

## Regional Settlement of Refugees: Implications for Policing, Refugee Entrants and Host Communities

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The Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) publishes regular Briefing Papers on topics related to the Institute's research program. Our third Briefing Paper, prepared by one of our PhD students, Danielle Campbell, provides some background to the issues of relevance in an ARC Linkage Project that TILES is conducting in collaboration with Tasmania Police and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Collaborative research that links academics with practitioners is a hallmark of TILES' research. This Briefing Paper demonstrates the value of such collaboration in enhancing the settlement experiences of refugees in regional Australia.

*Roberta Julian, Director*

The purpose of this briefing paper is to present a discussion of refugee settlement and policing that is grounded in the relevant literature. It provides an analysis of the context within which successful police-refugee interactions can occur in regional Australia. The paper is structured around an identification of the key components of this context. It highlights issues specific to regional settlement and some of the potential implications for policing. These are discussed from the perspectives of police services, refugee entrants and their families, as well as the host communities.

The paper focuses on refugees who have experienced the protracted conflicts that have characterised African refugee entrants to Australia in recent times. In the context of refugee settlement in regional Australia, these new refugee communities create particular challenges; specifically, those associated with high visibility,<sup>[1-4]</sup> high levels of trauma and diverse language support needs<sup>[4,5]</sup>. The paper avoids making statements about refugee settlement in Australia generally; rather, it focuses on some of the more complex scenarios that require sensitive and targeted approaches. It does not deal with Temporary Protection Visa holders (TPVs), nor does it address the debate surrounding the on-shore refugee program in Australia. These matters deserve particular attention but are not within the scope of this briefing paper.

This paper is part of a larger Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project titled, *Community Policing and Refugee Settlement in Regional Australia*. The project focuses on Tasmania as a case study, but in this paper regional settlement is explored in more general terms. The larger project is being undertaken at the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies (TILES) at the University of Tasmania, and includes the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)<sup>i</sup> and the Tasmanian Department of Police and Emergency Management (DPEM) as industry partners. This Linkage Project is a collaboration that explores particular challenges for new and emerging refugee communities and the potential of community policing to support successful regional settlement.

More specifically, this paper provides an overview of settlement issues as experienced by refugees in regional communities. These are referred to in the context of the policing environment and with a particular interest in community policing. The paper argues that refugee-police interaction is a

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particularly complex situation for refugees who have experienced high levels of trauma in their backgrounds. The focus on this topic is not to suggest that refugees who have experienced trauma necessarily have more contact with police than any other sectors, as data on this is not available. Nor does it suggest that a large proportion of refugee communities, or high numbers of refugees, have contact with police.<sup>[6]</sup> However, the argument is that when contact with police occurs (especially if it is in response to an incident), the issues and the complexity of these situations are difficult for both the refugee entrant (whether in a victim or accused capacity) and for the police involved. The aim is to canvass these issues rather than to present solutions.

## Defining Key Terms

The complexity of refugee settlement requires a clear understanding of the relevant terminology utilised in this briefing paper.

**Australia's Humanitarian Program** This program includes both on-shore and off-shore refugee categories. It offers resettlement as a means of protection and a durable solution for people overseas without other options. The off-shore program consists of Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) visa holders who are all permanent residents on arrival in Australia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website (2006) states:

A refugee is a person who 'owing to a 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 to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...' (The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.)<sup>[7]</sup>

The SHP also attempts to assist those who are not refugees within the strict legal definition but who are in refugee-like situations and are at risk of human rights abuses. The overall Humanitarian Program now accepts 13 000 annually: 6 000 under the refugee visa category and 7 000 under the SHP.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Refugee** In this paper refugee refers to Refugee and SHP visa entrants from the off-shore humanitarian program.

**Regional** The definition of regional shifts depending on the categorization utilized by the various state and federal government agencies. For the purposes of this paper it will refer to non-metropolitan areas that do not have significant metropolitan centres within easy commuting distance.

