

# The Sudanese Refugees and Fire Hazard Study



# Executive Summary

One particular area of focus for QFRS is to ensure that its services are inclusive of all Queenslanders, whether they permanently reside or are visiting the State. To this end, QFRS has been working on an Ethnic Communities Project, which aims to develop strategies to ensure that all people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD), are able to access QFRS community safety information and participate in QFRS programs.

The Sudanese refugees and Fire Hazard study has been undertaken as part of the Ethnic Communities Project, and specifically targets the needs of African refugees, in particular Sudanese refugees. Sudanese refugees were targeted because the country of Sudan is the second largest originator of refugees in the world and increasing numbers of Sudanese people are seeking refuge in Australia.

The city of Toowoomba was chosen as the site for this pilot project for two main reasons – firstly, because it is currently home to a growing number of Sudanese refugees and secondly, because it is located in a bushfire-risk area.

The following research project aimed to:

- Determine the extent of fire safety knowledge of newly arrived Sudanese refugees when they first arrived in Australia;
- Gain an understanding of specific fire and general safety information required by newly arrived Sudanese refugees; and
- Identify strategies to reach newly arrived Sudanese refugees with fire and general safety messages.

Four focus groups were conducted in Toowoomba with various members of the Sudanese community. The focus groups explored issues including fire and general safety knowledge, familiarity with fire safety products, and communication channels for getting messages across to the community.

The major findings of the research project identified that:

- In terms of fire safety, the prime focus of Sudanese refugees was on response rather than prevention;
- Sudanese refugees are unfamiliar with:
  - the different methods of cooking and the types of electrical appliances used in Australia;
  - how to extinguish different types of fires (i.e. oil fires, electrical fires)
  - smoke alarms (installation, maintenance and correct location to install in the house)
  - the triple zero (000) process;
- In the event of a fire in their home, the primary concern for refugees was for the safety of their children and family;
- Refugees perceived the main difficulty encountered when calling 000 are language/communication barriers.

Several broad recommendations have been made for consideration by QFRS in order to develop strategies and support tools to reach Sudanese refugees entering Australia.

1. QFRS to build rapport with the Sudanese community in Queensland;
2. QFRS to educate the Sudanese community on the emergency response and triple zero (000) processes;
3. QFRS to educate the Sudanese community on basic fire prevention/detection/response strategies. In particular, these messages should include information on the installation, use and maintenance of smoke alarms;
4. QFRS to ensure that fire safety information produced for the Sudanese community recognises the varied literacy and numeracy levels of Sudanese refugees entering Australia;
5. QFRS to collaborate with the Electrical Safety Office to explore strategies to reach the Sudanese community on electrical safety issues;
6. QFRS to work with various service providers to develop strategies to disseminate fire safety information to the Sudanese community;
7. QFRS to educate Emergency Service Staff on cultural issues relevant to African refugees;
8. QFRS to work in partnership with key service providers and local community members to review recommendations and develop support tools and strategies.

## Acknowledgments

The author of this report wishes to acknowledge the various service providers and local community members in Toowoomba and Brisbane who have provided ongoing support and guidance with this research project. Special thanks must go to Diane Warr (Queensland Fire and Rescue Service) the staff at the Southern Institute of TAFE, the Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre, and Anglicare for their tremendous support and for providing the venue and facilities to conduct the focus groups.

A very special thankyou is also reserved for Judy Newton and Maria Orifici (Queensland Fire and Rescue Service) and Dr Alison Cottrell (Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre) for taking the time to share their extensive knowledge and providing invaluable support, input and guidance with this research.

Thanks must also be extended to the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and James Cook University for providing the funds to conduct this research.

Sincere thanks must also be given to members of the Sudanese community in Toowoomba who were gracious enough to assist Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in this research project. Without their support and willingness to participate, this study would not have been possible.

