



Ballina Region
for Refugees
Welcome · Respect · Support

ADVOCACY RESOURCE KIT

Refugee Family Reunification Project

#keepfamilies together

I About this Advocacy Resource Kit

Welcome to the Refugee Family Reunification Project Advocacy Resource Kit. This kit has been created to raise awareness about the Australian government's current policies regarding refugee family reunification and to assist refugee support groups, social justice groups and faith groups on the Far North coast of New South Wales to advocate for these policies to be changed.

Many refugees in Australia who wish to be reunited with family members face difficulties due to visa restrictions and other barriers that will be explored in this kit.

This Advocacy Resource Kit is one component of the Refugee Family Reunification Project which is being implemented by Ballina Region for Refugees *. The project also aims to create a network of groups on the far north coast who can share knowledge and coordinate activities.

The project team will be available to support the network of groups involved in the project. The project runs from October 2018- March 2019.

This Advocacy Resource Kit has been developed by BR4R- Aya Pigdon (Project Worker) and Marilyn Leeks (Project Manager). For any further information about this kit or the project, please contact Aya Pigdon via email frp@br4r.org.au.

*Ballina Region for Refugees is a volunteer organisation based in Ballina, NSW and gratefully received funding for this project from the Mercy Foundation. For more information on BR4R, please [click here](#) to visit their website.

| Contents

The Importance of Advocacy - page 4

Families' Stories - page 5

How to Use the Kit - page 7

Advocacy Resource and Tool Kit - page 8

- 1 Visa information for refugee family reunion in Australia
- 2 Letter templates- write a letter to the:
Prime Minister
Opposition Leader
Members of Parliament
- 3 Call your local Member of Parliament- Tips and Script
- 4 Information stall guide
- 5 Sharing project information
- 6 Contact details for local and federal members of parliament
- 7 Other information and resources

Record of Actions – page 18

References - page 19

I The importance of advocacy

Advocacy can be a challenging activity to initiate and maintain but is essential in situations where innocent people are victims of harsh treatment and are subject to unjust government policies. Just think where we would be without the strong voices, commitment and dedication of people around the world fighting for injustices and inequalities.

Among many other international treaties and agreements, Australia is party to the 1951 'Convention relating to the Status of Refugees' and its 1967 protocol. We, as Australians, must ensure that our government upholds its obligations to these treaties and also supports the values that many of us share including justice for all, compassion, equality and keeping families together.

In addition, the government states that one of the aims in its own Refugee and Humanitarian Programme is to 'reunite refugees and people in refugee-like situations overseas with their family in Australia.' We must ensure that the government upholds its commitment to reuniting refugee families.

“Family separation undermines successful settlement outcomes.”

Refugee Council of Australia

Family reunion can be one of the most difficult factors in the settlement process for refugees. You may have heard stories about refugee families being separated between different detention facilities, states and even countries and more recently stories about families being separated as a result of medical transfers from the offshore detention facility on Nauru.

Here are a few examples of family separation and the effects on refugee families.

Father separated from partner and unborn child- 2018

Mary* is a young woman with tertiary qualifications who travelled from Pakistan to seek asylum in Australia. She was taken to Nauru by the Australian Border Force where she was detained for a number of years.

On Nauru, Mary met her partner. They both have refugee status. They were married in a Muslim ceremony in June 2017 and requested to have a civil marriage ceremony on Nauru but were refused permission.

In January 2018 Mary was 6 months pregnant and was transferred for medical treatment to the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA). Her husband was not allowed to accompany her.

Her husband remained on Nauru and was accepted to go to United States. He was told that if he went there, he would be permanently separated from his wife and unborn child in Australia. He chose to stay on Nauru.

Members of Ballina Region for Refugees (BR4R) organised people to visit Mary in MITA and advocated for her to remain in Melbourne where she had built a support network of visitors. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) proved frustrating to deal with and Mary's DHA caseworker closed down any communication.

BR4R were advised by a refugee non-government agency in Melbourne that Minister Dutton would have to give approval for Mary to remain in Melbourne and that was unlikely. It was more likely that in response to the request she would be forced to remain indefinitely in MITA and not be moved to community detention in Melbourne.

