

Developing a blueprint for Australia's Refugee Student Settlement Pilot



Overview

The Australian federal government, along with Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA), the Refugee Education Special Interest Group (RESIG), and the Australian Refugee Welcome University Sponsorship Consortium (ARWUSC), are in the process of designing a blueprint for ground-breaking new educational migration pathway for refugees, the **Refugee Student Settlement Pilot (RSSP)**.

Working from the successful Canadian program led by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), the RSSP is hoped to pave the way to an exciting new chapter in Australia's humanitarian story through developing a new pathway for refugee resettlement.

We are inviting you to contribute your expertise to the co-design process for the RSSP. By engaging in our consultations, your organisation will contribute meaningfully to the proposal for an exciting new chapter in Australia's refugee resettlement story with the potential for life-changing resettlement and educational opportunities for hundreds of refugee students in the years to come.

What is the timeframe?

The initial process of co-design (preparation, co-design workshops, and socialisation/ refinement) is expected to take place between August and October 2023, followed by further work to refine the proposal for consideration by the federal government and participating universities in early 2024.

Who else is involved?

The co-design process is being coordinated by:

- The Refugee, Humanitarian and Settlement Division of the Department of Home Affairs
- ARWUSC: a consortium of 10 social leading impact universities
- [Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia](#) (CRSA) is embedded in global networks that are developing community sponsorship programs and complementary pathways around the world.
- The [Refugee Education Special Interest Group](#) (RESIG) is a network of Australia and international teachers, academics, researchers, principals, advocates, and students from across the school, TAFE, university, and NGO sectors who have an interest in supporting educational opportunities for students from refugee backgrounds.

- A range of other stakeholders across the Australian government, refugee settlement and education sectors will also be involved in the co-design process, including refugee representatives.

Why is this pathway needed?

Global displacement has reached the highest level on record. By the mid-2022, there were 32.5 million refugees around the world, exacerbated by the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine, which show no signs of abating. Of these, 2 million are nominated as being in urgent need of resettlement. Durable solutions for refugees remain out of reach for most refugees. **Fewer than 1% of all refugees are ever resettled to a safe third country.** Further, access to education is a significant challenge for refugees. At the secondary level, **fewer than a quarter of refugee adolescents have access to secondary education**; at tertiary level, this drops to **only 5% of refugee youth able to access higher education.**

Recognising the scale of the global refugee crisis, and with traditional humanitarian and resettlement approaches unable to meet these needs, world leaders have moved to develop new measures including ‘whole of society’ responses. The **Global Compact on Refugees** outlines a need for predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, new partners and actors and a greater emphasis on complementary pathways and refugee self-reliance. In alignment with the principles and objectives of the Compact are UNHCR’s ambitious 15/30 strategy for resettlement, complementary pathways, and education for refugees. This strategy sets a target of 2-million refugees accessing complementary pathways and 15% refugee enrolment in higher education by 2030. Achieving these goals and living up to these commitments requires new actors, bold global action, and strong leadership.

What are education pathways for refugees?

The term ‘education pathways’ refers to the concept of educational institutions (together with their community of staff and students) instigating the resettlement of refugees who also wish to pursue educational opportunities in a resettlement country such as Australia. Education pathways help to create new educational opportunities for refugees, who are largely excluded from higher education.

The World University Service of Canada (WUSC) has 40 years’ of proof that this is possible and sustainable and that these solutions are replicable and scalable internationally, having developed a world-leading ‘Student Refugee Program’ (SRP). The SRP relies upon migration pathways provided by the Canadian government under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (also referred to as ‘community sponsorship’) and has supported over 2,000 refugee youth to access higher education, protection, and resettlement in communities across Canada. The SRP is a sponsorship model that empowers Canadian students to play an active role in the sponsorship of young refugees, who are then able to pursue their education on Canadian campuses.

The WUSC SRP has in recent years inspired the development of new education pathways in countries like Japan and Mexico, with new programs being developed in the US, UK, South Korea, and the Philippines. A similar program has great potential for Australia.

What are the potential benefits of this pathway for Australia?

There is enormous goodwill, enthusiasm, and expertise in the Australian community to welcome and support refugee and humanitarian entrants through community support, as evidenced through the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) (led by CRSA).

A new educational migration pathway for refugees has the potential to:

- Create new resettlement opportunities for Australia and engage new communities in refugee protection, such as universities, staff, and students, through a whole-of-society approach to refugee settlement.
- Provide hope and a future for young refugees and allow them to pursue their educational goals in safety.
- Create greater public awareness and support for refugees as more stakeholders in the education sector become involved in refugee resettlement.
- Enable universities in Australia to build upon their expertise of working with students to meet the needs of refugee youth and enhance their employment outcomes after graduation — with the potential to contribute to local skills gaps and professional shortages.

Dr William Mude is a beneficiary of the Canadian SRP - a former University of Toronto WUSC student from South Sudan who is now a Lecturer in Public Health at Central Queensland University. Dr Mude describes his experience as “life-transforming”, adding, “it gave me a purpose in life and quenched my thirst for education”. He adds, “WUSC SRP is a game changer and setting up a similar program in Australia is urgently warranted”.