**Integration** The term integration is rising in popularity and is currently being utilized in many forums. The UNHCR refers to integration as:

...a mutual, dynamic, multifaceted and ongoing process. From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population. (Adapted from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Policy on Integration, 1999<sup>[9]</sup>)

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) in Australia refers to integration in terms of promoting inclusion and participation in Australian society and assisting new arrivals in interacting with, and understanding, the broader community while also encouraging the wider community to be responsive to new arrivals.<sup>[10]</sup>

## The Current Climate

The issue of refugee settlement in Australia has always prompted interesting debate. It is an area that is in a constant state of flux depending on the origin and needs of refugees entering Australia at any one time.<sup>[11]</sup> Australia's immigration history has always been characterized by a level of controversy, both politically and within the mainstream community.<sup>[11]</sup> Recently, concerns over refugee settlement in regional Australia have been voiced and are present in the example of the Tamworth Council commentary over five Somali families settling in the region.<sup>[12]</sup> Although Tamworth Council has resolved to move ahead with this settlement, the portrayal of this debate in the media has been noteworthy.<sup>[13]</sup>

Equally important is the public's negative reaction to media reports of Sudanese youth and alleged criminal activity in Melbourne in early 2007.<sup>[14-18]</sup> These examples highlight the impact of mainstream public perceptions and mis-perceptions of immigration in shaping debate within the mainstream community. They highlight the role and responsibility of the media in shaping those perceptions. It is important to be conscious that public opinion is a significant component of the environment in which police undertake their duties everyday.

## Regional Versus Metropolitan

In light of recent debate, it is timely to present some of the regional issues associated with refugee settlement in Australia. A regional settlement context is a very different context to that of metropolitan settlement. Overall, neither is better or worse for the communities being settled or the host communities. However they are distinctly different environments.<sup>[19, 20]</sup> For the refugee being settled within the regional context there may be differences in settlement needs from those settled in metropolitan areas. Such differences may revolve around issues of access and/or strategy; they may therefore

require different policy foundations.<sup>[21]</sup> In some cases this has quite dramatic implications for service delivery.<sup>[5]</sup>

Statistics on refugee regional settlement are difficult to access because there are two processes by which refugees find themselves in regional Australia. Refugees are either directly settled as their first location on arrival in Australia, or they relocate from the city. Individuals or families may choose to move for opportunities of employment or to be closer to friends who may have already relocated.<sup>[22]</sup>

Since 2004 the Australian Government has actively aimed to double refugee numbers as recommended in the May 2003 *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*. This review sought to further opportunities to settle humanitarian entrants in regional Australia.<sup>[23]</sup> Specifically, it recommended settling some 'unattached' refugees<sup>[23]</sup> (without friends or family in other areas of Australia), and particularly those who come from a rural background or who have skills related to employment opportunities available in those areas.<sup>[23, 24]</sup> Refugee settlement is a complex area of policy making<sup>[19]</sup> and highly charged politically. As highlighted by Taylor, the regional settlement debate is influenced by population strategy, economic development in regional areas and the obligations to humanitarian goals that support successful refugee settlement.<sup>[21, 22]</sup>

## The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Australian Program

Australian refugee policy, particularly in relation to off-shore refugee settlement in Australia, has always supported those in greatest need. Most refugees are referred directly by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Addressing the highest need, as defined by the UNHCR, involves targeting different parts of the world where the durable options for particular refugees have all but diminished. In these cases, the UNHCR suggests that the risks are too high for those refugees to be sustained in the region. The Australian Government prioritises regions based on these UNHCR recommendations. Individual refugees must prove a well-founded fear of persecution.<sup>[24]</sup> With this as the basis for the refugee program, the origins of Australia's refugee population are in many ways defined externally.

In 2004–05, the Australian Government's regional priority was Africa, followed by the Middle East and South West Asia.<sup>[25]</sup> Consequently, recent refugee and humanitarian settlement in Australia has resulted in high numbers of refugees from Africa entering Australia. In the last five years, 32 356 individuals arrived from Africa and in 2004–05, refugees from Africa comprised 71.1% of the program intake.<sup>[25]</sup> In 2005–06 the intake from Africa comprised 55.65%.<sup>[10]</sup>

In recent history, Australia's refugee program has seen a dramatic increase in the proportion of refugees with

experiences of trauma,<sup>[11]</sup> first in the 1990s with refugees from Eastern Europe and then refugees from Africa. The use of the criterion of 'highest needs' means that the wave of refugees from Africa into Australia has increased dramatically in the last few years. In 1998–99, 1 552 refugees arrived from Africa. In 2001–02 this rose to 2 801 per annum, 5 616 in 2002–03 increasing to 8 353 and 8 486 in the following two yearly intakes.<sup>[25]</sup> In 2005–06, 7 100 Africans arrived in Australia under the Humanitarian Program.<sup>[10]</sup> This means most of the refugees from Africa that are currently living in Australia have arrived in the last five years. Thus, African refugees comprise a very new and emerging community<sup>ii</sup> with specific issues and challenges that are only now beginning to be understood.

