

Sydney, 26 August 2022

AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES WRITING A NEW CHAPTER FOR REFUGEE POLICY

Refugee families from Afghanistan, Syria and Myanmar start arriving in Australia this week to be welcomed by local communities who are writing a ground-breaking new chapter in our nation's refugee and humanitarian migration program.

Backed by the Federal Government, the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) sees groups of everyday Australians coming together to welcome and support refugee families fleeing persecution and the horrors of foreign conflicts.

Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Andrew Giles, was in Gosford on the NSW Central Coast today visiting the Gosford Anglican support group who over the next year will help a refugee family make a new home in the community.

"This is about everyday Australians looking at what is happening around the world and wanting to lend a hand. The Albanese government is committed to ensuring that in the future sponsorship programs such as the CRISP will expand Australia's refugee intake by becoming additional to existing refugee numbers," Minister Giles said.

Adrian Edwards, Regional Representative for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says: "It's easy for people to feel powerless about the scale of the situation of refugees globally. This project offers a chance for everyday Australians to do something practical and tackle the refugee challenge one family at a time."

Lisa Button is the CEO of Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA), which has been tasked by the Federal Government with mobilising, training and deploying community supporter groups under the CRISP program. Ms Button said that the program aims to build a network of 2,000 Australians who will support 1,500 new refugees over the duration of the pilot (2022-25), forming community supporter groups that assist in greeting refugees at the airport, finding temporary and long-term accommodation, acquiring basic household items, navigating government services and integrating into the community.

"A similar community-led approach in Canada has enabled more than 325,000 refugees to build their lives in safety over the last 40 years and has helped speed up the integration of those refugees into their new communities," Ms Button said.

"We have been working with the Commonwealth and a growing network of organisations like Amnesty International Australia, the Refugee Council of Australia, Save the Children Australia, Welcoming Australia and Rural Australians for Refugees for a number of years to have the program established here. It is wonderful to see it come to fruition and to see Australians from all walks of life signing up to be trained in the process."

Shayne Davy, the coordinator of an eight-person group supporting a new family arriving in Australia today, says that it is incredibly satisfying to come together with church and community members to be part of a global movement trying to address the world refugee challenge: “We can’t solve the problems of the world but we can reach out to help a single refugee family where we can, and already it is bringing our local community even closer together.”

Former Congolese refugee Blaise Itabelo is CRSA’s Community Engagement Manager. “When I came to Australia, I was lucky enough to stumble into a friendship with an Australian man and his family, who helped me build a new life, and feel like I belong. He rented a truck to help me collect second-hand furniture for my first flat from his network of family and friends, and gave me his old laptop, which I used to apply for my first job. This program will deliberately create these sorts of opportunities by matching up established members of the Australian community with refugee newcomers,” Mr Itabelo said.

Amnesty International Australia has worked alongside CRSA for more than four years in campaigning for an affordable and additional community refugee sponsorship program. Amnesty Australia Refugee Rights Campaigner, Zaki Haidari, said: “This program is an exciting new development for Australia and we are pleased the Albanese Government has plans to make the places additional to the current refugee quota, which means the efforts of everyday Australians will boost Australia’s overall refugee intake.”

Rev Tim Costello notes that: “Faith groups have been at the forefront of similar programs all around the world and I’m confident that local churches, temples and mosques will step up to support the new CRISP program as a practical expression of their faith, along with clubs, schools and businesses.”

More information: Those interested in becoming involved can go to CRSA’s website to find out more: www.refugeesponsorship.org.au

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Background

- This week marks the first arrivals under the CRISP Program approved and funded by the Commonwealth in 2021-22.
- The Australian government will identify refugees to participate in the program, drawing on those identified by the UNHCR as being in most urgent need of resettlement.
- Globally, there are now more than 27 million refugees, with more than 2 million predicted by UNHCR to be in need of resettlement in 2022. The number of available global resettlement opportunities is grossly inadequate to meet this need but community sponsorship programs in around a dozen countries are helping to increase this number.

- Refugees arrive as permanent residents eligible for government-funded English classes, Centrelink support (Medicare and income support) and most other federal, state and local services.
- Around 60 groups in locations around Australia are already in the process of forming and signing up to be a community supporter group under the CRISP but at least 300 groups will be needed over the next three years. They can be located anywhere in Australia provided that they can provide adequate support to a refugee family.
- To participate, Australians need to form a group of five or more adults who live near the location where they propose to help settle the refugee family, provide clear police and working with children checks, and undergo some initial training.
- Community supporter groups will offer 12 months of support to a refugee family and commit to assisting with:
 - local orientation, including meeting refugees at the airport
 - initial income support (first 1-2 weeks) and temporary accommodation (estimated 4 - 6 weeks)
 - securing long-term housing
 - enrolling children in school
 - registering for Centrelink support
 - registering with other government services and language classes
 - accessing social opportunities and emotional support
 - opening bank accounts
 - learning English
 - using public transport
 - getting a driver's license
 - finding a job or starting a business