in Australia
- › helping humanitarian entrants to find shops that sell familiar products
- › assisting parents to enrol children in school, and providing them with guidance about the Australian school system and schooling practices and responsibilities (for example, packing lunches, school days and times, uniforms, text books and stationery, school holidays, and interaction with teachers/principal)
- › linking humanitarian entrants to relevant ethnic, community, or religious associations, organisations and relevant places of worship
- › assisting new arrivals to use the public transport system, including reading timetables and route information and buying tickets
- › explaining emergency services and how to contact them
- › allaying any fears and misconceptions about the role of people in positions of authority (for example, police, fire brigade, doctors, government officials, teachers, and school principals)
- › helping humanitarian entrants to find permanent accommodation, and explaining rental practices, including how to maintain a western-style home
- › assisting in transporting humanitarian entrants to and from doctor and other appointments
- › helping to familiarise humanitarian entrants with Australian cultural practices and social

norms, like shaking hands when meeting new people and maintaining eye contact in conversation.

Volunteers are involved in several of the department's settlement programs including the IHSS, the settlement grants program and the AMEP.

People wishing to assist humanitarian entrants as volunteers should contact the

relevant IHSS service providers. Details of IHSS service providers in each state or territory, including contact numbers, can be obtained from local DIMIA offices.

The Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC) will be releasing *How You Can Help Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants: A Volunteer's Guide* in the near future.

Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council

RRAC advises the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs on matters relating to the settlement of Humanitarian Program entrants and migrants. The RRAC was first established in April 1997. The fourth term of the Council commenced on 5 July 2004 and will continue until 30 June 2007.

Council members are appointed on the basis of their knowledge and expertise in settlement issues and services. Members come from various backgrounds and do not represent individual states, territories or community organisations.

The Council provides advice on the delivery of settlement services and aims to improve the information flow on settlement policy between the Government and the community sector.

RRAC's Terms of Reference

RRAC advises the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs on matters relating to the settlement of humanitarian entrants and migrants, specifically in relation to:

- › implementation of the recommendations of the *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*

- › the appropriateness and adequacy of Australian Government services, especially for humanitarian entrants
- › priorities for attention in the planning of settlement services, with particular emphasis on improving coordination of service delivery for humanitarian entrants.

Members take care to ensure the advice they provide accurately reflects community perspectives and views. They attend the Minister's annual community consultations on the Humanitarian Program and a variety of other community fora around Australia.

Contact details

RRAC can be contacted through the:

RRAC Secretariat
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Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
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