Most African refugees have experienced high levels of trauma. In many ways it is this background that creates the challenges to successful settlement for them. The high levels of trauma in their backgrounds may also be the source of fear characterizing recent media portrayals of refugees. This is of concern because Australia is responsible for delivering people the best and most appropriate support for integration and maximising their opportunities to become active Australian citizens. As Jupp asserts "the overall objective of policy should be the avoidance or amelioration of disadvantage rather than simply easing the passage into Australian society".<sup>iii[26]</sup>

## Regional Context: Strengths and Challenges

As noted above, the Australian Government is encouraging regional refugee settlement<sup>[23, 27]</sup> and its intention is that 45% of refugees may be regionally located.<sup>[19]</sup> In order to analyse the police-refugee nexus, it is important to understand some of the more general implications of regional settlement. DIAC is currently working to identify new regional areas for the settlement of 'unattached' refugees and refugees from rural backgrounds with appropriate employment skills. To identify new regional locations, a range of factors is considered, including opportunities for early employment, population size and diversity, appropriate housing, the availability of mainstream and specialist settlement services, and whether the location can provide a welcoming environment.<sup>[24]</sup>

Regional communities are often isolated and therefore have a need to be self-reliant. This situation can create both strengths and challenges for refugee settlement. There is a potential positive in the connective nature of smaller communities and their capacity to welcome newcomers into the area in a very active way. There is a claim that people have time to help one another<sup>[28]</sup>. The regional environment can also offer refugees an ease of access to services that in larger centres would prove difficult.

For refugees, the challenges of regional Australia include isolation from people with shared experiences of the refugee background or people from the same culture, in terms of country of origin, language or ethnicity. There may be a lack of understanding of the refugee background and therefore a

limited capacity among members of host communities to connect with new community members from different backgrounds.<sup>[2,22]</sup> Accessing services can be difficult in some regional areas as can accessing employment opportunities.<sup>[28]</sup>

Recent funding increases demonstrate that the Government has recognized some of the resource issues in regional Australia. The 2004-05 Federal Budget provided \$4.9 million over four years (\$1.02 million in 2005-06) for Community Settlement Services Scheme (CSSS) grants to assist humanitarian entrants to settle in rural and regional Australia. This initiative is aimed at increasing humanitarian settlement in targeted regional locations.<sup>[29]</sup>

The importance of strengthening host communities has been highlighted by the UNHCR. It argues that refugees will integrate themselves in a facilitated environment in which people can be empowered. To achieve this outcome, it recommends equitable partnerships in a community and that the host community, and the general public, need accurate and timely information about refugee situations as well as specific information closer to arrival. This argument also highlights the important role the media has to play.<sup>[4,9]</sup>

## Refugee Context: Needs and Issues

Refugees have specific settlement needs.<sup>[9, 11, 20, 23, 29-32]</sup> Fundamentally it is necessary to create an environment for individuals and their families to become fully participating members of society<sup>[9, 11, 26]</sup> so that they are no longer perceived as 'refugees'. The term 'refugee' is in itself problematic in this context. In this paper, then, the term 'refugee' has been used simply as a reference to background; it makes no claims about the long-term status of individuals and/or families. The psychological element of labelling is a significant risk, and the concern of many refugee entrants is: "When do we stop being refugees and who decides?"

There are significant differences between refugee settlement and migrant settlement. The specific needs of refugees, that stem from the nature of the refugee experience itself,<sup>[4, 11, 22, 23, 26, 31]</sup> pose the greatest challenge to any settlement process. This challenge can be even more significant in a regional settlement context.<sup>[19, 21, 22, 28, 30, 32-34]</sup> Different sectors within the refugee community will also have particular needs and experiences. For example, in 2004-05, women at risk accounted for 15.1% of total refugee entrants,<sup>[35]</sup> and as female-headed households, often with multiple children in their care, they have a very particular situation. Youth, who comprise a large proportion of the refugee intake, also have specific issues.<sup>[36, 37]</sup>

