

Building a New Life in Australia

Introducing the Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants

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Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants is a newly initiated study that aims to better understand the factors that aid or hinder the successful settlement of humanitarian migrants in Australia, and to provide an evidence base to inform policy and program development. This ground-breaking longitudinal study will employ annual data collections over five years to trace the settlement journey of humanitarian migrants from their arrival in Australia through to their eligibility for citizenship. All study participants have received a permanent humanitarian visa enabling them to settle in Australia, granted either before their arrival in Australia as part of Australia's refugee program, or since their arrival, through Australia's asylum seeker humanitarian program. Study participants have come from a diverse range of backgrounds and a multitude of migration pathways.

Three broad research questions guide the study:

- What are the settlement outcomes of humanitarian migrants? How are they faring in terms of their English language proficiency, housing circumstances, labour force participation, use of qualifications, income, physical and mental health, community engagement, citizenship and level of satisfaction with life in Australia?
- How does access to and use of government and non-government services and welfare benefits contribute to humanitarian migrants' successful settlement?
- Do the settlement experiences and outcomes of humanitarian migrants vary according to the differing migration pathways taken?

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) has been commissioned by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) (formerly the Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC]) to undertake and manage the project. Colmar Brunton Social Research, in conjunction with Multicultural Marketing and Management, is the fieldwork agency undertaking the data collection for the project. From April 2014, responsibility for the study moved from the DIBP to the Department of Social Services.

Migrant communities have made considerable contributions to Australia's economic and social wellbeing.

Conceptualisation and development phase of the study

Australia has a long and proud tradition of resettling refugees and people in humanitarian need (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). The fundamentals of the humanitarian program have served Australian governments and the Australian community well, and have evolved over time to respond to changing circumstances. Australia's help does not end at providing humanitarian entrants with a start to a new life in Australia. Services and supports are provided to assist recent migrants to rebuild their lives and become active participants in our community (DIAC, 2012a; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013).

Migrant communities have made considerable contributions to Australia's economic and social wellbeing (DIAC, 2012a; Hugo, 2011; Richardson, Miller-Lewis, Ngo, & Ilsley, 2002). They have increased Australia's productive capacity by, for example, helping to meet labour shortages, providing a younger workforce to augment the ageing working population, and volunteering in both the wider community and within their own community groups (Australian Survey Research Group, 2011; DIAC, 2012a; Hugo, 2011). They have been a major contributor to the increase in the Australian population that has occurred since the mid–20th century. At the end of World War II, the Australian population was around seven million, with approximately 90% of the population Australian-born. Australia's population had grown to over 22 million by 2011, with approximately one-quarter born overseas (DIBP, 2014a). Migrant communities have also enriched our culture and brought about a broadening of Australia's social and communal life. It is from within this context that the Building a New Life in Australia study was conceived.

There were several key drivers associated with the commissioning and establishment of the study. Understanding how humanitarian migrants settle in a new country is paramount to ensuring effective policy and program responses; however, detailed research in this area was lacking. In addition, over a decade had elapsed since the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) was conducted (DIBP, 2014b). The LSIA study was broader in scope, comprising participants from a wider range of migration streams (e.g., family and skill streams), a smaller sample of humanitarian migrants and fewer waves of data collection. In particular, it contained limited data relating to refugee settlement in Australia. Other motivations for the establishment of the study



included the collection of updated information in the context of the changing composition of Australia's humanitarian program and the growth in the numbers of onshore (boat) arrivals since the LSIA data were collected. By establishing the study, the DIBP hoped to better understand the settlement experiences of recently arrived humanitarian migrants in terms of their differing backgrounds and diverse pathways towards settlement in Australia.

Initial development work for the project commenced in September 2010 with the Following Migrants Forward workshop held at the Australian National University. Two advisory groups were then convened to inform the study design and development: a Survey Reference Group comprising Commonwealth government officials and external stakeholders, and a Technical Advisory Group comprising experts in refugee resettlement and longitudinal survey methods and analysis. To further guide the project's development, two background papers were commissioned in 2012: one by Dr Siew-Ean Khoo examining key issues and settlement indicators on which the survey should focus (Khoo, 2012), and the other by Professor Matthew Gray and colleagues outlining design options for the study (Gray, Graycar, & Nicolou, 2012). A position paper was also prepared by the DIBP's Economic Analysis Unit, with input from the Survey Reference and Technical Advisory Groups (DIAC, 2012b).

