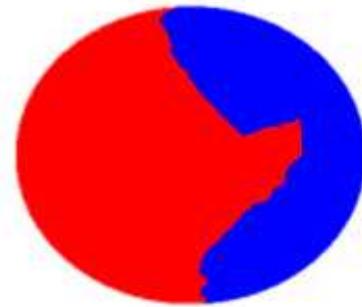


HORN OF AFRICA RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



*"We have a voice
- hear us"*



The Centre for Refugee Research
UNSW



**The settlement experiences of refugees and migrants from the
Horn of Africa**

Dr Eileen Pittaway and Dr Chrisanta Muli

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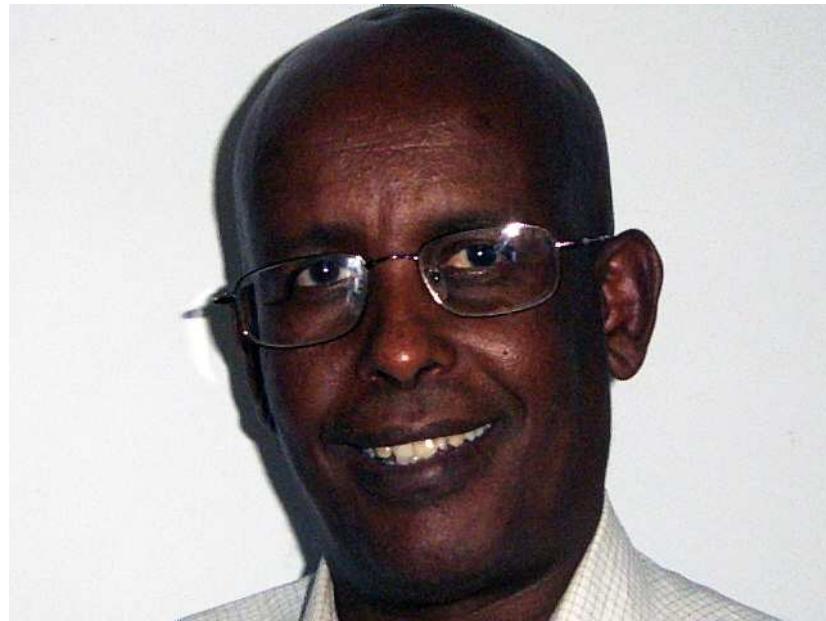
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STARTTS

The findings, analysis and views expressed in this report are those of the research team and not necessarily those of the HARDA management committee, which has changed several times over the course of the project.



Hassan Omar 1958-2009

**The Executive Committee and Members of the
Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency
acknowledge and pay tribute to our
Founding President**

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FOREWARD

I am pleased to write the foreword to this critically important report and recommendations arising from the research conducted for the Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency by Dr Eileen Pittaway and her colleagues at the Centre for Refugee Research. But I am deeply saddened that our friend and colleague Hassan Omar, who was the driving force in commissioning the research, did not live to see the final report and advocate for the implementation of the recommendations in his own inimitable way. Hassan was never daunted by people in high places and worked tirelessly for communities from the Horn of Africa living in Australia. We are privileged to have known him.

The report will be an invaluable resource for HARDA as we develop our new strategic plan, further extending our advocacy and support for communities from the seven countries of the Horn of Africa and their organisations. It addresses rights and citizenship, social bonds, employment, housing, education, health, language, culture, safety and stability and makes forty recommendations about how problems in these areas should be addressed. Australia has been recognised internationally by the UNHCR for its record in settlement services but the report makes it clear, in the voices of the participants, that there is still much to do.

This report will resonate beyond HARDA's boundaries, through local and regional service agencies and to state and national bodies concerned with settlement services, integration and human rights for African refugees. These include the Refugee Council of Australia, the Settlement Council of Australia, the Australian Human Rights Commission, government agencies and members of parliament across the political spectrum.

The organisations and people who contributed to the research are listed in the acknowledgements and we thank them for their generous support. We must particularly acknowledge those refugees and humanitarian entrants who participated in the individual interviews and group 'storyboarding' consultations. We are aware that sharing their horrendous experiences in the refugee camps in the Horn of Africa and recounting the difficulties faced during their re-settlement in Australia could not have been easy.

HARDA's very special thanks, of course, must be extended to Dr Pittaway. Her record of academic excellence and dedication as an advocate for refugees is recognised internationally. It is adequately demonstrated in the quality of the report and the many hours 'above and beyond the call of duty' that she contributed to its production.

John Cornwall
President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the past decade, over 20 000 refugees from the Horn of Africa (HoA) have been resettled to Australia. Others have come as skilled migrants, or as part of the special humanitarian program. In October 2007, communities from the HoA were dealt a significant blow, when the then Minister for Immigration, Kevin Andrews, published a media release and conducted several interviews in which he announced that Australia was cutting its humanitarian intake from Africa because these communities, particularly the Sudanese community, were experiencing significant settlement problems and not integrating well into Australian society (Andrews 2007: radio interview). Although the Minister made particular reference to refugees from the Sudan, he spoke broadly about problems for all refugees from Africa, homogenising vastly different ethnic, cultural and social groups. The repercussions of this announcement continue to reverberate negatively in African communities today, exacerbating existing community stress and tensions within and among diverse African communities and the broader community.

Despite experiences of persecution, violence, forced migration, loss of family, home, and cultural identity, many refugees from the HoA are settling successfully and working not only for themselves, but to assist their communities both here and in Africa. However, the media and public opinion in Australia seldom, if ever, addresses the fact that so many people from African countries are succeeding in building new lives, as well as contributing to the richness of the social, cultural and economic fabric of Australia. A major attribute of refugees and migrants from the HoA is their resilience and adaptability. This is evident in the way refugees seize the opportunities they are given in resettlement, while carrying with them the horrendous experiences of their past. There are, however many who are facing major challenges and problems in the process of settling into a new and vastly different country and culture.

To date, little detailed qualitative research has focused on the resettlement and integration in Australia of refugees from the HoA. This report tables the findings of a research project conducted on behalf of the HoA Relief and Development Agency by the Centre for Refugee Research, University of New South Wales in the years 2008 and 2009. The findings presented here fill a significant knowledge gap. This information will enhance both policy development and resettlement service provision, and foster better understanding of refugees from African communities living in Australia and other countries of resettlement. This report provides a unique opportunity to hear directly from refugees and migrants from the HoA of their experiences of resettlement and integration in Australia, as well as their concrete recommendations for how to better support their resettlement and integration.

The voice of the people

Many refugee communities in Australia are expressing their frustration at the number of times they are interviewed by service providers, students and academics, and how little benefit they see from their input. They particularly mentioned that what they say is seldom acted upon, leading one participant to passionately exclaim ‘We have a voice – hear us’. Another talked about ‘silent screams’. This report attempts to honour the commitment given by the researchers to give sound to that voice. As far as possible the findings have been presented in the voice of the refugee participants. While all participants in this project have given permission for their words to be used, most did not want to be identified. Care has been taken to maintain their anonymity. It is a sad reflection on the settlement process that people are fearful when talking about problems which are affecting them and their communities. These are some of the things they shared.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The framework of analysis used in the report is that of ten domains of successful integration as suggested by Ager and Strang (2008). The concept of integration has been used as one of positive humanitarian endeavour by the host community which directly benefits new arrivals and encourages social harmony.

Rights and citizenship

Many refugees and migrants who have arrived in Australia in the last decade have settled extremely well and are proud to be contributing to their new country.

“So many of our youth are going into nursing – it is what they can do with the education they have had. Others are going into aged care. They are working in shops, studying at TAFE and University, doing so much. We are doing jobs Australians do not want, we are opening our own businesses, dressmakers, hair braiding and many other things. We are working as community workers, teacher-aides and bi-lingual workers. We are doing so much.” (Refugee from Sudan)

For some, finding their identity is a gain.

“Australia gave me my rights! I never had rights before I came to Australia! Australia gave me rights as a black, Muslim woman. I am proud to be who I am.” (Refugee from Somalia)

For others the peace and security is a major gain.

“There is peace here and no bombs – we have a future.” (Refugee from Sudan)

The importance of social bonds with family and other members of community

The role of being welcomed by a supportive and familiar community was seen as critical by the majority of people who took part in the project. However, worry and concern about family left behind was also a major factor affecting the settlement experience.

“How can I sleep on foam here when they sleep on rocks there? If I had known they could not join me I would have not left Kenya.” (Refugee from Ethiopia)

Intergenerational conflict also was reported as a key issue affecting family and community unity.

“I cannot believe that my son will tell me ‘Dad, your ideas are stupid’. This is lack of respect.” (Migrant from Kenya)

The importance of social bridges between the new arrivals and the host community

The importance of communication between African communities and the wider Australian community was widely acknowledged. People talked with great sadness about the fact that they often did not feel welcome in Australia.

“I have been here for ten years and I have never once been invited into the home of an Australian.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“My children get a lot of racism and discrimination from school...this makes them not feel worthy or something like that... You get racism everywhere...you get it in the jobs, you get it in schools, you get it in the streets. Can you imagine, one time I was going for a party and the bus driver told me that you know Africans put on brighter colours because they are darker and they can’t be seen.” (Refugee from Sudan)

The importance of social links between the structures of the host state

“Sometimes we are all pushed together [by service providers]. They think that because we come from the same country we are all the same.” (Refugee from Ethiopia)

“People think life in Australia will be good or easy. You are peaceful, have a house, the kids go to school and got something to do. This is not happening. People don’t know it will be difficult here. They need awareness to know it won’t be easy.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“Nobody tells you anything. I went looking for a school for my children. I walked and walked and walked and kept asking as I went where the school was. Until I found it, there was no one to show me.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Access to employment

The need for employment was identified as a key factor in successful integration. It was also one of the most difficult areas.

“They ask us for work experience...work experience from where? We have been living in camps - we have no experience let alone work experience.” (Refugee from Somalia)

Access to housing

The current housing shortage in Sydney has affected many families from the Horn of Africa. Some are homeless, others crowded with family members into inadequate accommodation. It is causing tremendous stress and pain.

“The housing problem is even worse for our large African families. You find that most of the houses are 3 bedrooms. And one family comes here and they are 10, so there is no way they can fit. So instead of the department renting 2 houses next to each other...they just go and get any house and put them, in most cases breaking families apart.” (Migrant from Kenya)

Access to education

The major rewards are the feeling of security and the opportunities available in Australia, in particular for their children. Many adults are also taking advantage of education and training opportunities.

“It is too late for the older children to get to University – they missed too much education in Kakuma camp. They are going to TAFE, they will do well and get good jobs – but my grand children – they will be doctors and lawyers!!” (Refugee from Sudan)

However, many children and young people are experiencing problems in accessing education.

“They come here at say 15 years, you have never gone to school...then you come here you are taken to school according to your years. How do you think that child is going to manage? That is why you see all these boys on the streets idle...they are leaving school because they do not understand.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Access to health

Overall, there was a high degree of satisfaction with physical health services. However many people discussed the need for more access to mental health services.

“Although I came here literate, I had completed high school, when I migrated here I struggled a lot, I was really depressed here. I think [thought] people who commit suicide are right....you are just like in a prison.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Language and cultural knowledge

“Until I can learn English – I can do nothing – no work, no study, no future. I have tried and I can not learn. They do not understand what I need. I am not stupid but I feel stupid.” (Refugee from Eritrea)

The participants recommended that there was a need for bi-cultural support workers to help them understand the Australian culture on arrival and to support them until they had learnt a functional level of English.

Safety and stability

Many women reported that they did not feel safe here in Australia. They reported high levels of family and domestic violence. Single women and women who had arrived as part of the women at risk program were particularly vulnerable.

“If a woman has a child of rape, either from over there, or from here, or if she gets pregnant from her boyfriend, it can cause shame for herself and her family. The issue of shame is isolating people, dividing families and communities.”
(Service provider from the HoA)

Others talked of fear of gangs from within their own communities and from other groups. Fear and mistrust of police, who in their countries of origin had often been the perpetrators of torture, was a key factor in their unwillingness to seek help when they felt unsafe in Australia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Few if any of these recommendations are new. Many of the experiences recounted by refugees from the HoA have been reported by previous refugee intakes. We now have a deeper understanding of the nature of protracted refugee situations, and the impact of this on the settlement experiences of refugees. Some people argue that refugees from the HoA experience a deeper level of overt racism than has been seen before. The impact of the refugee experience on children and youth is now better understood. The nature and extent of family violence and breakdown is painfully obvious. It is important that as new waves of service providers and policy makers enter the field, the wisdom and experience of past service provision is not lost. Nor should the knowledge and understanding of mistakes made and gaps left in service provision be ignored. New knowledge and past experience must be combined to provide improved opportunities for refugees invited to make Australia their home.

An overarching recommendation is that

- Models of best practice service provision demonstrated by many individual service providers in Australia be documented and made available to all service providers in all areas.

The impact of pre arrival experience

- Service providers working with new arrivals should receive thorough training about the potential experiences of the new arrivals, the conditions from which they have come, and the likely impacts of this on their ability to settle. While acknowledging the resource constraints, the current short training sessions provided are patently not adequate and it is anticipated that more thorough training would result in significantly improved levels of service response. This would in turn result in improved settlement experience with better integration.
- A standardised needs analysis should be undertaken with each new intake of refugees, and the results of this used to tailor settlement service provision to directly respond to the needs of individual and unique refugee intakes.

Rights and citizenship

- The education sessions provided to new arrivals about their rights and responsibilities in Australia must be revised and expanded. This is particularly the case with regards to women's and children's rights.
- The timing of these education sessions should be considered as it has been reported that new arrivals are overwhelmed with information during the first difficult six months of settlement, and have requested that critical information should be offered in different formats and at different times in the first one or two years of settlement.

- It was strongly suggested that the English test be removed as a criteria for citizenship, as many participants who have been unable to acquire functional English nevertheless have strongly identified with Australia as their home and wish to become citizens.

The importance of social bonds with family and other members of community

- The importance of family reunion to the wellbeing and integration of refugees cannot be underestimated. It is strongly recommended that the Family Reunion Visa as suggested by the Refugee Council of Australia (2009) be implemented as a matter of urgency.
- More support needs to be made available to community based organisations to enable them to both support and represent their communities. This must include resources such as spaces to meet, funding for core functions and capacity building to allow the development of groups of confident and articulate people who can take part in debate about issues critical to their well being and the contributions that their communities can make to the broader society.

The importance of social bridges between the new arrivals and the host community

- The strengths, capacities and capabilities of refugees from the HoA should be documented, services structured and opportunities provided to ensure that social bridges are fully developed and utilised. This should include positive discrimination for those who have been denied the chance to develop conventional pathways to positions of influence and authority.
- Additional resources must be made available, and targeted to foster acceptance of new arrivals and to encourage members of the Australian community to open doors and break down barriers. This could include media campaigns and the deliberate inclusion of members of HoA communities on boards and advisory committees.
- Targeted anti-racism campaigns must be developed, directly addressing the community from the HoA, and used broadly in all areas of society.

The importance of social links between the structures of the host state

- The voices of the communities should be increasingly included in the decision making process in a significant and meaningful way, through broad based community consultation, and through the appointment of additional community members to key advisory committees.

- Government at all levels should work towards a more holistic and integrated model of settlement service provision.
- A thorough, comprehensive and independent evaluation of Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) and other forms of settlement service provision should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.
- An economic study should be undertaken which documents the many contributions which members of refugee communities make to Australian society, to counteract the often negative perception of a group only using social security benefits.

Access to employment

- Recognition must be given to the specific skills and nature of the contribution that people from protracted refugee situations can bring to the employment market, and targeted training be provided to enable them to capitalise on the skills that they have and to update and upgrade skills if they have not had any opportunity for training or employment for a number of years.
- Specific employment programs should be designed for refugees who have experienced severe torture and trauma to enable them to deal with the stress and challenges of employment in a new, foreign and stressful environment. Such programs were successfully initiated by the government during the 1990s.
- Every effort must be made to recognise and upgrade the skills and qualifications of newly arrived refugees acknowledging that many have lost documentation during flight and are unable to access source documents because of their refugee status.

