



MEDIA RELEASE

UNHCR welcomes move to take children and families out of detention

The United Nations Refugee Agency has today welcomed Australia's announcement that it intends to begin moving children and vulnerable family groups out of detention and into community-based accommodation.

"UNHCR welcomes the decision to begin moving children and vulnerable families into more appropriate community-based accommodation," UNHCR Regional Representative Richard Towle said today.

"Experience shows that prolonged detention can have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of people who have often already suffered from torture or trauma before arriving in this country."

"This is particularly the case for children, and so we welcome the decision to progressively begin moving them out of detention."

"Australia has an excellent network of NGOs and service providers experienced in helping asylum-seekers in the community and we welcome the Government's recognition that these groups will have an important role to play in the new arrangements," Mr Towle said.

With the Government's announcement of new detention facilities at Northam and Inverbrackie, UNHCR has also taken the opportunity to repeat its longstanding position that the detention of any asylum-seeker is inherently undesirable once health, identity and security checks are completed.

"While we welcome positive moves to take children and some family groups out of detention, we hope that Australia will also consider exploring alternatives to detention for other asylum-seekers who pose no identified health or security risks to the community," Mr Towle said.

Given the growing number of asylum-seekers in detention in Australia, including children and families, UNHCR has, over recent months, been conducting a round of visits to immigration detention facilities.

UNHCR will continue discussions with the Government and other key stakeholders on how to minimize the impact of detention arrangements on the health and welfare of asylum-seekers in Australia.

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