The use of ethnicity as a predictor of behaviour can trigger a dangerous process of creating assumptions about refugees that simplify a set of complex

processes.<sup>[38]</sup> Refugees' experiences cannot be explained in terms of ethnicity alone. An individual refugee's situation is best analysed through the lens of a number of layers: ethnicity, refugee experience and personality characteristics. An awareness of these layers assists service providers to support the negotiation of individual needs and personalities in a cross-cultural environment. As Kennedy states, acculturation is embedded in a complex social environment that increasingly is creating more self-styled versions of identity. The creation of a sense of connectedness and belonging is different for each individual.<sup>[38]</sup>

Knowledge of the characteristics of refugee backgrounds is valuable for understanding the needs of refugees and the issues they experience in settlement. Refugees arriving from Africa are considered to be more highly traumatized than many other refugee groups that have previously come to Australia.<sup>[39]</sup> Many have had extended stays in camps and endured high levels of danger and vulnerability during their flight in search of safety and asylum. Family compositions are diverse, with many female-headed households, a number of very large families and a lack of community members over 45 years of age. In 2004, the average age was 24 years, and 63 per cent of assisted cases included children.<sup>[20]</sup>

For some refugees, these characteristics exacerbate complexities particularly in terms of roles in families, intergenerational relations, and a lack of clarity in community leadership. It is reasonable to assume that pre-migration factors and experiences for African refugees are critical to their process of successful settlement. High vulnerability, low safety for long periods of time, in some cases generations, is the 'norm'. Subsequently, settlement service providers dealing with African refugees are presented with new complexities that may not have been exhibited in the same way before.<sup>[39]</sup>

Despite these similarities within the African community, considerable diversity and notable differences also exist. The countries of birth of African refugees include Sudan, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Tanzania, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia.<sup>[40]</sup> All have very distinct cultures. In 2005-06, 3 726 Sudanese, 888 Liberians, 460 from Sierra Leone, 363 Congolese (DRC) and 274 Eritreans arrived in Australia.<sup>[10]</sup> Even within these country groups there exist many different languages, often with a number of dialects associated with distinct ethnicities.<sup>[32]</sup>

The individual refugee may also have spent many years in a country of asylum where conditions and experiences may have been different again to both country of origin and Australia.<sup>[39, 40]</sup> The refugee journey of fleeing conflict may have resulted in families comprised of members with multiple ethnic origins over time.<sup>[38]</sup> Kennedy argues that often the notion of cultural identity utilized in practical service delivery models is too simplistic; that is,

that an individual's identification as 'ethnic' and the associated acculturation process are collapsed too easily. Over time this greatly influences the way an ethnic group may be viewed in a multicultural society such as Australia.<sup>[38]</sup>

The educational background of African refugees is equally diverse and the levels of English proficiency varied. Interruption to education is a common experience.<sup>[9]</sup> The level of educational or professional qualification may or may not necessarily correspond to the individual's ability to speak English. The average number of years of education for refugees from Africa (over five years of age) is six years. At least 42% have poor or no literacy in their own language, and 64% state that they require an English language interpreter.<sup>[20]</sup> This may depend on country of origin, country of asylum, camp conditions or the nature of the process of flight for an individual. The diversity in the refugee community is broad, from a lack of literacy in their own language to people with higher degrees from university and specialised professional qualifications.<sup>[39]</sup>

For African refugees, pre-migration experiences inevitably include being exposed to torture and trauma. The UNHCR has stated that studies have revealed that one in four refugees being offered permanent resettlement has experienced torture or severe human rights violations. Seven in ten have been subjected to traumatic events such as prolonged political repression and the loss of family members in violent circumstances.<sup>[9, 11]</sup> In addition, most have experienced poor health, primarily from living in hardship, deprivation, and lack of access to medical support.<sup>[9, 11]</sup>

Many African refugees have been in basic survival mode with feelings of fear, helplessness and dependency, leading to a limited sense of meaning and purpose which affects an individual's ability to plan, hope for, and trust in a future.<sup>[9]</sup> The loss of dignity, shame and guilt as a result of torture and trauma create issues of personal boundaries and undermine a strong sense of identity. This is reflected in the silence of refugee women who are victims of rape.<sup>[9]</sup> Another common experience is leaving family and friends behind and the guilt associated with feeling that they should have done or should do more for them.<sup>[9]</sup>

The table below attempts to bridge the gap between refugee experiences and their needs in settlement. It presents the potential sources of stress in the integration environment linking these directly to possible personal and emotional consequences for individual refugees. As an illustration of experiences in integration, it is also a useful heuristic device, to understand the climate that police need to consider in their interactions with refugee communities both in responding to incidents and in terms of reassurance policing.