Access to housing

- Consideration must be made of the specific housing needs of newly arrived refugees specifically from the HoA, in particular, recognition of the racism to which they are subjected by some members of the housing industry. The need for secure housing in the first years of settlement is far more than the need for shelter. It incorporates the need for safety and stability and provides a basis for rebuilding shattered lives.
- A community education campaign could be designed to accompany any change to the allocation of government housing to newly arrived refugees. The current model of short term on-arrival accommodation is exacerbating trauma, and inhibiting timely settlement. The exploitation of refugees by landlords is increasing social isolation and hindering the building of social bridges and links with mainstream Australia.

- Community Services must be given the authority and means to provide references for refugees seeking to enter the housing market, and real estate agents must be encouraged to accept these as valid security for the provision of housing.

Access to education

- The excellent programs for refugee students available in some schools in metropolitan Sydney must be extended to all schools that receive students from refugee backgrounds. Special attention should be directed to schools in regional and rural areas.
- Programs that are currently available to secondary school students should be extended to primary school students. If children are not able to perform well in primary school, they will not be able to participate effectively in secondary school and this will lead to failure to successfully integrate into Australian society.
- Current programs which support and encourage people from the HoA should be extended to ensure that all who wish to improve their educational status are able to do so, and financial incentives are provided to make this achievable.
- University scholarships for people from a refugee background should be extended to incorporate postgraduate scholarships, to enable access to positions of power and decision-making within Australian society.

Access to health services

- Specialist refugee health services currently available in some parts of metropolitan Sydney must be made accessible to refugees from the HoA wherever they are resettled.
- The current effective models of refugee mental health service provision must be extended to cover all parts of metropolitan Sydney and the state of NSW.
- Service provision by non-specialist service providers, often inadequately supported by specialist teams because of resource shortages, is not an adequate response to the needs of refugees from protracted refugee situations. Adequate resources must be provided as an urgent investment in the mental health of refugees and their families.
- Research into new models of refugee mental health service provision which draws on the capacity, capabilities and traditional methods of the communities themselves should be encouraged and new and innovative methods of community based service provision be developed and funded.

Language and cultural knowledge

- The participants recommend that there is a need for bi-cultural support workers to help them understand the Australian culture on arrival and as they continued to learn English.
- Proven models of bi-cultural service provision for people from a refugee background should be adopted and funded to assist new arrivals in the first difficult months.
- Bi-lingual teachers should be routinely employed to assist in the teaching of English to some groups of refugees as the current insistence, by some providers, on an ‘English only’ model of service delivery is patently failing to achieve the required results.
- New models of English language teaching should be explored to reach out to those who are failing to learn English under the current schemes.
- Hours of tuition should be extended and made available for as long as is necessary for an individual to be able to operate independently in Australian society.

Safety and stability

- Improved and consistent training must be provided for workers in women’s refuges, to enable them to structure and respond appropriately to domestic violence in refugee communities. This training must recognise the role of torture, trauma, and the impact of a protracted stay in refugee camps and settlements, on family violence and family functioning.
- Improved and consistent training must be given to child protection workers to enable them to understand the conditions from which refugee families have escaped and the potential impact of this on child protection issues.
- Special programs must be developed to respond to the needs of children and youth who have survived severe trauma and torture, and this must be available in all sites to which refugees are resettled.
- Specific programs must be developed to recognise and respond to violence that is the result of the formation of ethno specific gangs. These programs will actively involve police, not just as recipients of information, but as a positive force for achieving change.
- Research and analysis should be done to uncover the root causes of gang related behaviour and preventative measures as well as response mechanisms put in place. This is an essential step to prevent further discrimination and alienation of the HoA youth.

CONCLUSION

While these measures might at first seem to be an expensive addition to current service provision, Australia has a proud international reputation for its humanitarian response to refugees. We also boast about having the best settlement service provision in the world. The investment in improved service for people from the Horn of Africa can only enhance that reputation. It will demonstrate to the world that refugees from the Horn of Africa are proudly taking their place as equal members of Australian society. The cost of an effective and successful service provision for new arrivals will pay dividends in the long term, in terms of social harmony and by capitalising on the immense capacity that refugees from the Horn of Africa bring to Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa (HoA) is a peninsula of East Africa bounded by the Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden. The seven countries of the region are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda (Francis, 2006).



Source: FAO, 2002

The population of the HoA is currently estimated to be 160 million. It has more than doubled since 1974 and is projected to increase by a further 40 percent by 2015 (FOA 2009, Care 2009). It is considered to be one of the most important strategic regions of Africa for many reasons which include that it:

- is the bridge between Africa and Middle East and it is the gateway to the oil fields.
- is the only area where the Indian Ocean and Red Sea meet.
- is a culturally and historically rich region with great natural resources such as livestock, rivers and arable land suitable for a wide range of crops.
- has huge untapped potential of Petroleum and Natural Gas. (Asefa, 2003)

Social and cultural differences across the various communities from the HoA are great but the peoples living across this region have much in common. The majority of the region's inhabitants are cultivators whose existence, like that of the pastoralists, has been jeopardised by decades of famine, drought, poverty and starvation, civil conflict and inter-state wars, and political instability (Francis, 2006; Fukui & Markakis, 1994). Civil war has been raging in the Sudan for over 30 years, and has claimed the lives of millions. Ethiopia and Eritrea concluded a two-year war in 2000

that claimed about 100 000 lives and destroyed the infrastructure and resources of both countries. Somalia collapsed as a nation-state in 1991 and civil war continues to ravage this country (Asefa, 2003, Care 2009). As a result, millions have fled their homes, resulting in massive refugee flows and internally displaced persons in the region. Currently, the HoA is described as having the largest number of internally displaced persons in the world (Francis, 2006). This is of course not the only region of conflict in Africa, but the shared experiences and cultural understandings between these communities and their status as the largest group of refugees from Africa in Australia, sets them apart.

In the past 12 years, there has been a marked increase in the resettlement of refugees from the HoA to Australia, swelling numbers from 625 in 1996-97 to tens of thousands currently. Since the early 1990s, in response to international pressure and at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Federal Government targeted refugees from a number of countries in the African continent as a significant component of the annual resettlement quota of 13 500. Many refugees from the HoA have entered Australia in this way and many have subsequently sponsored family members to join them through the Special Humanitarian Program.

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is someone who:

“Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (1951 Refugee Convention)

In 1969, an additional agreement on the definition of refugee was agreed to in the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. This came into force on June 20, 1974. It states that:

“The term ‘refugee’ shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.” (Organisation of African Unity, 1969)

This further definition applies to the situation of many refugees from HoA. For more than a quarter century the countries of the HoA have served as a revolving door for refugees within the region. For example, Eritreans and Ethiopians fled to Sudan and Somalia; Sudanese to Ethiopia, Kenya and Eritrea; and Somalis to Kenya and Ethiopia. Djibouti received Somalis, Eritreans and Ethiopians. Each country in the HoA, with the exclusion of Djibouti and Kenya has produced as well as hosted

refugees. In 2004, 90 000 Sudanese fled to Ethiopia, 68 000 fled to Kenya and 215 000 fled to Uganda. 153 000 Somalians fled to Kenya, and 111 000 Eritreans fled to Sudan (UNHCR, 2006, p 107). Civil strife in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia continues today, resulting in large numbers of citizens from these countries being internally displaced. Yet, because they have not crossed an international border, internally displaced peoples (IDPs) are not classified as refugees. Since 2006, people displaced by conflict are recognised as ‘people of concern’ to UNHCR, but do not have access to the international protection granted to those who cross into a country of asylum. IDPs cannot be considered for resettlement.

The majority of refugees recently arriving from African Countries have come from ‘Protracted Refugee Situations’. UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as,

“one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance.” (UNHCR, 2004, p 2)

UNHCR estimates that six million refugees have been living in protracted refugee situations for at least five years, some as long as 20 years (UNHCR 2008). Many young people were born in refugee camps and have known no other life. The camps are dangerous and violent. Food, education and medical services are at a minimum. People suffer from serious challenges to their cultural heritage, their ability to maintain family and community life, and often struggle to maintain their capacity to create a sustainable lifestyle for themselves and their families.

What the recent intake of people from Africa has shown is the incredible strength, capabilities and will to succeed which people bring with them. In a relatively short period of time, many young people and adults are learning English, finding work, pursuing higher education, and planning a secure and successful future for their families. While not all of these refugees are from the HoA, it is a sad truth that many Australians do not know the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of the African continent, and merely regard all people from Africa as one homogeneous group. No distinction is made between peoples from different countries and pre-arrival backgrounds. People from Africa are stereotyped, and huge generalisations are made about ‘the Africans’.

A major attribute of migrants and refugees from the HoA is their resilience and adaptability. However, it must be acknowledged that this resilience needs nurturing. There are some members of these communities who are not settling as quickly as others. The horrendous experiences they have lived through prior to arrival, their constant worry about family left behind in danger, and gaps in settlement service provision have led to a situation whereby some people are not coping as well as they had hoped and dreamed that they would before arrival in Australia. Some young adolescents would appear to be at particular risk, and parents are openly discussing their concern and helplessness about how to assist their children.

As with other minority groups, the media and public opinion in Australia seldom if ever addresses the fact that so many people from African countries are settling successfully. Many are succeeding in building or rebuilding their lives in Australia and in doing so contributing to the richness of our social, cultural and economic lives. Mainly Australians only hear about the problems, often exaggerated.

Refugees do not leave their countries voluntarily. Most want to return to their homeland, to reconnect with their land and their community, culture and way of life. It is only when this becomes impossible that they seek resettlement in a country far away and often unknown and little understood. Refugees and migrants have a huge and vested interest in succeeding in their new life. Many parents defer gratification of their own dreams to ensure that their children succeed in the new country. Australia is dependent on its refugee and migrant population to help maintain the standard of living that we have all come to enjoy, and the rich diversity of our emerging and constantly changing culture. Refugees and migrants bring skills, knowledge, labour, families to boost our dwindling birth rate, and they are consumers in the economic system. In return, they need good ‘on arrival’ services to assist them to settle and integrate into the broader Australian community as quickly as possible. Australians also have a vested interested in this happening.

In order to provide effective settlement services to refugees and migrants from the HoA, we need to challenge the notion of African homogeneity. We cannot begin to effectively address resettlement needs and problems of refugees and migrants from the African continent unless we approach them on an individual level, to understand their individual problems. Only then can we tailor settlement services and projects, both within and without the government spectrum, to their real needs. This research seeks to explore the reality of the lives of people who have migrated from the HoA, and to document the successes and the challenges they experience. It explores and analyses the many reasons why some people and families succeed more easily and more quickly than others.

For information on the individual states which make up the HoA, see the country information chapter.

RESETTLEMENT TO AUSTRALIA

Australia is one of a small number of countries, mainly in the developed world, that has become a designated resettlement country for refugees. Based on agreements with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Australia receives a designated number of refugees on an annual basis. Australia has consistently had one of the highest per capita rates of refugee reception in the world. During the 2007-8 period Australia accepted 6 004 refugees (visa subclasses 200 and 204). Applicants for these visa categories require referral from UNHCR and must meet health and character requirements. Their medical and travel costs are paid and they have eligibility for a full range of Australian government settlement services. Of the refugee program, 10.5% of the total visa places are reserved for women at risk, a special visa category (subclass 204) for women and their children who have experienced extreme risk and who are vulnerable to future violence. An additional 5 026 people were accepted on Special Humanitarian Visas (visa sub class 202) as part of the resettlement program (Department of Immigration and Citizenship - DIAC 2008). The Special Humanitarian Visas (visa sub class 202) is for people who are outside their country of origin and have been identified as having experienced, or fear, gross discrimination amounting to a substantial violation of their human rights. People entering under this program have to have demonstrated a connection to Australia. In most cases this is through a family connection or through having previously lived or studied here (RCOA 2009).

Settlement service provision

Successful settlement and integration into the host community is a key objective of Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program (DIAC 2008). A range of settlement services are provided by the government to assist in resettling refugees in their first years in Australia. Critical on arrival settlement services are provided under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS). The IHSS, delivered by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), provides initial settlement support to newly-arrived entrants, based on an assessment of their settlement needs. IHSS services include: case coordination, information and referrals; on-arrival reception and assistance; accommodation services; and short-term torture and trauma counselling services (DIAC 2008).

IHSS services are automatically available to those people who enter Australia on a refugee visa, including subclasses 200 and 204. Humanitarian entrants arriving on a 202 visa are eligible for these services on a 'needs basis' (DIAC 2008). This can cause great hardship for newly arrived entrants, who usually come from the same camps and urban refugee sites as those who come as refugees, and have suffered the same deprivation and denial of basic needs. It can also create problems for their families who have sponsored them and who bear the responsibility of assisting them with their settlement. Families gladly take this responsibility, knowing the terrible conditions in which their families and friends are still living overseas.

IHSS services are generally provided for around six months, but may be extended in particular cases. Volunteer groups also work with service providers to support entrants and assist them to settle into the local community. Following the six month period, humanitarian entrants are referred to general settlement services provided through migrant resource centres, migrant service agencies and organisations funded under the Settlement Grants Program, also delivered by DIAC (DIAC 2008).

For further information please refer to the following weblink:

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/66ihss.htm>

Other services available

Other settlement services are provided by community groups, faith based services, and non government organisations. Some of these are funded by the Australian government. People who enter Australia as part of the refugee and humanitarian program are entitled to these services for up to five years. After that they are expected to access mainstream services if they need assistance in their daily lives. While many of these services are excellent, they are not consistently offered across the areas in which refugees are settled, and are often insufficiently resourced to meet the needs.

METHODOLOGY

This research study draws on the experience and wisdom of refugees and migrants from the HoA who have participated in this project. Community consultations and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 83 people, 37 men and 46 women, representing all countries in the HoA except Djibouti. The majority now live in metropolitan Sydney. Participants were identified by community leaders from Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency (HARDA), the networks of the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women and with the assistance of the Baulkham Hills, Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre. Some were community leaders, some professionals, some were unemployed and others were students. A range of family compositions were represented, including extended families, female headed households, and unaccompanied minors. Some had been in Australia for many years, others were newly arrived. They were asked to share their experiences of settlement in Australia, the things that they enjoyed and found positive, and the challenges which they faced. Secondary data from parallel projects of the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research with refugees and migrants from the HoA also informed the report.

A qualitative methodology was suitable for this study because this approach builds, on ‘a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting’ (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Qualitative research uses participant responses as a starting point from which broader analytical categories are drawn (Basit, 2003; Ezzy, 2002). This methodology enabled us to examine the resettlement experiences of refugees and migrants from the HoA, their contributions to Australian society and the challenges they face during resettlement. The researchers approached this study with a responsibility to listen to the voices of the participants as they articulated the issues that were important to them (Muli, 2009). A mix of interviews and community consultations were used to collect the data.

Semi structured interviews

Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were selected as the most appropriate method of gathering further data from individual participants. The interviews explored beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and opinions that for one reason or another might not have been exposed during the community consultations (Ritchie, 2001). The semi-structured nature of these interviews meant that the participants were asked a sequence of questions that could be altered, and additional questions could be added if necessary (Bryman, 2001; Sarantakos, 1998). This method allowed the participants a free flow of ideas and greater discussion, and further avoided forcing them to conform to preconceived notions and beliefs, and provided an opportunity for the researcher to explore the personal experiences of the participants (Muli, 2009).

Community consultations

The community consultations introduced a human rights framework and used narrative research techniques to document issues of concern to various refugee communities. This particular ‘Participatory Action Research’ methodology has been developed by Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei from the Centre for Refugee Research, University of NSW. It grew from their work examining the occurrence and impact of systematic rape and sexual abuse of refugee women and girls in camps and refugee sites in Thailand, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and, subsequently, in Australia.

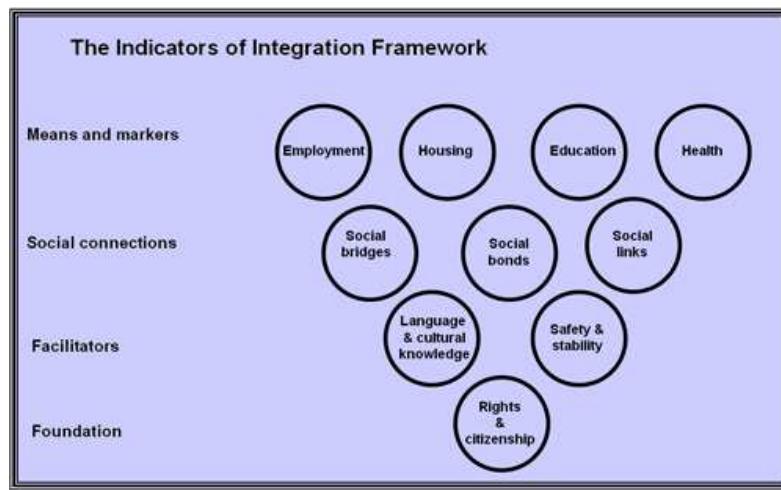
The focus of the method is the collection of information from often vulnerable populations in a way that is empowering, not harmful, not exploitative and which has the potential for bringing about social change. It is ideal for use with marginalised and disadvantaged groups who have valid and historically based reasons for distrusting people in authority, including researchers, academics and representatives of governments and other institutions.

