



Integration of Syrian Refugees in South Australia: A Snapshot – June 2017

Research conducted and written by Dr. Minerva Nasser-Eddine,
Director, Al Hikma Middle East Advisory Agency
Funded by SEEFAR

ABOUT US

*Our vision is for a world in which
vulnerable people have more
opportunities to advance themselves.*

*The purpose of our social enterprise
is to work with those people to build
a better future.*

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June 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Integration of Syrian Refugees in South Australia: A Snapshot – June 2017 is based on collaboration with Seefar. Seefar funded the research.

The author would like to thank all participants for their contributions and constructive comments. Deep appreciation is extended to the many individuals, groups and organisations throughout South Australia who offered their views and opinions and were generous in sharing their experiences with the researcher. The author gives heartfelt thanks to key individuals who helped facilitate some interviews and is grateful for the forthright and passionate responses and willingness to participate in this study. Their contributions are invaluable and have certainly informed the overall study. This project would not have been possible without their commitment and contribution.

June 2017

ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------------|--|
| AMRC | Australian Migrant Resource Centre |
| CCS | Complex Case Support |
| DFAT | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| DIBP | Department of Immigration and Border Protection |
| DSS | Department of Social Services |
| HSP | Humanitarian Settlement Program |
| HSS | Humanitarian Settlement Services |
| SAN | Settlement Action Network |
| SAPOL | South Australia Police |

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a snapshot of the Syrian refugee experience in South Australia. It was commissioned to review progress on integration, map strengths and weaknesses of the government and resettlement services and suggest lessons to be learned.

The report was commissioned on 8 May, 2017 and the period of interviewing and report writing took place throughout the month of May 2017.

The study focuses on multiple stakeholder views – government (federal, state and local), service providers and/or community organisations of the settlement services sector, volunteers assisting refugees and Syrian refugees in South Australia who arrived via the federal government's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP).

The study:

- Assesses the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of government and settlement services assistance in South Australia
- Informs policy direction for additional government assistance

Context

Since 2011, Australia has committed more than \$433 million in humanitarian assistance in response to the Syria crisis.¹ On 9 September 2015, Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced that "Australia will resettle an additional 12,000 refugees who are fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq." The newly arrived refugees were eligible to receive initial, intensive settlement assistance through the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program.² These services were available to humanitarian entrants for the first six to 12 months on a needs basis. The HSS program was delivered by contracted service providers who conduct settlement services on behalf of the Commonwealth. In South Australia, the Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC) and Anglicare were the top tier service providers assisting newly arrived Syrian refugees.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) has identified the importance of providing early assistance to new arrivals and empowering them to become self-reliant as early and as practicably possible, thereby reducing long term reliance on support services and ensuring their ability to survive and become vibrant members of society.³

In order to examine the integration experience of Syrian refugees in South Australia, this study consists of a review of DSS and other federal government literature on the Syrian refugee intake alongside interviews with HSS sector organisations and individuals, second-tier settlement service providers and volunteers and Syrian refugees in South Australia.

Main Findings

The consensus among stakeholders is that the Syrian refugees in South Australia seem to be more independent and integrating more quickly than some previous refugee cohorts. They have good networks that they use effectively; many service providers remarked on the technological connectedness of the Syrian refugee cohort.

¹ <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/syria/Pages/syria-humanitarian-response.aspx>

² The HSS programme was replaced by HSP on 30 October 2017. Although some changes are now occurring, including a name change, many of the services remain the same. Thus, the findings in this report remain relevant. Please refer to Annex 1 for details of changes under the new HSP.

³ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/syrian-iraqi-humanitarian-crisis>

Local service providers, businesses and government can capitalise on these networks and skills. The majority of surveyed respondents are eager to learn more about services and opportunities in Australia and to become successful contributing members of Australian society.

As with any new arrival experience, a number of challenges were identified involving housing, employment and health, which require immediate attention.

Male refugees found it difficult to find employment and reported feeling a loss of identity as they could no longer fulfill their traditional role of breadwinner. Some felt emasculated, a feeling exacerbated by the contrasting increase in confidence and independence of some their wives. On the other hand, some female refugees found the Australian norm of women working outside the home to be disconcerting and yearned to be allowed their purely domestic role.

All stakeholders interviewed broadly agreed that accommodation plays a significant role in facilitating integration and social cohesion and that every attempt should be made to find appropriate accommodation in safe, welcoming neighbourhoods, close to facilities such as schools, public transport, shops, medical facilities and social or religious institutions. However, affordability of rentals and property size present significant hurdles to placing refugee families in suitable housing as many Syrian families are quite large.

The study found that many families have been placed in unsuitable housing, including in neighbourhoods that were unwelcoming to Syrians where they endured verbal and physical harassment.

All stakeholders agreed on the importance of gaining employment as a key to integration and for promoting a sense of self worth. Service providers, volunteers, advocates and refugees interviewed regularly expressed frustration at the lack of employment and work experience opportunities for refugees in South Australia. Some male refugees were unhappy with English language requirements and prerequisites and preferred to enter the workforce as soon as possible to aid integration, improve their language skills and normalise their situation.

Tensions resulting from generational differences are beginning to emerge between Syrian parents and their children, while older refugees report frustration with the lack of integration opportunities available. Social stresses, such as changing family roles, were observed to be aggravated by the aforementioned challenges. Providing solutions to housing and employment issues may help ease some of the social pressures.

High volumes of health problems were reported among the Syrian refugees. The stigma around addressing mental health issues remains a particular challenge. To a limited extent, the study also suggests medical services currently provided are not adequate to address the needs of the Syrian refugees, and some medical personnel do not appear willing to use translators, which unnecessarily places pressure on their patients who resort to relying on children to assist.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the political, religious and sectarian divides causing destruction in Syria are festering under the surface in the South Australia community and some segmentation has already started to form.

Strong political and community leadership is needed to assist in building socially cohesive communities. Inter-governmental and multi-agency collaboration and effective communications are paramount for the success of Syrian refugee integration in Australia. The HSS sector model in South Australia can be improved, and the existing funding model options need to be further examined.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This report is a snapshot of the Syrian refugee experience in South Australia. The purpose of the report is to review progress on integration in order to:

- Identify the challenges and key contributors to integration of this specific refugee community
- Highlight lessons and implications for government and settlement services by assessing the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of government settlement assistance services in South Australia

The study gathered the views of Syrian refugees who have arrived in South Australia through the federal government's HSP and of other stakeholders, including government service providers (federal, state and local), community organisations in the settlement services sector and volunteers assisting refugees. This ensured a fully-developed understanding of the issues impacting integration.

The report examines:

- How Australia responded to the Syrian crisis
- How assistance was delivered, both in terms of policy and implementation across the settlement services sector
- Whether principles of integration featured in policy directives
- How integrated Syrian refugees in South Australia feel
- Gaps and successes in the integration process

Methodology

Geographically, this study focused on the experience of Syrian refugees settling in South Australia. Data was gathered through a literature review and interviews with key stakeholders in South Australia.

The literature review examined: publicly-accessible government documents such as reports, evaluations, fact sheets, media releases, Hansard, website information, doorstep interviews and guidance documents; media articles; and other documents and information publicly available online from stakeholders.

Stakeholders (comprising federal, state and government officials, settlement service providers, complex case support providers, second tier settlement service providers,⁴ representatives of religious organizations and Syrian-Australian advocates) were invited by email to participate in the study.⁵ Fifty stakeholders were emailed and given the option to respond via return email, phone or in person. In total, 12 participated by email, seven by phone and eight in person.

The initial questions put to stakeholders via email were:

- Broadly, what constitutes successful integration?
- Broadly, what constitutes integration failure?

⁴ Second tier settlement service providers are organisations such as the Australian Refugee Association, Australian Red Cross, Relationships Australia, St Vincent de Paul, Junction Community Centre and Welcome to Australia.

⁵ Organisational stakeholders such as HSS, CCS (Complex Case Support) and second tier services providers were chosen from a contact list circulated by Settlement Action Network (SAN), a network that meets quarterly to discuss settlement-related issues and to share information.

- Does your organisation/community group have a formal/informal position on integration? If so, how does it actively promote and practice it? If not, do you think it is essential or will it make a difference?
- Specific to your sector, can you identify key contributors to integration?
- Do you think the settlement services sector is doing a good job at integration? Please provide examples.