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April 2006

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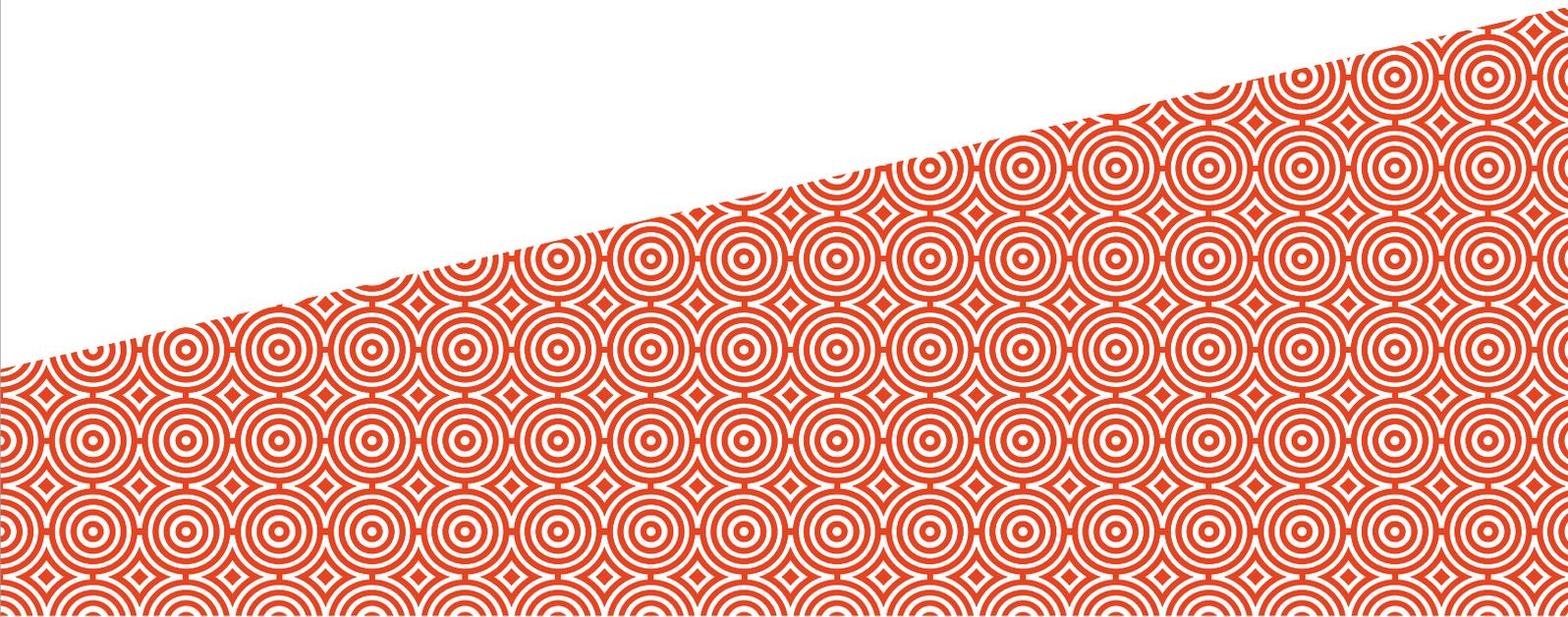
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## Abbreviations/Acronyms

In this report, the following abbreviations and acronyms are used;

<b>DIMIA</b>	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
<b>QFRS</b>	Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
<b>TRAMS</b>	Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The purpose of this research project is to use the knowledge gained to assist in the development of a home, fire and general safety strategy for the Sudanese community. The project explores the history of conflict of the Sudanese refugees in their country of origin and other relevant information about preparedness and mitigation behaviours in relation to fire in their home country. Primary research was also undertaken through the conduct of four focus groups with the Sudanese community in Toowoomba. This enabled an opportunity for discussion to take place, where the Sudanese community could provide input on their values and perceptions of fire risk in a multi-hazard context which takes into account their refugee status. The research explored a number of areas including fire and general safety, familiarity with fire safety products, and communication channels for getting messages across to the community.

The findings produced from this project will ultimately provide QFRS with the information to develop a strategy and various support tools that meets the particular information and communication needs of Sudanese refugees. While this project focuses on issues relating to the Sudanese community, it is anticipated that the findings and recommendations outlined in this report can be easily transferred onto African refugees throughout Queensland.

## 1.2 PROJECT AIMS

The overall objectives of this study were to:

- Determine the extent of fire safety knowledge of newly arrived Sudanese refugees when they first arrived in Australia;
- Gain a better understanding of specific fire and general safety information required by newly arrived Sudanese refugees; and
- Identify strategies to reach newly arrived Sudanese refugees with fire and general safety messages.

To achieve these aims, the following areas were investigated:

- family, cultural and living background, education levels;
- the nature of experiences with fire prior to arriving in Australia/cultural significance of fire;
- sources of information regarding how to deal with fire;
- perceived difficulties in dealing with Emergency Services in South East Queensland;
- adequacy of fire safety messages in Australia; and
- suggested improvements to current communication channels.

# Chapter 2 – Background

## 2.1 THE COUNTRY OF SUDAN

### 2.1.1 People, Religion and Culture

Sudan's population is one of the most diverse on the African continent. There are two distinct major cultures, Arab and black African, with hundreds of ethnic and tribal subdivisions and language groups (Global Security, 2005). The population of Sudan in July 2005 was estimated at 40.2 million with a new census planned for 2007 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2006).

