

Guidelines

For Hosts & Buddies

 *Refugees Welcome*



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1. About RWA

After more than a year of hard work, Refugees Welcome Australia has launched its version of the Refugees Welcome house sharing initiative. Refugees Welcome was founded in 2014 by a group of people in Berlin – who wanted to do something practical to help refugees and asylum seekers. Since then Refugees Welcome has initiated in Canada, Austria, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Northern Ireland, The Netherlands, Poland, Italy, Czech Republic and beyond.

The program is a simple idea, but one that can create large scale change and alleviate the hardship of many. Based on the principles of equality, inclusion and acceptance, Refugees Welcome Australia aims to connect people, who are willing to share their spare bedrooms or flats, with people seeking asylum.

When it comes to refugees and people seeking asylum, Australia's complicated visa-system often allows these people to fall through a governmental hoop. Once fallen through this hoop, many already in Australia find themselves without access to medical care, working rights, and other social and financial support systems, including accommodation. It is primarily these people that Refugees Welcome Australia wants to connect with potential hosts.

Refugees Welcome Australia is a division of Refugees Welcome International. Refugees Welcome Australia is not affiliated with any political party or religious group. We support and allocate accommodation based on needs. We do not discriminate according to the legal status of the asylum seeker, country of origin and certainly not based on religion.

2. Glossary

Refugee Recognised by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who is outside of country of nationality and can not return due to a well-founded fear of persecution: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, political opinion.

Asylum Seeker A person who has fled to a country to ask for protection but who has not yet had their claim to be a refugee formally determined.

Host A person who provides a safe and secure home to a refugee or person seeking asylum.

Buddy A person in the local community who is a friend to both guest and host, and who provides practical and social support.

3. Housing

The information below is sourced from Refugees Council Australia's "Housing Issues for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia: A Literature Review". Refugees in Australia face significant barriers in securing accommodation due to a number of factors. These factors may include lacking rental history in Australia, language barriers or having a limited understanding of Australian rental processes or their rights as tenants and expectations of landlords.

People seeking asylum face the same barriers with additional challenges which are compounded by the a very limited income and the uncertainty of their future. Studies have found that there is inadequate assistance provided to asylum seekers attempting to navigate the housing market and there is also a common misunderstanding by some service providers that they are not eligible for housing. There are also other barriers which they face due to lack of social and community supports and resources while often experiencing traumatic effects of family separation and breakdown.

4. Volunteering

4.1 Hosting

4.2 Buddy Role

4.1 Hosting

Your main role as a host is to provide a clean, safe and secure homestay style accommodation to your guest. If you are welcoming to your guest and make them feel comfortable and as a part of your household, you will be fulfilling your role as a host.

From the beginning, it is important to establish your expectations as well as your guest's expectations to ensure that you are both on the same page. This process of managing expectations and boundaries will be initiated by our 'facilitator' at the initial meeting. However, it is not possible that we will think of all possible scenarios at that time. During your guest's stay with you, you will both be on a journey to learn from each other. We encourage that you communicate frankly and respectfully with your guest if issues arise. Making an agreement does not have to be in writing.

It is important to note that while you might have a picture of what this experience will be like, it may not turn out to be what you expect. As stated before, the relationship between you and your guest will be an evolving one.

Here are some of the suggested points of discussion between you and your guest:

Internet usage

Your guest will most likely have family, relatives or friends overseas that they will communicate with by using Skype or similar communication services. It is advisable that you have a discussion with your guest beforehand on your internet limitations or appropriate times for louder conversations to avoid complications later.

Visitors

What are your expectations on your guest having visitors? Have a discussion with your guest so that you can both come to an amiable agreement and neither will be unsure or surprised later.

Cooking and kitchen usage

If you are doing the cooking, do you expect the guest to wash up? Are you planning to share cooking products and cupboard space or will you allocate some space for your guest to place their own items?

Laundry and bathroom

Will you share products? What are your expectations around how the washing machine and products will be used?

Social media

Most people are active on social media and sharing photos and videos has become part of our daily routines. For people seeking asylum in particular, having their identity open to public is not always desirable. You may want to talk about this with your guest so to avoid any concerns and issues later down the line.