Service recipients were interviewed in focus group settings: two 2-hour discussions with female Syrian Muslim refugees (eight participants), one 1-hour discussion with Syrian Christian-Armenian refugees (13 participants) and one 30-minute discussion with Syrian children whose average age was 11 (18 participants). These discussions were conducted in Arabic, with the aim of providing an understanding of the key issues of concern to beneficiaries and then eliciting their perspectives on the appropriateness and value of the assistance they have received and how the assistance could be improved. At the conclusion of each meeting, the author provided a verbal report to confirm that the beneficiaries' key contributions had been understood. Additionally, several one-on-one interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees.

The confidentiality of informants' responses was maintained throughout the research process, and informants were offered a copy of the final report. The views of contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisation(s) to which they belong and may be personal thoughts and reflections.

Substantially more resources are required for quantitative research to be undertaken and data retrieval. The advantage of undertaking a qualitative assessment of this nature is that, if a survey of Syrian refugees is undertaken in the future, then the themes identified in this study in terms of refugee concerns will provide a useful guide as to the precise questions that might be asked in a quantitative data survey.

Constraints and Limitations

Time and Resources

The research was carried out over approximately three weeks. Given the time limitations, the focus was on South Australia's settlement services sector. It was not proposed, nor would it have been feasible, to review all available documentation or engage equally with all stakeholders. Similarly, time and resource constraints meant that not all Settlement Action Network members could be included. Due to the high number of claims by interviewed stakeholders (including Syrian refugees) of assaults, racial abuse and discrimination, the author approached the South Australian Police (SAPOL) to participate in the study, but they were unable to do so in the time specified. A separate study on this issue, partnering with SAPOL, is highly recommended.

The limited timeframe of this study means that results are impressionistic. However, this study still provides a valuable snapshot of the challenges faced by recently-arrived refugees, which can be used to inform improvement of integration policy. The study also serves as a scoping exercise for further research and analysis. The themes identified in this study could potentially inform questions that might be asked in a quantitative data survey.

Limitations on Stakeholder Participation

Workloads and the limited resources of participant organisations restricted participation in the study. This in turn raises the question of how organisational stakeholders have the human resources and time to properly evaluate current programmes while providing services to a substantial group of new arrivals such as the Syrian cohort.

BACKGROUND

When Syrians began calling for political and economic reforms in March 2011, the Assad administration reacted to peaceful demands and demonstrations with force. Protests increasingly called for Assad's resignation and sometimes became violent. The Syrian government has continued to publicly view the resulting conflict as a legitimate fight against foreign terrorists. Initially, opposition forces were made up of ordinary Syrians of all political, ethnic, religious and sectarian persuasions and defectors of the Syrian armed forces who formed the Free Syrian Army. Further into the protracted conflict, reports emerged of foreign fighters, including radicalised insurgents, entering Syria and aligning themselves to the rapidly splintering factions that now make up the canvas of conflict now in its sixth year.

Over half of all Syrians have been forced from their homes since 2011, with approximately 6.3 million internally displaced and up to five million living in hard-to-reach or besieged areas.⁶ Over five million have fled to neighboring countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. Almost 1.2 million Syrians have made the perilous journey, some across the seas, to Europe. A number of countries in Europe, especially Germany, the UK, Canada, Australia and, to a lesser degree, the United States, have taken in Syrian refugees through humanitarian programmes.

⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE

Since 2011, Australia has committed more than AU \$433 million in humanitarian assistance in response to the Syrian crisis.⁷ Australian aid has largely gone to UN Agencies (68 percent), international humanitarian organizations (20 percent), Australian NGOs (eight percent) and Australian technical experts (four percent).⁸ The focus has been in the areas of education, health care, shelter, water (sanitation and hygiene), food security and nutrition, medical assistance, protection (child and psycho-social support) and livelihoods (employment and community building). Recent commitments include \$25 million in humanitarian assistance pledged at the February 2016 Syria Donors Conference in London.⁹

In February 2017, Australia further committed to the Syria Crisis Humanitarian Resilience Package-Design, which outlines a three-year \$220 million package of assistance to the Syria crisis.¹⁰ Under this package, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) intends to develop a series of investments through FY2018-19 targeting people affected by the conflict within Syria as well as those in neighbouring Jordan and Lebanon. The focus will be on humanitarian assistance, protection service, access to quality education and increased access to work, including disadvantaged communities within host countries.

In addition to providing financial support, Australia has been instrumental in improving humanitarian access inside Syria. For example, while on the United Nations Security Council, Australia co-authored Resolutions 2139 and 2165.¹¹ The latter resolution passed successfully in July 2014 and stressed the need for all border crossings to be used efficiently for United Nations humanitarian operations.¹²

The Syrian conflict was pushed to the forefront of public conversation when Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton jointly released a media statement on 9 September, 2015, announcing that Australia would provide \$44 million in humanitarian assistance to more than 240,000 Syrians and Iraqis who had been forced to flee their countries. They also announced that “Australia will resettle an additional 12,000 refugees who are fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Our focus will be on those most in need – the women, children and families of persecuted minorities who have sought refuge from the conflict in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.”¹³

⁷ <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/syria/Pages/syria-humanitarian-response.aspx>

⁸ DFAT, Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Crisis, Fact Sheet, May 2016.

⁹ <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/syria/Pages/syria-humanitarian-response.aspx> and http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2016/jb_mr_160204.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FIS0K%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D

¹⁰ This package design has clearly taken on board recommendations made in the September 2015 ‘Australia’s Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis: Evaluation Report’ by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), DFAT – which ensures that it develops a multi-year Syria response strategy, consolidates the number of partners, improves management of human resources, and provides more investment in medium-to-long term projects rather than short term emergency relief /early response.

¹¹ ‘Australia’s Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis: Evaluation Report’, Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), DFAT, September 2015.

¹² <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2165>

¹³ <http://www.formerministers.dss.gov.au/15738/the-syrian-and-iraqi-humanitarian-crisis/>

SECURITY & SYRIAN REFUGEE ARRIVALS

Refugee Selection Process

According to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's (DIBP) website, priority was given to people displaced by the conflict in Syria and Iraq who were:

- Assessed as being most vulnerable - persecuted minorities, women, children and families with the least prospect of ever returning safely to their homes
- Located in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey
- Registered with UNHCR

Potential beneficiaries of the programme were required to “pass a series of processing stages and checks, including health, character and security checks” before being granted a visa and resettling in Australia. They undergo “rigorous security checks - conducted in consultation with relevant Australian agencies and international partners. Security checks are supplemented by an interview with Australian departmental officers where claims for resettlement and identity are assessed.”¹⁴

¹⁴ <https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Refu/response-syrian-humanitarian-crisis#>

SETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

The DSS is responsible for providing settlement support and assistance to individuals who come to Australia under the HSP, which is comprised of the offshore HSS and Complex Case Support Services (CSS).¹⁵ The stated aims of the programme are to “build skills and knowledge for social and economic well being of humanitarian entrants through a needs-based case management approach.”¹⁶

Support and services include access to:

- Medicare
- Income support payments
- English language tuition (entitled to 510 hours TAFE, distance learning or home tutor scheme, part time/full time/evening and weekend classes)
- Torture and trauma counseling
- Settlement services¹⁷

Additionally, all individuals accepted into this programme are given Australian permanent residency.

The HSP is delivered nationally in 11 contract regions, with new contracts for HSP awarded in October 2017. The new providers are: the Australian Red Cross, Settlement Services International Ltd, MDA Ltd, Melaleuca Refugee Centre and Victoria-based AMES Australia in South Australia.¹⁸ This report focuses on the pre-October 2017 environment.

Overview of the Australian Government’s Approach to Integration

Although the terms integration and social cohesion are not used by DSS, it appears that the department is working towards these goals when settling new and emerging communities within the HSP and regular migrant intake.