The northern states of Sudan are home to approximately 22 million Sudanese who are predominately Arabic-speaking Muslims, though the majority also uses a non-Arabic mother tongue e.g. Nubian, Beja, Fur, Nuban, Ingessana, etc (Global Security, 2005). Among these are several distinct tribal groups: the Kababish of northern Kordofan, a camel-raising people; the Ja'alin and Shaigiyya groups of settled tribes along the rivers; the semi-nomadic Baggara of Kordofan and Darfur; the Hamitic Beja in the Red Sea area and Nubians of the northern Nile areas, some of whom have been resettled on the Atbara River; and the Negroid Nuba of southern Kordofan and Fur in the western reaches of the country (Global Security, 2005). The northern states encompass most of Sudan and include the majority of urban centres.

In sharp contrast, southern Sudan is predominately a rural, subsistence economy with an estimated population of 6 million (Global Security, 2005). Here, the Sudanese practice mostly indigenous beliefs, although the introduction of Christian missionaries into the region has converted some (Central Intelligence Agency, 2006). Southern Sudan also contains several tribal groups and a greater number of language groups than in the north. Of the many African tribes in Sudan, the largest is the Dinka, whose population is estimated at more than 1 million. The Dinka are classified as Nilotic tribes, along with the Shilluk and the Nuer. The Azande, Bor, and Jo Luo are "Sudanic" tribes in the west, and the Acholi and Lotuhu are located in the far south, extending into Uganda (Central Intelligence Agency, 2006).

Fire is imperative to the Sudanese subsistence. A large proportion of households in Sudan, particularly those from the south rely on fire for their daily cooking needs. In most households, cooking is undertaken outside the home on open fires using fuels such as coal or wood. Given the rural predominance in the south, most people practice shifting cultivation<sup>1</sup> or are pastoralists. In this practice, fire is used to clear the land and provide ash as a 'fertiliser' for the soil.



Figure 2.1 The Country of Sudan

### 2.1.2 Civil War

War has raged in Sudan for all but 11 years since its independence in 1956, making it possibly the longest civil conflict in the world (Martin, 2002). The prolonged war fundamentally stems from the unequal distribution of political and economic resources within the country and the strong hold on power relations by northern Sudan since independence. This is further complicated by the discovery of substantial oil reserves in the south that are used primarily for export and hard currency by the northern-dominated Khartoum government (Fluehr-Lobban and Lobban, 2001). Added to the political issue is a cultural one in which the North has tried to spread both its religion and language to a resistant South (Deng, 2001).

The ongoing conflict between Islamist government forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and other armed opposition groups has hindered Sudan's economic and political development and has resulted in countless human rights abuses by all parties, including executions, torture, abductions, sexual violence, forcible recruitment of child soldiers and slavery (Deng, 2001). More than two million people have died as a result of war and related causes. Approximately five million people have been displaced, while half a million have fled across an international border (Deng, 2001).



Almost fifty years after its independence, Sudan is still struggling with the basic elements of building a democratic, just and stable state (Lesch, 2001). Any continued attempt to Islamicize the south by politics or force will be met with fierce resistance, as has been the case historically. The fighting between the north and south shows no signs of diminishing, despite ongoing peace talks and partial and temporary ceasefires (Lesch, 2001). The current situation in Sudan has resulted in the country being recognised as the second largest originator of refugees in the world (Centacare and Lifeline Darling Downs, 2005).

## 2.2 MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

### 2.2.1 African migrants

In Australia, a new wave of migration has begun as refugees from Africa seek a safer place to live, away from the horrors of civil war, famine and countless human rights abuses in their home countries. These migrants arrive in search of new opportunities for better jobs, services and more freedom. Africa is the current priority region for resettlement both internationally and in Australia. Comprising the Africa region in 2005 are Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, Congolese, Rwandans, Burundians, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis and Sudanese (Australian Government, 2005).

The largest nationality group resettled in Australia in the past two years is Sudanese (Australian Government, 2005). Since 2001, there have been more than 14,000 Sudanese refugees and people in humanitarian need resettled in Australia (Media Centre). From the period of 2003/2004, 6147 Sudanese people were granted humanitarian visas in Australia (Centacare and Lifeline Darling Downs, 2005). In 2004/2005 the number of visas slightly decreased to 5220 (DIMIA, 2005).

Figure 2 shows the number of Sudanese settlers in Australia from 1994-95 to 2004-05.

AUSTRALIA HUMANITARIAN SETTLER ARRIVALS BY BIRTHPLACE, 1994-95 TO 2004-05										
1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
361	452	365	430	566	594	1,145	1,078	2,775	4,591	5,654

Figure 2.2 DIMIA, 2005

Figure 3 depicts the numbers of Sudanese who have settled in each Australia State or Territory during 2004-05.