In February 2018 Mary was transferred to a community detention house in the suburbs of Adelaide. Mary was extremely distressed - separated from her husband and told he wouldn't be allowed to come to Australia, was about to give birth, and living by herself in unfamiliar Adelaide.

Nauru Friendship Group (BR4R) members organised friends from Adelaide to visit and regularly phone Mary while she settled into her house in Adelaide.

*name has been changed

Siblings and mother separated- April 2018

A Hazar woman, Narges, has not seen her mother since 2014 and continues to suffer from this separation despite numerous recommendations from medical professionals that her family be reunited. Narges said, "I understand that as a 27-year-old woman, the Australian Border Force considers me an independent. However, this is not the case in our culture and therefore life without my mother is meaningless for me.

If I was in Kabul, I might be killed once, but on Nauru, I am dying a slow death every day. Separation from my country – Afghanistan – is much easier than separation from my mother. I sincerely believe that reuniting with my mother can save my life, and humbly ask for consideration of my critical state".

Narges and her brother have both suffered mentally and physically after the separation from their mother. Narges has self-harmed and attempted suicide. Both she and her brother have been diagnosed with illnesses including severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Both have been repeatedly recommended for family reunification by the numerous service providers that are paid by the Australian government to take care of them. The psychiatrist's recommendation is for Narges to be transferred to Australia and reunited with her mother and rest of her family, as a matter of priority.

"I've seen case after case where government officials simply turn a blind eye to expert advice that indicates that family members are at risk of real harm and even death because of government inaction, and yet they ignore that advice," says Human Rights Lawyer, George Newhouse. (1)

Father has never met his son- October 2018

Mohammed is a few months shy of his second birthday, and he has never met his father. The long shadow of Australia's harsh policies to deter boat arrivals keeps this family 5000 kilometres apart. Hani, Mohammed's father, has been stuck on Nauru for the past five years.

Tina (named changed), Mohammed's mother, is among a small group of refugees who were able to leave Nauru. She was transferred to Australia due to complications with her pregnancy, and gave birth in Cairns. She has since moved interstate where she is raising Mohammed alone.

"It's hard to be a single mum," says Tina. "What makes it harder - and heartbreaking - is that my husband missed his [Mohammed's] first milestones and he missed all these precious moments here with us. I just want my child to grow up in a free and safe place, like any parent in the world." (2)

| How to use the kit

The kit has a number of different advocacy tools available and it is up to you and your group to decide how you wish to use these tools. We encourage you and your group to use effective and creative ways to educate your community and advocate for change.

If you use the letter templates and know someone with personal experience relating to refugee family reunion, we encourage you to use these personal stories as it is a very effective advocacy method. If you do use a personal story, you must gain clear and full consent and provide an opportunity for the person or people that the story is about to review and amend the content if needed.

Once you start your advocacy work, please remember to record all of your actions in the Record of Actions table (page 18) and when it has been completed, send it to frp@br4r.org.au. This is important for the project team to track the outcomes of the project and report to the funding body.

| Advocacy Resources and Tools

The kit includes the following resources and tools:

- 1 Visa information for refugee family reunion in Australia
- 2 Letter templates- write a letter to the:
Prime Minister
Opposition Leader
Members of Parliament
- 3 Call your local member of parliament- Tips and Script
- 4 Information stall guide
- 5 Sharing project information
- 6 Contact details for local and federal members of parliament
- 7 Other information and resources

1 Visa information for refugee family reunion in Australia

There are many barriers for refugee families to be reunited including limitations of eligibility for family reunion, processing priorities, prolonged delays and high costs.

Not all refugee visas entitle their holders to apply for family reunion. The main types of visas which allow for family reunion are 'Refugee and Humanitarian' visa, the 'Permanent Protection' visa and the 'Resolution of Status' visa. 'Temporary Protection' visa holders and 'Safe Haven Enterprise' visa holders are not permitted to apply for family reunion.

In addition, refugees who have arrived by boat on or after 13 August 2012 are not permitted to apply for family reunion under the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP). Due to recent changes in government policy, children under the age of 18 who arrived in Australia by boat are also excluded from seeking family reunion under the SHP.