The Settlement Services Program Guidelines Overview notes: “The Families and Communities Program aims to strengthen relationships, support families, improve children’s well-being and increase the participation in community life to strengthen family and community functioning, and reduce the costs of family breakdown.” It further adds: “The broad aim of the Settlement Services Activity is to deliver services which assist eligible clients to become self-reliant and participate equitably in Australian society, with a focus on fostering social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being and community connectedness.”¹⁹

Similarly, the DSS website states: “Australia’s approach to the settlement of migrants and humanitarian entrants is based on several key principles, including providing support based on need, fostering participation in Australian society as soon as possible, fostering welcoming communities and drawing on the valuable skills and expertise of civil society to provide services and support.”²⁰ It cautions that this may take a while and that ongoing support is available where required.²¹

The government maintains a policy of multiculturalism. Although the term multiculturalism is not mentioned in

¹⁵ The HSS and CSS programmes were replaced by the HSP on 30 October 2017. Although some changes are now occurring, including a name change, many of the services remain the same. Thus, the findings in this report remain relevant. Please refer to Annex 1 for details of changes under the new HSP.

¹⁶ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services>

¹⁷ <https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Refu/response-syrian-humanitarian-crisis#>

¹⁸ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services>

¹⁹ Families and Communities Program: Settlement Service Program Guidelines Overview, DSS, April 2017, p5.

²⁰ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/syrian-iraqi-humanitarian-crisis>

²¹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/syrian-iraqi-humanitarian-crisis>

the recently published booklet “Life in Australia: Australian Values and Principles”, the content of the booklet incorporates the premise of integration and focuses on multiculturalism for all Australians with statements such as: “Australia’s cultural diversity is a strength which makes for a dynamic society” and “Within the framework of Australia’s laws, all Australians have the right to express their culture and beliefs and to participate freely in Australia’s national life. At the same time, everyone is expected to uphold the principles and shared values, as outlined in the introduction, that support Australia’s way of life.”²² It repeatedly highlights the importance of accepting Australian values, listed as:

- Respect for equal worth and the dignity and freedom of the individual
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion and secular government
- Freedom of association
- Support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law
- Equality under the law
- Equality of men and women
- Equality of opportunity
- Peacefulness
- A spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, mutual respect and compassion for those in need.²³

The National Settlement Framework

The National Settlement Framework is a nine-page blueprint for Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments to work in partnership to engage, plan and deliver joint services that support the settlement of migrants and new arrivals in Australia. Developed in consultation with all state and territory governments, the framework’s intention is to guide stakeholders “to make planning decisions on the provision of settlement and support services, and to deliver coordinated, client-centric services, informed by research and evaluation.”²⁴ The framework “reflects the commitment of the three tiers of government to enhance inter-governmental collaboration, information sharing and coordination to improve settlement outcomes for migrants and new arrivals in Australia.”²⁵

The framework identifies settlement and support service requirements for migrants and new arrivals to be predominantly in nine priority areas: employment, education and training, language services, housing, civic participation, transport, health and wellbeing, family and social support and justice.²⁶ The document also indicates where each stakeholder’s responsibilities lie.

Although the framework outlines the existing responsibilities of each tier of government (for example, local governments are to provide services and access to local libraries, community language programs and community transport services), the conditions are not in place for it to be fully implemented. The research suggested there were problems with coordination and communication between different levels of authority. For example, some local councils approached for this study did not know of the framework’s existence, while the South Australian Local Government Association, the leading local government representative body, does not appear to be

²² http://www.border.gov.au/LifeinAustralia/Documents/lia_english_full.pdf, p9.

²³ http://www.border.gov.au/LifeinAustralia/Documents/lia_english_full.pdf, p4.

²⁴ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/publications/national-settlement-framework>

²⁵ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2016/the_national_settlement_framework.pdf, p1.

²⁶ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2016/the_national_settlement_framework.pdf, p3.

coordinating with the federal or state government regarding settlement services.²⁷

Although local councils are supposed to “provide information to the other tiers of government regarding the needs and issues for particular community groups”, numerous council staff indicated that councils are often not informed of who moves in (or out) of the city, and that it is only through community connections and local events that a council is notified of the arrival of a new cohort of refugees. Members of the state government have also expressed frustration with the lack of information sharing and progress reports on the settlement of Syrians in South Australia. In combination, these problems suggest that more could be done to make the framework effective.

Recommendation: The government should review how the National Settlement Framework is being implemented, especially information sharing and coordination among stakeholders.

Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS)

Under the HSS program,²⁸ newly-arrived refugees were eligible to receive initial, intensive settlement assistance for the first six to 12 months on the basis of need. Service providers such as the AMRC and Anglicare, top-tier providers in South Australia, were contracted by the government to assist newly-arrived Syrian refugees.

Discussions with various government and non-government service providers suggests that the settlement of Syrians was based on:

- Where they may have family or community
- Whether they have a location preference
- The size and composition of potential settlement communities²⁹
- Resources, existing infrastructure, service and capacity to accommodate new arrivals

Newly-arrived Syrian refugees received various forms of assistance:

- Arrival reception and assistance (AMRC & Anglicare)
- Help with transport to their initial accommodation
- Assistance with short and long term accommodation (Anglicare)
- Property induction (Anglicare)
- An initial food package and start-up pack of household goods
- Assistance registering with Centrelink, Medicare, health services, banks and schools (AMRC)
- Orientation to life in Australia (AMRC)
- Introduction to community and recreation programs through the HSS program (AMRC)
- Introduction to the Adult Migrant English Program (Dept of Education and Training)

The DSS website stipulated that Syrian refugees (like other refugees and humanitarian entrants) do not receive higher benefits than other social security recipients, do not have their rental bonds automatically paid by

²⁷ Interview conducted with Subject Z, health worker and volunteer, June 2, 2017.

²⁸ Along with the CCS, the HSS programme was recently replaced by the HSP. See Annex 1 for details.

²⁹ <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/international/causes/syrian-iraqi-conflict/>

government and do not receive a lump sum payment from government upon arrival.³⁰ DSS identifies the importance of providing early assistance to new arrivals and empowering them to become self-reliant as early as practicably possible to reduce long-term reliance on support services and to ensure their ability to survive and become vibrant members of society.³¹

According to the DSS website, the objectives of the HSS program were to provide humanitarian entrants with:

- Tailored support to begin a new life in Australia
- An opportunity to strengthen their ability to fully participate in the economic and social life of Australia
- Skills and knowledge to independently access services beyond the HSS program services in accordance with the programme's principles³²

Service providers were guided by a number of delivery principles.³³ HSS case managers were responsible for assisting refugees in accessing services or programs relevant for immediate and long-term settlement. Services are "based on [client] needs",³⁴ but it was unclear who makes the initial assessment and whether a follow-up assessment takes place. This is potentially problematic as circumstances may change or it may only become clear after some time that certain services are relevant or necessary.

The HSS program ends six to 12 months after arrival, with exit based on "clients being able to clearly define settlement outcomes", which may include:

- Residing in long-term accommodation (generally a lease of at least six months)
- Links to the required services identified in their case management plan
- School age children are enrolled and attending school
- Ensuring clients have "understood the messages delivered through orientation and have the skills and knowledge to independently access services."³⁵

Complex Case Support (CCS) Programme

The CCS sought to deliver "specialised and intensive case management services to eligible humanitarian entrants with exceptional needs which extend beyond the scope of other settlement services" such as HSS.³⁶ The CCS programme provided "tailored and flexible responses" and generally covered individuals who were unable to independently engage. Eligibility for CCS was based on a client displaying an inability to independently engage with appropriate supports as well as being impacted by one or more of the following:

- Mental or physical disability
- Severe, critical, long term and/or unmanaged health needs

³⁰ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/syrian-iraqi-humanitarian-crisis>

³¹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/syrian-iraqi-humanitarian-crisis>

³² <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-services-hss>

³³ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-services-hss>

³⁴ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-services-hss>

³⁵ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-services-hss>

³⁶ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs-programs-policy/settlement-services/complex-case-support-programme>

- Mental health issues that significantly impact daily life
- Homelessness or housing instability
- Domestic and family violence
- Child and youth welfare concerns³⁷

Findings

Although study participants acknowledged the positive work of the HSS and CSS in South Australia, noting their genuine desire to assist, and provision of services with limited budgets and human resources, some patterns emerged for areas of improvement:

1. Lack of coordination between agencies: The two agencies had little dialogue, and some clients and assistance providers noted there was rivalry and blame-shifting between the agencies.
2. Availability of accurate information about additional services required by individual refugee clients: Second-tier service providers and community groups highlighted difficulties in accessing holistic settlement service information and statistics from HSS, CCS and the federal government and also that information was sometimes incomplete or inconsistent.

According to some second-tier service providers, some clients were left to fend for themselves and/or seek someone independent of the first-tier service provider agencies.

