



Media release

Senator Chris Evans

Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

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Australia increases commitment to refugees

The Rudd Government will increase Australia's refugee and humanitarian intake as part of its commitment to offer a new life to those most in need, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said today.

The Humanitarian Program is increasing to 13,500 in 2008-09. This includes 6500 offshore refugee places, with a one-off increase of 500 places in the coming financial year to assist people affected by the conflict in Iraq.

From 2009-10 onwards, there will be an increase of 750 places in the Special Humanitarian Program to 7750 places.

"The offshore component of the 2008-09 Humanitarian Program will focus on refugees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East," Senator Evans said.

"We are committed to helping people in vulnerable situations from around the world, in particular Iraqi nationals and refugees in Africa who are unable to return to their homes.

"The target for the Woman at Risk category will remain at 10.5 per cent of the offshore refugee allocation.

"The size and composition of the program was decided after taking into consideration the views expressed across the Australian community, non-government organisations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees."

Senator Evans said the Budget also allocates \$10 million in 2008-09 to assist with stabilising populations in Iraq through the Displaced Persons and Refugee Fund.

Another \$42 million is provided over four years to enable the permanent resettlement in Australia of Iraqi employees, who provided support to Australian troops in Iraq, and their families.

The new visa policy, announced last month, will assist up to 600 people, comprising locally engaged employees and their families, at risk in Iraq because of their engagement with the Australian Government.

"Due to the personal security situation these people will face as Australia withdraws its combat forces from southern Iraq, this policy will give them the opportunity to start a new life in Australia," Senator Evans said.

"The funding will cover the costs of visa processing, transport to Australia, settlement, health, education, employment assistance and income support."

Senator Evans said the Rudd Government intended to place more of a focus on delivering effective ways to assist humanitarian entrants into employment as quickly as possible.

“This will include examining the expansion of the regional resettlement program, particularly in areas where there are critical labour shortages,” Senator Evans said.

Any expansion of the program will require a coordinated approach involving local employers, industry groups and training organisations, and state and territory governments.

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