STATE/TERRITORY OF INTENDED RESIDENCE								
NSW	Vic.	Qld.	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Total
1,424	2,022	708	407	789	172	67	65	5,654

Figure 2.3 DIMIA, 2005

The number of Sudanese who have settled in Queensland from 1994-1995 to 2004-2005 is illustrated in Figure 4.

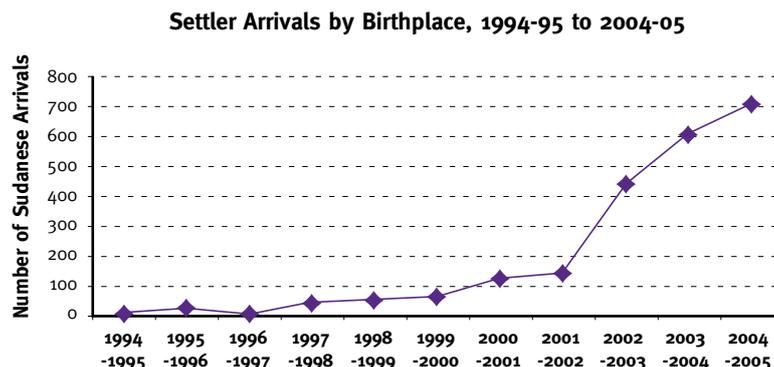


Figure 2.4 DIMIA, 2005



### 2.2.2 Sudanese Community in Toowoomba

Before 2001, the city of Toowoomba had a consistent but relatively small number of refugees settling in the locality however during the past five years this number has rapidly increased. A study conducted in Toowoomba in June 2005 by Centacare and Lifeline Darling Downs estimates the population of Southern Sudanese living in the area at 750, however numbers are now thought to have increased to roughly 800 in 2006<sup>2</sup>. At the time the study was conducted, the most prominent language spoken in the Sudanese community was Dinka, followed by Arabic and then English (Centacare and Lifeline Darling Downs, 2005). The vast majority of Sudanese living in Toowoomba originated from Southern Sudan with a smaller number of these newly arrived people coming from other locations, e.g. Myanmar and Sierra Leone. The findings from the 2005 study also indicate that the Sudanese population is a very young one with roughly 95% of respondents under the age of 40 (Centacare and Lifeline Darling Downs, 2005). Given such a young population, a large proportion of Sudanese people in Toowoomba are enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

### 2.2.3 The effects of Migration to Australia

Sudanese refugees arriving in Australia not only face the stresses of migration related to sudden changes in language and culture but must also contend with a past that is often filled with extremely traumatic experiences. Most have left their home countries without their immediate families as a result of war and or other major political disturbances (Brough et al., 2003). A significant proportion of Sudanese in Toowoomba have entered the country under refugee status<sup>3</sup>. The circumstances under which these people have had to leave their homes were often extremely traumatic. Some have often experienced civil conflicts, such as torture, rape, family separation and loss, and imprisonment and those who have not have, lived in fear of such possibilities for several years (Brough et al., 2003). Not surprisingly, the trauma Sudanese refugees have experienced places them at risk of a range of psychological problems including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Sowey, 2005).

Refugees also commonly experience a great deal of culture shock. Despite Australia being a multicultural society, African communities are not yet established. These communities are classified as “small and emerging”, that is, small in membership and generally lacking in community structure and resources. The cultural distance that must be covered, especially for rural Sudanese must be enormous. Shortly after arriving in Australia, refugees are faced with a period of intensive assistance where they are inundated with vast amounts of written and verbal information relating to Australian customs and law, housing, employment, social security, transport, education and childcare, health, finance and various other local government and community services (DIMIA, 2005). For most, comprehending and absorbing this vital information is extremely difficult given a large number of refugees have received limited or no prior education (often due to many years being spent in refugee camps) (Sowey, 2005). Access to various local government and community services in particular can often be a major difficulty. Apart from the obvious barrier of language, there is often a lack of knowledge and awareness of available services and difficulties in understanding the current information provided.

Migration can also have a significant effect on the country of arrival. Inevitably the arrival of refugees in a new country can create tensions between different cultural groups as they are forced to live together. Racism and discrimination remain very real issues in Toowoomba. There have been reports of racial tension between the Sudanese and Aboriginal and Islander youth of Toowoomba. Furthermore, incidents of racism between the local residents and the Sudanese community have also been reported<sup>4</sup>.

Given the imminent difficulties Sudanese refugees face living in Australia, it is evident that further research is necessary to not only ensure that QFRS messages are successfully received and understood by the Sudanese but that the community is accessing and utilising QFRS services.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

### 3.1 STUDY AREA

The city of Toowoomba is located 132km west of Queensland's capital city, Brisbane, and two hours drive from the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast beaches (Figure 3.1). In 2003, the city's population was estimated at 113,687 making Toowoomba Australia's second largest inland city after Canberra, the nation's capital (Wikipedia, 2006). Given the large concentration of Sudanese located in Toowoomba, the city became the ideal site for QFRS to conduct this research.