Some study participants – both service providers and refugees – also voiced concern that the federal government is passing political responsibility³⁸ for service limitations to HSS and CCS, which, because they lack human resources and budgetary capacity, are in turn relying heavily on smaller informal and formal second-tier service providers, religious organisations, charities, volunteers as well as state and local governments. There seemed to be little provision from the federal government for monitoring and evaluation or other controls to ensure services are delivered.

These findings suggest that information exchange across agencies, across the sector and across all levels of government could be improved.

³⁷ The DSS website description of the CCS programme elaborates more on these categories, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/complex-case-support-programme>

³⁸ For example, finding adequate housing for new arrivals (acknowledging that there is a nation-wide housing crisis and record numbers of homeless people). Although the housing crisis has been identified as a significant problem by all three tiers of government in recent years, the federal government has yet to develop a national policy that addresses the immediate, short, medium and long-term needs of acquiring adequate, safe, affordable and appropriate shelter.

THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CASE STUDY: A SNAPSHOT

Refugees began trickling into South Australia in late 2015, with numbers peaking between the end of March and early May 2016, and then reducing again to a regular monthly flow. Based on information conducted over the course of this study, the Syrian arrivals in South Australia appear to be doing well despite the displacement and traumatic experiences many have endured. Service provider interviewees described the Syrian cohort as proactive in seeking out and utilizing opportunities in Australia, including educational facilities. They noted that this cohort seems to be different from previous cohorts; one key point of difference is that conflict and war is relatively new to Syrians, whereas the Bhutanese, Iraqi and Vietnamese refugees have experienced conflict for decades. One HSS worker stated there might be something distinct about Syrians as “new refugees” as opposed to Afghans who have been living with war, instability and displacement for decades.³⁹

As the Syrians compare their current situations with their past lives, their expectations of service providers are much higher, especially for the minority who are from a middle class or professional background. There is less tolerance for the length of time often needed to resolve housing and employment issues. Some case officers believe that the Syrians know how to use services effectively, noting that this cohort has also made use of other service providers and returned to the original HSS provider/case officer armed with ideas and knowledge. Some case officers have been forced to rethink or adjust their strategies in resolving problems as they arise, as strategies that may have worked with refugees from other countries are not working for the Syrians. HSS workers also thought that levels of self-reliance and proactiveness among this cohort of refugees were advanced, with the Syrians generally having a sense of urgency in building a stable home.

Some service providers, advocates and refugees expressed mixed feelings about the services provided by agencies in the settlement services sector. In general, refugee respondents expressed gratitude at being safe and at receiving shelter and health services but also annoyance and disappointment at the challenges they face in obtaining work. If anything, it seems that some of these Syrian new arrivals want to make up for lost time and return to the same lifestyle and status they once held. They can see that the opportunities are available to them in Australia, but the language hurdles and immediate employment prospects are holding them back. Some refugees seemed to perceive a gap between the values put forth in the Life In Australia booklet, specifically “respect for equal worth, and the dignity and freedom of the individual” and “a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, mutual respect and compassion for those in need”,⁴⁰ and their own experience. Although culturally-sensitive and appropriate conduct has come a long way, there is still, according to one service provider, “room for improvement”. The respondent continued, “Some service providers feel uncomfortable with some of the case officers’ attitudes and conduct towards some Syrians.”⁴¹

I AM GRATEFUL FOR BEING SAFE, I AM
THANKFUL FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN
PROVIDED BUT I AM NOT AN ANIMAL!
TREAT ME WITH DIGNITY... DIGNITY!

Cultural differences remain a challenge to many service providers as well. One provider observed, “There are many organisations wanting to offer help, but it seems as though they take two steps forward and one back as they’re too concerned that they will offend by acting in a culturally- inappropriate manner. However, this is being tackled to some degree through partnerships.”⁴² In addition to partnerships, implementing further cultural immersion training of staff and creating organisational values statements on integration and social cohesion (which many participating agencies do not have) will help to ensure that staff who work closely with refugees are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and empathy.

Some respondents indicated that they felt the approach by some in the settlement services sector to be condescending and disrespectful. One service provider asked, “Who wants to be a recipient of a second hand blanket?” and further noted that “some of the homes being allocated to Syrians are not fit for humans. No

³⁹ Interview conducted with Subject M, HSS worker, 1 June, 2017.

⁴⁰ http://www.border.gov.au/LifeinAustralia/Documents/lia_english_full.pdf, p4 of 11.

⁴¹ Interview conducted with Subject Z, health worker and volunteer, 2 June, 2017.

⁴² Email response, second-tier HSS provider, 28 May, 2017.

Australian would accept them as appropriate housing; they are rat-infested, mouldy, uninhabitable.⁴³ This reflects a common complaint among families interviewed that many available homes are of poor quality. For example, the ceiling of the living room in one house was observed to have three water-damaged areas. Buckets are required to collect water that drips from the ceiling when it rains. As the living room is the only available communal room, it is used most frequently. The dampness and humidity worsens the father's respiratory problems. Despite complaints to the (private) landlord, no action has been taken to remedy the situation. Other houses were observed to be dark, run down and old with salt damp and plumbing problems. A number of volunteers assisting refugees have reported homes infested with rats.⁴⁴

Although this situation may be the result of a housing shortage, one provider also felt that there might be a lack of action because of a feeling that "considering where they have come from, they ought to be grateful."⁴⁵ Refugee respondents articulated an awareness that this type of attitude might exist. One Syrian male asked why vouchers were given to refugees to obtain items at charities such as Vinnies (run by the St. Vincent de Paul Society) or food banks rather than to "supermarkets that sell groceries that have yet to expire" and clothes "that have yet to be worn". He asked, "Is it because I am a refugee? You're forcing this label, this existence onto me, despite the fact that I'm trying to move away from it. I am human. I have dignity."⁴⁶

A female refugee described another situation where disorganised processes have led to feelings of resentment and being disrespected: "Because we, as a refugee cohort, are well connected via technology, word gets around that free new blankets, for instance, are being given away at any given time. Members of the community in need of blankets would show up within the hour to collect. Upon arrival they are told, 'Sorry but the new blankets have gone, all we have left are second hand blankets.' Some would react badly to this, and complain about why some have received new blankets and others received second hand ones. Some will be offended and refuse. Others will be grateful. Whilst others are very jealous asking, 'is that family better than mine? Is it because I'm wearing a hijab that you're discriminating against me with a second hand blanket?'"⁴⁷ Since it is well known that word spreads rapidly among the Syrian cohort about services and goods on offer, she suggested, "Isn't it wiser that clearer descriptions of such items are provided in order to avoid offence?"⁴⁸

Feeling that one is not being accorded dignity and respect can easily be a barrier to immediate and long-term integration. As one service provider noted, "Integration is a process, one that is very subjective and hard to quantify objectively. However, there are integral steps in this process that can help the people involved to be more successful in feeling integrated." He added that "mutual respect is critical."⁴⁹

Refugee respondents identified the following additional factors as crucial to successful integration:

- Opportunities for mainstream and migrant groups to mingle and learn from one another's cultural values, practices and experiences
- Feeling welcome and part of the community
- Ability to become involved in the community
- Feeling able to express yourself freely
- Feeling accepted and valued

⁴³ Interview conducted with Subject X, HSS provider, 26 May, 2017.

⁴⁴ Interview conducted with Subject Z, health worker and volunteer, 2 June, 2017; Interview conducted with Subject 2, Syrian female refugee, 3 June, 2017; and interview conducted with Subject C, Syrian community advocate, 23 May, 2017.

⁴⁵ Interview conducted with Subject X, HSS provider, 26 May, 2017.

⁴⁶ Interview conducted with Subject D, Syrian male refugee, 24 May, 2017.

⁴⁷ Interview conducted with Subject 2, Syrian female refugee, 3 June, 2017.

⁴⁸ Interview conducted with Subject 2, Syrian female refugee, 3 June, 2017.

⁴⁹ Email response, CCS provider, 23 May, 2017.

Feeling able to celebrate your own culture and experience the different cultures of Australia

There was consensus among the refugee respondents that it is important to be able to live independently and be “able to access available services and be capable of navigating through existing systems.”⁵⁰ One volunteer added that it is “important that the refugees are empowered and equipped to work with the system and not be set up for failure.”⁵¹ Refugees and service providers alike linked the importance of language, education and training and the ability to find work with successful settlement and integration. They also identified access to housing, health, education and services as rights.