Applications for family reunion under the SHP are processed according to a list of specified priorities. These priorities have a significant impact in determining whether an application will be successful. Humanitarian and Refugee visa holders proposing 'immediate family members' are given the highest processing priority. Permanent Protection visa holders and Resolution of Status visa holders are given the lowest processing priority and are highly unlikely to result in family reunion.

The term 'immediate family' also has a restrictive definition based on the Western concept of the nuclear family. It includes a spouse or a de facto partner, a dependent child or a parent if the proposer is under 18 years old. There are several family configurations that are excluded from this definition, including polygamous relationships, children under 18 years who are engaged to be married, children who have been informally adopted, and children over the age of 18 years who have been separated from their parents (unless financially, psychologically or physically dependent).

Refugees can only propose family members whose relationship was declared at the time of their own visa grant. A number of people fail to declare family relationships due to the family member not being present at the time, mistakes made in filling out the form, mistakes made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees workers or interpreters, or the occurrence of marriage or birth after the application was submitted. (3)

The Refugee Council of Australia, through annual refugee community consultations, has found many refugees reporting that they have to wait for many years to be reunited with their families. Based on available government data, demand exceeds supply at a rate of seven to one in relation to the SHP, which explains the extremely long waiting period.

The Refugee Council of Australia recommends absorbing SHP split-families into a new, dedicated 'Humanitarian' allocation of family visas in the General Migration Programme.

There are many other ways forward within the SHP. These options include broadening the definition of 'immediate family', allocating more places in the SHP for family reunion, and allowing unaccompanied minors who arrive as such to propose family members. (4)

2 Write a letter- templates

Writing a letter to the Prime Minister, Opposition Leaders and your local Member of Parliament is an effective advocacy strategy. The key to successful letter writing campaigns is to get high volumes of letters sent. Please ask your friends and family to join you in writing letters to demand that the government change these policies and keep refugee families together. You will find three templates below which you are welcome to use or adapt. If you have a personal story about refugee family separation, please include this in your letter.

To personalise your letter, you can:

1. Include a personal experience (with permission)
2. Highlight a local connection to the issue
3. Include relevant facts and figures

Letter to Prime Minister

00/00/2019

The Hon. Scott Morrison, MP

Prime Minister of Australia

Parliament House Canberra

ACT 2600, Australia

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you to express my concern about the current Australian government policies relating to refugee family reunion. These policies do not support the settlement process for refugees in Australia.

Refugee family reunion is a vital aspect of the overall refugee settlement process and contributes to the wellbeing of refugees in Australia. Refugees that are unable to reunite with their families can be subject to significant psychological, social, health and economic issues and this can have a lasting impact on the ability of refugees to fully participate in and contribute to Australian society.

One of the aims of the Australian Government's Refugee and Humanitarian Programme is to "reunite refugees and people in refugee-like situations overseas with their family in Australia". The current policies do not reflect this aim and do not allow refugees to reunite with their family in a fair and just way. In fact, instead of supporting the reunion of refugee families, the current government policies make it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for refugees to be reunited with their family in Australia.

I ask you to change the current Australian government policies that would enable refugee families to be reunited. Policy changes include: reducing the costs and processing times of applications; increasing the visa options for family reunion; removing current restrictions on family reunion for refugees who came by boat; and increasing the support offered to people applying for family reunion.

Making family reunion easier and less stressful for refugees would have lasting benefits both for those individuals and their families, and for the Australian community and economy.

I trust you will consider my submission and I eagerly await your reply outlining what actions you will take on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

(Your signature, name and contact details)

Letter to Opposition Leader

00/00/2019

Hon B. Shorten MP

Leader of the Opposition

Suite 1A 12 Hall Street

Moonee Ponds Victoria 3039

Dear Mr. Shorten,

I am writing to you to express my concern about the current Australian government policies relating to refugee family reunion. These policies do not support the settlement process for refugees in Australia.

Refugee family reunion is a vital aspect of the overall refugee settlement process and contributes to the wellbeing of refugees in Australia. Refugees that are unable to reunite with their families can be subject to significant psychological, social, health and economic issues and this can have a lasting impact on the ability of refugees to fully participate in and contribute to Australian society.

One of the aims of the Australian Government's Refugee and Humanitarian Programme is to "reunite refugees and people in refugee-like situations overseas with their family in Australia". The current policies do not reflect this aim and do not allow refugees to reunite with their family in a fair and just way. In fact, instead of supporting the reunion of refugee families, the current government policies make it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for refugees to be reunited with their family in Australia.