To further inform key aspects of the study design and ensure appropriate survey content and data collection processes were in place, AIFS undertook additional scoping work and consulted widely with a range of key stakeholders in the settlement sector, such as representatives of peak agencies; settlement service providers; community, cultural and faith-based groups; and humanitarian migrant communities. The main focus of these consultations was to seek advice about the study design and methodology, recruitment and retention strategies, survey content, and cultural sensitivities in undertaking research with this population.

Building a New Life in Australia is a complex project that has been developed within a policy environment that is dynamic, political and contentious. The DIBP's conceptual framework for understanding settlement outcomes, and the background work and consultations conducted with the advisory groups and other stakeholders were paramount to informing and refining the design and methodology of the study.

Study population

The study population comprises individuals or families who were granted their permanent visa through Australia's "offshore" and "onshore" humanitarian programs. Box 1 provides a description of the offshore and onshore components of Australia's humanitarian program.

Box 1: Australia's humanitarian program

Offshore humanitarian migrants have arrived in Australia after being identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as refugees in need of settlement, as well as people who came to Australia via the Special Humanitarian program. These individuals or families have been granted a permanent humanitarian visa in the 200 subclass prior to their arrival in Australia (e.g., 200—Refugee; 201, 202—Special Humanitarian Migrant; 203, 204—Women-At-Risk).[1]

Onshore humanitarian migrants have sought protection following their arrival in Australia. This group comprises individuals or families who arrived by boat (termed "illegal maritime arrivals" [IMAs] by the DIBP) and were subsequently granted a permanent humanitarian visa; or those who originally came to Australia on another type of visa (e.g., student or tourist visa) and subsequently sought and were granted a permanent humanitarian visa. The onshore group have been granted an 866 visa.

Initially, it was proposed that the study would be made up of 70% offshore and 30% onshore humanitarian entrants. This ratio broadly followed the distribution of government grant applications in the 2013 humanitarian program. To be eligible for the study, offshore visa holders had to have arrived in Australia holding a permanent visa three to six months prior to their Wave 1 interview (i.e., between May and December 2013). Onshore visa holders had to have received their permanent protection visa in the same three to six month period prior to Wave 1 to be eligible for the study.[2] However, with the implementation of offshore processing on 15 June 2013 and the transfer of IMAs from Australia to Nauru and Manus Island for processing, some changes to the sample composition were required. The revised sample parameters were an offshore component of 77% and an onshore component of 23%.

Understanding how humanitarian migrants settle in a new country is paramount to ensuring effective policy and program responses.

The humanitarian migrant population is a vulnerable one and some have low levels of literacy or limited familiarity with Western research methods and concepts.

Selection into the study was based on the "migrating unit" named on the visa application, which could consist of a single individual or members of a family. The adult "principal applicant" on the application (the person upon whom approval for a permanent visa was based) was designated as the lead participant in the study. The principal applicant (aged 18 years and over) was required to consent to take part in the study before other members of the family could be invited to participate. "Secondary applicants" comprised other members of the migrating unit named on the visa application (e.g., spouse, children). Secondary applicants had to be aged 15 years and over and residing with the principal applicant in order to participate in the study. However, once recruited to the study, secondary applicants are able to independently continue participating in later waves if they choose (e.g,. in circumstances where the principal applicant withdraws or there has been a family break-up).

Design and methodology

Conducting a study of this type is complex and technically challenging. The humanitarian migrant population is a vulnerable one and some have low levels of literacy or limited familiarity with Western research methods and concepts. The data collection methods and survey questions developed must be able to accommodate the differing needs of this diverse population. As such, innovative methodological approaches needed to be devised to ensure that the survey design and administration was appropriate for use with this group.

A sample size of approximately 1,500 principal applicants was the target, with no constraints made on the number of secondary applicants per migrating unit who could be recruited into the study. Thus it was envisaged that the total number of individuals taking part in the study could range between 2,000 and 3,000.

Participants have been recruited from 11 sites in urban and regional communities across Australia. These sites were primarily selected to maximise the pool of eligible participants available. Other factors also considered in selecting sites included ensuring adequate sample sizes of smaller visa classes of particular interest (e.g., the 204 Women-At-Risk visa subclass), and obtaining a geographical spread of participants across Australia. Figure 1 shows the number of participating "migrating units" in states and territories across Australia.