Challenges in Priority Areas

The following sections outline some of the challenges that have arisen in addressing priority needs, the impact they have had on the refugee cohort and a reflection on lessons learned.

Housing

All stakeholders interviewed broadly agreed that accommodation plays a significant role in facilitating integration and social cohesion, and that every attempt should be made to find appropriate accommodation in safe, welcoming neighbourhoods, close to facilities such as schools, public transport, shops, medical facilities and social or religious institutions. However, affordability of rentals and property size are factors that present significant hurdles to placing refugee families in suitable housing. Many of the 150 families that have settled in South Australia have large families with four to 10 children, requiring homes with three to four, or more, bedrooms. These homes, of course, command higher rental prices. In some cases, families reported spending up to 40-45 percent of their Centrelink benefits on rentals, placing them in the “housing stress” category, as well as difficulty paying their utility bills.

Many Syrian families who were initially settled in northern suburbs because of cheaper housing have moved to the south of Adelaide and are increasingly relocating to the western suburbs – areas with established mosques. Some families told the author that they moved: to be closer to friends; closer to a mosque; because they were unhappy in their previous house (too small, not suitable, run down); and because they were unhappy with the previous suburb (too rough, too many social problems, racism).

This study observed that some Syrians have moved into the private rental market more quickly than previous refugee cohorts. Many have managed to maintain their leases, but some return to housing providers for assistance after six to 12 months when they find that private rental accommodation is not financially sustainable. Other factors leading to their return to public housing include suitability issues such as rules against smoking and changes in a family situation.

One challenge associated with housing is the difficulty of “blending in” to their new neighbourhoods. Refugee respondents described being subject to direct and indirect discrimination, including racially-tinged verbal abuse, intimidation and assault. Incidents occurred in both affluent and poorer areas but seemed to be more common in the (poorer) northern suburbs.

Some refugees located in metropolitan Adelaide faced serious harassment and abuse. They are easy targets because of their race and religion. In one case, a family had rubbish regularly thrown in their yards, their vegetable patch uprooted and was verbally abused with racial slurs every time they left or entered their home. One respondent reported that all three female members of his family had been subject to abuse and his mother’s hijab forcefully removed.⁵² Initially, many remained silent due to fear that if they complained they would be returned overseas. Some did complain to the police but gave up when the police insisted corroborating evidence was needed before any enforcement action would be taken. These experiences have led many families who have

⁵⁰ Email response, CCS provider, 23 May, 2017; interview conducted with Subject Z, health worker and volunteer, 2 June, 2017.

⁵¹ Interview conducted with Subject Z, health worker and volunteer, 2 June, 2017.

⁵² Interview conducted with Subject 1, Syrian male refugee, 3 June, 2017.

suffered abuse to relocate. Word seems to have spread among the cohort that there is no point reporting abuse, because the police are not interested in resolving these types of problems. Some service providers have responded by suggesting that local community leaders mediate, or by providing counseling themselves. In some cases, minor disputes/misunderstandings have been resolved, but in other cases families have concluded it is easier to relocate.

Another challenge for Syrian families is the comparatively small size of their new homes and the lack of safe outdoor space. In one case, a newly arrived family of 14 was tenanted in a four bedroom apartment – large by Australian standards but small for this family from rural Syria that had farmed for generations. The parents reported being afraid to let their children leave the apartment, that their children were unhappy being confined to such a small space and that the family was feeling increasingly frustrated. Overcrowding can result in a variety of negative consequences, including putting individuals at risk of primary or secondary homelessness, increasing the risk of domestic violence and pushing families to require CCS services. Child marriage, disengagement from educational activities and developmental concerns can all stem from housing pressures.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ☑ Anglicare (and any future provider) along with state and federal governments need to assess the current housing stock, including the standard, location and suitability, and improve processes to better match housing to client needs
- ☑ Public housing managers (including state government agencies and NGOs) and private landlords need to ensure basic maintenance including repairs and pest control. Annual audits of the safety of the properties should be considered
- ☑ SAPOL and settlement providers should record and compile statistics of racial assaults and abuse with appropriate criminal investigations undertaken where relevant
- ☑ If a property is targeted because the tenants are of a particular ethnic or religious persuasion then it should not be tenanted again to individuals from this ethnic/religious group⁵³
- ☑ Service providers should monitor the situation within larger households, especially as the young children grow into adolescents and require their own space

Health Problems

Many study participants reported that high volumes of health problems exist among the Syrian refugees, with issues such as heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol and blood pressure coming to the surface after arrival. Discussions with CCS service providers in South Australia suggest a significantly higher number of Syrian clients receive CCS services as compared to other refugee cohorts. Considering the trauma and harrowing experiences many endured in Syria and while seeking asylum in neighbouring countries, this is not surprising. There also seems to be a number of refugees that have family members with physical, intellectual or psychiatric impairment. Some refugees have shrapnel lodged in their bodies and some continue to require treatment after sustaining injuries in Syria. Such health needs require long-term management.

A problem compounding depression and other underlying mental health issues is the stigma around mental health. In Arab cultures generally, speaking about mental health remains taboo. In religious families, religious observance is seen as the best (perhaps only) remedy to overcoming depression. Some physicians have learned to rephrase the diagnosis of depression in order to make it more acceptable to patients. For example, when anti-depressants are prescribed, the patient is told “this will help you relax a bit and cope with the circumstances in which you currently find yourself.” A community advocate explained, “It’s about pitching it to the patient in a way he/she will understand (and accept).”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Interview conducted with Subject C, Syrian community advocate, 23 May, 2017.

Another problem identified by one health worker is the considerable “disconnect in [medical] services.” She notes, “It is hard enough for an Australian to navigate systems, let alone someone who has just arrived with limited or no English.” The problem is “there is no one health directory. The orientation and information provided by HSS and CCS is insufficient.”⁵⁵ She added that some physicians and specialists seemed reluctant and even refused to use interpreters, whether for reasons of cost or the time required. The “culture and approach needs to be challenged and fixed,”⁵⁶ she suggested. From her interactions with refugees and health workers, she felt that little cross-cultural understanding or respect is shown to many of the newcomers who access medical services.

She also expressed concern for the psychological impact on children who have to act as interpreters and provide care for their parents. Currently, it does not appear that any specific person or agency has responsibility for assessing the psychological load they carry.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ☑ Key settlement service providers ought to identify doctors and service providers who are willing to adjust their approach to providing care for refugees
- ☑ Encourage doctors and medical staff to develop long-term relationships with patients as underlying and interconnected problems often only surface after doctor-patient trust has been established
- ☑ Educate health workers about the importance of interpreters
- ☑ Improve coordination of refugee healthcare between medical service providers, case managers and clients

Employment

All stakeholders agreed on the importance of gaining employment as a key to integration and for promoting a sense of self worth. Service providers, volunteers, advocates and refugees interviewed regularly expressed frustration at the lack of employment and work experience opportunities for refugees in South Australia. Some male refugees who participated in this study were considering leaving South Australia, because they heard “you can get a job easily in Sydney.”⁵⁷ An older man was upset that he “chose to come to Australia and not Germany where everything is available”.⁵⁸ A number of service providers and a few refugees stated that the refugees were feeling “cheated by the government”.

“WE’VE BECOME ANIMALS HERE. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SHELTER, SAFETY AND ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO US YET WE ARE TREATED AND ACT LIKE ANIMALS. WE ARE FED, WATERED, BATHED AND BEDDED. THIS IS OUR EXISTENCE. IT IS BORING, IT IS DEPRESSING. WE EXIST BUT WE DO NOT LIVE. JUST GIVE ME WORK! I AM DYING INSIDE, WE ARE DYING INSIDE!”¹

Much of this seems to stem from misinformation, which led to expectations not being met. Multiple refugee respondents reported that, while being processed in countries neighbouring Syria, they were told they would be guaranteed health, education, home ownership and employment if they chose to come to Australia. Many felt aggrieved that the latter two promises have not been delivered. When asked who made these promises, respondents answered “the government” or the “person processing the forms/conducting the interview”. Various people independently reported hearing these promises so understanding the origin of these promises might be a worthwhile line of future inquiry.

⁵⁵ Interview conducted with Subject Z, health worker and volunteer, 2 June, 2017.