I ask you to consider changes to the current Australian government policies that would enable refugee families to be reunited. Policy changes might include: reducing the costs and processing times of applications; increasing the visa options for family reunion; removing current restrictions on family reunion for refugees who came by boat; and increasing the support offered to people applying for family reunion.

Making family reunion easier and less stressful for refugees would have lasting benefits both for those individuals and their families, and for the Australian community and economy.

I trust you will consider my submission and I eagerly await your reply outlining what actions you will take on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

(Your signature, name and contact details)

Letter to your local member of parliament

00/00/2019

<INSERT ADDRESS OF MP>

Dear <insert MP's name>,

I live in, your electorate, and I am considering my vote for the forthcoming federal election. I am writing to you to express my concern about the current Australian government policies relating to refugee family reunion. These policies do not support the settlement process for refugees in Australia.

Refugee family reunion is a vital aspect of the overall refugee settlement process and contributes to the wellbeing of refugees in Australia. Refugees that are unable to reunite with their families can be subject to significant psychological, social, health and economic issues and this can have a lasting impact on the ability of refugees to fully participate in and contribute to Australian society.

One of the aims of the Australian Government's Refugee and Humanitarian Programme is to "reunite refugees and people in refugee-like situations overseas with their family in Australia". The current policies do not reflect this aim and do not allow refugees to reunite with their family in a fair and just way. In fact, instead of supporting the reunion of refugee families, the current government policies make it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for refugees to be reunited with their family in Australia.

I ask you to support changes to your party's policies that would enable refugee families to be reunited. Policy changes include: reducing the costs and processing times of applications; increasing the visa options for family reunion; removing current restrictions on family reunion for refugees who came by boat; and increasing the support offered to people applying for family reunion.

Making family reunion easier and less stressful for refugees would have lasting benefits both for those individuals and their families, and for the Australian community and economy.

I trust you will consider my submission and I eagerly await your reply outlining what actions you will take on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

(Your signature, name and contact details)

3 Call your local member of parliament- Tips and Script

Thank you for taking time to advocate for changes to policies that affect the reunification of refugee families. Before you call your local Member of Parliament, here are a few tips.



TIPS

- Start by introducing yourself, and tell them which suburb you live in within their electorate.
- You will probably be talking to someone in their staff. Be kind and respectful but tell them exactly how you feel.
- Ask questions about what your MP's position is and if supportive, what they are going to **do** about it.

PHONE CALLING SCRIPT

“

Hello, my name is _____. I live in _____ **<your electorate>**.
As your constituent, I want _____ **<name of your MP>** to
advocate for changes to the governments refugee family reunion
policies.

*The government has imposed visa restrictions, increased costs and made
punitive decisions all of which have resulted in the separation of refugee
families. These policies continue to have devastating effects on the
mental, social and communal health of refugees.*

*I want to know, will **<name of your MP>** do the right thing and advocate
for these policies to be changed to allow refugees to apply for their
families to join them in Australia in a fair and just way? Irrespective of
party positions, I think this should be something all MPs with good values
should support. This isn't about politics, the right and left. This is about
keeping families together!*

*I am asking you to take action to support your party to change these
policies*

”

4 Information Stall Guide

You or your group might like to set up an information stall at a market, at your church or another community event to raise awareness and engage the general public on this issue. We encourage you to print information flyers and letter templates for people to sign on the spot. See the guide below for steps on how to engage people.



STEP 1 | GET THEIR ATTENTION

Ask a question e.g. “Do you know many refugee families remain separated after they arrive in Australia?”

STEP 2 | PROVIDE INFORMATION

Give facts, case studies, share stories and ways they can advocate for change in policy e.g. lobbying members of parliament.

STEP 3 | OFFER SOLUTIONS & TAKE ACTION

Ask if they can sign letters/postcards/petitions; sign them up to your group/newsletter/volunteering/events.

5 Sharing Project Information

Social Media

The groups involved in the project are invited to share information, resources, ideas and actions on a closed Facebook group. If you would like to join this group, please [click here](#).

Ballina Region for Refugees will share this Resource Kit on their website and social media.



