

CommuniTEA

Conversation starters

Best served to those who have an appetite for change.

NOTE: The answers to questions 1-8 have been pre-written and you can refer to them directly when hosting your dinner or event. However, answers to questions 9-18 are suggestions and prompts only.



1. What is a refugee?

Defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone outside of their country of origin, unable to return to their country of origin out of legitimate fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

2. How is a refugee different from an asylum seeker?

An asylum-seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. All refugees start out as asylum-seekers, but not all asylum-seekers achieve refugee status.

3. Which countries do refugees come from?

Refugees can come from anywhere in the world. Generally, refugees come from countries marked by widespread persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. In 2023, the countries with the largest number of refugees were Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Syria.

4. How do refugees come to Australia?

Refugees come to Australia via a number of pathways, however, most arrive through Australian's Humanitarian Settlement Program. For the CRISP, the UNHCR refers refugees to the Department of Home Affairs for resettlement. The Department then selects refugees eligible for the CRISP and enlists the support of Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) to match the refugee with a local community supporter group (CSG) who will welcome and support them on arrival. The Department also engages the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to organise transport, pre-arrival information and health checks.

5. Who is CRSA?

Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) is an independent Australian charity leading civil society efforts to establish community sponsorship of refugees as a common practice throughout Australia.

6. What is the CRISP?

CRISP stands for the Community Refugee Integration & Settlement Pilot. It enables community members to support the practical settlement of refugees who are identified by the UNHCR. The program enlists the help of everyday Australians in communities all around the country (including those in regional communities) to welcome refugees into their local area and provide them with practical resettlement and integration support. The program, launched in the first half of 2022, will support up to 1,500 refugees over the pilot period (mid 2022 to mid 2025).



7. Is there proof that community sponsorship works?

Yes. Community refugee sponsorship has been working successfully in Canada for more than 40 years. Ordinary community members in Canada have sponsored and welcomed more than 325,000 refugees since the late 1970s. This number is in addition to those entering under the government-funded resettlement program. The practice of community sponsorship is now spreading around the world with countries including the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, New Zealand, Spain, and Argentina. According to the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, since 2021, almost 700,000 refugees globally have been welcomed via a broad range of refugee sponsorship initiatives in many different countries.

8. Why is community important to the settlement of a refugee household?

Imagine relocating to a country where you don't know the language, the culture, or anyone at all for that matter. It makes a world of difference having someone waiting at the other end. Refugees greatly benefit from a strong personal network of people to help them find their feet in a new community. This more individualised support can lessen the acculturation stress and isolation that refugees experience in their early stages of settlement. Beyond this, community sponsorship can enrich civic life, foster social cohesion, and cultivate full economic independence of humanitarian migrants in Australia. Sponsorship can also help regional communities attract and retain migrants to boost their populations and expand their workforces.

9. How do you get involved in a Community Supporter Group?

To join or form a CSG, you'll need to find 5 or more adults who live nearby and want to offer some time to welcome a refugee household. Start by speaking to people in your community - you never know who might be interested. Let CRSA know that you're interested by submitting an Intention to Apply form.

10. Why would someone give up their time to help a group of people they don't know?

While you may not know these people, you know some of the things they have surely felt. Fear, anxiety, hope, gratitude. The program is about showing humanity to others. It's an opportunity to make a real difference, to work with others in your community and build relationships.

11. Do you need a particular skillset to join or start a group?

No 'formal' experience is required to join or start a group. CRSA provides training and extra support, and you'll undergo your own local research and planning. Day to day activities will differ, but what you'll bring is your ability to navigate life in Australia. Are you particularly good at organizing and paying bills? Have you enrolled children in school before? Do you understand the Medicare system? Are you involved in social or sporting clubs? You'll be surprised at what you have to offer when you really think about it.

12. How do you communicate with someone who doesn't speak the same language as you?

There are a variety of ways in which you can communicate with someone who doesn't speak English. In the CRISP program all groups have access to free phone and in person interpretation via TIS National, a government funded service. Groups can also access online tools such as Google translate and other apps that can support incidental conversation.

13. How much will we need to fundraise?

The amount needed to support a refugee household varies. Usually, groups raise between \$5-25k to help the household cover the initial costs of settling, with the amount required to support an individual differing from the amount required to support a larger family. You might be able to source household items and in-kind donations from your networks – this will lower the amount you'll need to fundraise. Refugees can access government services, such as Centrelink, when they arrive in Australia.

14. Where do you go to when you need support?

You can seek support from CRSA, Supporting Community Organisations (SCOs) and other relevant bodies to help guide you through the process. The local community is also a great source of knowledge and support. CRSA encourages groups to engage with your local networks to ensure people know what you're doing and how they can support you. It's all about who you know and who you can ask for specific support. Speak with local real estate agents, schools, local council, sporting clubs and associations – their networks will be invaluable.

15. What's the end goal for the refugee household?

The end goal for each household in the CRISP is going to be different, just like it will be different for each group and individual engaged in the program. Groups are encouraged to speak with the household they're matched with to find out what their goals and aspirations are, and how the group can help to facilitate them achieving some or all of this over time.

16. When you're in a new space, what makes you feel most welcome?

Reflect on what helps you to feel more comfortable in a new space. Is it something material or tangible, like an object or a familiar food? When there are people around, what actions or attitudes show you that you're welcome?

17. What are some of your traditions?

Share some of your cultural or family traditions. What is it about them that keeps them going? What do you need to continue your traditions? Could you continue them if you needed to move away?

18. How do you find the answer to something you don't know?

Where or who do you turn to if you don't know the answer? Is it a Google search? A phone call to a close friend or family member? The local library or community center? As a Community Supporter Group, you won't be expected to have the answer – but you'll have a better idea of how to find it. Identify a few places and people that are trusted sources of information.