Expressing concerns

People who are in need of support can feel indebted. This may make it difficult for people to express concerns or say no. Keep this in mind in your interaction with your guest. What may help is letting your guest know you are as grateful for the experience as they are.

4.2 Buddy Role

A buddy is a friend to a refugee or person seeking asylum living in the community. As a buddy in our housing program, you are the local contact person who checks in regularly with the host and guest and provide social and emotional support. Depending on your availability and your boundaries, you can support in practical, social and emotional terms. We are here to match you with a guest and host, and guide you along the way. In the end, it is up to you as to how often you like to meet. We do require a minimum commitment of 3 months and a minimum of 1 hour a week.

5. Mental health and effects of trauma

It is likely that although out of pending danger, refugees and people seeking asylum may continue to experience the impact of traumatic events that may have occurred in their country of origin, on their journey to Australia, or in Australia whilst in detention. Trauma can cause people to live in a state of anxiety with a range of physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms. It can also lead to other mental health issues such as depression, substance abuse, self-harm or in some cases, suicide. However, do not assume that all people seeking asylum have significant needs or vulnerabilities. The people you will host may be very resilient and eager to learn and connect with the wider community. They may feel positive about their future.

A host should aim to provide as stable a life as possible, imparting a sense of security and promoting self-sufficiency and self-esteem. If you find yourself in the position of your guest talking about traumatic or sad events, you may wish to encourage the person to seek further support as well as seek support for yourself. If you wish to understand the impact of engaging with someone with a traumatic experience on yourself, QPASTT's publication on compassion fatigue, burnout and vicarious trauma is a great place to start. We also encourage you to let your **buddy** know about your feelings.

6. Support

6.1 Buddy and host network

6.2 Workshops

It's important that you've got somewhere to go if you need support. Refugees Welcome Australia values collaboration with other organisations and agencies in order to provide the best support to you and your guest or friend. We are basically here to match you with a person seeking accommodation, and to help you along the way. We help by referring you and your guest to other organisations who can assist with specific needs, such as mental health, food and legal support. We are here to facilitate, but we are in no position to be case managers.

6.1 Buddy and host network

As a host, you are assigned a buddy who will check in on you and your guest on a weekly basis at a time that you've agreed on. As a buddy, you can always check in with volunteer coordinators.

As a buddy or host we encourage you to be part of our online buddy and host network platform. We manage a closed Facebook page where you as buddy or host can pose questions and share experiences and knowledge. This is also a good place to connect with other buddies and hosts for group activities.

6.2 Workshops

We find it very important you feel well prepared for the experience of becoming a buddy or host. Together with our partners, we aim to offer regular workshop sessions you can join to enhance your knowledge on topics such as mental health, the refugee experience, boundaries, and cultural awareness. We hope by offering regular workshops, we can attend to your concerns about becoming or being a buddy or host.

7. Points to Consider

Self-care

It is important that the relationship between you and your guest is nourishing and beneficial to both of you. We don't expect you to become your guest's caseworker.

Confidentiality

Trust is vital to people that you will be supporting. It needs to be clear to them that we never disclose anything that is said to you without permission. It would be important to listen actively without judgement and create a space that is safe for people to talk about their experiences in the country of origin and in detention, if that is their desire. This may occasionally expose you to stories of torture and trauma, or mistreatment. It is important to remember self-care principles at this time.

Overall, it is important to ask rather than assume when in doubt about whether something that is said to you is confidential. We must hold people's privacy in high regard and disclose without permission people's stories. Disclosure may put people's lives and families at risk, their immigration cases may be jeopardized. They may also find themselves in a position of vulnerability if stories told in confidentiality are told to public members with whom they do not have a prior relationship with.

Cultural Sensitivity

Communication is key to finding out what is appropriate or not appropriate for both you and your guest. You could do research on the cultural background of your guest but it is best not to assume anything. Stereotyping or making assumptions about people from similar backgrounds based on your own experiences or what you've heard is not suitable and may lead to misunderstandings. We will also suggest that you be proactive in trying bridge a cultural gap if you feel like there is one.