This method uses an introduction to human rights and gender issues to provide a context to guide participants through an examination and articulation of issues of critical concern to their communities. Strict confidentiality agreements are negotiated at the beginning of each session, and all participants sign a group agreement. It involves a technique called ‘Storyboarding’, during which participants use a series of drawings to conduct situational analyses including proposals for action, response and intervention. The story board technique allows participants to name problems and issues within their communities in a positive and empowering context. It recognises the skills, knowledge and experience which participants bring to situations, and provides a human rights framework which acknowledges their rights to a secure life and social support. The underlying premise is that all people have capabilities and capacity to identify and address community problems if the resources are available to support them. This method can be used with people of all levels of education, including people who are pre-literate.

Conceptual framework

The model of ‘integration criteria’ developed by Ager & Strang (2008) is used to explore the findings. In view of an increasing international focus on the use of ‘integration criteria’, it was seen as a useful conceptual tool with which to frame the findings. Integration is a core component and policy goal of many immigration programs, including Australia’s, and a widely used concept in the field of refugee and migrant studies. Nevertheless, it remains a contested, controversial and ‘chaotic’ concept (Robinson 1998: 118). Castles et al (2002) have noted ‘there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration’ (2002: 12). In response, Ager & Strang, working with the UK Home Office, have proposed a conceptual framework for understanding and defining integration comprising ten core domains of wide relevance, based on normative understandings of what constitutes successful integration (2008: 166). Their framework examines key

potential indicators of integration which are: markers of integration, means of achievement of integration, processes of achievement, and facilitators of local integration. Achievement of and access to employment, housing, education and health are identified as discrete domains and are recognised as both markers of integration and as potential means to support the achievement of integration (Ager & Strang 2008: 169). Processes of social connection are broken down into three discrete domains which also determine the achievement of integration: social bonds – with family and other members of their community; social bridges – with other communities, including the host community; and social links – with the structures of the host state. Language and cultural knowledge, and safety and security are identified as discrete domains and considered ‘facilitators’ of local integration (Ager & Strang 2008: 181). Foundational to all of these is the experience of citizenship and rights.



(UK Home Office 2008)

The concept of integration as a positive humanitarian endeavour which benefits both the resettling refugee and the host community has in recent times been overtaken by a more sinister concept. Some governments are using the notion of ‘integration potential’ as criteria for selecting refugees for resettlement, thus placing the responsibility for successful settlement and integration on the shoulders of the refugees. We argue that this concept is contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the 2001 UNHCR Agenda for Protection. Resettlement is a protection measure for those refugees who are unable to return to their country of origin or to integrate into the country of first asylum. It is part of the humanitarian response to the international refugee crisis to which many developed countries have committed, in the spirit of burden sharing with those developing countries who host the majority of the world’s refugees. As such, providing the services and infrastructure necessary for integration is the prerequisite of inviting refugees to resettle. Integration is not the responsibility of the refugees. The Australian government has been a strong defender of these rights and has spoken strongly against the notion of integration criteria as a screening tool for selecting refugees for resettlement. The application of the framework in this study is in the spirit of humanitarian endeavour.

The findings and recommendations have been loosely grouped according to the domains suggested by Ager and Strang (2008). While providing a very useful framework, it must be acknowledged they do not encapsulate the full complexity nor the breadth of the experience of new arrivals. They do not identify all of the imperatives which contribute to or hinder successful settlement and integration. In particular they do not explicitly acknowledge the impact of pre-arrival experience as a refugee on the ability to settle. Nor do they consider the role of expectations brought by newly arrived refugees. Staff from Foundation House, Victoria¹ amongst others, have noted that the issue of family reunification, and mental health issues, in practically all those linked to torture and trauma are not given prominence, and yet they play an enormous role in successful settlement. Finally it is important to acknowledge that these domains are intersectional, and cannot be considered in isolation. With those caveats, it is still considered that they can be taken as a guide to indicate the areas of settlement which service providers need to focus on to improve the experience of new arrivals. This knowledge can then be incorporated into policy consideration and service provision. They provide a useful tool, where one has not been previously available. The decision to use this framework was made towards the end of the project and was not reflected in the design of the semi-structured interviews or consultation trigger questions. It is therefore significant to see how closely the research findings can be correlated with the domains identified in the framework.

¹ The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST)

PRE-ARRIVAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RESETTLEMENT

Before examining indicators of integration and settlement experience, it is important to acknowledge that the pre arrival experience of refugees has to be taken into account.

"I walked 3 months from Sudan to Ethiopia...I saw colleagues, friends and family die along the journey, we had not access to food, no water, no medical assistance, no security. There was a lot of fear, if you don't walk hard you die. Girls were killed and raped by the soldiers. By the time we got to Ethiopia we were skeletons...we looked like skeletons." (Refugee from Sudan)

The majority of refugees from the HoA now living in Australia have come from 'Protracted Refugee Situations'. Due to horrendous conflict and persecution they have had to flee their homelands, leaving behind their homes and families, and have lived in appalling refugee camps for up to 20 years. Many children and young people were born in refugee camps and have known no other life. The camps are dangerous and often violent. Food, education and medical services are at a minimum. People suffer from serious challenges to their cultural heritage, their ability to maintain family and community life. Participants in this project shared their stories of survival, of flight and life as refugees in camps or hiding in cities.

"Life in Sudan was very bad...we really suffered. That is when I understood suffering. Suffering is about treating someone like animal, like second class citizen." (Refugee from Sudan)

"We ran away in the middle of the night with nothing...bullets were passing our heads as we ran. We walked for 15 days with strangers until we got to the Kenyan border." (Refugee from Somalia)

"We left with nothing! We took nothing with us except the clothes that we were wearing that day. We had no money, no food...nothing." (Refugee from Somalia)

The loss of life, loss of family members, loss of freedom, and the loss of their material possessions were all discussed at length by the participants.

"Our village was attacked my brother and younger sister were killed during the war by the North troop." (Refugee from Sudan)

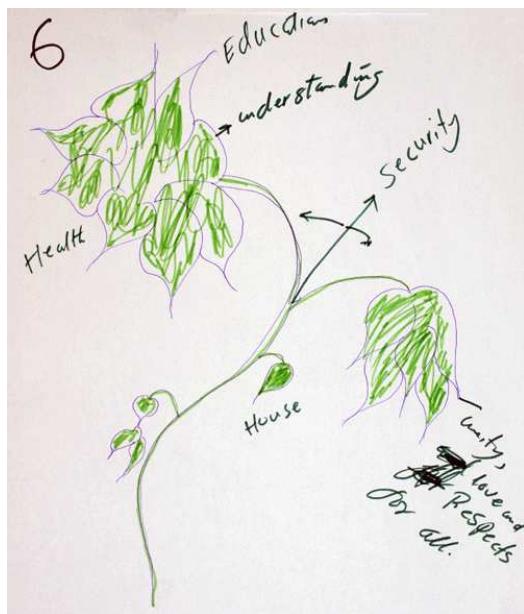
"Everyone lost someone, my whole family was killed during the war. The last time I saw my mother and sister was 18 years ago, and they were being rounded up by the militia. I ran away it was an unbelievable experience people died...many people died." (Refugee from Sudan)

Instead of security and protection, many refugees found that the camps or refugee sites in cities were as dangerous as the places they had fled from.

"Kakuma camp was horrible, horrible, dangerous, hot and dusty - 55 degrees, not enough food or water, and danger everywhere, people killed, women raped, no safety anywhere, nothing to do, no proper school for the children, the hospital was a tent." (Refugee from Eritrea)

"Egyptians did not want us they did not want to support our humanitarian need. They spit on us on the streets, they would call you names and throw rubbish at you...it was an awful experience. The experience of a Sudanese who has lived in Egypt will change the person to become aggressive, protective of yourself, we had to fight for our lives in Egypt as well. We developed an enormous sense of group – group mentality to survive." (Refugee from Sudan)

Upon resettlement to Australia refugees from the HoA face significant challenges due to cultural, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds which are very different from the background of the host population (Casimiro *et al.* 2007: 56). The pre-arrival refugee experience of hardship, loss, trauma and torture has a strong impact on resettlement and integration. The horror of conflict and the hardship of the refugee experience can place people in a position of limbo. They are in transition from a familiar, predictable past toward an alien, unknown future, where all certainties are questioned, including their own roles and status, identities and relationships (Krufteld and Camino 1994: ix).



"The trauma I have now is about that experience but I was determined to survive. I can survive anything because of my refugee experience." (Refugee from Somalia)

"We come here empty handed leaving all our material things behind...what is the outcome of this? We still have nothing!" (Refugee from Sudan)

However, the most important things that refugees bring are their resilience and determination to succeed.

Hopes and dreams

Participants described their pre-arrival dreams and expectations once they had been granted their resettlement visa. This was accepted as a ‘sign’ for many that they had been invited and would be welcomed by Australians.

“When I got visa, nothing could make me upset, nothing could put me in a bad way because the way I saw it was that Australians are honest and very nice people who were inviting me to their country. I thought I would be very happy here.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“When we got our visa, we thought we were going to heaven...and that everything would be easy.” (Refugee from Somalia)

Their dreams and expectations were for safety and security which would include housing, education and freedom amongst friendly and supportive people who had invited them and would welcome them into their country.

“I am going to paradise, I will be staying in a beautiful house, I will learn English and will be living with friendly, supportive people who accepted people to come to their country. I expected everything to be good.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I thought that coming to Australia would be good for my children to get an education and for us to rest and spend time with my family, and build myself.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I felt like everything was waiting or me and my family in Australia. My children would get educated I felt that I was finally finding security and peace.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“I just wanted peace when coming to Australia. What I wanted was a safe place to live. Just give me that and I will know what to do. I wanted to build my life once I got here.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“I wanted a better life in Australia, it was not safe for me as a girl in my country I had to find a way out otherwise I would have been raped.” (Refugee from Somalia)

For some these expectations have been realised, for others, the reality is still a distant dream. Sadly many are realising that life in Australia will never live up to the expectations they had when they first thought of escape to a new and secure life for themselves and their families.

“People think life in Australia will be good or easy. You are peaceful, have a house, the kids go to school and got something to do. This is not happening. People don’t know it will be difficult here. They need awareness to know it won’t be easy.” (Refugee from Sudan)

I AM HOME! – RIGHTS, CITIZENSHIP AND A SENSE OF BELONGING

Many of the refugees and migrants from the HoA who have arrived in Australia in the last decade have settled extremely well, and are proud to be contributing to their new country. They have a sense of finally living a ‘normal’ life after the trauma they have experienced as protracted refugees. Issues of rights and citizenship, and a feeling of belonging figured largely in the discussions with participants.

“I feel like Australia is home. I have family, job and safety is big because if you don’t have safety you have nothing. I have a new life.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“Australia is one place you can do something normal, live a normal live in a multicultural place that is secure.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I will never...never go back to Somalia! It is hell, there is no life in Somalia...there is no justice in Somalia. As long as my children are here with me I have no reason to ever go back. Australia is my home.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“I can never go to Sudan! I go back to Sudan I die. Australia is now my home, I have no other choice.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Although in some cases the participants did not necessarily identify with the Australian culture and way of life, many felt that being in Australia had allowed them to develop a new identity.

“Australia gave me my rights! I never had rights before I came to Australia! Australia gave me rights as a black, Muslim woman. I am proud to be who I am.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“I did not know human rights, we did not know human rights, the only person with rights in my country is the government who you must support or you die. I only know anything about rights when I came to Australia, this is a good country – it told me about my rights.” (Refugee from Sudan)

The feeling of belonging varied depending on the length of time people had been in Australia, and the quality of their first years of settlement. This included the attitudes of the Australian community, their access to good quality settlement services and their ability to take control of their own lives. For some, finding their identity and being able to celebrate their human rights is a major gain. For the first time they felt that their human rights were not being violated.

Access to the right and opportunity to vote without fear of persecution is seen as a major right to be enjoyed in Australia, one which it was felt was taken for granted by many Australians. The right to vote means freedom. It gives an overall sense of belonging and exercising one’s rights.

“You get to vote without fear of persecution and allow for people to hear your voice.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“You can vote for whoever you like and not get killed for it.” (Refugee from Eritrea)

When considering the meaning of belonging, some people did not want to be identified as refugees once they had settled in Australia, while others thought that they would always see themselves as refugees.

“It is easy for people to say that I am Australian, but I am not. I am and will always be a refugee. So I better maintain my Somali culture so that I have some identity. Culture is special because it is part of your identity...” (Refugee from Somalia)

“As a Somali refugee, I will never be truly Aussie...because being Somali is part of my identity and I have to retain my culture. It is easy to say that I am Australian but am I really? No I am not.” (Refugee from Somalia)

The moment of belonging also differs and several participants did not begin to feel that Australia was home until they had returned to their country of origin for a visit.

“I kept saying that I want to go home, I want to go home...then I asked myself, where is home? That is what now opened my eyes that now home is Australia, and I am here to stay.” (Migrant from Kenya)

Gender differences

Not all the perceptions of rights in Australia were positive. Women face particular problems in resettlement, and changing gender roles has posed major issues and challenges. The notion of women's and children's rights are not always seen as positive and can be very confronting for people who have come from very patriarchal societies.

“You see here women have rights compared to where they came from where they had no rights at all. The men don't want to take it...in the western countries like Australia women are equal to men, and they have a right to complain you know to the police...men don't like this, so the women suffer for it and have nowhere to turn.” (Refugee from Sudan)

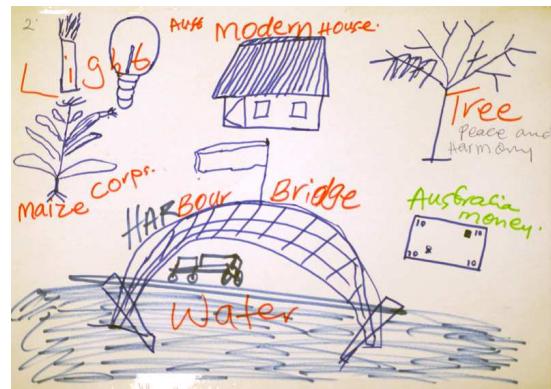
Opportunities

The opportunities available in Australia were widely discussed. With these opportunities came a sense of relief and urgency to take up the opportunities and make a life for themselves and their families.

"I was born in a remote village in Somalia. My first migration was when I moved to the city in order to seek a better life. I always make the best from the worst circumstances in life." (Somali Migrant)

"Just not everything is going bad, we are here, I am doing well, I am contributing now and I will contribute to Australia in the future". (Refugee from Sudan)

"The best thing we have found in Australia is light. Where we have come from, we don't have 'light', we find the 'light' in Australia, it is a different 'light' but it is a 'light'. We have modern house in Australia, we have peace and harmony and security as you can see in the tree below. Also we got maize crops we like maize, it symbolized food, we have food. We have opera house, harbour bridge – these are all good things in Australia. I also like Australian money that allows for financial security, to live a good life and enjoy life in Australia." (Refugee from Sudan)



"I am grateful to be here, there are opportunities here, I feel like there are a lot opportunities for refugees to pursue in Australia." (Refugee from Somalia)

"I wake up everyday with a choice to do things. A choice! I have a choice to be in charge of my life...a choice to make a good life for myself and my family." (Refugee from Somalia)

Some participants who had lived in Australia for many years understood that while they themselves might never be able to fully enjoy the opportunities, it was possible for their children. At times this placed an enormous burden of expectation on the children.

"It is too late for the older children to get to University – they missed too much education in Kakuma camp. They are going to TAFE, they will do well and get good jobs – but my grand children – they will be doctors and lawyers!!" (Refugee from Sudan)

"All three of my children are at University, two doing nursing and one doing computer science. I am so proud of them even though I never got opportunity to go to University." (Refugee from Sudan)

The choice and opportunities that were discussed as being available to refugee communities included; learning a new way of life, health care, employment opportunities, and education. These all resulted in their successful resettlement and integration.