Table 1: The Experience of Integration	
Potential sources of stress in the integration environment:	Possible personal and emotional consequences:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ongoing danger in country-of-origin</li> <li>• continuing separation from family members</li> <li>• lack of understanding/hostility on the part of government officials</li> <li>• injustices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fear and anxiety</li> <li>• loss of trust</li> <li>• grief</li> <li>• lack of family support</li> <li>• guilt</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• minority status in a dominant culture</li> <li>• limited community support networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loss of a sense of belonging</li> <li>• cultural, racial or religious integrity undermined</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prejudice and hostility on grounds of ethnicity, race, religion</li> <li>• limited access to cultural and religious institutions</li> <li>• poor social status</li> <li>• gender role and status adjustment</li> <li>• intergenerational adjustment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identity undermined</li> <li>• lack/loss of social support</li> <li>• family conflict and tension</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unemployment</li> <li>• underemployment</li> <li>• difficulties in accessing education and health care</li> <li>• insecure housing</li> <li>• new and unfamiliar environment</li> <li>• lack of proficiency in the language of the receiving society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fear about the future and of not coping</li> <li>• altered capacity to plan the future</li> <li>• social and economic dependency</li> <li>• poor health</li> </ul>

Source: UNHCR (2002) *Refugee Resettlement and International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*

Individual refugees have different ways of settling with individual styles and coping mechanisms.<sup>[41]</sup> There are, however, some basic needs that are universal. Basic physical needs include housing, access to income, schooling, food, employment and knowledge of services.<sup>[9]</sup> Meeting basic needs assists refugees to regain a sense of security, predictability and control over their lives. To achieve these outcomes, access to income, accommodation and health care are fundamental.<sup>[9]</sup> There is a need for both knowledge and understanding so that refugees acquire the ability to negotiate the basic systems of the host community, both in the public and private arenas.<sup>[9]</sup> These can be in relation to banks, schools, employment, health care, education, childcare, shopping and other requirements for running a household such as electricity, gas, water, and telephone services.

If the practical needs of refugees are met, this provides an important system of support which also has significant psychological benefits. Psychological needs include safety,<sup>[42-44]</sup> coupled with an understanding and hope for the future (via education, employment<sup>[28]</sup>). The regaining of trust, dignity and self-esteem are crucial for participating fully in a new life.<sup>[9]</sup> Studies show that meaningful relations are fundamental to settlement being successful.<sup>[33, 45]</sup>

Real barriers exist for refugee individuals and families. These include diverse language needs and issues associated with being visibly different.<sup>[1]</sup> An ability to communicate is fundamental to participating in social and economic institutions and in establishing social connections.<sup>[9]</sup> Changes in family structure<sup>[33]</sup> are one of the most powerful challenges for refugee individuals and families, and one of the most complex areas in terms of the provision of support in settlement.

It is difficult to appreciate the physical and psychological reassurance needs of individual refugees and their families in the process of settlement. In each case indicators need to be tracked and acknowledged and identified needs appropriately supported. The premature withdrawal of support for refugee families often leads to frustration among service providers and the refugee communities themselves. It leaves issues unaddressed that may confirm or heighten fears expressed by the mainstream public and host communities.

The resilience<sup>[41]</sup> of individuals and families should never be underestimated but transition is difficult and stressful: it requires significant support systems. For most refugees, governments in their country of origin and often the country of asylum, have at best failed to protect their rights; at worst many have experienced state-sanctioned violence and human rights abuses.<sup>[46]</sup> Negative perceptions of positions of authority, especially people in uniform, can lead to stressful interactions. An understanding of, and sensitivity to, this issue is crucial to positive settlement experiences.<sup>[9]</sup> This is an important

element of the backdrop for police and other emergency managers in their interactions with refugees, especially during early settlement.