Five annual waves of data collection are planned to take place between 2013–14 and 2017–18, with alternating waves of home visits (Waves 1, 3 and 5) and telephone interviews (Waves 2 and 4). In Waves 1, 3 and 5 the survey will be administered using a computer-assisted self-interview (CASI) on a small portable computer tablet. The CASI has audio and flashlight functions available so that participants can listen to the questions and answers at the same time as the spoken words are highlighted on the screen. This feature is particularly useful for participants with low levels of literacy. A computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) is also offered to participants who prefer to complete the survey with an interviewer. When neither of these methods is feasible, participants are assisted by an accredited interpreter over the phone or in person, with an interviewer also present to pose the questions and record the answers. To accommodate the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of individuals in the study, the survey and participant materials were translated into 14 languages. Box 2 (on page 9) provides a further description of the languages translated, the translation process and the methodological issues involved in conducting interviews in languages other than English with this population. For Waves 2 and 4, data will be collected using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) with bilingual interviewers.

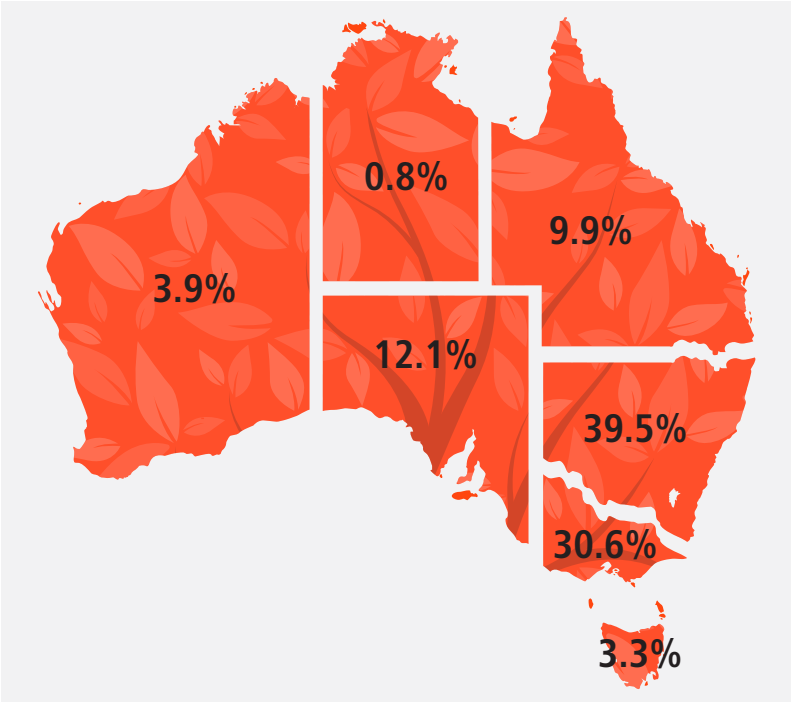


Figure 1: Distribution of participating individuals/families across states and territories of Australia

Box 2. Translation and methodological challenges

Apart from English, the languages available for survey completion include:

1. Amharic
2. Arabic
3. Burmese/ Myanmar
4. Chin Haka
5. Dari
6. Hazaragi
7. Nepali
8. Oromo
9. Pashto
10. Persian
11. Somali
12. Swahili
13. Tamil
14. Tigrinya

The translation of the survey into multiple languages was a challenging process. Some of the key issues faced and learnings from this aspect of the study were:

- The translated materials required multiple stages of independent checking for quality assurance. This was a time-consuming process that also had implications for our capacity to make changes to content between the first and second phases of Wave 1 data collection.
- The software platform did not support some of the characters used in particular languages, with the result that some languages could not be programmed. This affected the scope of languages that could be translated. However, some participants could complete the survey in other languages or in English (e.g., Assyrian participants were often able to complete the survey using the Arabic language materials).
- Interpreters were available for participants with language requirements beyond the translated languages. Our preference was for the interpreter to attend the home visit; however, this was not always possible due to the small pool of accredited interpreters in Australia (particularly for rare languages), the geographic dispersion of participants, and the need for both interpreters and interviewers to be available at the same time. In some cases, interpreters assisted over the telephone.
- Expert advice (e.g., the advisory groups) strongly recommended gathering data using standard scales or items so that the outcomes for the humanitarian migrants could be compared with the general Australian population. Upon this advice, a suite of standard employment items and mental health scales were used. However, field interviewers noted that these were difficult for some participants to understand. Thus, it was challenging to balance the need for comparison with other data sources and participants' limited understanding of Western scales and concepts.