“Being here has given me a good experience to see and learn how others are getting along and how they do things to succeed.” (Refugee from Sudan)

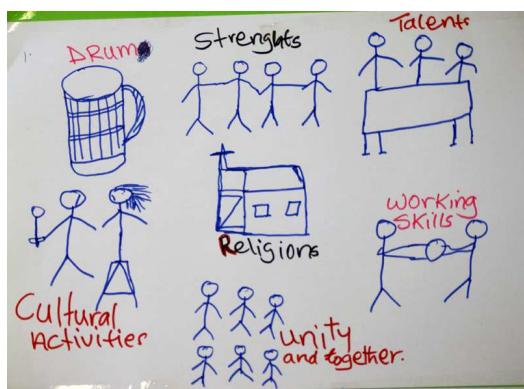
“Australia is really good, there are good opportunities. Life is easier, no difficulties with medication because there is more money here for us than in Sudan.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I have the opportunity to be educated. I did not have this opportunity in Sudan. I never thought these things would happen to me. I can’t believe that I am living like this while my family suffers in Sudan.” (Refugee from Sudan)

However, the notion of citizenship and belonging was not a one-way street in which refugees are expected to be grateful recipients of the benefits provided by the host country. They were adamant that being a part of their new community meant that not only would they be learning and sharing in the new culture but that their new community needed to acknowledge that they too had positive contributions to make to Australia.

“We are here, I am doing well, I am contributing now and I will contribute to Australia in the future.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“We bring different culture and knowledge. Before we came here, Australians may not have been aware of our culture and knowledge, now that we are here, they are aware and learning and we are also learning from them. They are learning about our culture and we are learning about theirs.” (Refugee from Sudan)



“We bring drums, not the drum from Australia but the drum made from Sudan and Africa. You see people holding hands in this picture, it shows strength pulling together to make a nation and become stronger. We bring strength to Australia. Togetherness is unity, especially for Sudanese from the war we have gone through we have had to be together. People are dancing proud of their own culture and customs. We bring our religion and spirituality. We have talents and work skills in different services that we bring to Australia.” (Refugee from Sudan).

“We are no longer just refugees, we are equal and will be giving back to community.” (Refugee from Somalia)

People from the HoA are taking their place at all levels in Australian society. Many participants have successfully resettled and are positively contributing to the Australian economy. They are employed as senior public servants, as university

lecturers, as doctors, and in all professions. They are starting businesses, and working in every sector of the employment market.

“So many of our youth are going into nursing – it is what they can do with the education they have had. Others are going into aged care. They are working in shops, studying at TAFE and University, doing so much. We are doing jobs Australians do not want, we are opening our own businesses, dressmakers, hair braiding and many other things. We are working as community workers, teacher-aides and bi-lingual workers. We are doing so much.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I opened my own business [shop] 2 years ago, which I run during the day. I am also a nurse assistant at night. You can do anything if you try. I wanted to work and give back to Australia.” (Refugee from Somalia)

Some clearly identified their resilience, strength and will to succeed as being inspirational to other members of the community.

“Our bad experiences as refugees have forced us to succeed in Australia.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“I see my refugee experience as strength not a weakness, I have survived a lot and Australians can learn a lot from our journey, our experiences, our way of thinking. We can be inspirational if we are allowed to express ourselves.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“Australians can learn from the enormous resilience in Africans to function in the depth of the discrimination...they can learn from us.” (Refugee from Sudan)

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL BONDS WITH FAMILY AND OTHER MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY

The welcome refugees and migrants received from members of their own community when they initially arrived and the support they continued to receive was undoubtedly one of the key factors in successful settlement and integration. Family connections and community support were identified as critical in dealing with the loneliness that many encounter on arrival in Australia. Support from community members who understood and had survived similar refugee experiences themselves was seen as fundamental to the settlement and integration of many participants.

“I need to hear my own language, to know where to buy our food. What day can women go to the mosque? I want someone who knows and does not have to have everything [about the cultural background} explained.” (Refugee from Ethiopia)

“When I first arrived, my own community helped me settle, I lived with a family from my community for 3 months and did not have to pay any rent. They helped me a lot they gave me free accommodation and took me to Centre Link to register, they helped me with real estate to find a house.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I have met a lot of South Sudanese Dinka speaking women, who like me don’t speak English. They have really helped me with the language and resettling issues particularly my loneliness.” (Refugee from Sudan)

However it was noted that the time pressures of re-establishing lives in a new country made it very difficult to maintain the customs and networks from the home country. The differences in culture, custom and law also posed significant challenges and made the maintenance of community difficult.

“I am confused with the meaning of community in Australia. I do not know how I can divide myself into being a member of my Eritrean community and at the same time being a part and parcel of my new found home Australia.” (Refugee from Eritrea)

Despite these problems communities do flourish, and support each other. People meet together and share their language customs and culture.

“I want to work and help my community members. I have started a Sudanese community organization that helps new comers into Australia.” (Refugee from Sudan)

In recognition of the need to build strong community groups, in order to unite and support each other, and to maintain a cultural identity, many African community organisations have been founded. Most of these are new and their members are recent arrivals. This means that there is a continual struggle by members and their organisations to adapt to the demands of the new society and at the same time pursue their individual goals to succeed.

“Operating African Community organisations from the perspective of its members in a western law framework is the hardest thing we African Community leaders face in Australia.” (African Community Leader)

Huge expectations are placed on community based organisations. They receive little funding and are often only staffed on a part time basis or by volunteers. They are expected to be the media face of their community, to respond to requests for information from a range of government departments, politicians and large non governmental organisations. They are asked to represent their communities on committees and at meetings. They also have to complete funding proposals and monitoring reports, and they are expected to organise community events. There were complaints that service providers sometimes imposed the idea of community and suggested that people should go to their communities for assistance, rather than to organisations. This was particularly true for people who had come on humanitarian visas and who are not entitled to full IHSS service provision. The biggest demand for their time is for case work from their communities. The community expects a high level of response and good results. This is often not possible.

“We are burning up – we do not have the time to do what we want to do, which is to help our community. I am paid part time and yet I work all the time, and at night and at the weekends.” (Community worker from the HoA)

Despite these problems, communities do flourish and support each other. People meet together and share their language, customs and culture. Sport is also very important and there are many football and basketball clubs which are breaking down social barriers between various youth groups from different communities. Religion is one key focus and many mainstream churches host special services for communities from Africa.

However, not all participants wanted to be with their own community and it is important that the background and wishes of individual refugees are taken into account when placing them for settlement.

“I was the only one from my tribe in [a small country town in Australia]. There were people from another tribe – they had killed my husband. There was no-one there for me. The white people told me I had to mix with the other Africans – they said “you are all from Sudan”. I ran away to Sydney to find some of my people. I left all of my things there.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Family breakdown

Serious challenges to the maintenance of family and community structures have also emerged. The difference between Australian conceptions of family and traditional roles of husband, wife and children and those of communities from the HoA was widely discussed. It was felt that there was a lack of understanding on both sides, and people felt that they were not given enough information about the social and legal implications of these differences. When all family members are struggling to adapt to a new culture and new ways of dealing with their everyday realities, the parents may

experience the lack of sufficient knowledge required to support their children. Children acquire English language and a working knowledge of the new culture more quickly than their parents, even if their perception is sometimes distorted by television and misinformation. This increases the tendency for the parents to feel that they are losing control.

“Who is the head of the family in Australia? The law should tell us.” (Refugee from Uganda)

Roles are sometimes reversed and children are often put into the position of “head of family”: translating and negotiating with service providers, doctors and the school. Parents become the ones socialised by their children.

“Children grow up too fast – they have to interpret for their parents negotiating rental agreement – hearing their parents’ stories of torture and trauma.” (Refugee from Eritrea)

Participants felt that there was insufficient information and training given in the early months of settlement about Australian law and customs. There is misunderstanding about the role of child protection agencies, and the power of youth to challenge the authority of their parents.

“The big issue is that families lose their kids here. Daughters run away, and they don’t listen to the family.” (Refugee from Sudan)

These issues pose major challenges to social bonding, and family and community integrity.

The need for family reunification – families left behind

Family reunion was identified by all participants as critical to successful settlement and integration. The horrendous experiences they have lived through prior to arrival; their constant worry about family left behind in danger; and gaps in settlement service provision has led to a situation whereby some people are not coping as well as they had hoped and dreamed that they would before arrival in Australia.

“I arrived in Australia in 2005 and since then, 16 members of my family have died since then in Sudan. This has caused me a lot of trauma and worry for my relatives left behind in Sudan.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I am still struggling still worried about my brothers and sisters and other relatives back home in Sudan....I need to support myself and finish study...it is hard.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Many participants had stories of misleading information being given by UNHCR local staff and by community workers in the places where they were refugees. People came to Australia certain that once established here they would be able to apply to have their close family members join them.

“My children are in Egypt being taken care of by family members. I worry about them. I was misled and did not include them in my application forms. I think about how I can get them here, otherwise I have to go back.” (Refugee from Sudan)

A further stress and complication is the different definition of ‘family’ held by the Australian government and many refugees. The Australian government’s definition insists on biological ties and will only consider close family members, and children under the age of 18. Notions of family responsibility are much broader in many African communities and this is even more important in refugee situations. In the face of so much death and destruction when parents are killed, nephews and nieces are raised by aunts, uncles or cousins. People informally adopt orphans and bring them up as their own. Even if formal adoption is an institution in the country of origin, or the country of first asylum, refugees have no recourse to regularize these relationships. When they are not recognised by UNHCR and consular officials it causes tremendous hardships.

“The Australians say we are lying – but we are not lying – we just want our families here.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Likewise the notion that a woman at risk can have a male partner, or might genuinely not know where her husband is, are not generally considered. People who arrive in Australia not understanding our narrow definitions of family are often accused of lying and fraud when they try to reunite with family members.

“How can I sleep on foam here when they sleep on rocks there? If I had known they could not join me I would have not left Kenya.” (Refugee from Ethiopia)

The need to send money back to family in camps is a constant stress and moral obligation. This is often not understood by service providers. Some participants described their humiliation when they went to request food assistance from charities, and were told that it was their fault that they were hungry – they had no right to send overseas the money that the government gave them to live on here.

“I will not be happy until my family is with me. I do not sleep at night worrying about them. I send all my spare money to them. I cannot study or learn English when my head is full of their problems.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“I have thrown away my phone – I can not talk to them again. They phone, they need money for medicine for food, they are sick, they are starving. What can I do – I can not pay the rent here. I cry all day and I cry all night.” (Refugee from Uganda)

The pain of family separation is a major challenge to timely and successful settlement and integration, as it denies people the opportunity of the social bonding which is recognised as one of the essential ingredients for this to happen.

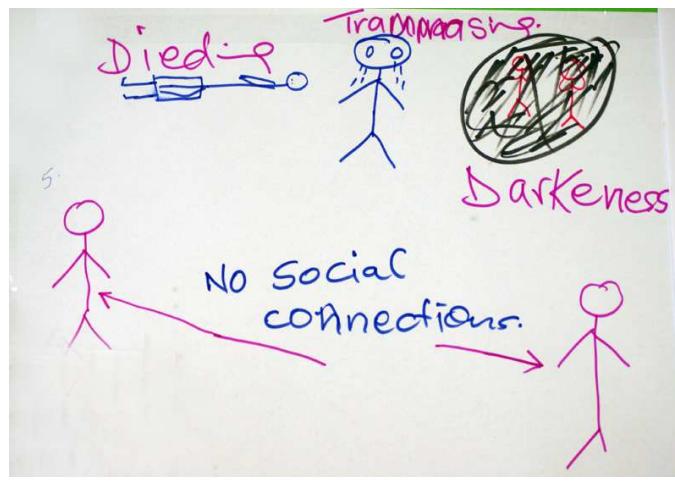
THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL BRIDGES BETWEEN THE NEW ARRIVALS AND THE HOST COMMUNITY

"I have been here for ten years and I have never once been inside an Australian home – it is strange to us. In our culture we share food with our neighbours. Australians do not do this." (Refugee from Sudan)

Social integration in Australia is a major factor that challenges the resettlement of refugees in Australia. The lack of social networks and support services was mentioned by many participants, resulting in isolation and loneliness and an overall sense of not belonging to or fitting in with the Australian community.

"We have no family networks when we get here, some of us end up home-bound and do not socialize, no one notices you, you feel lost and alone." (Refugee from Somalia)

"Australian society does not play a major role when settling here because maybe they feel that it is not their responsibility, and that it is up to the refugees to settle the right way and teach new arrivals how to settle...many of us have been here many years but we do not feel settled...how then can we help others settle?" (Refugee from Sudan)



"I struggle to cope with the isolation and loneliness. You have no one to talk to, no one to share with, you are really isolated. Where we come from we had neighbours and family, here we have no neighbours and no family. Instead we have sub-communities in Australia, small sub-communities that you are not welcome to everywhere." (Refugee from Somalia)

The role of the church and the mosque were mentioned as important in bridging the divide between new arrivals and the mainstream community.

"I got a lot of support from the teacher who was teaching me English at IECS, also a lot of support from my church as well." (Refugee from Sudan)

"My church community helped me find employment. The owner [employer] was really patient with me because I did not speak English. He was Italian, he was

really against racism and helped me learn the job even without the language. He was a good man." (Refugee from Uganda)

However even this is not without problems.

"The church is our 'home' here, but some of the Australian who live near the church complain because they say we make too much noise singing. There was a picture in the paper of a man with earphones on because of the singing. It was horrible." (Refugee from Sudan)

The lack of familiarity with the way of life in Australia, compounded with the absence of support and acceptance from the Australian community, has resulted in a strong sense of isolation and loneliness for some refugees and migrants. Many participants were adamant that they did not feel welcomed and supported by the Australian community. This meant that they had resorted to supporting each other within their own community. They valued proximity to family and members from their own community who shared their culture and understood their experiences as refugees. However, this then led to accusations of anti-social behaviour and lack of willingness to mix with the broader community.

"I can not make someone invite me into his home!!" (Migrant from Kenya)

"Do you know why we Sudanese walk together in a group? It is because we want to be with people that speak the same and think the same. It is about being with the same people that understand me. They help themselves, for example, if one has a car then that one will help them go to real estate or around. That one person will help them until they can do it themselves. This being together has resulted in, we are being discriminated." (Refugee from Sudan)

"I feel like I don't belong to Australia. Is this where I want to grow old and where my children should grow old? No...we are not at home here." (Refugee from Sudan)

There was also a suggestion from participants that while they appreciate the role and value of their community in helping them settle quickly during their initial period of resettlement, they feel a strong need for social intercourse with the 'mainstream community' if they are to become fully functioning members of Australian society. Sadly this does not happen easily. This has resulted in feelings of not being welcome, and a lack of belonging, which has meant that for some, there was an urge and yearning to 'go back home'.

"I don't think about going back to Sudan because there is still a war going on, but I think about going back to Kenya. I felt at home in Kenya...here I feel like I am not in my country...I feel like an unwanted visitor. When you go out people look at you funny and in a train they will not sit next to you unless the train is full and yours is the only sit they have left." (Refugee from Sudan)

"I aspire to go back home. I want to go back home. This is not my country. I feel like I don't really belong here. Sometimes I feel like I don't belong here. I can't

go back to Somalia because it is unstable. The people who live here make me feel discriminated and the media here labels us, they make us feel like second class citizens.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“This is the funny thing about being a refugee...I feel like Australia is my home for the past 16 years, but I feel that something is missing. I find that although I can’t complain in Australia, I have no family in Australia. I feel a small connection to Australia but subconsciously I always dream about Somalia and how I would like to go back.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“When it is your own country, you will always feel connected, you cannot change that connection. So when the government of Somalia is stable I will go back.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“I cannot stay here. I have to go back to Africa. There are no human rights in Africa but there are none in Australia as well.” (Refugee from Sudan)

The impact of racism

“Racism silences communities.” (Community worker from the HoA)

The issue of racism was discussed at length by the participants.

