

18 January 2017

Your ref:

Our ref: ARC16/0148

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE
ON MIGRATION**

RECEIVED

23 JAN 2017

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

**Response to the inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee into
Migration of the Commonwealth Parliament**

Introduction

Armidale has had a steady inflow of migrants, including refugees, since the Second World War. There has never been an outspoken negative community stance regarding this. The town has a multicultural appeal resulting in the growth of services, supporting organisations, a general community welcome and much voluntary help. The Council over many years has expressed unanimous support for such settlement. The strong town multicultural mix has resulted in no evident sense of isolation but rather a sense of social cohesion.

The University of New England has had an ongoing intake of overseas students and academics. A significant number of these have gained permanent residency through university-registered sponsorships and other means of migration. Migrants have also come through regional employer sponsorships or through state nominated skill requirements.

Guyra takes few migrants in the above categories but does participate in the Pacific Island Foreign Aid Program (employment at the Costa 'tomato farm'). Many live in Armidale.

This response to your invitation will focus on refugee settlement for it is understood that concerns regarding this was the prompt for your inquiry. Whilst there is a view some services to some other categories of migrants such as medical costs, access to Centrelink and employment agencies could be improved, these will not be addressed here as these concerns do not apply to refugees.

The following responds to your dot points.

1. Settlement services

Direct refugee settlement has been formalised since 2003 with the formation of Armidale Sanctuary Humanitarian Settlement Inc and the Council declaration in 2005 as a Refugee Welcome Zone. The provision of government-contracted settlement services has followed i.e. Northern Settlement Services (under International Settlement Services), a refugee nurse (Hunter and New England Health), AMEP English (New England TAFE Armidale), access to STARTTS and Navitas etc. These services have been excellent and well coordinated. Additional services have followed with sponsorship and support by the Council, several community groups, especially sporting bodies as well as government departments.

As a voluntary organisation Armidale Sanctuary is only able to propose and settle Special Humanitarian Visa (SHV) 202 holders. It works very closely with the above contracted services and the Council.

Access to services and other assistance is readily available due to both the experience and willingness of helpers and to the relative size of the town.

2. Settlement outcomes and prospects

The service provisions and practices for overseas-approved refugee settlement in Australia, in general, are outstanding and rank amongst the best in the world. However there are some concerns:

a. The limited number of settlement areas approved by the Australian Government (other than for SHV202 settlers) has resulted in a very large influx of refugees to these areas. This can result in ghettos especially where there is little employment, high rental costs, little recreational opportunity for youth and lack of general community support. Gang formation of disenchanted youth who feel alienated might follow. A smaller number of arrivals at any one time, particularly to rural areas of opportunities and welcome, such as Armidale would achieve better outcomes for all.

b. Whilst it appears clearly admirable to bring very large numbers of new arrivals to areas where there are family, extended family and same ethnicity this can result in exacerbating the challenging situations currently occurring in some cities (referred to in a. above). Armidale's experience of SHV202 holders is that in bringing the first family others, some with close connections and similar needs, will follow as second settlers (settled elsewhere first). This has been particularly the case with families with young children and with prospective tertiary students who have heard of the educational advantages of this town. This graduated arrival appears to be much more successful than concentrated arrival of large numbers.

3. English language

There is some, but not major, evidence that refugees who arrive with little or no English language ability are disadvantaged regarding settlement outcomes. A basic understanding and use of English is central to social confidence and key to employment opportunities. However it is difficult to predict an individual's ease of language learning.

Whilst the allotted 510 hours of adult AMEP eligibility is usually adequate for basic understanding and usage, research clearly shows that an intense (immersion) period of language learning is much more effective than a small number of hours per week. Every effort should be made to ensure immersion.

Similarly school students, especially secondary school new arrivals, should wherever possible have intense English learning opportunities. Secondary school arrivals with little educational background and no English are socially, emotionally and educationally disadvantaged when placed in classrooms where they do not understand the language and the content is unfamiliar. Intensive language learning, even with a very small number of needy students, would in the long run be more cost effective, educationally and socially, than continuing struggles and failures.

4. Current migration selection processes

It is difficult to both assess and predict a person's settlement prospects in a relatively short interview. In general Armidale has found that families with young children, perhaps because of the necessity of parental early and continuing contact with schools, other organisations, other parents etc readily settle into their new home. However this can also be said about those with educational aspirations and some educational background. Each group has its exceptions.

The Armidale community and its services have a history of responding to need and would like this to be a major criteria in selection.

5. Related matters

Council, Armidale Sanctuary and the community in general is frustrated that our town is not a designated settlement area. This is perplexing in view of the fact that our willingness and the provision, coordination and extent of settlement services in our town are of a very high order. The town's experience and successful settlement outcomes, its full range of essential services with experienced service providers, its opportunities especially in education, work, availability of low rentals, as well as its welcoming and multicultural atmosphere and its voluntary organisations, indicate it is an ideal settlement town. This is recognised by the many refugees who have moved here following their arrival in another town. It is also recognised by the Refugee Council of Australia as well as other national bodies.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ian Tiley
Administrator