Survey content

To improve understanding of the factors that aid (or impede) successful settlement, there is a need to consider both the outcomes of humanitarian migrants—in terms of their settlement success over time (e.g., economic wellbeing, social participation)—and the wide range of variables that might affect those outcomes along the migration and settlement journey (e.g., personal characteristics, migration experiences).

As noted by Khoo (2012), successful settlement can be considered from the perspective of the migrants themselves, as well as from the viewpoint of the host (country). From a migrant's perspective, this can encompass notions of living comfortably, intentions to stay in Australia, personal wellbeing and satisfaction with their life. From the perspective of the host, which is perhaps best considered through the lens of the host government, successful settlement has usually been seen in terms of social and economic participation and related outcomes. The study thus aimed to assess a broad range of factors reflecting these diverse contributors and outcomes.

The project will also help to fill in some of the gaps in the refugee resettlement evidence base identified by Fozdar and Hartley (2013). They argued that there is a clear need for longitudinal investigations of the housing, employment, health and social connections of humanitarian migrants. They also noted that further exploration of the nature and frequency of support that refugees receive and the return of refugees to their local communities would be areas of particular interest. The BNLA study, having collected extensive data on all of these aspects of refugee resettlement, is well placed to contribute in these areas.

The major domains assessed in Wave 1 included: family composition and demographics; housing and neighbourhood characteristics; English language proficiency and training; engagement in other educational study or training; employment, income and financial hardship; migration pathways and experiences; physical and mental health; self-sufficiency; community engagement and support; personal resources and life satisfaction; and perceptions of life in Australia. A summary is provided in Table 1 (on page 10). As this is a longitudinal study, it is anticipated that almost all these topics will be included in later waves of the study.

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Table 1: Topics covered in the BNLA study

Topic	Scope
Family composition and demographics	Demographic information relating to the family, such as age and gender of family members, country of birth, marital status
Housing and neighbourhood	Assistance required in finding housing; number of times moved home; tenure type; quality of housing; number of bedrooms; neighbourhood characteristics
English language proficiency	Languages spoken at home; English language proficiency; whether attending English language classes; use and helpfulness of interpreting services
Education and training	Highest level of education achieved; current education and training undertaken; educational aspirations; previous qualifications gained prior to arrival in Australia and whether they have been recognised
Employment and income	Current employment status; employment characteristics; prior occupation and work experience before coming to Australia; experience of unemployment in Australia; income and government benefits received; financial strain
Immigration experience	Life before settling in Australia including countries resided in prior to arrival; the experience of deprivation or trauma; time spent and type of services accessed in refugee camps, Australian detention centres or community detention; reasons for migrating to Australia; social networks available upon arrival
Health	Information on physical and mental health; life stressors and coping
Self-sufficiency	Experiences and ease of accessing services, information and transport; barriers to service use
Community support	Levels of support from national, religious and other community groups; involvement in community activities; ease of making friends; sense of belonging in Australia
Personal resources and life satisfaction	Satisfaction with current life and situation; self-concept; self-efficacy; levels of trust in different community groups and organisations; experience of discrimination
Perceptions of life in Australia	Expectations of life in Australia before arrival; factors promoting or hindering settlement; ease of settling in Australia

Survey methodology for Wave 1 data collection

Information from the DIBP's Settlement Database was used to identify all permanent humanitarian visa holders residing in the selected locations who met the eligibility timeframe described above. A total of 4,035 individuals or families were identified as potential participants in the study. The contact details of these individuals/families were supplied to Colmar Brunton Social Research for follow-up. A letter of invitation to the study from AIFS was sent to the individuals/families together with an accompanying information brochure. The letter and brochure were translated into the individual/family's primary language and contained the following information:

- a description of the study's rationale, aims, and methodology, and the topics to be covered in the interview;
- an explanation of the differing roles of the organisations involved in the study;
- reassurance that participation would be anonymous, and the information that participants provided would be confidential, would not be available to others, and could not be linked to a person's name and address;
- an assurance that participation was voluntary and that acceptance or refusal of the invitation to participate (in Wave 1 or future waves) would not affect a person's visa status or access to services and supports; and
- details of the website established to provide further information about the study (where the content is presented in English as well as the 14 languages translated).

Following this initial contact, Colmar Brunton interviewers telephoned each potential participating individual/family to ascertain their interest in taking part in the study, and to make an appointment if appropriate. If phone contact could not be made, interviewers undertook a home visit to try to reach potential study members. As the population is highly mobile, making contact with potential participants was one of the largest challenges faced by the study in Wave 1. Community Engagement Officers (respected members of local migrant communities) were recruited to advocate for the study, communicate

information about the study within their local community, assist with participant recruitment and broker introductions, and assist with locating potential participants whose contact details were inaccurate.