“People who settled here a few years ago. They are hardworking and get a lot of depression because of racial discrimination. Australia rejects African people.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I was the odd one out. I looked different and I spoke different. No one spoke to me. They all made fun of me and my Somali accent...One day, as I was coming home from school a group white men started yelling out. “Go back where you came from”. I was really scared, I kept on walking and thinking....If I had the choice then I would but I can’t so where do you want me to go back to?” (Refugee from Somalia)

Community workers described how some people fight racist attitudes, but others internalise them and begin to believe that they are true. When communities are demonised in the press there is even less willingness from banks, police and schools to assist them.

“My little daughter tried to scrub the brown colour from her skin in the bath – she said the children at school were laughing at her.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“Where do you come from? I don’t want to deal with you because I don’t want to deal with your type.” (Refugee from Sudan)

This negative experience has a major impact on the resettlement process for refugees and migrants.

“Sometimes I wish that I had not come to Australia, I feel like as Africans, and especially Sudanese, are not treated as people. We are treated with no dignity...and yet only the colour of our skin is different.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“Even though we are benefiting and are happy to be in Australia, we are not free because of racism in this country. If you feed a person and then assault him then you really did not do anything good even if you fed him.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Participants could not understand how the government could not stop the media and people in power from being overtly racist.

“Australia does racism in a very smart way they have no respect for black people and no value for our life. The bad thing is that the government supports racism when it does not stop the media from saying bad things and humiliating our people....the government could stop it if they wanted to. The equal opportunity for everyone policy is just a toy...a symbol to be seen...one that is not implemented they talk about respect for all but they violate my right to be here.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“How can we talk to politician and service providers about our complex needs when we know there is racism?” (Community worker from the HoA)

“There is a lot of discrimination against Sudanese because of how the media portrays us. We are portrayed very badly in the media which then the public adopts as the truth. There are many success stories about the refugees that the media won’t show.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Racism and discrimination was described as having a great impact on the resettlement of refugees in Australia. It had resulted in discrimination when seeking housing, and employment opportunities. It was also seen as a root cause of problems with young people who felt marginalised and isolated.

Without strong bridges between the host community and new arrivals, integration can never occur. The best that can be achieved is that of parallel communities living in an uneasy peace. Racism is one of the biggest challenges to building of strong bridges between Australians and people from the HoA.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL LINKS BETWEEN THE STRUCTURES OF THE HOST STATE

The first months – the power of welcome and information

The most important link with the structures of the host state for new arrivals are those structures and services which provide the range of on-arrival and settlement services. It was obvious from all of the interviews that the quality of the settlement services in the first months in Australia is critical to the settlement experience. People who had a friendly supportive worker and access to a range of good service provision found the process much easier than those who did not have this experience.

“This wonderful person met us at the airport. She took us to the flat, she and her friends made food for us and the next day they came and took us everywhere. Whenever we need help I can call her. We felt so strange and lonely and she was there. That was two years ago. She is now the god-mother of my daughter. When her mother died I helped her with the funeral.” (Refugee from Sudan)

However, many participants expressed their frustration about the lack of settlement support they experienced when they arrived in Australia.

“We came on a Friday night and they took us to a flat and left us and we just sat in the flat all weekend. We did not know how to cook the food they left, we were scared to go out.... It was Monday before they came to see us and for two days we did not eat - we had only water from the tap.” (Refugee from Sudan)

They also talked about the way information was given to them, and the fact that they were given too much information in the first days and weeks when everything was confusing to them, and not when they needed it, later on.

“In the first week, they gave us so many papers, and told us so many things, so many offices. It is just like a dream, I can not remember any of it, and I feel stupid.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“Not knowing where to go, what to do, how to find a job. I did not have someone to direct me. I had to figure how to survive in Australia on my own.” (Refugee from Eritrea).

Community workers commented that while there are many services available, people get lost in the system. New arrivals do not know how to navigate the system.

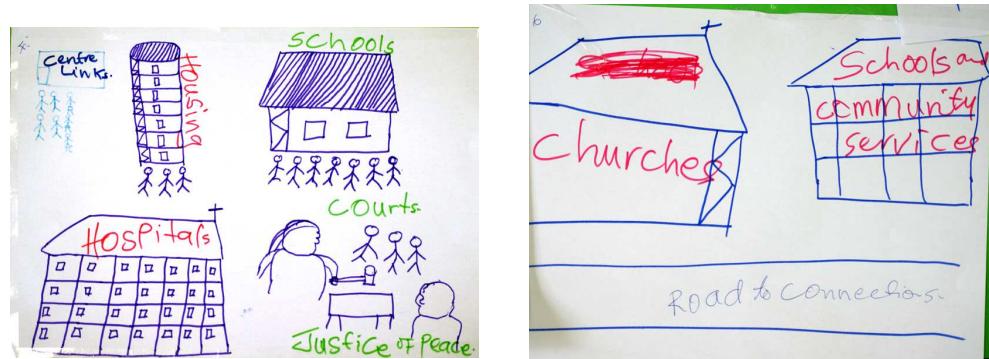
“We need to have a situation where one case-worker is not responsible for 500 people!!!” (Service provider from the HoA)

There was a feeling among the participants that while they were frustrated about not having enough information, they did not want to be looked after like children. They

just needed to be given the information in a way that would allow them to take control over their own lives.

Various challenges faced when learning to use the Australian system were identified. People described a feeling of disconnection between them and the services offered, and between the various services. This led to feelings of confusion, and not being believed when they had to tell their story over and over again.

They described the need for a ‘road to connection’ to access the services.



"We have many problems when we arrive in Australia. One of the key issue that we realize on arrival is language barrier...domestic violence in most cases in some part of the world you get that. Violence is something that we have had to live with all our lives...family separation, you find a good family married but when they are over and when they come here they separated. You see woman and children moving away from the man because of the difficulty they face. Soccer, when they play they don't understand themselves and particularly do not fit in with other children there might be conflict, one might hit another. The police in Africa means there is violence. You cannot go near police unless something is going on. Australian police is always investigating our young people all the time, because they do not understand them. We have young men holding drugs in their hands. Now here in western Sydney our children are mostly involve in taking drug. That is not in their culture. This is something they have learnt from this culture." (Refugee from Sudan)



Fear of police and other authorities

It was reported that some problems are emerging between the police and refugee youth. In many countries from which refugees have fled, the police and other

authorities have been the agents of persecution and torture. It takes a long time for some refugees to learn to trust the police. Their initial response is one of fear. In some cases their experience here does little to dispel that fear.

“When I first arrived at the airport and told the officials that I was a refugee. They laughed at me and said that I looked more like a model and not a refugee. They put me in Villawood. It was a jail...I was isolated and had no freedom. Where can you run to when you have no document, no money, no language, where can you run...it was horrible. Australians have no sympathy for refugee people they come here you get locked up like criminal!” (Refugee from Somalia)

It was reported that some problems are emerging between the police and refugee youth.

“If they see people with a gun they will think they are the enemy.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Police often do not understand the refugee experience and can react in an inappropriate manner when dealing with refugee youth. Refugee youth do tend to socialise together and there are accusations and host community fears about ‘gangs’.

The fact that some youth are forming gangs and exhibiting anti-social behaviour was discussed by participants. It is causing enormous grief within communities, and they are at a loss as to know how to deal with it.

“The lack of police support in Australia on the youth is clear. The duty of care is really lacking. The move-along-rule by the police is discriminatory and confrontational to the youth.” (Refugee from Sudan)

This is an area of key concern and a patent failure of engagement in the structures of the host society except in the most negative sense.

Lack of services for humanitarian entrants

An additional problem experienced by refugees is the lack of service provision for those who arrive on the Special Humanitarian Program. These people are effectively blocked from accessing many of the structures of the host society for their first year in Australia. This can cause great hardship for the newly arrived entrants, who usually come from the same camps and urban refugee sites as those who come as refugees, and have suffered the same deprivation and denial of basic needs. It can also cause problems for their families who have sponsored them and who bear the responsibility of assisting them with their settlement. Families gladly take this responsibility, knowing the terrible conditions in which their families and friends are still living.

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

The lack of employment for many meant that they were unable to access an income to secure financial independence and survive in Australia. The participants identified employment as one of the determinants to the successful settlement experience of migrants. This related to secure income, status in society, self identity, and an overall sense of belonging. However, most have experienced a significant lowering of status since resettling though they might be better-off financially than previously. The skills they bring with them are often fundamentally different, originating in rural or refugee camp backgrounds, and are not easily transferable to a ‘technological and urbanised environment’ such as Australia’s (Lower 2008). After 15 years in camps, even skilled professionals can find that their qualifications and previous experience is now redundant.

“I don’t have a sense of belonging, it is a real challenge living in Australia. It is a privilege to be here but I can’t even find a job to support myself.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“Although I relatively enjoy a better life now, but I am not fully satisfied that I cannot get the job for which I have been trained over the past 20 years.” (Eritrean Migrant)

Many faced serious discrimination in the employment market because of their lack of ‘Australian’ work experience.

“We spent a lot of time looking for job. You go and they ask you for a resume, you don’t have it. So you have to go and find ways of getting a resume...and even when you have a resume, they ask you for Australian work experience... you have just arrived in Australia. I don’t know how they want us to get experience if they do not want to give us a job.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I was a farmer and now I work in a factory. I nearly lost my hand in a conveyor belt. Thank God I still have my hand.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“They ask us for work experience...work experience from where? When we have been living in camps - we have no experience let alone work experience.” (Refugee from Somalia)

A further barrier to securing employment is the non-recognition of the qualifications that the participants brought with them to Australia. Many, as a result of the war and leaving all their belongings behind, do not have any proof of their experience and qualifications. Qualifications are often out of date, and people have not had an opportunity to practice their professions. Overseas qualifications are often not recognised in Australia. These factors either preclude many refugees from attaining employment, or trap them in the most menial of jobs.

“We believe we bring incredible human resource to Australia. We are very well educated...just because we are refugees does not mean we do not have an

education. When we come here our qualifications and education are not recognized and so we do not get jobs here.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“It is a big loss of humans because we all come with skills. There are a lot of educated people and we need a good outcome.” (Refugee from Sudan)

People who have spent long years in camps have not had the opportunity for adult education.

“I could not find a job. After interviews they would say that I did not have experience. I am capable of doing the job but then they will not give me job. They discriminate.” (Refugee from Sudan)

For the participants, employment and financial security was paramount as in most cases they were not just supporting the immediate family in Australia but also those left behind in the refugee camps.

“I am also supporting my whole family in Sudan, it is not easy but it is my responsibility.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Accessing meaningful employment is critical to successful settlement and integration. It impacts on identity, status, and a feeling of being a person of worth. It allows people to build a new life in Australia and to fulfil obligations to family still trapped in the horror of refugee camps overseas.

ACCESS TO HOUSING

The housing problem was described by all the participants as a key challenge to their successful settlement. The frustration was shared by all the participants. The pre-arrival experiences of loss of their homes and many years in refugee camps or in transit make housing crucial to an overall sense of security and the resettlement process in Australia. It was noted by participants that housing and home mean safety, stability and normality – a place to rebuild lives.

"I could not find a place to live. It took me 3 months to find a place. It was a terrible experience because I have been living in the bushes, and in the refugee camps in Africa. At least I could create a shelter...you know I could crawl under a tree a shelter and I secure it and I know that, that is my shelter. But when I come to Australia first of all there was no explanation why I could not be getting that house. They just say that your application has been refused." (Refugee from Sudan)

The current housing crisis in Sydney has also led to an increase in rent, making it impossible for many people to afford housing. This is forcing families to share accommodation and leads to overcrowding. They live in fear of landlords finding out how many people are sharing a house. Some landlords are taking advantage of the situation and charging high rents for substandard accommodation, knowing that the refugees have no alternatives.

"The biggest problem is that of housing – especially for the single women. There are so many women and children [from the HoA] who become homeless and have to go into refuges. It is impossible to find them accommodation and the Department of Housing can not help." (Community worker from the HoA)

The overall physical and emotional effect that the lack of appropriate housing has on resettlement was discussed at length. It was noted that housing means safety, stability and normality – a place to rebuild lives - ‘a home’. Refugees risk re-traumatisation if they are evicted, it means they have lost everything all over again.

"I was evicted from my house because the owner of the house could not pay his mortgage even though I was paying my rent on time and regularly. The Sheriff came to the house one day and locked us outside. I was kicked out with the children. They came with the police and locked the doors with such force. They handed me the notice of eviction while we were outside and said that it had been sent to the owner to give to me. My wife was heavily expecting and she had our sixth child 2 days later. It was a very hectic horrible time for us. It was a nightmare. I took my family to the Merrylands park to wait for me while I went to find a motel and talk to the housing department – I had nowhere else to take them."



We were walking from one motel to another motel. Finally, they took us to a motel...a room like for me, my wife and my six children including a new born baby! I could not believe it. There was no service for a new born baby. They finally moved us to a motel in Lidcombe it was full of bed bugs and cockroaches. We were there for 2 days. I could not keep my family there. I had been driving all over the place, I did not know what to do, I had finished all the money I had with me. I was losing my mind and did not know where to go for help. I have gone though many countries as a refugee but being evicted was the end...it is very bad to call myself homeless. This system has failed me." (Refugee from Sudan)

Housing for the participants was not just about access to a house. Appropriate housing for the participants included the physical size of the house, as well as the quality of the accommodation available and afforded to refugees on arrival in Australia. For large families the problem and frustration was even worse, as often families have to rent separate accommodation. In some cases participants described how the lack of appropriate housing resulted in their family being separated.

"Australians have 2 children or three. I need 4 bedroom house at least for my 6 children and it is my right, why isn't the government doing something about it. A big family is being denied these days when you go for housing. In a war torn country you have a lot of things happening, but if you walk together as a group you can help each other." (Refugee from Sudan)

"Because I have a large family and it is my first private housing rent, for nearly a year, everywhere I apply: Decline! Decline!! Decline!!! I am forced to separate with my older sons." (Refugee from Sudan)

"This is what has happened to our families; from extended family households to extended units." (Refugee from Somalia)

"Housing is a real problem especially if you have large family...the waiting list is years. And because they don't understand our culture they break up families and make us share rooms with our brothers and fathers." (Refugee from Somalia)

The separation of families is causing enormous emotional strain to parents and children alike. The feeling of losing control by parents is made worse during the separation. This is particularly true if the youth join delinquent subcultures or adopt a lifestyle that contravenes the parents' expectations. Parents invest so much hope that their children will take advantage of the newly found opportunities.

"Housing and discrimination go hand in hand." (Refugee from Somalia)

"We are rejected for houses because of racism. In the housing real estate application form they ask what languages you speak at home. They are not supposed to ask that...it is discrimination and language is not going to pay your rent." (Refugee from Sudan)

"When you go to look for a house they ask you a reference? No. Have you ever rented a house? No. What is your income? Centrelink. You see all these questions.

And how many are you? 8. So who would lend his house to 8 people with kids...and not give it to a couple of 2 with no kids and they have cars and they have good source of income. So it was very very hard." (Refugee from Sudan)

"I always get rejected by the real estate. I get discriminated because I have many children. I am discriminated because I am black. They value the money here, not human life in Australia. My basic human right to shelter is denied in Australia." (Refugee from Sudan)

"As an African we go and see a house, fill in the application and tomorrow we get the rejection even if the house is still available. Discrimination, because we have too many children and the colour of my skin. There is a real lack of tenant protection in the legislation." (Refugee from Sudan)

Many refugees suggest that service agencies dealing with refugees could help in providing references for newly arrived refugees wishing to rent private housing. Agents require this reference. Without access to suitable and affordable housing refugees and migrants feel marginalised from Australian society.

"We are unwelcome guests." (Refugee from Somalia)

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Children and youth

The importance of education and particularly integration into the school system for the children and youth with refugee backgrounds was seen as critical in the settlement of refugees in Australia. The high expectations that many parents hold for their families is focused on their children's educational attainment. As previously mentioned, many refugee children and youth are excelling at school, college and university. However others are experiencing serious problems. Many parents expressed their frustration at the lack of information about the school system and where to take their children to school.

"Nobody tells you anything. I went looking for a school for my children. I walked and walked and walked and kept asking as I went where the school was. Until I found it, there was no one to show me." (Refugee from Sudan)

"They helped us when we first came, with the high school, but now he has to go to TAFE – there is no-one I can talk to." (Refugee from Sudan)

Refugee children's experience of education is impacted by insufficient support for learning in the school environment. The participants were particularly distressed by the isolation and exclusion that some of their children were facing within the education system.



