

The meanings of rights across cultures:
an exploration of the interpretation of the human rights
framework in refugee settlement.

A research partnership to improve settlement outcomes

This exciting project will explore how understandings of human rights influence refugee settlement in Australia. It is being undertaken by the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) in partnership with refugee settlement service providers: AMES Victoria, Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT), NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) and Townsville Multicultural Support Group (TMSG).

The aim is to contribute to positive settlement outcomes for refugees through exploring interpretations of human rights in refugee settlement, and the impact of this on settlement outcomes and service provision.

The project will involve consultation with refugee men, women and young people and with settlement services. It will gather ideas and information that will contribute to an understanding of the different ways that 'rights' are conceptualized, experienced and practiced by different groups. This understanding will enable the development of theoretical models and practical tools that support a rights-based approach to settlement services and that enable refugees to settle with safety and dignity while living within the legal frameworks of their new country.

Project funding is through a grant from the Australian Research Council and contributions from the project partners.



It's not just about communities understanding Australia - it goes two ways (Resettled refugee)

Why this project?

Resettlement is not an easy process; newly arrived refugees face many challenges as they learn to live in a new country. One of these challenges is learning about and adapting to a different system of laws and rights.

People who have had to flee their homes and live for years with violence and denial of their rights, welcome the human rights which life in Australia promises. Resettlement brings an assumption that the rights of refugees previously denied them will be restored, and that they will enjoy and experience rights in similar ways to other citizens.

However, preliminary research by CRR and the project partners has found that the issue of human rights in refugee settlement is far more complex. Many report that concerns over the meaning

of rights, or how information about rights is presented, is leading to confusion and misunderstandings. There is concern in some refugee communities about rights for particular groups in Australia, especially women's and children's rights. Instead of being seen as positive, rights are seen as negative or as a problem for family or community. For some new arrivals, issues around 'rights and responsibilities' negatively affect their settlement.

Just imagine 20 years in suffering, then you reach here and face some of these issues.... "rights" destroy our families – our women leave and our children rebel against us. (Resettled refugee)

Refugees have lived through trauma and horror before coming to Australia. It is important they feel welcome, safe, and that effective services are available to support their settlement. Understanding what new arrivals need in adapting to their new home, including in relation to human rights and legal frameworks in Australia, and developing tools and resources to meet those needs, can assist in ensuring effective support and positive settlement outcomes for new arrivals.

Previous work by CRR also indicates a gap in conceptual understandings of how the international human rights framework is reflected in Australian law and practice, how it is applied in the settlement context, and the legal, social and cultural implications of human rights for resettling refugees. This project will therefore also explore theoretical aspects of rights in refugee settlement.

In partnership with refugee groups, CRR and AMES developed booklets on rights in Australia for new arrivals.

Download in 9 languages at <http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au/education-and-training-resources/human-rights-booklets/>

Project aim and objectives

To achieve its aim of contributing to positive settlement outcomes through an exploration of human rights in settlement, the research team will

- examine how meanings of human rights are understood and culturally mediated by resettled refugees
- analyse the meanings of family, women's and children's rights in resettlement, and the impact on family and community life in Australia
- examine how human rights are understood and implemented in current models of settlement support
- understand the impact of services (direct and indirect) on new arrivals' experiences, perceptions and understandings of rights in Australia
- identify how the international human rights framework is reflected in Australian law, policy and practice
- explore current academic literature and practice discourse on human rights in settlement and integration
- develop practical tools that support a rights-based approach to refugee services and that enable refugees to settle with safety and dignity, within legal frameworks of their new home

Project outcomes

1. The development of a conceptual framework, which incorporates the meanings and legal implications of human rights as experienced in Australia, to inform settlement service provision and support.
2. The development of a toolkit of responses, which builds on existing resources and tools, to
 - assist refugees to understand how human rights are applied in Australia, and the nexus between

- human rights and Australian law,
- support a rights-based approach to refugee settlement services.

3. A practical and evidence-based contribution to the theoretical framework, conceptual debates and discourse on human rights in refugee settlement.

Research methods

Research consultations and interviews will be held with resettled refugees and service providers, to learn about their feelings, experiences and opinions on issues relating to rights in settlement. Tools and strategies to respond to identified issues will be developed and trialed, informed by the fieldwork and by academic research.



The study will use CRR's 'Reciprocal Research' method, based on human rights and community development frameworks. Reciprocal research engages people from refugee backgrounds as active research participants, ensuring they are involved in a way that is empowering and not exploitative, and that they gain some value from their involvement. It recognises and draws on the capacities and capabilities of refugee community members.

All of these rights we are getting here in Australia, I am very happy and proud; but there is problems with family pressures and children's behaviour. (Resettled refugee)

The project will take place over three years across six sites: Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Townsville, Coffs Harbour and Geelong. The UNSW Human Ethics Committee has approved the research plan and method: approval HC13362.

Research Partners

The UNSW Centre for Refugee Research contributes to increased understanding of forced displacement and settlement, and uses research evidence to advocate for improved refugee protection and support.

CRR team: Honorary Professor Eileen Pittaway, Dr Linda Bartolomei, Prof Richard Hugman, Geraldine Doney, Marcela Garrett, Kristy Ward, Dr Rebecca Eckert, Rochelle Baughan.

AMES (Melbourne, Geelong) provides settlement services to assist refugees in their first years in Australia. AMES partners with a range of community and volunteer groups, governments, TAFEs and universities to undertake research, raise awareness, and build networks to improve refugee services.

Partner Investigator: Melika Sheikh Eldin

QPASTT (Brisbane) provides counselling, support and community development activities for refugee survivors of torture and trauma. They put a strong emphasis on community engagement and on community development activities that aid in community healing and recovery.

Partner Investigator: Megan Leitz

STARTTS (Sydney, Coffs Harbour) provides individual, community and group programs to facilitate the healing of torture and trauma survivors. They assist and resource other agencies to provide effective and culturally sensitive services. They undertake research and advocacy, publishing articles and resources relevant to their work.

Partner Investigator: Mariano Coello

TMSG (Townsville) provides initial and longer-term settlement support to refugees, and complementary programs. TMSG partners with the local Council in programs to increase understanding of refugee needs. They support local, national and international students to gain practical strengths-focused work experience with refugees.

Partner Investigator: Meg Davis.

For further information please contact CRR, or your local partner organisation.
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The most important thing is to recognise the strength of the parents, and that these are some of the strongest parents in the world. Problems affecting families in Australia are not the fault of the family; it is the result of coming into Australia and requiring significant adjustment from their previous lives. (Settlement worker)