## Community Acceptance

The importance of community acceptance for refugee settlement is becoming clear.<sup>[2, 33]</sup> Community acceptance requires the transfer of knowledge and understanding as a two-way process.<sup>[9]</sup> Its foundations are based on relationships and associations.<sup>[42, 43]</sup> The expectations of the host community must be higher than just that of tolerance. Tolerance is 'putting up with' and in terms of the long-term health of both the host and refugee communities, a goal of tolerance is potentially aiming very low.<sup>[43, 47]</sup> Commonly, settlement situations are characterized by 'no trouble' attitudes<sup>[43]</sup> where acceptance occurs when there are no obvious problems and is possibly characterised by limited interaction. However, a more interactive relationship-orientated environment is most supportive of successful long term settlement.<sup>[9]</sup> Processes of inclusion and exclusion are also important in refugee settlement. There is a small body of research in Australia that highlights the existence of exclusion in refugee settlement and how that impacts on individuals and families.<sup>[2, 3, 20, 30]</sup> This research concludes that the inclusion/exclusion experience has a crucial impact on the success of refugee settlement.

In the context of refugee settlement equity is obviously very important. In the case of refugees, this may require individuals to be treated differently in order to gain equal access to services. As is often the case in regional communities where resources and access to resources are already stretched, the perceived special needs of a sub-population, or the special service delivery given to one sector of the community, can sometimes breed resentment.<sup>[4]</sup> This is not surprising or easily avoidable.<sup>iv</sup> It is important that such a trend is acknowledged and the impact of that resentment is not felt by the individuals who are receiving the necessary, timely and quite specialized support at a time of high transition. There also needs to be attention paid to the concept of rural racism<sup>[48]</sup> where communities hold dear a strong and fixed ideal about their area. This is a phenomenon that makes the act of 'othering'<sup>[49]</sup> outsiders more likely to occur and less likely to be acknowledged.<sup>[3, 48]</sup> This also requires the acceptance of realistic timescales in refugee settlement and the recognition of negative community attitudes as an active barrier<sup>[33]</sup> to successful settlement.

The processes by which refugees enter Australia and are allocated a primary place of residence, create issues related to the unpredictability of arrival and the concentration of communities. This arrival process creates difficult timelines for the transfer of knowledge and understanding to promote the acceptance of refugees by host communities. The arrival process also means that relationships between police and newly

arrived communities are an ongoing project. Individual refugees are continuously arriving and consequently services need to be in a constant state of reaction. This leads to a tendency to be predominately reactive rather than proactive in the process of refugee settlement.

It can be seen that the development of community acceptance is complex and vital. The reactions of a host community are important. Studies have found that a friendly and understanding attitude is one of the major factors in promoting health in the successful settlement of refugees.<sup>[4, 33]</sup> If an individual thinks they are part of the community and can be accepted as 'normal', it increases their sense of self-worth and therefore enhances that individual's potential. Recent studies have highlighted issues around losing one's identity in the transition<sup>[33]</sup> and settlement process.<sup>[38]</sup> For some refugees, this will lead to dramatic changes in intra-relations (loneliness, identity), inter-relations (roles in family), and extra-relations (employment).<sup>[33]</sup>

Research findings suggest that meaningful relationships<sup>[9, 45]</sup> are pivotal to successful refugee settlement and positive integration. The refugee experience is characterised by weakened relationships<sup>[32]</sup> with family members, family support networks and community. For refugee individuals the 'survival values'<sup>[32]</sup> created in the flight from conflict need to be replaced by solid, dependable and predictable relationship networks. The nature of this dislocation is even more pronounced for 'unattached' humanitarian entrants,<sup>[8]</sup> for without either friends or relatives in Australia they are, in many ways, more vulnerable. After a refugee transition, how do individuals normalize perceptions based on their experiences and create realistic expectations<sup>[32]</sup> and, furthermore, what support do they need to assist this process?

The role of the media<sup>[4, 9, 45]</sup> is a core factor in influencing community acceptance. Refugee settlement will always create a level of controversy and as such will remain highly political. The media portrayal of sectors of the Australian community, in this case newly arrived refugees, can have an impact on the level of acceptance those communities may experience. While controversy and emotion (especially fear) 'sells papers', it remains an unnerving influence on public opinion.<sup>[50]</sup> Other methods to increase the depth of practical knowledge and understanding of the refugee experience and settlement among the general public, host communities and specialist, and non-specialist service providers<sup>[9]</sup> must be explored and adopted.