"I always felt like the odd one out in school. It was difficult to make friends with other kids. I looked different, and the kids in school looked at me different." (Refugee from Somalia)

"I was the odd one out. I looked different and I spoke different. No one at school would speak to me they all made fun of me and my Somali accent...One day, as I was coming home from school a group white men started yelling out. 'Go back where you came from'. I was really scared, I kept on walking and thinking.... When they tell us to go back where we came from...if I had

the choice and it was safe I would but I can't go back but I can't so where do you want me to go back to?" (Refugee from Somalia)

Parents were frustrated by the lack of settlement support in place for their children in school. They discussed the lack of teacher training and some teachers' lack of preparedness to work with refugee communities and particularly refugee children.

This hindered the children's transition into the new education system, and was viewed as resulting in the resettlement difficulties that children have to deal with in school.

"Teachers should be trained to work with refugee children. These are children that need a lot more than regular students in terms of support and understanding. This would make the transition easier and vital for resettlement." (Refugee from Somalia)

"There was no guidance for children in high school. The teachers are not very helpful they had no clue. They were unprepared for refugee children. The teachers in the IECS were multicultural and very understanding. These ones lacked training in regards to teaching multicultural young people." (Refugee from Somalia)

The participants identified that one of the reasons for the lack of integration of their children into the education system stemmed from the fact that they were streamed into school according to their age and not on the level of education previously attained.

"Some of our children have never been to a class or have only gone till year 2 or 3, because we have been running from the war moving from place to place. When you get here they put you in year 10 because of their age." (Refugee from Sudan)

"You are put in with all the other children who have been learning in English from nursery school. How are they expected to stay in school?" (Refugee from Sudan)

Adults

For some participants, Australia offered an opportunity for an education not just for their children but for adults as well.

"There is a good living standards, more employment opportunities here than where we come from. My children and myself as well get free education. Life in Australia is good." (Refugee from Somalia)

"I could not read or write, but look at me know - I can talk in English and now I am learning to read and write in English." (Refugee from Sudan)

"Good place to get an education and skills to get a job...this a good country with lots of opportunity." (Refugee from Sudan)

"Australia gives good opportunity for women to get an education and learn for free. I have had an opportunity to learn English and continue education, back home in Sudan women do no have a chance to learn or be educated." (Refugee from Sudan)

A strong need was expressed for more education and training opportunities for adults. People who have grown up in camps and who are now adults lack basic education and have not had the opportunity for adult education. Refugees from the HoA have tremendous capabilities, but they discussed the need for education to enable these to be realised.

“We need longer [training] projects. It is a big loss of humans because we all come with skills. There are a lot of educated people and we need a good outcome.” (Refugee from Sudan)

ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

Very few of the participants in this study discussed major problems with access to physical health care. They expressed gratitude at the access they had to doctors and hospitals, and the availability of medications. In many interviews the access to health care was contrasted favourably with the lack of access to doctors in camps and refugee situations. The majority of the participants lived in the west of Sydney within close proximity to public hospitals and specialist refugee health services. They recounted that members of their communities living in country towns had less favourable experiences than they did, and that some people came to Sydney after having been resettled in regional areas in order to access health services. There were also stories of families and friends who had come to Australia on special humanitarian visas having problems accessing adequate health care for themselves and their families.

“My friend’s wife started to give birth at home because they did not have the money for her to go to the hospital. She was bad – we were scared, then an ambulance came and got her.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Mental Health services

The urgent need for services that specialised in addressing the mental health needs of refugees was discussed at length by participants in the project.

“When you arrive as new arrival and you are not being shown how to follow your life you feel depressed...like the person with the big head. Life makes his head big, he is confused, stressed traumatised, depressed. You don’t know where to go what to do. This person is stuck. He will bang his head.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“When you don’t find all these services you get re-traumatised and tired...you see someone traumatised he has tears.” (Refugee from Sudan)



They were aware of and appreciative of the services that did exist, and described the relief that could come from receiving appropriate assistance. However, many reported that they and their friends often found it difficult to get assistance when and how they needed it most. They described long waiting times and lack of interpreter services. Although a key attribute of refugees and migrants from the HoA is their resilience and adaptability, their refugee experience in the majority of cases resulted in feelings of sadness, loneliness, depression, trauma, stress and confusion.

“I cry every night – I remember the torture, I still feel the pain.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“This is the first time I had tears - we were very very alone. ..[we asked] why are we here - is it going to be better than Africa?” (Refugee from Sudan)

“We lost appetite, there was plenty of food,[in Australia] but we didn’t want to eat.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“My son, he was only 3 years old – he saw all the bodies. Now he says to me ‘Mum, I can still see the bodies’ – what can I say to him, I hide my tears.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Resilience needs nurturing. The lack of sufficient health services and treatment that caters directly to the needs of refugees inhibits and challenged their integration and resettlement process.

“I cannot mentally settle in this country. I was brought here and told you are here now deal with it. It does not matter how you survived out there...here it is new survival. How can you cope, you get depressed and anxious and feel very lost. Most of us have very many mental illnesses. Many of us are scared of losing our identity.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“When you come here you want a better life put they put you in jail, you get mental health problems...we all have mental problems as refugees...we need help.” (Refugee from Somalia)

It was identified that unaccompanied minors need particular care. They are still children and need the love and guidance of caring adults.

“We don’t have parents, no one here, no friends, we are alone, what are we going to do? We have to start again.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I have to be brave to encourage him [his younger brother]. If I am weak what will happen to him..... We need someone to talk to but there was no one to talk to us. Someone to be a mother, to tell us what to do.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Many of the participants described the need for someone to talk to them about what they had survived. Some went to counselling services, and reported that it had helped them tremendously. Others reported that in some cases there was a lack of understanding from the counsellor on the experiences of the refugees and that they could not assist them appropriately.

“I went to the counsellor – he did not know – how could he know what they did to us? Sometimes the pain is too great.” (Refugee from Uganda)

Many made the comment that generalist service providers did not encourage them to talk about the bad things that had happened. They expressed the need to tell their stories as part of the healing process that they needed to integrate into the community.

“This is the first time I have told anyone about this – this is the first time I have been allowed to talk.” (Refugee from Ethiopia)

“The resettlement process is not creative, we need to tell our stories and express our experiences so that we can start healing.” (Refugee from Somalia)

The horrendous experiences that the majority of the participants in this project had experienced had caused both trauma and depression. Some expressed the view that it was important that there was a space for them to tell their stories and to be heard. They felt that this could break down some of the barriers between them and the broader Australian community.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Cultural knowledge goes both ways

The notion of cultural acceptance and understanding of different cultures and how people from different cultures can work together for the common good was presented as critical to the resettlement of refugees. The participants indicated that their strength and resilience, work experience and qualifications, as all positive attributes that they brought with them and that can be incorporated in nation building in Australia.

"The major problem that we face when we first arrive in Australia is learning about the new life...This tree according to the colour representing all the cultures that we need to learn in Australia. All these colours represent the way of life we need to learn in Australia. For us to integrate we need to learn new life new culture with all the different colours in it."
(Refugee from Sudan)



The differences in culture, custom and law also posed significant challenges and made the maintenance of community difficult. Adjusting to a new culture had not been an easy task. However many commented that the time pressures of re-establishing lives in a new country made it very difficult to maintain the customs and networks from the home country.

"I am confused with the meaning of community in Australia. I do not know how I can divide myself into being a member of my Eritrean community and at the same time being a part and parcel of my new found home Australia." (Refugee from Eritrea)

The participants talked of the differences and misunderstandings between their culture and the new Australian culture hindering their resettlement and integration in Australia.

"They do not respect our diversity." (Refugee from Sudan)

"In our culture, we like to be in a group living in one room. Here in Australia they say everyone needs to have their own room but I don't think they have such a

big house here. We have very big families. If they stay in one room at least for a while maybe they can divide into other rooms later. Let the settle first and then they can go look for work.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I did not understand...for example the differences in how fighting is understood in Australia includes verbal abuse. Verbal abuse is considered as a mode of fighting. Back home fighting is only physical fighting, I felt like I was disappearing and being misunderstood.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“They say our names are strange...well Australian names are strange to us also...we have never heard of such strange names before.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“It is sometimes difficult to manage the expectations from our community and the Australian community we live in now.” (Refugee from Somalia)

The clash in cultures was seen as particularly causing a major challenge in the resettlement of the youth.

“It is harder for the youth because they experience pressure from their parents culture and the Australian culture.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“My kids are learning two cultural points of view that don’t connect. It is very difficult, to balance their lives because they have to learn both Australian and Sudanese culture. That is why as a parent, I needed to get educated on this new culture and especially the language so that I could understand where my children are coming from.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“When raising my children it is different because I cannot raise them in my African way because we are in Australia. I just have to find a way of balancing it with the new culture.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“My fear is that I am losing the African culture with my children. The kids are losing their culture and are more involved in the Australian culture.” (Refugee from Sudan)

The need for the host community to also find out about the culture of the new arrivals was seen as critical.

“You take in a person into your country and meanwhile you have not understood their culture and custom. If you take in people you should take in their culture and custom, otherwise how they can integrate into the system.” (Refugee from Sudan)

English language acquisition

A major hurdle to resettlement was the lack of English language, and the difficulties experienced in learning a second language, in particular for those who have not been literate in their mother tongue.

“When I first came to Australia, I was lost. Everything was unfamiliar! I did not speak the language, I looked different. There was no one to show us where to go and what to do. I had to take public transport from Gosford to Chatswood for my English class...I had to take public transport without even knowing how to speak English. I could only speak Somali language.” (Refugee from Somalia)

The participants discussed the role of language in their resettlement process, and stated that the lack of communication exacerbated their challenges in resettling.

“I have been here for four years and I still can not speak English – It is like being in a basket. I can see out but can’t join in. I can’t do anything. I can not help my children with their school work. Without English I can not get a good job.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“When I got to Australia my father had remarried and had a son. I could not even speak to my brother in English, and he could not speak Somali. I was really lost...I could not communicate. I wish there was a bi-cultural support worker to help me during this time...maybe there was, I just did not know where to find them.” (Refugee from Somalia)

Proficiency in the English language was discussed as being vital to gaining employment and the services necessary for resettlement and the rebuilding of a new life in Australia. The lack of communication exacerbated the challenges in resettling and the link and connection between language barriers and access to services was discussed at length.

“You cannot do anything if you don’t speak English...I could not communicate when I first got here. I once got onto a bus and the driver could not understand me, no English no transport.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“You go to a hospital they cannot speak English, you have to use your hands if you don’t have the language to communicate.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“It is very difficult to cope with Australia life, my wife does not speak English and is not able to go out by herself and cannot get a job because as a girl in Sudan she did not go to school when she was a child.” (Refugee from Sudan)

The participants requested that they be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what their cultures were or whether they spoke English or not. They stressed that it should not matter where they came from or what they looked like. They needed understanding and acceptance by the Australian society.

“Centrelink, if you cannot learn English fast enough then you cannot find proper employment which will lead you to Centrelink. Discrimination happens a lot at Centrelink...You know we Africans have many children it is our culture, and then to add to the family we live with our extended family so it will not be you and the children in the house. Then you have to go to Centrelink and they look at you funny because you have many children and you cannot explain to them what you

want because you do not speak good English. So you just watch them discriminate you.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“We need bi-cultural support workers who can help us understand the Australian culture, because when we first come here there is a lot of pressure on us to learn the new culture to fit into the community...otherwise we are isolated.” (Refugee from Somalia)

SAFETY AND STABILITY

Safety and security were described by the participants as fundamental to their resettlement. The participants felt that Australia was now home because of the security and freedom they experienced here. For some, they ‘felt at home’ because they were secure from war. For others, because they could sleep in peace without fear of being killed.

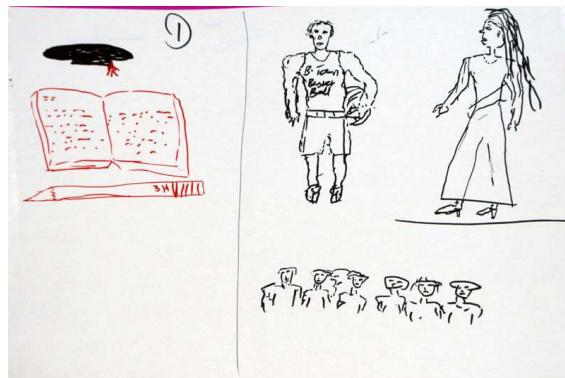
“The first night we are very happy we sleep in peace now, we felt like we were the luckiest people in the world we left the refugee camp alive.” (Refugee from Somalia)

“The best thing about being in Australia is there we have rights and security...we are secure...Australian security is not like the refugee camp.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“Safety is a big issue when you have experienced war as a refugee, in Sudan there is lack of security, but Australia is safe.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Security for the participants was described as not just the security from physical harm, but the security to learn and get an education, the security to rent, the security to live a better life than that the lives that they lived in the refugee camps.

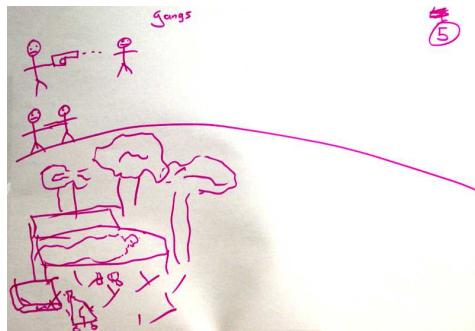
“The freedom and safety here is really good.” (Refugee from Somalia)



There was discussion from some participants about fear for their safety due to the emergence of gangs. For others, the fear of violence, if they are forced to sleep in the park because they are homeless.

Gender aspects of safety and security

However, not everyone felt safe here in Australia. Women reported that some men control their wives by threatening to send them back to the camps or the refugee sites if they do not obey them. Women are not always aware of their rights.



"The women who come here are sponsored by their husbands. Nobody gives them information on how they can even contact 000 so when they are beaten. They suffer in silence in their homes. Because these women are threatened they are told that they will be sent back...by their husbands...they have a lot of problems...they don't know where to go and they don't have anyone to support them." (Migrant from Kenya)

"Other women are abused physically and financially. The men take all the money from them and they go on for years and years. They can't do anything when the men send the money back to their home countries to do other things...if they have other wives. After all, the men have paid dowry for these women and now they are dumping them." (Refugee from Sudan)

Many single women and widows come to Australia as part of the ‘Women at Risk’ program. This is a UNHCR program to identify women at urgent need of resettlement. Australia has a ‘Women at Risk’ visa category that supports the entry of approximately 600 people to Australia each year. Sadly, it would appear that the risks do not stop when the women arrive in Australia. There are many reports of on-going risks for refugee women and girls, both from this visa category and more generally. There is a lack of support, both formal and informal, and a lack of information to service providers about the special needs of this group. This lack of support and access to information has resulted in women who were already at risk as refugees coming to Australia and being even more at risk.

"Women who experience domestic violence are often blamed for the abuse – people think it is her fault and even the communities will say 'what did you do this time?' Because the communities are so small everyone will know if you report it and will say 'don't go near that woman she is no good.' We try to pretend everything is OK." (Community worker from the HoA)

Women reported that the problems come with them from overseas. If it is known that they had to engage in survival sex in order to survive and feed their children in camps then they are targeted here. Single men will come to their homes and say “You were a prostitute over there.” Sometimes they are raped, but are too afraid to report it to the police. Women who have borne children of rape report that their children are discriminated against if it is known in the community that the child is the child of the enemy. They have started to approach community workers for help with this problem.

“I come from a wrong [dangerous] country I don't need a wrong country here.”
(Refugee from Sudan)

“What happens there happens here – it comes with us here.” (Refugee from Sudan)

“I am afraid to live in my community because they know what happened to me over there. But I want my community – it is strange here and I am lonely.”
(Refugee from Somalia)

There were also reports of males in the community suffering from terrible guilt and disempowerment because they had not been able to protect their women from abuse. The impact of violence against women reverberates through communities and poses major challenges for successful settlement.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the findings of this study, that refugees and migrants from the HoA have enormous potential to settle successfully into Australia and are already contributing significantly to our social, economic and cultural life. This analysis of the problems they face is their analysis. People know the challenges they face, and they know what needs to be done to assist them to overcome these.