Figure 3.1 City of Toowoomba (Wikipedia, 2006)

### 3.2 CONSULTATION

Development of the topic guide for the focus groups was preceded by consultation with various stakeholders and local community representatives. A list of the groups consulted is contained in Appendix A. Completion of the consultation phase provided guidance for the development of appropriate questions for the topic guide (Appendix B).



PLATE 3.1 FOCUS GROUP 1 – TAFE

### 3.3 FOCUS GROUPS

A total of four focus groups were conducted during March 2005 with members of the Sudanese community in Toowoomba. These focus groups were organised with the assistance and cooperation of a range of government and non-government organisations, and individuals in Toowoomba and Brisbane. The first two were held at the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE and were conducted as part of the weekly English class. The third was carried out at the Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre (TRAMS) and was incorporated into the women’s weekly cooking class. The final focus group involved staff members at the Refugee Settlement Support Centre, Anglicare.

Each focus group ran for approximately 45-50 minutes and followed the topic guide outlined in Appendix B. An interpreter (fluent in both Dinka and Sudanese Arabic) was present at each session to ensure effective communication between the facilitator and participants. Incentives were also provided in order to encourage attendance and included food and beverages, various fire safety products, pamphlets and souvenirs. A Kitchen Fire Van demonstration was conducted after the focus groups which provided participants information on fire preparedness, evacuation procedures, alongside with the demonstration of the correct way to extinguish an oil cooking fire.

### 3.2 LIMITATIONS

This research project is not without limitations. The participants of this research varied in both number and diversity. Given the number of participants was fairly small and consisted of a larger proportion of females, the views expressed by participants cannot be assumed to represent those of the broader community. The responses given however are considered to have some validity given they belong to members of the Sudanese community.



PLATE 3.2 FOCUS GROUP 1 – TAFE

## Chapter 4 – Research Findings

The following section provides the research findings from four focus groups conducted in March 2006 in Toowoomba.

### USE OF FIRE IN AFRICA:

Most refugees have experience with basic heating and cooking methods including coal, wood and kerosene. The cooking was usually done outside on an open fire. Fire also has special cultural relevance to some refugees' backgrounds. One participant stated that incense was used after childbirth as a purification technique to drive out bad spirits.

Some participants had experienced bushfires in their homeland. People used a traditional method to extinguish the fire which involved beating the fire with sticks and leaves. The focus group findings indicate that in terms of fire in Africa, the focus is on response rather than prevention.



PLATE 3.1 FOCUS GROUP 1 – TAFE

### MAJOR SAFETY CONCERNS IN AUSTRALIA:

Refugees appear to be aware that household fires occur in Queensland and that they do present a risk. Concerns relate to the different methods of cooking used in Australia. The majority of Sudanese refugees have only experienced basic heating and cooking methods, predominately open fires.

*“In a refugee camp it is very rare that people cook inside the house. People cook outside the house and there is a totally different way of avoiding any fire risk than here.”*

Many were unfamiliar with the types of electrical appliances and sources of heating that are common in Australia e.g. electricity and gas. Furthermore, most participants lacked basic knowledge about safety features in the home, particularly circuit breakers and safety switches.

A further concern raised by refugees was the lack of understanding for the differences between electrical fires and other types of fires. Subsequently, several participants expressed concerns relating to the different ways to extinguish fires within the home. One participant stated that in Africa she was told to always use water to put out fire and therefore was very anxious to learn the correct way to extinguish fires.

*“In our country we don't use gas or electricity for cooking. We just use wood or charcoal for cooking. The only thing we use to put out fire is water. All of our kids that we brought here have that idea. When there is a fire, there is a need to pour water.”*

Fears of their children starting a fire in their home are also pressing concerns amongst refugees. These concerns are further exemplified given the young age (approximately 8 years old) in which Sudanese children begin cooking in the household.

There was common recognition amongst participants that fire is not restricted to within the home. Refugees are aware that bushfires occur in the natural environment and therefore pose safety risks to both their lives and property in Toowoomba.

One participant considered his current situation here in Australia to be safer than life in Africa given he's away from the horrors or civil war.

*“When I first came here I feel like I am secure like because the situation I have been in my country is not here. We have a civil war in my country but its not here so I thought that this place is safe.”*

### MAJOR CONCERNS REGARDING SAFETY IN THE HOME:

Most refugees perceived their house to be at risk of fire. Safety concerns within the home emulate those expressed about general safety in Australia.