## The Policing Context: Understanding and Strategies

How is refugee settlement in a regional context characterized from a service provision perspective and more particularly, in terms of police service provision? How does public opinion, particularly if negative, impact on police carrying out their duties, especially if the interaction is characterized by an element of diversity which could create difficulties (e.g.

language or cultural difference)? What are the processes by which refugees access the services of police? All these questions highlight the implications for policing because most refer to an area of difference and complexity or an area where practical research is lacking. These concerns include the question of ethnicity and its relationship to reporting and underreporting, especially with issues such as family violence.<sup>[5, 51]</sup> There are also ethnic variations in attitudes associated with safety, security and trust.

Protracted social issues<sup>[4]</sup> such as gaining employment, accessing affordable and stable housing, and dealing with family transition, although not specifically police work, can potentially create a climate of frustration and heightened intensity that may influence a situation involving police contact. In addition, low socioeconomic status<sup>[4]</sup> and/or welfare dependency can make individuals feel particularly vulnerable, especially women.<sup>[45, 51]</sup> As shown in Table 1, these issues can become cocktails of frustration and discontent linking strongly to the individual's or family's ability to perceive a hopeful future.<sup>[9]</sup>

The implications of refugee settlement in regional areas for policing can be emphasized by exploring the areas of public opinion,<sup>[2]</sup> racism<sup>[2, 3]</sup> and family violence. The level of community acceptance and the direction of public opinion permeates all contact that police have with refugee communities; it impacts on the settlement environment as a whole. For the policing of communities with high visibility,<sup>[1-4]</sup> high trauma and diverse language support needs,<sup>[4, 5]</sup> an understanding of those complex characteristics is vital. Equally, police would benefit from enhanced knowledge of the differential social construction of crime problems in rural localities and the way this impacts on police-refugee relations, in particular the tendency to racialise questions of crime and law and order.<sup>[52-54]</sup> An example of this is the association often made between street presence and colour.<sup>[36, 37]</sup>

Police work is concerned with real or perceived threats to the public safety. As Reisig highlights, a sense of safety is linked to an individual's sense of vulnerability.<sup>[55]</sup> A refugee background creates very particular perceptions and therefore significantly influences interaction and police/refugee relations in general.<sup>[39]</sup> Attitudes to police, crime and safety<sup>[42, 56-58]</sup> are fundamentally shaped by the refugee experience. For attitudes to change, positive experiences and time may be required. Personal safety has been an everyday concern for most refugees in survival mode over long periods.<sup>[42-44, 56, 58]</sup> It has been emphasized that safety and security are crucial to establishing social connections and relationships in the host community.<sup>[43]</sup> This can be particularly difficult after experiences of racism.<sup>[28]</sup>

Diverse community views on refugee settlement are to be expected but behaviour attached to those views in general interaction, institutional practices<sup>[1]</sup> or the media, can support the promotion of racism and xenophobia.<sup>[5, 45]</sup> Racism is more likely to be experienced by a visibly different refugee community. Such experiences often create safety issues for refugee communities and also destroy the rebuilding

of trust and hope. As well, these experiences may contribute to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.<sup>[33]</sup> The existence of racism can affect integration and participation in the host society.<sup>[45]</sup> Examples include access to housing and employment, acceptance of children at school, and wariness to interact in their new community.<sup>[9]</sup> This environment can breed stress and exacerbate experiences of isolation for some individual refugees and families. Anti-racism laws support a process of creating stronger communities.<sup>[32]</sup>

Another issue that has complex implications for policing is family violence. West's research on domestic violence in ethnically and racially diverse families points out that historically, individuals from these families have been less likely to speak out on violence. This reluctance is due to a real or perceived idea that reporting will lead to excessive state surveillance and that it brings stigma to their community.<sup>[5, 45, 51]</sup> Personal safety has not necessarily been seen as a real outcome of intervention.

Protracted social issues can become stress factors that influence family violence.<sup>[51]</sup> These are also connected strongly to the transition associated with refugee settlement. Changes in family structures, roles within families<sup>[33]</sup> and issues associated with identity<sup>[38]</sup> are part of the myriad of changes experienced during settlement. The acculturation process presents stressors to the family environment.<sup>[51]</sup> A high level of acculturation may include a real and long-term realization concerning discrimination. A low level of acculturation may lead to being economically and socially marginalized including the experience of isolation and lack of social support. All of these factors increase family stress and decrease the chance of effective support and intervention in addressing family violence.<sup>[51]</sup> Alcohol abuse is always a risk factor in family violence and can appear as an exacerbating factor or a symptom of a family experiencing high levels of stress.<sup>[51]</sup>