The data collection for Wave 1 occurred in two phases. The first phase was conducted in June 2013 and tested the study methodology and interview content. A total of 154 individuals were interviewed (102 principal applicants, 47 adult secondary applicants aged 18+ years and 5 adolescent secondary applicants aged 15–17 years). The second phase took place between October 2013 and March 2014. A total of 1,509 principal applicants completed an interview, as did 755 adult secondary applicants and 135 adolescent secondary applicants. In total, 2,399 individuals took part in the second phase of Wave 1.

Principal applicants completed a longer survey than secondary applicants, as they provided information about the family that was only collected once (e.g., household demographics). The average principal applicant interview took 56 minutes to complete. The average interview length for secondary applicants was 40 minutes. Some variation in survey timings between subgroups was found, with the onshore principal applicant group taking less time on average compared to offshore principal applicants. Little difference was found in survey length across the secondary applicant visa-subclass subgroups.

Participation and response rates for the second phase of the study are detailed in Table 2. There are several ways in which the response rate can be evaluated. Firstly, this can be examined as the proportion of the total eligible sample. A rate of 37% was achieved using this criterion. However, this includes individuals/families who were not initiated for contact,[3] could not be contacted, or who refused. Secondly, response rate can be examined as the proportion of the cohort who were initiated for contact (n = 2,769). Using this criterion, a rate of 55% was achieved. Thirdly, using the criterion of the proportion who were successfully contacted (n = 2,031), a response rate of 74% was achieved (see cooperation rate 1). This includes people who were successfully contacted but could not proceed with an interview for a variety of reasons, such as the quota having been met, their having moved to an area outside of the scope of interviewing or were unavailable for the duration of the fieldwork period. Finally, a response rate (cooperation rate 2) was calculated using the proportion who were successfully contacted and eligible to proceed with an interview. Using this criterion, Table 2 shows that 83% of respondents who were contacted and able to proceed with an interview agreed to participate, while 17% refused. Rates of participation were very high across all visa subclasses, with the exception of the 866 visa subclass non-IMA group, approximately two-thirds of whom agreed to take part. Thus, inability to contact potential participants was the largest reason for non-response, while the rate of refusal was relatively low.

The profile of participants in terms of their visa subclass, gender and location are shown in Table 3 (on page 12). As seen in Table 3, the majority (85%) of participants were recruited

Table 2: Principal applicants' participation and response rates, by visa subclass

Visa subclass	Eligible sample	Completed interviews	Response rate 1 [a]	Response rate 2 [b]	Cooperation rate 1 [c]	Cooperation rate 2 [d]
200	2,266	942	41.6%	59.3%	80.4%	85.2%
201	24	8	33.3%	42.1%	66.7%	66.7%
202	112	42	37.5%	53.2%	70.0%	75.0%
203	1	–	–	–	–	–
204	401	183	45.6%	62.7%	83.6%	89.3%
866 IMA	555	234	42.2%	51.7%	70.5%	85.4%
866 non-IMA	676	100	14.8%	29.8%	42.4%	58.1%
Total	4,035	1,509	37.4%	54.5%	74.3%	82.7%

Notes: Formulas for calculating standardised response rates have been developed by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR): <www.aapor.org/Response_Rates_An_Overview1.htm#.U2w46S_rXZt>. [a] Response rate 1 calculated as the proportion of the eligible sample who completed an interview. [b] Response rate 2 calculated as the proportion of the sample initiated for contact who completed an interview. This is consistent with the way the AAPOR calculates response rate 1. [c] Cooperation rate 1 calculated as the proportion of the sample successfully contacted who completed an interview. This is consistent with the way the AAPOR calculates cooperation rate 1. [d] Cooperation rate 2 calculated as the proportion of the sample successfully contacted and eligible to proceed, who completed an interview. This is consistent with the way the AAPOR calculates cooperation rate 3.