⁵⁶ Interview conducted with Subject Z, Health worker and volunteer, 2 June, 2017.

⁵⁷ Interview conducted with Subject D, Syrian male refugee, 24 May, 2017.

⁵⁸ Focus group, Syrian Armenians, conducted 20 May, 2017.

Throughout the course of the interviews, a number of interlinked points around employment and education surfaced:

English-language requirements

To aid integration, the government has mandated 510 hours of free language instruction within the first 12 months of settlement. Most of the refugees surveyed attended class three times a week, with some enrolled full-time and others part-time. Female respondents appeared happier with the classes than male. Specifically, male respondents appeared to place a higher priority on employment and expressed unhappiness with their inability to find work in their trade or profession. Some reported being told they needed to obtain a minimum of Certificate 3 in English proficiency, while others reported being told they needed local work experience before being considered for a job. Thus, they found themselves stuck in a loop with enormous pressure to succeed. One health worker said that the English language requirements placed “pressure [on the refugees] to succeed overnight ... yet there’s little support provided to understand and appreciate that each case is different and requires a different approach – it’s not a one size fits all solution”.⁵⁹

The refugees themselves often see integration through the lens of work, which in turn helps them learn English more effectively and to participate in the wider community. For example, one male refugee wondered why there wasn’t flexibility for him to gain work experience through a work-programme while taking classes:

“Why can’t the government or my case officer match my skills with a potential employer?” he asked. “I can go to TAFE for two hours, three days a week and go to work the rest of the week. I suspect I will learn more English on the job than I do in class. Especially when the vocabulary learnt is more relevant to my profession than the type of English being taught in class. I already consider myself getting paid (receipt of benefits) so isn’t this a better use of my time? Giving me the opportunity to learn and integrate? If the workplace likes my work and thinks I can add value, then they can employ me (through paid work), and I can go off the benefits. Alternatively, if they do not have the capacity to employ me or do not like my work, at least I have gained local work experience and have the confidence to actively apply for (paid) work.”⁶⁰

Another male refugee, who said he was fed up with the welfare system and the English language training requirements, claimed he walked into Centrelink, demanded that all benefits cease and announced he was no longer going to attend English classes. He subsequently found a job in his trade. Though he has limited English language skills, he stated he is content with his situation and is learning English on the job.⁶¹

Change in family relations

The difficulty in finding employment has had negative social consequences that also affect family dynamics. Married male refugees, including relatively young and able men, expressed feeling increasingly despondent and frustrated. Some reported feeling angry and emasculated, particularly because their traditional role of being the breadwinner was impossible to fulfill, resulting in the loss of an important part of their identity. These feelings were particularly acute when they saw their wives become more confident and independent. In addition, unemployment changed family dynamics, resulting in new tensions. One man explained:

“Without telling you about other families, I will speak of my own. I feel that my sons no longer respect me, no longer see me as a role model or adequate father figure. All they see is me sitting on the couch at home when they leave the house for school and when they return. They see me bickering with their mother, because I’m now concerning myself with petty things such as household matters. They see the tension between their mum and I. They would prefer to sit in their bedrooms alone than spend time with me. They have never seen me like this. I was always the breadwinner. I was the proactive, vibrant,

⁵⁹ Interview conducted with Subject Z, health worker and volunteer, 2 June, 2017.

⁶⁰ Interview conducted with Subject 1, Syrian male refugee, 3 June, 2017.

⁶¹ Interview conducted with Subject 1, Syrian male refugee, 3 June, 2017.

healthy parent who would bring joy, wealth and experience to the home. If AMRC or ARA could run employment-matching service workshops rather than community dinners or concerts we would be a lot better off. This is a dangerous situation they have created, very dangerous.”⁶²

These feelings were particularly acute when men saw their wives becoming more confident and independent. Some men have responded by disengaging, while others isolate themselves. Still others are content to receive benefits with little desire to try any further – something the government has been actively trying to avoid.⁶³

Female refugees also face challenges in adapting to the different gender norms and roles in Australia. Most were homemakers and mothers in Syria, and many found the Australian norm of women working outside the home strange and disconcerting. One female refugee said, “They want me to look for work. I am working - I’m a mother.”⁶⁴

One community advocate noted that for many refugees, the period of unemployment in Australia is the first time couples have spent so much time with each another. In Syria, the man would leave early in the morning and return in the evening for a meal, then go out to socialise with male friends and relatives. In general, little time was spent as a family. When Syrians were displaced to neighbouring countries, most men would again spend hours outside the home looking for work or juggling multiple jobs. In Adelaide, couples now find themselves spending a lot more idle time together, leading to bickering about small matters – an additional consequence of anxiety over difficulties finding work.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ☑ Assess the effectiveness of materials and services provided by employment agencies
- ☑ Establish a volunteer/work experience hub where local businesses can register to have refugees matched based on skills and qualifications
- ☑ To promote capacity building and help refugees gain valuable work experience, consider establishing an agency dedicated to the employment of new arrivals similar to Disability Employment Services, which matches workers to potential employers
- ☑ Review English language delivery and requirements to ensure classes are effective and appropriately tailored. For example, one student mentioned that the class he attends has up to 50 students at all levels of English proficiency with one teacher⁶⁵
- ☑ Review studies of previous cohorts from similar patriarchal societies to learn lessons about addressing challenges resulting in changing family dynamics
- ☑ Establish men’s group forums to provide social, psychological and practical support to integration, finding work and dealing with changing family dynamics

Inter-Generational and Age-Specific Challenges

Respondents observed that generational differences are beginning to emerge between Syrian parents and their children. Many adolescent and young adult refugees are in awe of the freedom, opportunities and affluence in Australia. Parents report feeling afraid that they will lose their children to temptations, and many try to restrict their children’s movements and interactions with non-Syrians and non-Muslims. This has resulted in frustration and anger among the youth who sometimes rebel against their parents and traditional values and practices. For

⁶² Interview conducted with Subject 1, Syrian male refugee, 3 June, 2017. Many other similar sentiments were shared by both male and female refugees over the period of this study.

⁶³ Interview conducted with Subject 1, Syrian male refugee, 3 June, 2017. Many other similar sentiments were shared by both male and female refugees over the period of this study.

⁶⁴ Focus group, Syrian Muslim women, conducted 17 May, 2017.

⁶⁵ Interview conducted with Subject 1, Syrian male refugee, 3 June, 2017.

example, school teachers and a school chaplain suggested that many girls are curious about intimate relationships and sex, and that tensions are arising in households around these issues.⁶⁶ In the traditionally patriarchal society in Syria, boys generally have more freedoms than girls. This norm is being challenged by some girls in Adelaide as they straddle two cultures while simultaneously grappling with the challenges of adolescence and puberty.

Older refugees in their 60s also voiced frustrations. In focus group discussions, respondents complained about the lack of integration opportunities with people their age. They were bored and wanted more opportunities to socialise, but their limited English language skills were a barrier. Female respondents expressed a desire to volunteer but were told their skills were not needed. They felt that their life experiences and skills, such as sewing, were unappreciated and underutilised, leading them to feel increasingly isolated.

Adult children who were once independent and skilled in a profession or trade in Syria also felt they have been overlooked by the government, with attention directed towards their parents or young children.