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Appendix A.

History of Australian Refugee Law & Policy

Introduction

After the atrocities that occurred during World War II, it was thought inherently necessary to comprehensively recognise international protection for refugees. So, in 1951 the United Nations (UN) Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention) was drafted, and is still the focal instrument governing international protection of refugees today. Entering into force in 1954, the Refugee Convention has been amended once by the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1967 Protocol), which removed the geographical and time limitations originally imposed. The Refugee Convention has been ratified by 145 states.

The Refugee Convention outlines who a refugee is, the rights that should be afforded to refugees, as well as the responsibilities of countries' in protecting refugees. There is not, however, any clearly outlined enforcement mechanism or any responsibility sharing mechanism within the document.

Australia is a party to the Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol. This means that Australia has voluntarily agreed to uphold the international legal obligations outlined in the Refugee Convention. The protection of refugees, recognition of the rights of refugees and state responsibilities in relation to people seeking asylum and refugees should therefore be reflected in Australian law.

Australia has recently been subjected to severe scrutiny by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Agency tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Refugee Convention, and international human rights organisations, as well as by human rights advocates, lawyers and the public within Australia. This is due to serious concern for several of Australia's policies in their treatment of people seeking asylum and refugees.

Who is a refugee?

According to Article 1 of the Refugee Convention, 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 [/her] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [/ herself] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [/her] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Australia’s obligations to refugees under international law?

One of the most important legal duties within the Refugee Convention is the prohibition against states expelling or returning a refugee ‘in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his [her] life or freedom would be threatened on account of his [her] race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.’ (Article 33).

This means that every refugee has a right to non-refoulement, a principle which has been recognised as customary international law (and therefore it must be adhered to by all countries).

The Refugee Convention also outlines that refugees have rights to the following; freedom of religion; freedom of association; access to courts; to work (including self-employment); to primary education; freedom of movement; and the provision for documentation.

The Refugee Convention also recommends that governments protect the family unit. For example, where one person within a family is recognised as a refugee, the whole family should be afforded that status. Fundamental to the drafting of and the core protection concepts underpinning the Refugee Convention is the universal human right to seek asylum, outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 14). Following on from that, the Refugee Convention outlines that no refugee should be penalised for their mode of arrival or ‘illegal’ entry into a country they seek asylum (Article 31).

Australian law & policy

Up until the early 1990s, refugees were given permanent protection visas, and so recognising that a secure future is focal to a person's ability to integrate into a new country and recover from persecution. This visa afforded refugees similar rights to normal citizens initially (except voting rights and overseas travel rights).

Temporary protection visas (TPVs) were introduced in Australia by the Howard government in 1999, for those who had arrived without a visa and were seeking asylum (so usually by boat). This system was abolished in 2008, but again introduced by the Government in 2013 and made law in 2014, again focusing on the particular mode of arrival, rather than legitimacy of a person's refugee claim.

Under this scheme there are two types of temporary visas that a person who arrived by boat (between certain dates) who is seeking asylum may apply for – a TPV (three years) or a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (five years). Both are temporary visas, which means at the end of their visa the person's refugee claim may need to be re-evaluated. The

process of going through refugee status determination once alone is traumatic, requiring a person to re-live their experiences of persecution and present their claims to a government.

Successive governments have stated that the use of TPVs has reduced the number of refugees wishing to travel to Australia seeking asylum. However recent Senate investigations have shown that this is not the case. These investigations also stated that temporary protection "incur(s) a considerable cost in terms of human suffering." On a temporary protection visa, a refugee is not able to feel real safety, not able to reunify with their family or plan for a stable future.

Temporary protection of refugees under international law

Under international law, temporary protection is accepted only as a short-term emergency mechanism designed to respond to humanitarian crisis, conflict or disaster, and in order to provide immediate protection to persons at risk of refoulement.

Immigration Detention of people seeking asylum

Upon arrival in Australia, a person who wishes to be recognised as a refugee must claim to be seeking asylum. It is then Australia's duty under international law to process the claim. Asylum seekers are taken to mandatory detention centres until their application can be processed, with no time limit specified in law.