Refugees were particularly concerned about their children starting a fire within their home. Concerns were again raised as to the correct method of extinguishing house fires. Participants perceive that there is heightened fire risk in their homes here in Australia which stems largely from the variation in cooking practices and the use of electrical appliances (i.e. electricity, gas etc).

In the event of a fire in their home refugees primary concern was for the safety of their children and family. Possessions were very rarely mentioned and therefore did not appear to be of real significance to refugees in comparison to the lives of their family and friends.

*“If there is a fire in your house your biggest concern is the life of your kids”*



PLATE 3.4 FOCUS GROUP 3 – TRAMS



## SAFETY MEASURES TAKEN IN HOME TO REDUCE FIRE RISK

Whilst there was good unprompted mention of household smoke alarms several participants did not fully understand their purpose. Over half of the participants had smoke alarms in their house yet for most the functionality of the device was unknown.

*“When I moved into my new house, it didn’t have an alarm and I went to the market and bought my own but it didn’t sound. Is it working properly or is not in good order?”*

Furthermore, the need for them to be functioning properly does not appear to be fully appreciated. This is evidenced by the fact that none knew how to install and maintain their alarms. Moreover, few participants knew the correct location to install smoke alarms in their house.

The lack of knowledge on smoke alarms is not surprising given that the majority of participants did not have device installed in their home in Africa. Most resided in fairly basic accommodation and often in rural areas. Whilst participants acknowledged the use of smoke alarms in Africa, they indicated that their existence was limited to luxurious homes situated mostly in urban areas.

*“Some houses in Kenya have alarms. The luxurious houses have them, the houses for rich people”.*

Subsequently, many refugees were first introduced to smoke alarms in Australia through an experience in their home where the alarm sounded.

*“When I heard the noise (from the smoke alarm) I was very confused. I opened the window, I opened everything, I opened fridge and there was still noise so I ran out.”*

Only one participant acknowledged that his home contained a fire extinguisher and fire blanket. Additionally, none had considered creating a detailed fire evacuation plan for their home. For most, the only training received in evacuating a building was at TAFE during a fire drill.

*“When we are back home we know if there is a fire you can run away but here nobody has shown us where the set place to run to is.”*

*“We have been trained here in TAFE. They put on the alarm and if it makes sound there is a place where we can go and meet.”*

## ACTIONS IN THE CASE OF A FIRE

Several participants indicated that in the event of a fire, they would phone triple zero (000) and ask for the fire brigade before evacuating themselves and family members from the residence.

Others suggested their reaction would be controlled by the nature of the house fire. If controllable, they indicated they would try to extinguish the fire themselves. Only when they perceived the fire to be beyond their control would they call the fire brigade. One participant was hesitant to call the fire brigade given his lack of English and reverted to calling his neighbour instead to help extinguish the fire in his home.

These actions suggest that in terms of fire safety in Australia, refugees tend to focus on response rather than prevention.

## SOURCE OF FIRE SAFETY INFORMATION

The majority of refugees have experienced some form of education or learning that has served to increase their fire safety knowledge. This fire safety education often occurred in their home country and/or in Australia. For others however, there has been little or no information about fire safety and any knowledge about the dangers of fire has been acquired since arriving in Australia.

There are a number of ways in which fire safety information may have been provided to Sudanese refugees, including;

1. **Orientation in Africa:** some participants had undergone orientation (up to 3 days) in their home country before arriving in Australia. However not all refugees have this opportunity as they are often forced to leave the country with very short notice.

*“Some were taught about fire in orientation in Egypt before coming to Australia. They us told to call 000 for Fire, Police and Ambulance”.*

2. On arrival in Australia through various **Refugee Settlement Programs and support agencies** e.g. Anglicare and TRAMS.
3. **Education Institutions:** Some Refugees receive basic fire safety information during English language classes at TAFE.
4. **Family and Friends:** Some of the Sudanese refugees in Toowoomba did not enter Australia through a Refugee Settlement Program. More often, their entry was funded by relatives currently residing in the country. Consequently these migrants are reliant on family and friends to provide them the basic fire safety information and training.

*“There are some people who are fully government funded and they pass through this program where they have contact with you (Anglicare) and there are other people who rely on there family to pass on this information”.*

## AWARENESS OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Refugees acknowledged that emergency services existed in their home country, although given most were from rural areas they generally had limited or no contact with the service. Similarly, in Australia few participants reported having dealings with emergency services, nonetheless most identified the three services comprising emergency services – fire; ambulance; police.





Participants understood that by calling triple zero (000) they would be required to specify what service was needed (i.e. fire, police, ambulance).