The importance of training police officers in both domestic violence and racism highlights the interconnected nature of these issues.<sup>[59]</sup> In addition, training supports police officers to acknowledge their attitudes towards refugees and how this influences their perspectives<sup>[46]</sup> on the incident. This is particularly important in maximizing effectiveness and maintaining professionalism as the incident unfolds.<sup>[59]</sup> The complex nature of family violence in a context of diversity is a challenge to police, particularly when factors such as limited access to resources, lack of experience of diversity and language barriers make addressing this issue even more complex.<sup>[39]</sup>

Debate exists concerning community or 'reassurance' policing.<sup>[60-64]</sup> As a support for refugee settlement, especially in the regional context, community policing has merit.<sup>[39]</sup> The literature poses the questions: 'what community?' and 'for whom is community policing being supportive?'.<sup>[65]</sup> Consulting refugee communities

is a necessary and specialised process<sup>[32, 58, 66]</sup> that should be undertaken to generate understanding and trust. Basic concepts need to have a common understanding by all parties. For example, what is safety,<sup>[9, 56]</sup> of whom, by whom, where and when? Police-led initiatives need to engage refugees communities<sup>[67]</sup> and particularly sub-sectors within them. These include 'unattached' entrants, youth,<sup>[36, 37, 68, 69]</sup> and women<sup>[70]</sup> who have quite specific experiences.

It could be argued that the regional context allows highly effective community policing strategies to develop.<sup>[39]</sup> In particular, the promotion of relationships and trust in police by refugees can assist in offsetting social disadvantage.<sup>[55]</sup> Regional Australia can be well placed to support successful refugee settlement,<sup>[39, 70]</sup> as are small police services, especially if trust and relationship creation is seen as fundamental<sup>[7, 39, 45]</sup> to successful settlement.

## Conclusion

The regional settlement of refugees is a very specific situation. It has implications for refugees, host communities and for policing.<sup>[39]</sup> Strategies in regional Australia will need to be different to those in metropolitan areas and locally relevant to reflect the characteristics of the refugee and host communities while also considering the resources available. A challenge exists for police to play an active role to counteract the detrimental consequences of negative perceptions of police held by many refugees, to support refugee-police relationships and to assist in creating stronger communities. This briefing paper argues that it is possible to support and create positive perceptions of law enforcement services. Police will need to be actively and practically aware of supporting a community with characteristics that include high visibility, high trauma background and diverse language support needs.<sup>[46]</sup> This process has the potential to reduce negative perceptions of refugees and in turn heighten understanding of the refugee experience for both host communities and the general public. The challenge is to create hospitable communities and to restore the faith of refugees in government during the settlement process.

## Further Research

At the present time there is a dearth of research with positive findings of refugee settlement in regional Australia. This is because much of the material has been produced in reaction to justifiable and practical concerns about service delivery capabilities in regional Australia in supporting refugee settlement. However much anecdotal evidence suggests that not all aspects of the regional settlement experience are negative. What is required now is the production of best practice models from these positive refugee settlement experiences. There is some interesting research emerging from

Canada and Northern Europe<sup>[19,71]</sup> emphasizing the influences of different social environments and community acceptance on refugee settlement and overall health. It is timely for research adopting a similar approach to be conducted in regional Australia. The ARC Linkage Grant currently being conducted by TILES should go a long way to achieving this goal.

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## Endnotes

- i It should be noted that there have been name changes in recent years in the Federal Government Department overseeing immigration. They are cited in the bibliography and are as follows:
  - DIMIA Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
  - DIMA Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
  - DIAC Department of Immigration and Citizenship
- ii The concept of community is being used here in its policy context not in its sociological and/or anthropological sense. The use of this term does not imply the existence of a single homogenous, bounded social entity. It is recognised that community formation involves a complex process of identification by 'self' and 'other' such that the category of 'African refugees' comprises a number of distinct communities that have established themselves in different parts of Australia. These processes are addressed in the larger study but cannot be discussed in any detail in this paper.
- iii This is a quote from pg xiii of Jupp, J., 1994, *Exile or Refugee? The Settlement of Refugee, Humanitarian and Displaced Immigrants*. Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, AGPS: Canberra.
- iv It is acknowledged that there is an extensive political debate and academic literature in relation to issues of access and equity. However, these cannot be addressed here.

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