Australia is the only OECD country that does not set a limit on the time on which a refugee can spend in detention. Some refugees have been known to spend up to years in mandatory detention.

Although the screening process varies based on where the refugee came from, the most common practice is the enhanced screening process. Designed in 2012, this process was made to speed up applications from Sri Lankan refugees. The enhanced screening process involves an interview with an immigration department employee who determines whether the refugee has a valid claim. To determine this the refugees is asked "what are your reasons for coming to Australia?" If the response references

making a protection claim additional questions are asked to examine the claim. However, if the person does not raise such a claim they may be sent back to their country of origin. Many humanitarian organisations take issue with this policy as the interview may be too brief to determine the validity of their claim. The UNHCR has stated that that the policy is 'unfair and unreliable.'

Appendix B. Housing Needs & Policy

There are currently approximately 24,500 people seeking asylum living in our communities. Most of these people are on temporary Bridging Visa's. Based on recent data, close to 12,000 people have applied under the fast track process and a suspected 12,000 are yet to apply.

The vast majority of the approximate 24,500 people who are still awaiting for their visas to be processed are struggling to find decent and affordable housing. In general, real estates and private tenant arrangements are not available, which leaves people who have little or no income with few other options. Non-for-profit organisations help to the best of their abilities, but it is a difficult and sometimes impossible task.

In addition, there exists a large number of people who are cut off government support systems and are not entitled to work. These people are on the brink of homelessness and rely entirely on the efforts of non-for-profit organisations and informal community groups.

More and more people are in need of emergency housing each day, and more and more people end up in shelters or worse. We know there are options available for these people, and that we need to create a more sustainable solution to address the growing need.

Appendix C.

Words that Work

The ASRC recently held events to launch our ground-breaking new research to find words that work and that change the debate around people seeking asylum. The research shows what language is most effective in persuading the bulk of Australians to shift their ideas on people seeking asylum. Check out the website for more information: <https://www.asrc.org.au/resources/words-that-work/>.

Here is a snapshot of the outcome of the research that you can use right away.

REPLACE	EMBRACE
✘ Asylum Seeker(s)	✔ People seeking asylum
✘ Australia(ns) should/must/can	✔ We should/must/can
✘ Fix our broken system, tackle the problem	✔ Create a fair and efficient process, fairly examine each (person's) case
✘ Comply with international human rights law, humanitarian and legal obligations	✔ Treat others the way we want to be treated, do the right thing
✘ Physical and sexual abuse, torture, inhumane, shunt people to remote prison camps	✔ Turn back to harm, denied basic rights
✘ Security, survival	✔ Live in peace, care for children, live free from danger, safety
✘ Be settled in Australia, be placed onshore	✔ Integrate into our communities
✘ Fleeing persecution, violence and torture	✔ Seeking safety, rebuilding their lives where it's safe, looking to set up a safe home
✘ It is not illegal to seek asylum, not a security issue, not a threat, no need to fear, myth busting	✔ It is legal to seek asylum, it is an issue of basic rights, foundation of human dignity
✘ Survive, not seeking a better life	✔ Flourish, prosper, thrive
✘ Injustices being perpetrated, harm being inflicted, conditions worsened	✔ Government choosing to detain, [Name] decided to deny rights

Appendix D. Further Reading

Information on the different temporary asylum seeker visa's, financial support and eligibility and the current debate.

- www.asrc.org.au/resources/fact-sheet/
- www.redcross.org.au/asylum-seekers-refugees-facts.aspx

Statistics of refugee intake, current asylum seeker processing and offshore and onshore detention.

- <https://www.asrc.org.au/resources/statistics/>
- <https://www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/60refugee>
- <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/statistics/>

Mythbusters

- <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/mythbusters/>

The refugee experience

- <http://www.redcross.org.au/asylum-seekers-refugees-game.aspx>
- <https://www.welcometoaustralia.org.au/success-stories/>

**Refugees Welcome Australia
Refugees Welcome International
Enough Room (Sydney)**

- <https://www.refugeeswelcome.org.au>
- <http://www.refugees-welcome.net>
- <http://enoughroom.org>