*“We have been trained when we first arrived here. You can dial triple zero. You can get the police, hospital and fire. They will ask you what your emergency is about.”*

Most refugees were uncertain about the emergency response and triple zero process. Findings indicated they were unsure how their address is recorded on the phone, the time it takes emergency services to arrive at their residence.

## BARRIERS IN CONTACTING EMERGENCY SERVICES

The main difficulties refugees thought they may encounter when calling 000 included:

1. The language barrier which may make it difficult for refugees to communicate effectively with Emergency Services staff. People generally felt uncomfortable calling QFRS if there was a fire in their home due to these concerns.

*“If you can’t speak English how can you talk to the policeman? He can not help you. How can you tell him your address so that he can come?”*

2. Some participants were concerned that their house phone may not be operational in the event of a fire.

Most participants said that they would feel comfortable if approached by Emergency Services staff. Uniforms worn by Emergency Services staff are not considered to evoke feelings of fear for the majority of refugees. The only uniform considered to potentially raise concerns for refugees was that of the police given the association with uniformed police back in Africa.

## CURRENT COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

1. **Within a couple days of arrival:** There was strong support for communication of fire safety messages at this stage. Several participants stated that they had not received any information on arrival and feel that it would have been highly beneficial.
2. Participants stressed the need for reinforcement/refreshment of safety messages **a few months after arrival**. Refugees felt that more detailed fire safety information and training could be provided at this time.

## CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF QFRS FIRE SAFETY MESSAGES

Two QFRS fire safety brochures were shown to refugees during the focus groups.

1. *Working Smoke Alarms Can Save Lives*
2. *Fire – are you prepared?*

The first brochure was written in both English and Arabic.

The majority of refugees at TAFE were able to read and understand the information contained in the brochures written in English. Only a small percentage could read those brochures written in Arabic given a large proportion of participants only spoke Dinka. English proficiency and literacy levels were generally lower for those interviewed at TRAMS. Consequently the majority were unable to read or understand the information contained in both the English and Arabic brochures. Refugees consulted at Anglicare could read and clearly understand the fire safety information contained both in the English and Arabic brochures.

## PREFERRED WAY OF RECEIVING INFORMATION

Refugees preferred to receive information through the following modes of communication:

1. **Educations institution of TAFE:** Participants advised that fire safety information could be provided to the community as part of their English language class.
2. **Settlement support groups and services:** Refugees also considered support groups and service providers such as TRAMS and Anglicare to be ideal locations for conveying fire safety messages to the community.
3. **Radio:** Some participants identified the Sudanese Community Radio as an effective way to broadcast messages about workshops and courses where fire safety information and training could be provided. This radio airs every Friday morning from 6am to 8am and presenters speak in both Arabic and Dinka.
4. **Church:** Refugees also suggested that churches in Toowoomba could be a means for advising Sudanese of upcoming workshops and courses on fire safety.

## PREFERRED INFORMATION MEDIUM

Refugees preferred to receive information through the following avenues:

- **Face to face demonstrations:** Participants were partial to the idea of face to face interaction with Emergency Service staff where basic fire safety information and training could be exchanged (e.g. demonstration at fire station/kitchen fire van).
- **Visual Resources:** Refugees showed strong support for the idea of developing visual resources such as a video or DVD. Participants felt that innovative resources such as these would be especially beneficial to those with low literacy competence.
- **Brochures/Pamphlets:** Participants indicated that brochures and pamphlets are a useful way for migrants to absorb fire safety messages. However there are obvious limitations with this type of medium given the variation of literacy levels amongst refugees.
- **Emergency Card (ooo):** One participant had received a small card in Northern Territory that specified the number to call in an emergency (triple zero) and the 3 services that could be contacted from calling this number (Fire, Ambulance, Police). She stored this card in her wallet where it could be easily accessed in the case of an emergency.

For written materials, participants stressed the need for QFRS to provide resources in three different languages – Arabic, Dinka and English.

## Chapter 5 – Recommendations

Several recommendations have been made for consideration by QFRS in order to develop strategies and support tools to reach Sudanese refugees entering Australia.

1. QFRS to build rapport with the Sudanese community in Queensland;
2. QFRS to educate the Sudanese community on the emergency response and triple zero (000) processes;
3. QFRS to educate the Sudanese community on basic fire prevention/detection/response strategies. In particular, these messages should include information on the installation, use and maintenance of smoke alarms.
4. QFRS to ensure that the fire safety information produced for the Sudanese community recognises the varied literacy and numeracy levels of Sudanese refugees entering Australia.
5. QFRS to collaborate with the Electrical Safety Office to explore strategies to reach the Sudanese community on electrical safety issues.
6. QFRS to work with various service providers to develop strategies to disseminate fire safety information to the Sudanese community.
7. QFRS to educate Emergency Service staff on cultural issues relevant to African refugees.
8. QFRS to work in partnership with key service providers and local community members to review recommendations and develop support tools and strategies.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The findings from the research project indicate that the Sudanese community are highly motivated and eager to learn more about fire and general safety. Although most refugees have received some form of education on fire safety, the language barrier makes accessibility and utilisation of QFRS services an overwhelming and difficult task for refugees.