Most participants of this study acknowledged that the group best cared for by government agencies is young children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ☑ Lessons learned from previous refugee cohorts on how to best tackle inter-generational challenges should be examined and applied where applicable
- ☑ Integration opportunities for older Syrians should be created. For example:
 - ▣ Connect them to activities for older members of the community that allow for knowledge and skills exchange and to organisations such as Probus. Opportunities such as “men’s shed” activities should be developed to improve integration regardless of the language barrier
 - ▣ Engage them as mentors to younger members of the community, especially those who are here without grandparents
 - ▣ Match their skills to local government community centres. Opportunities for them to volunteer in the community should be actively explored
- ☑ Opportunities should be provided to young adults in education, training and work experience

Orientation and Ongoing Support

The orientation guide provided to newly arrived refugees (during the study period) was short and non-descript, lacking basic, practical information. Conversations with study respondents suggest that the following information would be useful in helping refugees adjust to their new lives:

- Tenancy rights and obligations, including basic but detailed practical information about managing utility bills, applying for rental housing, putting bins out for rubbish collection, etc
- Technology and phone service models, including the difference between a lock-in phone data contract and a pay-as-you-go model
- Financial management advice
- A list of medical providers experienced in providing care to refugees
- Contact information and instructions on how to lodge complaints
- Australian customs and culture, including colloquialisms, greetings, sexual harassment, relationships

⁶⁶ Interview conducted with Subject E, school chaplain, 4 May, 2016.

between genders and norms about personal space

- Explanation of road signs and driving rules in Australia

The HSS programme provides support for six months, extendable to up to 12 months where necessary.⁶⁷ Many of the families who have been here longer than six months and no longer receive HSS services felt that the safety net is cut off too soon. Client respondents stated that they are only able to fully absorb some of the information provided to them after their lives begin to normalise and they feel safe and settled. Many stated they only began to feel settled approximately six months after arrival, but that when they seek further information about a particular service, they are told that assistance is no longer available. For many, the first few months of disorientation is followed by a period of relative stability, during which past traumas may emerge. In many cases, the need for psychological support is therefore greater several months after arrival. Some religious service providers are conscious of this and do not turn people away who seek services after a certain amount of time. However, not all organisations have the human or financial resources to maintain the same levels of service.

Government literature, *The Settlement Journey: The Path to Refugee Settlement Australia*,⁶⁸ suggests that the journey ends for the refugee once they have been in Australia for five years, at which point access to Settlement Services ceases. In practice, it appeared that HSS services ceased after six to 12 months. It is unclear, including to the refugees, who is responsible for refugees after the first year and how they can continue to access services.

An interview with one respondent suggests that the exit interview could be much improved. She expressed dissatisfaction with the process and referred to it as “a joke”. She felt that the case officer didn’t really want to know or understand the daily problems she faced, and that only very basic questions were asked, such as, “Do you know how to use the phone? Do you know who you need call if in trouble?” There were no opportunities for her to bring up issues that were not asked about.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ☑ Increase services to provide psychological support for immediate arrivals as well as ongoing support.
- ☑ In partnership with state and local governments, the federal government should develop a comprehensive orientation guide for newly arrived refugees with detailed practical information and life skills relevant to Australia.
- ☑ Review the exit interview to ensure that refugees’ experiences are adequately captured and can be used to continually inform orientation and support services. Consider including open-ended questions.

Inter-Community Tensions

Based on longstanding divisions in Syria, suspicion and distrust exist between different Syrian communities, and many do not like to be lumped together as one cohort. Community leaders in migrant communities do not necessarily have authority over all the refugees; therefore, when service providers speak to certain community leaders, the message may only be passed on to a fraction of the target audience. Clear segmentation of the Syrian refugee community in South Australia has already started to form. Many of the 170 or so Syrian refugee families in South Australia are Sunni Muslim, but not all identify themselves as religious. Some are more conservative than others. The established Kurdish migrant community in South Australia has embraced the Syrian Kurds, but internally they are also divided. The established Armenians have embraced the new Armenians. A Syrian community advocate who organises monthly social gatherings for the Syrian refugee community noted that they “tried to involve the Armenians, Christians, Yazidis and Kurds but they are not all willing.” He suspects that the conflict is still raw for some, so they don’t want to be involved in some inter-ethnic gatherings. Other refugees do not attend these monthly gatherings, because they perceive the organisation to be politically and ideologically

⁶⁷ This has changed under the HSP (see Annex 1).

⁶⁸ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2016/the_settlement_journey_green-accessible.pdf

driven, which they say they “left Syria to avoid”.⁶⁹

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the political, religious and sectarian divides causing destruction in Syria are festering under the surface in the South Australia communities. Several respondents described problems at the Adelaide Secondary School Of English (ASSOE). In one schoolyard incident, a male student from Aleppo had a physical altercation with a child from Idlib, and fellow students took sides based on regional and political divisions. The children’s reactions are likely due to their lived experiences in Syria and neighbouring countries but also because of “what they are hearing at home”.⁷⁰ Respondents indicated that many teachers are uninformed about Syrian culture, values and the political realities these children come from. As a result, when tensions break out in the schoolyard, the significance of the altercations may not be appreciated or understood and not properly handled.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ☑ The Department of Social Services and state government social inclusion units ought to introduce a social stability response strategy to promote healing and reconciliation
- ☑ Create conditions at community levels to manage festering tensions by having local institutions identify conflict indicators, target youth and men at risk, organise peace building interventions and apply peace building and conflict resolution techniques. This would help minimise the risk of integration failure (withdrawal, isolation, bitterness, discrimination and unequal opportunities) and mitigate heightened tensions in the community
- ☑ Provide a safe forum for reconciliation and healing, and identify strategies for progress and social cohesion within the Syrian community

Perspectives on Integration

Respondents offered differing views as to whether Syrian refugees have been successfully integrating and what they needed to do to improve integration:

- Some local Syrians differentiate between internal integration into the existing Syrian community and integration into the broader Australian community. One contributor thought “Syrians are integrating well in the broader community” but that “Kurds have integrated better [into the Syrian community] than the Armenian Syrians.”⁷¹
- Some volunteers and local Muslim leaders felt that the Syrians spend too much time with one another and do not take opportunities to learn English.
- A local Syrian advocate admitted that some Syrians do not want to associate much with other communities but are generally happy to live in South Australia and to integrate “when required”. Some have experienced problems with racism, which may explain the reluctance to broaden their networks.
- A local Muslim leader stated he believed new arrivals needed to mix with the broader community and not just focus on programmes and activities run by Muslims.⁷²
- One service provider expressed concern that some of the more conservative families who have arrived in Adelaide in the last 18 months are not making an effort to mix with either liberal refugee Syrian Muslims or non-Muslims. This minority is fearful their “way of life” will be “corrupted” and that “their

⁶⁹ Interview conducted with Subject D, Syrian male refugee, 24 May, 2017.

⁷⁰ Interview conducted with Subject C, Syrian community advocate, 23 May, 2017.

⁷¹ Interview conducted with Subject C, Syrian community advocate, 23 May, 2017.

⁷² Interview conducted with Subject G, Muslim community leader, 18 May, 2017.

children [will be] lost to temptations” found within society.⁷³

- Some refugee children stated they are not permitted by their parents to attend music and art classes as they fall on a Friday (due to perceived religious prohibition). They are sad that they are missing out and feel excluded. Some repeated what their parents have told them, that it is religiously inappropriate to play music on a Friday, while others seemed genuinely disappointed.⁷⁴

The study identified an initiative that seems to hold promise for facilitating cross-cultural interaction. A local council runs a weekly Migrant Women’s Group that attracts a diverse range of women from various cultural and religious backgrounds. Half of the attendees are Arabic-speaking. Sub-groups have started to form, with Afghans speaking together and Arabic speakers staying together. The group conveners are making an effort to break down these sub-groups and encourage the women to learn more about each other. One activity that has broken down some of these barriers is cooking

About half of the children respondents said they mix with non-Syrian, non-Muslim neighbourhood children.⁷⁵

Religious Organisations and Activities

Many religious institutions of various faith affiliations have opened their doors to the Syrians. This study observed that some faith-based organisations feel over-extended while others want to provide more assistance but are not sure how:

1. Many religious institutions that have an Arabic-speaking preacher (mosque or church) and Arabic-speaking worshippers expressed frustration with their inability to assist newly-arrived refugees or those who have been in South Australia for longer than 12 months. When the Syrians (and Iraqis) first arrived, leaders at these institutions worked hard to assist in their settlement process. They learned of gaps in the HSS and CCS services sector and assisted where possible, uncompensated. After taking time off work, recruiting volunteers and accompanying individuals/families to appointments, these leaders felt emotionally exhausted and financially strained. At least two such leaders stated with great sadness that they have been forced to cease assisting refugees en masse as their respective groups do not have the capacity to help. They simply could not provide anything other than “spiritual nourishment”.⁷⁶

One religious leader felt that it was “wrong the government has supported such a huge intake without following up on their needs. They require ongoing assistance and monitoring.”⁷⁷ However, the leaders were impressed with the tenacity, resilience and prolific network that exists among the new arrivals.

