

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

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Dear Ms Larkins

## **RE: REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

Amnesty International Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Review of Australia's Community Support Program for refugees.

### **Australian experience**

Since 2018 we have travelled to every state and territory for a national outreach campaign to build support for a fair and accessible model of community sponsorship for refugees. Our work has revealed the enormous goodwill in neighbourhoods across the country to welcome and support refugees to build better, safer lives.

Nearly 40,000 Australians have since signed our petition calling on the Government to expand and improve the current program. A range of community groups from refugee diaspora communities to church groups to sports clubs have pledged their support. Around 40 Mayors and local councils have sent letters to the Federal Government or passed motions, expressing support for a new model of the community sponsorship program.

The Review in 2020 has inspired dozens of the communities Amnesty International has worked with to take their voices directly to the Government. We appreciate that you have received over 15 submissions to the Review from these communities, many of which come from areas where refugee sponsorship could successfully take place, within an improved model. These submissions have also been made available to the federal parliamentarians in those local areas. As you will gather from their recommendations, communities across the country are speaking with a united voice: **Australia needs a community-oriented and affordable model that would encourage widespread community participation in welcoming and supporting refugees.**

## International experience

Globally for the last few years, Amnesty International has worked with governments, civil society and stakeholders in eight countries to establish new programs for community sponsorship or make existing ones more sustainable, accessible and effective.

To cite a few examples, in Argentina, where over 400 Syrian nationals arrived through a scheme set up in 2014, Amnesty supported local communities in utilising their power as advocates of change. In Ireland, our section office has worked with other civil society groups to engage in policy design with the government and build the infrastructure essential for the program's viability. Consequently, we saw the Irish Government launching its community sponsorship program last year.

Our vision is to ensure that a fair community sponsorship program becomes a reality around the world as it breathes new life into communities, refugees and host countries alike, for generations to come.

## Our recommendations

By working with like-minded civil society organisations, we have developed an alternative model for the community sponsorship program for refugees similar to Canada's model, which has been successful for many years. An appropriate program would:

- **Not take places from others in need**

For Australia to do its fair share in meeting the global need for people seeking asylum, the community sponsorship program must be above and beyond any existing humanitarian or visa quotas. Ensuring community sponsorship places are additional to Australia's existing humanitarian intake will mean that the Government is not merely passing the buck by shifting their responsibility onto the community. We have also heard from businesses and community groups that additionality is needed to give them confidence that their contributions to the community sponsorship program are delivering real humanitarian outcomes.

Based on our wealth, population and current support for community sponsorship, Amnesty recommends that the Australian community could support the sponsorship of around 10,000 refugees per annum through the community sponsorship program.

- **Limit costs**

An improved program must ensure it is not too costly for refugees or their sponsors. Currently, the high cost of the application and visas is approximately \$80,000 for a family of five – three times the amount of the Canadian program.

- **Provide adequate support and services**

To assist people seeking asylum to integrate successfully into our communities, the Government must provide adequate settlement and support services. The pilot program allows access to Medicare and Australian Migrant English Program, but more clarity around services and entitlements is needed. It is also necessary to put in place measures to protect refugees from exploitation or harm in the event of their sponsor seeking to make a profit from their arrival or if the sponsorship arrangement breaks down.

- **Allow community, family and businesses to act as sponsors**

Amnesty recommends that there be three main categories of potential sponsors:

1. Family sponsors bringing refugee family members residing overseas who require international protection
2. Independent sponsors such as faith-based groups, universities and diaspora communities, who may sponsor those most in need, as identified by UNHCR, who do not have family links and who are not yet job-ready.
3. Business/employer sponsors who want to employ job-ready refugees to meet dual commercial and corporate social responsibility objectives.

## **Conclusion**

Australia can and must do more to address the global refugee crisis. Particularly in the wake of the recent Federal Budget, which cuts 5,000 places from our humanitarian intake each year over the next four years. A better program will enable communities to come together to support more people seeking safety to build their lives here and contribute to the Australian community. By welcoming more refugees to enter Australia legally, we not only meet our international obligations to tackle this significant global problem, but we also gain from the cultures, knowledge and skills that refugees bring to our shores from all corners of the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this review process. We hope it will conclude in favour of designing a fairer and most just community sponsorship program for the benefit of both refugees and the Australian community.

Yours sincerely,



Sam Klintworth  
National Director  
Amnesty International Australia