“We might as well not bring them [refugees] here if we can't support them; we are not doing them any benefits ... all they need is someone to avail this opportunity to them.” (Refugee from Sudan)

Refugees come to Australia with capacity and capabilities. They need to be given the opportunity to use this capacity and capability to help themselves. With effective service provision, their resilience can be supported and grow. Australian society is already benefiting from the migrants and refugees from the HoA. We have to ensure that we do it even better.

“Even if we have maybe 50% positive and 50% negative, we will have 100% positive if we do the right thing now.” (Refugee from Sudan)

While many of the problems experienced by refugees, such as language acquisition, recognition of overseas qualifications, rental problems, and intergenerational problems are common to other migrants, there is a significant difference for people who come to Australia as refugees. The horrors of persecution, loss of family and homeland, the violence of flight and the stark conditions in refugee camps leave scars which take a long time to heal. People are often vulnerable and the need for security is critical. The meaning of home as a place to rebuild shattered lives has incredible importance. Having survived these horrors, the need to maintain family and culture in a new country has enormous significance. People feel the need to be able to contribute to their new country, to retake control of their own lives, and to regain their dignity and their freedom.

It was obvious during the project that the pre-arrival experience of refugees has a significant impact on their settlement experience. If the pre-arrival experiences are not taken into account by service providers, some of the critical needs of newly arriving refugees will not be met. This will then have significant impact on the ability of these refugees to integrate in a timely manner, and make a fulfilling and secure new life for themselves and their families. While the Australian government might understand the resettlement program as a part of our humanitarian response, unfortunately many people in the community and some politicians do not understand it in this way. If new arrivals have very obvious problems in settling into their new country, these problems will be used by some to criticise the entire community, and Australia's program of resettlement. It is therefore essential that effective settlement services be provided to all new arrivals, both for their wellbeing, and also to promote community harmony. The government has an obligation to create a social context for successful integration.

The framework of integration domains suggested by Ager and Strang (2008) has proved useful in examining the outcomes of the project. The application has reinforced the need for the recognition of the interconnectedness of these domains and the need for the host community, and the host structures, in this case Australia, to provide the infrastructure and services for these means and markers of integration to be fulfilled. This can be equally applied to those refugees and migrants who have achieved what they would describe as successful settlement and integration, and those still struggling to achieve this.

New arrivals have identified serious problems accessing appropriate employment, housing, education and health services. It is obvious that the process needs attention. The social connections are at times extremely weak and flaws in the system make it hard to either build or maintain these. Stresses within communities make social bonding difficult to establish and maintain. Bridges with other communities are rare, and difficult to navigate. Social links with the structures of host states are fraught with problems, and these are exacerbated by a lack of English and understanding of the new social structure. The facilitators of integration need attention. New arrivals are having problems acquiring sufficient English language skills and mediating mutual cultural understandings. While safety and security is a major benefit to new arrivals, it is not enjoyed by all, in particular by some women. The shortage of affordable housing is exacerbating the problems. It would appear that while the foundation stones of rights and citizenship are firmly in place, misunderstanding of how these apply are causing confusion and hardship, and are in fact hindering rather than providing solid bases for successful settlement.

The refugees and migrants who felt that they were successfully settled reported positive outcomes in each of the domains mentioned in framework. While experiences differed, on the whole, they were citizens who felt that they belonged and were contributing to Australian society. They had achieved family reunion, and were satisfied with their access to employment, housing, education and health services, including treatment of torture and trauma. This does not mean that they had not experienced problems in the past, or that they did not wish for improvements in the future, but for the time being they felt that they were in a good position relative to other migrants, if not to mainstream Australians. They all had a good command of the English language, and had social links with all three areas of social connection, some stronger than others. It was interesting to note that employment with the Australian host structure, such as in a government department or a community organisation was reported to provide strong links to both one's community and to the host community. Without fail, they had expectations that their children would exceed their social status and levels of integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In keeping with the context of analysis, the recommendations have been grouped according to the 10 suggested domains of successful integration, and taking into account the pre-arrival experiences of refugees. While Australia does have a world-leading model of refugee settlement service provision, there are obvious gaps and shortcomings in both the models and the service provided. The most obvious problem is in the inconsistent spread of these services within metropolitan areas, and in particular in regional and rural areas.

Few if any of these recommendations are new. Many of the experiences recounted by refugees from the Horn of Africa have been reported by previous refugee intakes. We now have a deeper understanding of the nature of protracted refugee situations, and the impact of these on the settlement experience of refugees. Some people argue that refugees from the HoA experience a deeper level of overt racism than has been seen before. The impact of the refugee experience on children and youth is now better understood. The nature and extent of family violence and breakdown is painfully obvious. It is important that as new waves of service providers and policy makers enter the field, the wisdom and experience of past service provision is not lost. Nor should the knowledge and understanding of mistakes made and gaps left in service provision be ignored. New knowledge and past experience must be combined to provide improved opportunities for refugees invited to make Australia their home.

An overarching recommendation is that

- models of best practice service provision demonstrated by many individual service providers in Australia be documented and made available to all service providers in all areas.

The impact of pre arrival experience

- Service providers working with new arrivals should receive thorough training about the potential experiences of the new arrivals, the conditions from which they have come, and the likely impacts of this on their ability to settle. While acknowledging the resource constraints, the current short training sessions provided are patently not adequate and it is anticipated that more thorough training would result in significantly improved levels of service response. This would in turn result in improved settlement experience with better integration experience.
- A standardised needs analysis should be undertaken with each new intake of refugees, and the results of this used to tailor settlement service provision to directly respond to the needs of individual and unique refugee intakes.

Rights and citizenship

- The education sessions provided to new arrivals about their rights and responsibilities in Australia must be revised and expanded. This is particularly the case in regard to women's and children's rights.
- The timing of these education sessions should be considered as it has been reported that new arrivals are overwhelmed with information during the first difficult six months of settlement, and have requested that critical information should be offered in different formats and at different times in the first one or two years of settlement.
- It was strongly suggested that the English test be removed as a criteria for citizenship, as many participants who have been unable to acquire functional English never the less have strongly identified with Australia as their home and wish to become citizens.

The importance of social bonds with family and other members of community

- The importance of family reunion to the wellbeing and integration of refugees cannot be underestimated. It strongly recommended that the Family Reunion Visa as suggested by the Refugee Council of Australia 2009 be implemented as a matter of urgency.
- More support needs to be made available to community based organisations to enable them to both support and represent their communities. This must include resources such as spaces to meet, funding for core functions and capacity building to allow the building of groups of confident and articulate people who can take part in debate about issues critical to their well being and the contributions that their communities can make to the broader society.

The importance of social bridges between the new arrivals and the host community

- The strengths, capacities and capabilities of refugees from the HoA should be documented, services structured and opportunities provided to ensure that social bridges are fully developed and utilised. This should include positive discrimination for those who have been denied the chance to develop conventional pathways' to positions of influence and authority.
- Additional resources must be made available, and targeted to foster acceptance of new arrivals and to encourage members of the Australian community to open doors and break down barriers. This could include media campaigns, the deliberate inclusion of members of HoA communities on boards and advisory committees.

- Targeted anti-racism campaigns must be developed, directly addressing the community from the Horn of Africa, and used broadly in all areas of society.

The importance of social links between the structures of the host state

- The voices of the communities should be increasingly included in the decision making process in a significant and meaningful way, through broad based community consultation, and through the appointment of additional community members to key advisory committees.
- Government at all levels should work towards a more holistic and integrated model of settlement service provision.
- A thorough, comprehensive and independent evaluation of IHSS and other forms of settlement service provision should be undertaken as a matter of urgency.
- An economic study should be undertaken which documents the many contributions which members of refugee communities make to Australian society, to counteract the often negative perception of a group only using social security benefits.

Access to employment

- Recognition must be given to the specific skills and nature of the contribution that people from protracted refugee situations can bring to the employment market, and targeted training be provided to enable them to capitalise on the skills that they have and to update and upgrade skills for those who have not have any opportunity for training or employment for a number of years.
- Specific employment programs should be designed to enable refugees who have experienced severe torture and trauma to enable them to deal with the stress and challenges of employment in a new, foreign and stressful environment. Such programs were successfully initiated by the government during the 1990s.
- Every effort must be made to recognise and upgrade the skills and qualifications of newly arrived refugees acknowledging that many have lost documentation during flight and are unable to access source documents because of their refugee status.

Access to Housing

- Consideration must be made to the specific housing needs of newly arrived refugees specifically from the HoA, in particular recognition of the racism to

which they are subjected by some members of the housing industry. The need for secure housing in the first years of settlement is far more than the need for shelter. It incorporates the need for safety stability and provides a basis for rebuilding shattered lives.

- A community education campaign could be designed to accompany any change to the allocation of government housing to newly arrived refugees. The current model of short term on-arrival accommodation is exacerbating trauma, and inhibiting timely settlement. The exploitation of refugees by landlords is increasing social isolation and hindering the building of social bridges and links with mainstream Australia.
- Community Services must be given the authority and means to provide references for refugees seeking to enter the housing market, and real estate agents must be encouraged to accept these as valid security for the provision of housing.

Access to Education

- The excellent programs for refugee students available in some schools in metropolitan Sydney must be extended to all schools that receive students from refugee backgrounds. Special attention should be placed on schools in regional and rural areas.
- Programs currently available to secondary school students should be extended to primary school students. If children are not able to perform well in primary school, they will not be able to participate effectively in secondary school and this will lead to failure to successfully integrate into Australian society.
- Current programs, which support and encourage people from the HoA, should be extended to ensure that all who wish to improve their educational status are able to do so and financial incentives provided to make this achievable.
- University scholarships for people from a refugee background should be extended to incorporate postgraduate scholarships, to enable access to positions of power and decision-making within Australian society.

Access to Health Services

- Specialist refugee health services currently available in some parts of metropolitan Sydney must be made accessible to refugees from the HoA in whichever place they are resettled.
- The current effective models of refugee mental health service provision must be extended to cover all parts of metropolitan Sydney and the state of NSW.

- Service provision by non-specialist service providers, often inadequately supported by specialist teams because of resource shortages, is not an adequate response to the needs of refugees from protracted refugee situations. Adequate resources must be provided as an urgent investment in the mental health of refugees and their families.
- Research into new models of refugee mental health service provision which draws on the capacity, capabilities and traditional methods of the communities themselves should be encouraged and new and innovative methods of community based service provision be developed and funded.

Language and cultural knowledge

- The participants recommended that there was a need for bi-cultural support workers to help them understand the Australian culture on arrival as they continued to learn English.
- Proven models of bi-cultural service provision from people from a refugee background should be adopted and funded to assist new arrivals in the first difficult months of arrival.
- Bilingual teachers should be routinely employed to assist the teaching of English to some groups of refugees as the current insistence on an “English only” model of service delivery by some providers is patently failing to achieve the required results.
- New models of English language teaching should be explored to reach out to those who are failing to learn English under the current schemes.
- Hours of tuition should be extended and made available for as long as is necessary for an individual to be able to operate independently in Australian society.

Safety and stability

- Improved and consistent training must be provided for workers in women’s refuges, to enable them to structure and respond appropriately to domestic violence in refugee communities. This training must recognise the role of torture, trauma and the impact of a protracted stay in refugee camps and settlements, on family violence and family functioning.
- Improved and consistent training must be given to child protection workers to enable them to understand the conditions from which refugee families have escaped and the potential impact on this on child protection issues.

- Special programs must be developed to respond to the needs of children and youth who have survived severe trauma and torture, and this must be available in all sites to which refugees are resettled.
- Specific programs must be developed to recognise and respond to violence which is the result of the formation of ethno specific gangs. These programs will actively involve police, not just as recipients of information, but as a positive force for achieving change.
- Analysis should be done to uncover the root causes of gang related behaviour in order that appropriate preventative measures, and response mechanisms, be put in place. This is an essential step to prevent the development of further discrimination and alienation of youth and the disruption of social harmony.

End Note

While these measures might at first seem to be an expensive addition to current service provision, Australia has a proud international reputation for its humanitarian response to refugees. We also boast about having the best settlement service provision in the world. The investment in improved service for people from the Horn of Africa can only enhance this reputation. It will demonstrate to the world that refugees from the Horn of Africa are proudly taking their place as equal members of Australian society. The cost of an effective and successful service provision for new arrivals will pay dividends in the long term, in terms of social harmony and by capitalising on the immense capital that refugees from the Horn of Africa bring to Australia.

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Summary of background

The Horn of Africa countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Uganda have numerous issues that need to be addressed urgently. Although the international community has responded to these issues for years, the situation in the HoA remains complex. Issues such as civil wars, poverty, famine and droughts resulting in food shortages continue to contribute to the refugee producing phenomenon in the region.

Although similar in many ways, the countries constituting the HoA also have many differences. Their economic, political and social systems are different. While for example Kenya has had some tribal clashes, it continues to be viewed by the other countries in the region as the central hub for refugees. It is clear that the HoA hosts the largest number of displaced people in the world.

There are currently four major conflicts in the HoA with extreme violations of human rights occurring. The most deadly conflict in the region, and in the world, is Sudan's civil war. The availability of guns in the HoA is making the situation worse. It produces further poverty and environmental degradation. Until this is eliminated the conflicts in the region will continue to be extremely violent regardless of how much food aid is provided.

The HoA has received help and assistance from the international community for years, however more needs to be done. As research shows, providing foreign aid alone is not enough to stop the civil strife and violation of human rights that are rampant in the region.

A) SOMALIA

Somalia is a coastal nation and is officially known as the Republic of Somalia. It is bordered by Djibouti to the northwest, Kenya to the southwest, Yemen to the north, the Indian Ocean to the east and Ethiopia to the west. The capital of Somalia is Mogadishu and the population is between 9 and 12 million. The main language spoken in Somalia is Somali (Terdman, 2008; Farah et al, 2002).

Historical context

Somalia was colonised by the British, French and Italians. The British were interested in Somalia because they already controlled the port city of Aden in Yemen, just across the Red Sea, and wanted to control its counterpart, Berbera, on the Somali side. The Red Sea was a crucial shipping lane to British colonies in India, and they wanted to secure these 'gatekeeper' ports at all costs. This was British Somaliland. The French on the other hand were interested in coal deposits further inland and wanted to disrupt British ambitions to construct a north-south transcontinental railroad along

Africa's east coast, by blocking an important section (currently Djibouti). They took control of the southern part of Somalia, which would become the largest European claim in the country, but the least strategically significant. This formed Italian Somaliland (Terdman, 2008).

Somalia gained its independence from Italy on 1st July 1960 and from the British on the 26th June 1960. After their independence British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland merged in to one Somalia. The part of Somalia that was occupied by the French declared its independence from Somalia on the June 27th 1977. Soon after gaining their autonomy there was a coup and General Siad Barre became the president of Somalia. During the 1960s and 1970s Somalia fought border disputes with Kenya over the northern frontier district and with Ethiopia over Ogaden in 1977-1978 (Farah et al, 2002).

The Ogaden region is a highly debated area between Ethiopia and Somalia. Both countries claimed ownership of the region for a long time, resulting in the Ogaden war in 1977. As a consequence, there was a refugee influx and a decline in their economies which forced both nations to depend heavily on humanitarian aid. By 1978, many people were struggling to survive as a result of the economic downturn. The loss of the Ogaden war to Ethiopia resulted in the unpopularity of General Siad Barre. During his long rule (1969-1991), the main beneficiaries were the clans that supported his regime. Famine, hunger, poverty and conflict started to arise when the rest of the clans in Somalia began to resist and consequently armed resistance broke out (Terdman, 2008).

General Said Barre was overthrown by opposition rebel groups in the country, resulting in the collapse of Somalia as a nation-state in 1991. Post-Barre Somalia emerged with a raging violent political struggle as clans sought to confiscate resources and land previously expropriated by president Barre's supporters, and terrorised the local communities (Asefa, 2003; Markakis, 1996). The state disintegrated further when certain clans acquired a virtual monopoly of state power and resources, prompting others to take up arms and redress the balance (Asefa, 2003). Somalia reverted to the pre-colonial pattern of clan autonomy during the post-Cold war period. Somalia remains a failed state, the Transitional Federal Government, supported by the international community and recognised by the United Nations, failed to bring peace and stability to the country. Somalis continue to flee their homes in Mogadishu and other cities in Southern Somalia. Somalia is one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters with over 3.2 million people dependent on humanitarian aid and approximately 1.3 million internally displaced (Refugees International, n.d.).

