

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 27-28 MAY 2009

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(73) Program 5.1 Settlement Services for Migrants and Refugees

Senator Hanson-Young asked:

I would like to touch on the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) that was introduced in 2000 to provide intensive on-arrival assistance for humanitarian entrants.

I am concerned about access to housing. Once humanitarian entrants exit the IHSS they often face difficulties in accessing suitable housing, facing barriers such as a shortage of public housing, discrimination from real estate agents, difficulties in completing paperwork and providing the documentation necessary to access the private rental market, and lack of affordable private housing in areas close to employment and community links.

(1) What plans does the government have to enable non government agencies to deliver government programs in regard to housing?

(2) What initiatives does the government have to address issues regarding housing security and tenure once asylum seekers find housing?

Answer:

The Department's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) provides assistance to help humanitarian entrants start building a life in Australia, under a case management model, and includes assistance sourcing and securing long-term accommodation.

Service providers assist entrants with documentation in relation to accommodation arrangements for both initial and longer-term accommodation. Entrants are provided with information on their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and are advised about rental costs. They are assisted also with applications for rental properties, negotiating rental agreements, entering into a property lease and completing inventory and property condition reports. Where entrants are not literate in English or in their own language, appropriate language assistance is provided.

IHSS service providers are required to provide tenancy training as soon as possible after arrival, so that entrants are able to cook, clean, shop and generally manage themselves and their households and meet their obligations under their tenancy agreements.

Service providers continue to develop extensive networks with housing providers, including state/territory housing authorities, community housing services and private sector rental providers to generate more and earlier housing options for entrants, and promote fairness and equity for entrants to assist them in obtaining housing.

In January 2008, Humanitarian entrants became eligible to apply for Centrelink's crisis payment on arrival in Australia. This one off payment is equivalent to one week's income support payment. This helps to relieve some of the stress associated with establishing a household on arrival.

Once humanitarian entrants have exited the IHSS they are able to access longer term, less intensive settlement support through a network of service providers delivering assistance under the Settlement Grants Program (SGP). Under the SGP the Department is funding housing-related activities in a limited number of locations on a pilot basis. These include assisting clients to learn how to find, apply for and maintain properties; liaison with real estate agents to increase awareness of client group needs; and information sessions on tenancy rights and responsibilities.

Consideration is also being given to the scope and delivery of a pilot program to extend free telephone interpreting services to real estate agents in targeted settlement locations to help overcome language barriers. The intent of the pilot is to assist humanitarian entrants in accessing the rental market, in particular the provision of specific targeted information concerning rights and responsibilities associated with rental agreements.

The Department is also developing an Asian settlement information DVD for newly-arrived humanitarian entrants from Burma and Bhutan. It will include information about accommodation in Australia translated into appropriate languages. In 2007, the Department launched a settlement information DVD for newly-arrived humanitarian entrants from Africa. This DVD includes a chapter on accommodation and raises issues such as finding accommodation, renting and property maintenance translated into six African languages.