As the number of African refugees being resettled in Australia continues to increase, so does the need for appropriate meaningful and culturally appropriate support tools and strategies to help educate these emerging communities. It is hoped that the issues and practical suggestions canvassed in this report will form the basis from which such mechanisms can be developed. Ultimately QFRS must take on a targeted approach to delivering fire safety messages to the Sudanese community. Through positive partnerships with service providers and the Sudanese community, appropriate strategies can be developed that can help to increase the level of fire safety knowledge and awareness of African refugees in Australia.

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## Appendix A – Organisations/Institutions Consulted

- Mission Australia
- Multicultural Affairs Queensland
- Refugee and Migrant Ministry
- Refugee Settlement Support Interagency (RSSI)
- Toowoomba City Council
- Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre (TRAMS)
- Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE – Toowoomba
- Queensland Police Service – Toowoomba Crime Prevention Unit
- Queensland Fire and Rescue Service – Toowoomba
- Queensland Ambulance Service – Toowoomba

## Appendix B – Focus Group Topic Guide

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- Explain topic and why the project is being conducted – what are we hoping to achieve and why
- Confidentiality
- Seek permission to tape record
- No right or wrong answers – here to listen.

### 2. FIRE USE AND KNOWLEDGE IN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (Omit – Q's too sensitive)

**Objective: To understand how fire safety knowledge in Australia is influenced by cultural background and the degree of fire experiences before migration.**

We will be talking about your fire experiences and your knowledge of fire safety in some detail but first, I would like you to think back to before you migrated to Australia:

- How did you use fire back in your homeland?  
Possible follow on Q's: when you were cooking – was it an open fire? What type of house did you live in? Does fire have any cultural significance?
- If you experienced a fire in your home back in Sudan, what did you do? If nothing, why?  
Possible follow on Q's: What actions would you take? Who is involved? Would you seek help or fight the fire by yourself?

### 3. PERCEPTION OF FIRE RISK

**Objective: To determine the Sudanese community's perception of fire risk.**

- What were your major safety concerns upon arriving to Australia? (determine from answers if fire is a concern and how it compares with other safety risks)
- What are some of your concerns regarding safety at home?
- Do you think your house is at risk of a fire? Why?
- What would you be most concerned about if your house caught on fire?

### 4. SAFETY AWARENESS/KNOWLEDGE

**Objective: To assess the awareness and knowledge of the Sudanese community towards fire safety.**

- How many of you have experienced a fire in your home here in Australia?
- If so, what did you do? OR lets say there was a fire in your house, what would you do?
- Possible flow on question: what fire protection measure do you have in your home?
- Where did you get this knowledge about fire safety/procedures from?  
Follow on question if Emergency Services is not mentioned previously: Are you aware of Emergency Services? Would you call them? At what point would you call them? What concerns would you have in contacting ES?
- If they did call them: Did you understand the Q's asked by EM staff? Did you know how to respond?
- If not: why didn't you call them?/What would you say are the main reasons why people do not seek help from the fire brigade if they were to experience a fire?

### 5. COMMUNICATION OF FIRE SAFETY MEASURES

**Objective: Assess the best way to communicate QFRS safety messages to newly arrived Sudanese Migrants.**

- What information did you receive on arrival in Australia? (general Q)
  - Was there any other safety info that you felt you should have received?
  - Was any of it fire related?
  - Could you understand this information? Why not? (Possible example e.g. pamphlet: ask if they have seen this, can they understand the message? Why/why not?)
  - What do you think is the best way of getting fire information across to people like you? How can we make it easier to learn and understand?
  - Possible questions to explore:
    - Is/was it easier to understand English when written or spoken?
    - Do you think as Dvd would be useful for the Sudanese Community?
- 1 Shifting cultivation is the process by which people take an area of land to use for agriculture, only to abandon it a short time later. This often involves clearing of a piece of land followed by two or three years of farming until the soil loses fertility. Once the land becomes inadequate for crop production, it is left to be reclaimed by natural vegetation
  - 2 Interview with Sharyn McCarthy (Lifeline Darling Downs) on 08/03/06.
  - 3 Interview with Albino Thiik (TRAMS) on 08/03/06
  - 4 Interview with Sergeant Mike Jordan (Queensland Police Unit) on 16/02/06