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Table 3: Profile of recruited sample, Wave 1

	Principal applicant	Secondary applicant: Adult	Secondary applicant: Adolescent	Total
Visa subclass				
200	942	601	85	1,628
201	8	2	0	10
202	42	31	16	89
204	183	78	31	292
866 IMA	234	24	2	260
866 non-IMA	100	19	1	120
Gender				
Male	1,061	188	58	1,307
Female	448	567	77	1,092
Location				
Metropolitan	1,349	681	123	2,153
Non-metropolitan	160	74	12	246
Total	1,509	755	135	2,399

Table 4: Principal applicants' language of survey completion, by interview mode, Wave 1

Interview language	CASI (%)	CAPI with interviewer (%)	CAPI with interpreter (%)	All modes
Arabic	38.1	39.9	5.7	37.9
Persian	22.4	24.1	8.6	22.6
English	12.0	10.6	–	11.3
Dari	8.4	13.6	31.4	10.5
Hazaragi	4.2	5.0	–	4.3
Burmese/Mynamar	4.0	2.4	2.9	3.5
Nepali	4.1	0.2	5.7	2.9
Chin Haka	2.5	2.4	–	2.4
Tamil	2.0	0.7	–	1.5
Swahili	0.6	0.7	25.7	1.2
Pashto	0.7	0.2	–	0.5
Tigrinya	0.3	0.4	–	0.3
Amharic	0.4	–	–	0.3
Oromo	0.4	–	–	0.3
Somali	0.1	–	2.9	0.1
Chin Zome	–	–	2.9	0.1
Spanish	–	–	2.9	0.1
Other languages [a]			11.4	0.3
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of interviews	1,010	464	35	1,509

Notes: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding. [a] This included CAPI interviews with interpreter assistance in the following languages: Karenni, Kirundi, Kinyarawanda and Vietnamese.



from the offshore cohort (i.e., visa subclasses 200–204), and was largely comprised of participants with a 200 visa. The remaining 15% were recruited from the onshore cohort (i.e., visa subclass 866). This closely reflects the distribution of the humanitarian program population from which the sample was drawn. A smaller proportion of secondary applicants were recruited from the onshore cohort compared to the offshore cohort; however ,this can be attributed to the smaller migrating unit size observed among the onshore cohort, which mostly comprised single individuals. While recruitment is skewed towards males at the principal applicant level and females at the secondary applicant level, there were roughly equal proportions of males (54%) and females (46%) at the total sample level.

With the availability of interpreters, 19 languages were used across the Wave 1 sample. The most common languages of completion were Arabic, Persian, English and Dari. Table 4 (on page 12) provides details about the languages used to complete the survey, analysed by the three modes available for survey completion. Almost four-tenths of principal applicants (38%) completed the CASI survey in Arabic. Dari (31%) and Swahili (26%) language speakers were the most likely to need interpreter assistance.

The dataset has recently been cleaned and compiled. It is anticipated that the first findings from the study will be available in late 2014–early 2015.

Participant engagement and study promotion

A number of strategies have been put in place in order to engage and retain participants over the five-year life of the study. These include:

- the development of the Building a New Life in Australia website <www.bnla.com.au>, which provides information about the study, updates, and reports of progress (most participants are able to access this information in their own language, as the content is translated into multiple languages);
- mailing out annual newsletters to participants providing an overview of study progress, highlighting the key findings emerging, and giving information about the next data collection wave;
- providing a modest reimbursement to thank participants for their contribution and time; and
- recruiting Community Engagement Officers, who have played an important role in supporting participant engagement by promoting the study in local communities.

Data availability

Data from the first wave of the study will be available in the second half of 2014. It is likely that the dataset will be made publicly available to approved data users, subject to an application process managed through the Department of Social Services.

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Summary

This important new study will shed light on the settlement pathways and outcomes of newly arrived humanitarian migrants, focusing particularly on the factors that promote or hinder a successful transition. With longitudinal data, it will be possible to analyse patterns and dynamics in the journeys that individual humanitarian migrants take, from arrival to citizenship. The study will thus yield the information required to make targeted policy decisions aimed at maximising settlement success for humanitarian migrants.

Endnotes

1 Eligibility for each visa category is slightly different. Visa 200 requires a person who has suffered persecution in their home country to be living outside of that country, whereas Visa 201 is for people who have not been able to leave that country and seek refuge elsewhere. People applying for Visa 202 must be supported by an authorised "proposer" and Visa 204 is for female applicants and their dependants who are living outside of their home country without the protection of a male relative.

2 Onshore visa holders have been in Australia for a longer period, either on a different visa type or in immigration/community detention.

3 "Not initiated for contact" means that the interviewer did not attempt to contact the individual/family for an interview. This was mostly due to the fact that there was a large sample available and the entire sample did not need to be contacted in order to reach the target numbers.

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