2. The other group of religious organisations surveyed in this study is quiet suburban churches with ageing congregations that do not have Arabic-speaking preachers or worshippers. These congregation members invite refugees to existing organised activities (regardless of faith) and expressed willingness to assist where possible in creating new initiatives. However, they also said that “the problem [is] we don’t know how to get to them and ... we don’t know what they need.”⁷⁸ Through the course of this study, a meeting was initiated between the local council, which runs the Migrant Women’s Group (which includes a number of Syrian refugees), and a church that has both women’s and men’s groups that meet weekly.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

⁷³ Email response, second tier HSS provider, 28 May, 2017.

⁷⁴ Focus group, Syrian refugee children, conducted 27 May, 2017.

⁷⁵ Focus group, Syrian refugee children, conducted 27 May, 2017.

⁷⁶ Interview conducted with Subject F, church convenor, 20 May, 2017.

⁷⁷ Interview conducted with Subject G, Muslim community leader, 18 May, 2017.

⁷⁸ Interview conducted with Subject H, church minister, 19 May, 2017.

- ☑ Improve coordination between state and local government councils with neighbourhood centres and religious or secular organisations active in the area of settlement to ensure that families are provided with a welcome kit to the local area and informed of local services and free facilities soon after arrival.
- ☑ State, local governments and religious organisations could assist in promoting knowledge-sharing between religious institutions so that those that want to offer more assistance can learn from organisations that have been providing assistance but may be over-extended.
- ☑ Regional community liaison officers should be employed by any one of the three tiers of government in order to propagate ideas, facilitate introductions and connections in the immediate neighbourhood, which would aid the natural evolution of integration.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Australian government has shown a strong commitment to resettling refugees and people in humanitarian need, including approximately 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees. This study, a brief qualitative assessment, provides a snapshot of the Syrian cohort's experience of integration in South Australia, assessing the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of government and settlement assistance services in order to inform the policy direction of future government assistance. Additionally, this study suggests areas for further research.

The consensus among stakeholders interviewed in this study is that the Syrian refugees in South Australia have some characteristics that make them distinct from previous refugee cohorts. The Syrians are more independent and have good networks that they use effectively, including through the use of technology. The majority of the Syrian refugees appear eager to learn more about services and opportunities in Australia and to become successful contributing members of Australian society. Another key point of difference is that experience of conflict and war is relatively new to Syrians, unlike other refugees who have experienced conflict for decades. While lessons learned from settling previous cohorts are applicable, settlement services should be tailored to the specific needs of the Syrian refugees in order to facilitate integration.

The study identified the following key areas of concern and makes recommendations on ways to respond:

➤ **Tension resulting from changing family relations and gender dynamics**

- Male refugees who found it difficult to find employment reported feeling a loss of identity as they could no longer fulfill their traditional role of breadwinner. Some reported feeling emasculated, which was exacerbated by the contrasting increase in confidence and independence of some their wives.
- Some female refugees found the Australian norm of women working outside the home to be disconcerting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ☑ Commission further research to better understand factors that contribute to feelings of de-masculinisation and loss of identity in men in order to identify potential interventions.
- ☑ Review case studies of other patriarchal groups that have undergone shifts in family dynamics to identify and apply lessons.

➤ **Inter-generational and age-specific challenges**

- Tensions resulting from generational differences are beginning to emerge between Syrian parents and their children.
- Older refugees report frustration with the lack of integration opportunities available.

Recommendations:

- ☑ Lessons learned from previous refugee cohorts on how to best tackle inter-generational challenges should be examined and implemented where applicable.
- ☑ Integration opportunities for older Syrians should be created; for example, they could be engaged as mentors to younger members of the communities or matched with volunteer activities.

➤ **Priority needs and gaps in services**

Housing:

All stakeholders interviewed broadly agreed that accommodation plays a significant role in facilitating integration and social cohesion and that every attempt should be made to find appropriate accommodation in safe, welcoming neighbourhoods, close to schools, public transport, shops, medical facilities and social or religious institutions. However, affordability of rentals and property size are factors that present significant hurdles to placing refugee families in suitable housing, as many Syrian families are quite large. The study found that many families have been placed in unsuitable housing, including in neighbourhoods that were unwelcoming to Syrians where they endured verbal and physical harassment.

Employment and English-language requirements:

All stakeholders agreed on the importance of gaining employment as a key to integration and for promoting a sense of self worth. Service providers, volunteers, advocates and refugees regularly expressed frustration at the lack of employment and work experience opportunities for refugees in South Australia. In particular, some male refugees were unhappy with English-language requirements and prerequisites.

Health:

High volumes of health problems were reported among the Syrian refugees. The stigma around addressing mental health issues remains a particular challenge. To a limited extent, the study also suggests medical services currently provided are not adequate to address the needs of the Syrian refugees. Some medical personnel do not appear willing to use translators.

Recommendations:

- ☑ Improve communication between stakeholders, including all tiers of government and service providers in order to remedy gaps in services provided.

Housing:

- ☑ State government and Anglicare (or the replacement organisation) need to assess the current housing stock, including the standard, location and suitability, and improve processes to better match housing to client needs.
- ☑ State government and landlords need to ensure basic maintenance including repairs and pest control. Annual audits of the safety of the property should be considered.
- ☑ SAPOL and settlement providers should record and compile statistics of racial assaults and abuse, with appropriate criminal investigations where relevant.

Employment and English-language training:

- ☑ To promote capacity building and help refugees gain valuable work experience, consider establishing an agency to dedicate attention to the employment of new arrivals, in the same way that Disability Employment Services strives to match workers to potential employers.
- ☑ Review English language delivery and requirements to ensure classes are effective and appropriately tailored.

Health:

- ☑ Federal and state governments and related service providers need to identify doctors and service providers who are willing to adjust their approach to providing care for refugees.
- ☑ Encourage doctors and medical staff to develop long-term relationships

with patients, as underlying and interconnected problems often only surface after doctor-patient trust has been established.

- Educate health workers about the importance of interpreters.

➤ **Inter-community tensions**

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the political, religious and sectarian divides causing destruction in Syria are festering under the surface in the South Australia community with clear segmentation already starting to form.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a social stability response strategy to promote healing and reconciliation.
- Create conditions at community levels to manage festering tensions by having local institutions identify conflict indicators, target youth and men at risk, organise peace building interventions and apply peace building and conflict resolution techniques. This would help minimise the risk of integration failure (withdrawal, isolation, bitterness, discrimination and unequal opportunities) and mitigate heightened tensions in the community.
- Provide a safe forum for reconciliation and healing, and identify strategies for progress and social cohesion within the Syrian communities.

ANNEX 1

The Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) replaced the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Complex Case Support (CCS) programmes on 30 October, 2017.

The HSP aims to “assist clients to build the skills and knowledge they need to become self-reliant and active members of [Australian] society, through a needs-based, case management approach.”⁷⁹ The HSP is delivered by five services providers in contract regions across Australia. In South Australia, where this study took place, AMES Australia was selected to be service providers.

Under the new HSP guidelines, “HSP service providers work with clients to identify their needs and goals and develop an individual case management plan. Service providers support clients to achieve outcomes in:

- Housing
- Physical and mental health and well-being
- Managing money
- Community participation and networking
- Family functioning and social support
- Justice
- Language services
- Education and training
- Employment⁸⁰

The outcomes are outlined in the HSP Outcomes Framework.

Clients remain in the HSP until they have achieved the outcomes set out in their case management plan. According to DSS, “for most clients, these outcomes will be reached within 18 months of their arrival in Australia. The duration of delivery of Specialised and Intensive Services may vary according to the client’s needs. This will likely be a short-term intervention to address identified barriers. Upon exit, clients will be linked to Settlement grants or other related mainstream programs.”

⁷⁹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-program>

⁸⁰ <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-program>

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Anglicare
Australians for Syria
Australian Migration Resource Centre (AMRC)
Australian Refugee Association (ARA)
Australian Red Cross
Baptist Care (SA) Incorporated
Baptist Church, Richmond
Circles of Friends
City of Marion Council
City of Port Adelaide Enfield Council
City of Salisbury
Department of Social Services
Department of Immigration and Border Protection
Intercultural Connections
Islamic Society of South Australia
Junction Community Centre
Justice for Refugees
Mercy House of Welcome
Multicultural South Australia
Multicultural Youth South Australia (MYSA)
Parkholme Mosque
St Elizabeth church, Warradale
St. Vincent de Paul Migrant and Refugee Centre
Syrian refugees
Techfugees Hackathon Adelaide
Volunteers

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A Snapshot – June 2017

www.seefar.org

