

Factsheet 1: Migration and settlement in a new country

Settling into your new community might take some time

Arriving in Australia can bring up many different emotions. At first, you might feel relieved, safe, or excited. But after some time, you might experience other emotions like feeling lost, overwhelmed, or tired. It can be a big shock to learn a new language, understand a new culture, and deal with new systems. It can be tiring having to learn so much. You may feel uneasy or uncomfortable because everything is so different.

You may also feel sad about leaving everything and everyone you knew behind. Your financial situation might have changed a lot, and you might feel guilty for leaving while other people stayed. You might worry about the safety of those left behind. You might also feel helpless if your loved ones are in a difficult situation.

Some people find it hard to make decisions and accept help, especially if they are used to being very independent. Some people feel they must be strong and not show their feelings. If you have difficulties with a visa, you might not feel safe because of the uncertainty about your future.

“ You have a lot of stress because it’s not your country. When we first came, everything was different.” Bana, refugee survivor

“ When we were on our way here, we had a general idea that there was such a continent and such a country, and that it would be somehow different there. When we came here, it came as a shock to us.”

Vasyl, refugee survivor

“ I was here with two children, and I felt so sad and alone. When I see the news about my country - my brother is still there - I feel so sad and homeless.”

Caroleen, refugee survivor



Adjusting to a new culture

When people settle in a new country, they may experience various stages of adjustment:

Arrival stage:

An initial feeling of hope and excitement. Everything is new and people have high expectations about their new home.

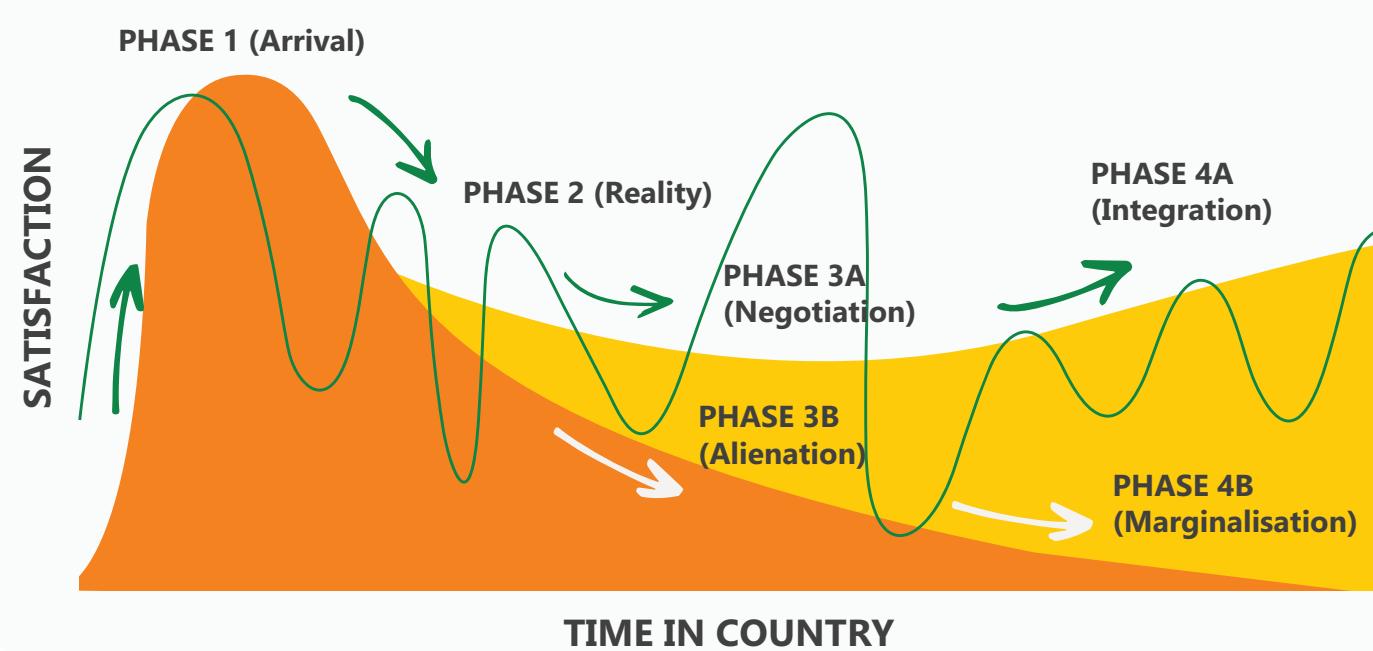
Reality stage:

A period of feeling homesick, lonely and unhappy. People may experience frustration, confusion, overwhelm and even anger as cultural differences become more apparent.

Integration stage:

The process of becoming more integrated into the new culture. People may start to feel more comfortable and confident and at home in their new environment.

PHASES OF REFUGEE ADJUSTMENT



Adapted from the Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2006

The graph above shows that there can be many ups and downs as people move through these stages. It also shows that some people may experience ongoing challenges and feelings of not belonging in a community if they do not receive support.

Everyone's experience of adjustment is unique. People will move through stages at different rates depending on their circumstances. All people will not necessarily experience all stages.

It is important to know that all feelings and adjustment experiences are normal. In Australia, it is safe to ask for the support you need. With time, and with the support of loved ones, communities and services, thriving is possible.

“When I talk about my past trauma it helps me a lot.”
QPASTT counselling client

To speak with QPASTT or find out more about our services, please call 07 3391 6677 or visit qpastt.org.au.

QPASTT is the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma. It is a community organisation which provides a variety of flexible and culturally sensitive support services to people who have been tortured or who have suffered refugee-related trauma. QPASTT has offices across Queensland.