It is reported by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees that thousands of Somalis have fled as refugees to the neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia. The civil war in Somalia destroyed Somalia's infrastructure and brought all economic activities to a virtual halt (Terdman, 2008), resulting in increased poverty and starvation for the people. The intense fighting due to the civil war has also made it extremely difficult to provide international aid. Somalia is not ranked in the Human Development Index ranking.

B) SUDAN

Sudan, located in northeast Africa, is the largest country in Africa. Sudan's neighbours are Chad and the Central African Republic on the west, Egypt and Libya to the north, Ethiopia and Eritrea on the east, and Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the south. The capital of Sudan is Khartoum and the population of the country is 42 million people. The official language spoken in Sudan is Arabic (DIMIA, 2007; Maxted & Zegeye, 2001).

Historical context

Sudan was occupied by Egypt in 1874. In 1882, the British occupied Egypt and also took over Sudan. They occupied both Egypt and Sudan until 1955, during this time Sudan was known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Sudan gained independence and self-government from Egypt and Britain in 1953, and became self-governing on January 1st 1956 (Goldsmith et al, 2002). Since independence, Sudan has been ruled by many unstable parliamentary governments and military regimes. The first Sudanese president was General Gaafar Nimeiri who instituted a fundamentalist Islamic law. This intensified the rift between the Arab (39%) north who are Muslims and the majority Africans (52%) in the south who are Christians (Beswick, 2004).

The differences of ethnicity, language and religion between these two groups resulted in disagreements in the sharing of political power which resulted in the ongoing civil war. The civil war predominantly began between the government forces who were strongly supported by the National Islamic Front (NIF) and southern rebels who were supported by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In July 2002, a cease fire was declared between the Sudanese government and the SPLA. Peace talks were held and continued through to 2003 (Shillington, 2005). Both parties agreed on a power-sharing government for six years, which followed a referendum on self-determination for the south. Nonetheless, the fighting continued throughout the peace negotiations. In May 2004, an agreement between the government and the SPLA was signed which ended 20 years of violent civil war. However, as this civil war was coming to an end in 2003, another war was beginning in the north-western Darfur region.

The Darfur insurgency began virtually unnoticed in February 2003. The victims are the non-Arab or African tribal groups in Darfur. This group of people has long been politically and economically marginalised by the NIF supported government. The non-Arabic group accused the Arab-dominated government of rallying tribal fighters to kill non-Arab rebel groups that started to attack the government, and indicated that they had been neglected and discriminated against by the government (Reeves, 2005).

Human rights have been and continue to be violated, as people are persecuted because of their religion and race in Sudan. The government of Sudan has carried out massacres by the Janjaweed against the villagers and rebel groups in Darfur. The international community was shocked by the nature of the attacks on African villages in Darfur and resulting comprehensive destruction of both human life and livelihood; men were slaughtered, women were raped and buildings were burned (Reeves, 2005). The government of Sudan responded to the international community's accusations by denying any links to the Arab-militia.

The civil war in Sudan has generated some four million displaced people and it is estimated that over two million Sudanese people have died as a result of fighting and related starvation and disease (Reeves, 2005; Goldsmith et al, 2002). Food shortages remain one of the greatest threats to human life in Darfur. Darfuris rely on foraging in times of desperation, but the insecurity that continues to be created by the Janjaweed makes this impossible. Many of the hundreds of thousands internally displaced Sudanese are slowly starving (Reeves, 2005).

According to the figures shown in the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Sudanese community is one of the fastest growing groups in Australia. Australia has resettled approximately 21,000 Sudanese, the majority of them born in refugee camps such as Kakuma and Dadaab camps in Kenya (DIMIA, 2007; ABS, 2008). However, since the signing of the peace agreement in 2005 between the Sudanese government and the SPLA, over 100,000 Sudanese have returned to Sudan. An estimated 850,000 internally displaced people also returned to south Sudan and many more are expected to return in the years to come (UNHCR, 2007). The situation is so bad that many are fleeing again to Kenya.

C) ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world and occupies a predominant position as the second most populous nation. Ethiopia is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Sudan to the west, Kenya to the south, Somalia to the east and Djibouti to the north-east. Ethiopia has an estimated population of 78 million people. The main languages spoken in Ethiopia are Amharic and English. Other languages spoken are Oromigna, Tigrinya and Somali (DIMIA, 2006a; Maxted & Zegeye, 2001).

Historical context

Ethiopia was never colonised, however Italy brutally occupied Ethiopia for a short-term from 1936-1941. In the 1970s, Ethiopia was at war with Somalia over the Ogaden region, as well as a civil war that was started by the Derg, the Red Terror group. The Derg was a communist military junta that was also known as the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces Police and Territorial Army that came to power in 1974, and ruled Ethiopia until 1987. Under the Derg regime, human rights violations were rampant. They executed and imprisoned thousands of people without a trial, which lead to a civil war between the Derg party and the public who opposed their regime. As a consequence of this over 1 million Ethiopians became displaced, fleeing to neighbouring countries, as well the turmoil that the country was in played a major role for Ethiopians to become displaced (Kloos, 1998; Keller, 1992).

Furthermore, the prolonged famine in the mid 1980s drove Ethiopians to flee further to the other Horn of Africa countries. It is reported that 100,000 people fled to Somalia, 300, 000 to Sudan and 10,000 to Djibouti. The countries that the Ethiopians fled to are in similar if not worse situations themselves. Between 2000 and 2005, Australia accepted over 3000 entrants from Ethiopia, all of whom arrived under the Humanitarian Program. Today there are over 8800 refugees from Ethiopia living in Australia (DIMIA, 2006a). Although there is no ongoing war in Ethiopia,

malnutrition, starvation, low life expectancy, gender inequality, malaria and HIV/AIDS continue to be a daily struggle in the life of the people.

D) ERITREA

Eritrea was formerly the northern most state of Ethiopia. Eritrea is bordered by Sudan on the north and west, the Red Sea on the north and west and Ethiopia and Djibouti on the south. The capital of Eritrea is Asmara and the population is 5 million people. The main languages spoken in Eritrea are Afar, Arabic and Tigre (DIMIA, 2006b; Maxted & Zegeye, 2001).

Historical context

In the 8th century Eritrea was part of Ethiopia. Between 1889 and 1941 Eritrea was an Italian and Ethiopian colony. The British took charge of the colony until 1952, when the country was administrated as a United Nations Trust Territory and federated with Ethiopia in September 1952. In 1961 the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) took up arms and led the independence struggle. This was the beginning of a 32 year civil war for independence against the Ethiopian government. In 1970, the ELF split into two branches, the original ELF and the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front), resulting in a civil war between the two groups. In 1974 the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown and a communist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam seized power in 1977, with the support of the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1980s the Soviet Union pulled out of renewing its defence and cooperation agreement when its attempts to mediate a ceasefire failed. The Ethiopians made a crucial mistake when they decided to overthrow Mengistu in 1993. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front was then able to gain control in the capital of Eritrea, Asmara, after this the EPLF formed a provisional government. In a referendum supported by Ethiopia, the Eritreans overwhelmingly and unanimously voted in favour of independence on April 23-25, 1993 in a UN-monitored referendum. The Eritrean authorities declared Eritrea an independent state on April 27th 1993. The government was reorganised and after a national election the National Assembly was expanded to include both EPLF and non-EPLF members. The EPLF reorganised itself as a political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) (Trivelli, 1998).

Ethiopia recognised Eritrea's sovereignty and a new era for both countries began. However, peace did not last long. Ethiopia and Eritrea disagreed about the exact demarcation of their borders and in 1998 border fighting broke out. During this, both Eritrea and Ethiopia were suffering from poverty and famine, yet both countries continued to spend millions on the war. Approximately 100,000 Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers died during this conflict. 750,000 persons primarily from the densely populated agricultural border were uprooted and internally displaced. Thousands of people lost their lives on both sides (USCR, 2001a). By May 2002, Ethiopia occupied about a quarter of Eritrea's territory, displacing 650,000 people, and had destroyed key components of Eritrea's infrastructure. The war ended in an agreement and a formal peace accord that was signed by both parties, however after a year's respite, the peace negotiations were broken off and hostilities resumed. In 2002 both Eritrea and Ethiopia signed another peace agreement (Adejumobi, 2007).

Eritrea spent hundreds of millions of dollars on the war and suffered the loss of tens of thousands of their citizens killed or wounded as a direct consequence of the conflict, and contributed to the refugee producing phenomenon in the HoA. The war led Eritrea to depend solely on foreign aid. Since the war in Eritrea many people have fled the country seeking refuge. Drought and famine are still a great concern for Eritrea, because severe drought has lead to crop failures and water shortages. Furthermore, the need to guarantee a safe return for internally displaced Eritreans who are arriving back in the country and to stabilize the country are priorities of the Eritrean government.

At the time of the 2001 Australian Census, there were only 1620 Eritrean. By 2006 there were over 2020 Eritrean born people in Australia.

E) KENYA

Kenya is located in east-central Africa on the coast of the Indian Ocean. Kenya borders Somalia to the east, Ethiopia to the north, and Tanzania to the south, and Uganda to the west and Sudan to the northwest. The capital of Kenya is Nairobi and the population is 37 million people. The official languages spoken in Kenya are English and Swahili. 42 other indigenous languages are spoken as well.

Historical context

Kenya was occupied by the British in 1890 and was named British East Africa. In 1952 the Mau Mau militia movement rebelled against British rule. The struggle for independence ended on December 12th 1963, when Kenya gained full independence. The first president elected was Jomo Kenyatta (Shillington, 2005).

Kenya was ruled as a one-party state by the Kenya African National Union until 1992, when demonstrations were held and riots that pressured president Moi to have multi party elections. During this year Kenya saw a decline in the economy which contributed to the withdrawal of much needed foreign aid (Mwakikagile, 2001; Throup & Hornsby, 1998). In addition to this, natural disasters such as the severe flooding in 1997 and 1998 destroyed roads, bridges and crops. During this time there were ethnic clashes between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin. In August 1998 a terrorist attack at the U.S embassy in Nairobi resulted in the deaths of 243 people and injured more than 1,000 people (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1999). The country was devastated by severe drought in 2005. During this Kenyans continued to live in corruption and in poverty. In 2006 over 2.5 million Kenyans faced starvation. Kenya is not yet stable, in February 2008, more than 1,000 people died in ethnic violence after the national elections.

Kenya is viewed as a ‘safe haven’ for Horn of Africa refugees, with the majority of these, taking shelter there. By 2001, Kenya was hosting approximately 230,000 refugees, an estimated 160,000 from Somalia, more than 55,000 from Sudan, about 8,000 from Ethiopia and over 10,000 from other African countries. Some 100,000 Kenyans were internally displaced. Kenya has no refugee law and therefore refugees living in Kenya have no legal status. The authorities require most refugees to live in

three designated camps near the village of Dadaab in the country's remote east, and in three camps northwest of Kenya known as Kakuma (USCR, 2001b).

F) DJIBOUTI

Djibouti, officially known as the Republic of Djibouti, is located in the Horn of Africa. The Republic of Djibouti gained its independence on June 27th 1977. It is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Ethiopia in the west and south and Somalia in the southeast. The rest of the border is formed by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The population of Djibouti is an estimated 848,000 people and the capital of Djibouti is City of Djibouti.

The official languages spoken in the country are French, Arabic and Somali (Maxted & Zegeye, 2001).

Historical context

Djibouti became a colony of France at the end of 19th century. At the time of colonisation Djibouti was called French Somaliland and a referendum was held in 1967, which decided that Djibouti should stay as a French ruled territory and in the same year Djibouti changed its name to the French Territory of Afars and Issas. Djibouti achieved independence from the French on 27th June 1977 and on the same day the current national flag was adopted. After their independence Djibouti had a government which was balance of both major ethnic groups, Issas and Afars (Leonard, 2006).

The first president of Djibouti was Hassan Gouled Aptidon was elected in 1977 and was in power until 1999, in the end of each of the presidential term he was re-elected for 23 years. During his term as president, he converted Djibouti in to a one party state. The People's Rally for Progress became the only legal party, which resulted in the civil war. Many civilians were killed and many others became internally displaced people (Maxted & Zegeye, 2001).

The Djiboutian civil war occurred between 1991 and 1994 after increasing tensions between the Issaa ethnic group that dominated the government, and the Afar ethnic rebel movement. The lack of Afar presence in the majority Issaa government, despite being the majority ethnic group, resulted in the three year civil war (IRIN, 2007; Maxted & Zegeye, 2001).

While fighting was continuing there were thousands of refugees from war-torn neighbouring countries fleeing to Djibouti, these refugees came mainly from Somalia and Ethiopia (Refugees International, n.d). The situation in Djibouti escalated further because of severe drought and famine that the country was suffering (UN, 2006). The civil war of Djibouti came to an end on December 26th 1994, when both parties signed a peace agreement. There are 102 Djiboutian born people living in Australia. All of them came on the Humanitarian Program.

Djibouti continues to struggle with massive numbers of refugees who flee from the neighbouring countries. By the end of 2005, Djibouti had taken in about 30,000

refugees, mainly from Somalia over the past decade, and was viewed as one of the top 10 refugee-hosting countries with a ration of 13 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants (IRIN, 2007). Djibouti's location is the main economic asset of the country as it is mainly barren. Much of Djibouti's income comes from their transport system, which is used by other African countries to fly out their exports, through this Djibouti earns good transit and harbour fees.

G) UGANDA

Uganda is located in the Horn of Africa. Officially known as the Republic of Uganda, it is bordered on the west by Congo, on the north by Sudan, on the east by Kenya, and on the south by Tanzania and Rwanda. Also Lake Victoria forms part of the southern border. The capital of Uganda is Kampala and the population of the country is 30.9 million people. The official languages in the country are English and Luganda.

Historical context

Uganda was first explored by the British and the Arab traders in 1844. The British declared Uganda part of the British East Africa Company. Soon after this in 1894 the British claimed Uganda and it was declared a formal British protectorate. Britain granted Uganda internal self-government in 1961, soon after this Uganda held its first national election and elected Benedicto Kiwanuka from the Democratic Party. Although Uganda became an independent nation it still maintained its Commonwealth membership (Jørgensen, 1981).

In the 1970's and 1980 Uganda became known for its brutal human rights violations, first during the time of Idi Amin who was then prime minister. In 1971, Idi Amin seized power from the then president, Milton Obote, who went into exile in Tanzania. In 1971, ruling the country with the military forces, Idi Amin tortured its opponents and killed thousands of people. Throughout the time that Idi Amin held government it is estimated that more than 300,000 civilians were killed. In June 1978 Idi Amin violated border laws with Tanzania by holding military exercises on the Tanzanian border. This angered the Tanzanian government and with the help of supporters of the past prime minister, Obote who was in exile, invaded Uganda and violent fighting started between the Ugandans and Tanzanian troops. After two years of fighting the supporters of Obote and the Tanzanian troops won the war and Idi was in return sent to exile in Saudi-Arabia. Soon after this, national elections were held and Milton Obote resumed power in 1980 (Macrae, 2001; Sivard, 1993).

Five years later army troops staged a coup and took over the government. Again Obote fled into exile. The military regime appointed General Tito Okello as chief of state and General Okello pledged to restore peace and to stop human rights abuse in the country and to work with the opposing government party the National Resistance Army. However, massive human rights violations continued to happen as the Okello government ravaged countrysides and murdered civilians in order to destroy the supporters of the opposing party. This peace conference was fruitless and fighting continued till early 1986 when Musevene's troops won the fight against Okello. Soon Musevene was declared as the president of Uganda and a new chapter in Uganda's history started.

Uganda has been subject to many conflicts which include armed fighting among hostile ethnic groups, rebels, armed gangs, militia, and various government forces that extend across its border. This subsequently has forced many Ugandans to flee their country and seek protection in other countries. Currently Uganda hosts 209,860 Sudanese, 27,560 Congolese, and 19,710 Rwandan refugees, while Ugandan refugees seek shelter in Sudan and in Congo.

Current situation

The food situation in Uganda is critical as the country relies heavily on foreign aid. Thousands of children are in danger of abduction and rape, many children in Uganda leave their homes and sleep in the bushes and hide in fear of abduction. Often the children who are abducted are mutilated, girls raped and the boys made soldiers. This is the reality for Ugandan children today. Human rights are still today violated and thousands of people face starvation every day.

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