Please share with others on your social media platform.

Please use hashtag **#keepfamielstogether**

Information Flyer

Print this flyer and share.

REFUGEE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROJECT

The Refugee Family Reunification Project funded by Ballina Region for Refugees aims to work with a range of refugee support and advocacy groups, faith groups and social justice groups on the Far North Coast of NSW to raise awareness and advocate for changes to the federal government's refugee family reunion policies leading up to the 2019 federal election.

The government has imposed visa restrictions, increased costs and made punitive decisions all of which have resulted in the separation of refugee families. These policies continue to have devastating effects on the mental, social and communal health of refugee families.

An Advocacy Resource Kit has been developed to raise awareness about the government's current policies, and includes tools and resources to advocate for change.

If you or your community group are interested in becoming involved in this project, please visit www.br4r.org.au or email Project Worker, Aya Pigdon, frp@br4r.org.au.



6 Contact details for local and federal parliament members

Members of Parliament

Hon Justine Elliot- Member for Richmond- ALP

PO Box 6996 Tweed Heads South, NSW, 2486

Telephone: (07) 5523 4371

Mr Kevin Hogan MP- Member for Page- The Nationals

63 Molesworth Street, Lismore, NSW 2480

Telephone: (02) 6277 4746

Minister for Immigration

Hon David Coleman M.P.

22 Revesby Place, Revesby, NSW 2212

Postal address: PO Box 564, Revesby, NSW, 2212

Telephone: (02) 9771 3400

Minister for Home Affairs

Hon Peter Dutton

PO Box 2012, Strathpine, Qld 4500

Postal address: PO Box 6022, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Telephone: (07) 3205 9977

Federal

Hon S Morrison PM

Suite 102, Level 1 30 Kingsway, Cronulla, NSW 2230

Hon B. Shorten MP (Leader of the Opposition)

Suite 1A 12 Hall Street, Moonee Ponds, VIC 3039

Postal address: PO Box 214, Moonee Ponds, VIC, 3039

Telephone: (03) 9326 1300

For more contact details- https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members

7 Other information and resources

NEWS

[Children transferred from Nauru for medical transfer](#)

[Families separated amid ongoing medical transfers](#)

FAMILY REUNION

Australia:

[Addressing the Pain of separation of refugee families- Refugee Council of Australia](#)

[Syrian refugee reunited with family in Cambodia after Nauru, Christmas Island detention](#)

International:

[Germany misses 2018 targets for family reunifications](#)

[UK Ministers urged to relax immigration rules on family reunions](#)

HOME AFFAIRS

[Home Affairs- Refugee and Humanitarian Program](#)

[Home Affairs- Review into integration employment and settlement outcomes](#)

PROMOTION

Settlement Council of Australia- Register your advocacy activities- <http://scoa.org.au/innovation-centre/promote-your-innovation/>

REFUGEE SUPPORT and ADVOCACY GROUPS

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre- www.asrc.org.au

Refugee Council of Australia- www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Get Up- www.getup.org.au

RECORD OF ACTIONS

Refugee Family Reunification Project

Group name.....

Contact number.....

Action	Who (did you call, send a letter to or visit?)	Date	Comments
Letters			
Visit to MP's office			
Phone calls			
Stall			

Once your group has completed your actions, please send this table to frp@br4r.org.au. The information that we collect from all of the groups is very important for reporting purposes. Thank you.

References

- [1 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/08/im-dying-a-slow-death-hazara-refugees-plead-for-release-from-nauru](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/08/im-dying-a-slow-death-hazara-refugees-plead-for-release-from-nauru)
- [2 https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/separated-refugee-families-launch-legal-action-against-australian-government-at-un-20181009-p508kg.html](https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/separated-refugee-families-launch-legal-action-against-australian-government-at-un-20181009-p508kg.html)
- [3 https://law.blogs.latrobe.edu.au/2016/09/26/family-reunion-for-refugees-in-australia-restrictive-laws-and-policies/](https://law.blogs.latrobe.edu.au/2016/09/26/family-reunion-for-refugees-in-australia-restrictive-laws-and-policies/)
- [4 https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Intake-sub_2018_2019_RCOA_final.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Intake-sub_2018_2019_RCOA_final.pdf)