

Founded in 2001, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) is Australia's largest independent aid and advocacy organisation for people seeking asylum and refugees, supporting and empowering people at the most critical junctures of their journey.

The ASRC's 2025-2026 budget priorities are informed by consultation with refugees and our employment, education, legal programs and frontline services, working with tens of thousands of people seeking asylum and refugees over two decades.

This year's budget will be handed down in the lead up to the Federal election. The areas of expenditure will send a clear message as to the priorities of the Albanese Government. We are seeking action and expenditure in the below areas as a reflection of compassionate, fair policies and treatment of people seeking asylum and refugees.

Recommendations

- 1. FREEDOM: Fund the immediate evacuation of refugees remaining in Papua New Guinea and Nauru to Australia and end the policy of offshoring people seeking asylum and refugees:** The Federal Government must immediately fund the evacuation of refugees and their families remaining in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Nauru to Australia while resettlement options are found and progressed. The health crisis offshore continues to deepen for refugees exiled to PNG eleven years ago by the Australian Government, and people recently sent to Nauru. Lives are at risk and people are without adequate health care.
- 2. FREEDOM: Commit to ending Australia's immigration detention regime:** The Albanese Government will spend a staggering \$1.1 billion in 2024-25 to maintain a cruel onshore immigration detention regime, and over \$1 billion will be spent between 2023-2024 to 2026-2027 on detaining refugees offshore. This funding should be invested into alternatives to detention, medical evacuation, resettlement and social support.
- 3. FAIRNESS: Urgently resource the transition to permanency for 8,125 people failed by the Fast Track process:** These men, women and children have been living in our communities for over a decade, still live with the fear and uncertainty they could be taken away from the towns and suburbs they call home. The ASRC calls on the Federal Government to immediately end this cruelty and provide an opportunity for people to rebuild their lives here in Australia with certainty.
- 4. FAIRNESS: Facilitate family reunion for those refugees who have been separated from their family due to lengthy visa processing delays:** The Federal Government should invest in reforming family reunion processes for refugees. This includes adopting a more inclusive definition of the family unit as many cannot access the Family Stream of the Migration Program due to complex processes and visa fees.
- 5. SAFETY: Provide ongoing work and study rights for people seeking asylum during the refugee status determination process:** There are thousands of people seeking asylum in Australia who are unable to work due to their visa status. By granting work and

study rights to people seeking asylum while they await a final outcome for their Protection Visa application, more people could become financially independent and less reliant on government-funded services.

- 6. SAFETY: Ensure universal safety and mainstream social support for all refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia:** People seeking asylum in Australia are systematically excluded from mainstream social support systems that others in the community can access. Without this vital support, people seeking asylum are prevented from rebuilding their lives, integrating into the community and engaging effectively with the protection visa application process.

- 7. HUMANITY: Increase Australia's humanitarian intake:** The ALP won the 2022 election with a policy of increasing the humanitarian intake to 27,000 places per year, and 10,000 additional complementary pathway processes. However, the Albanese Government to date has only taken small steps towards meeting those commitments. In light of the escalating violence and impacts of war and conflict globally, the ASRC believes the Government should immediately deliver on promises made and fill the allocated places, as well as, consider increasing the Humanitarian Intake to 50,000 places per year.

1. Fund the immediate evacuation of refugees and families remaining in Papua New Guinea and Nauru to Australia

The harm of offshore detention is well known with over 14 deaths, documented child abuse, physical and sexual assault, medical neglect and a history of urgent court injunctions for medical transfer of hundreds of people to Australia.

Despite this, the Australian Government continues to fund offshore processing, and spent more than a staggering \$12 billion from July 2012 to June 2024, and set aside \$604.4 million in the 2024-2025 budget, or \$600,000 per person detained on Nauru.

The UN Human Rights Committee's recent landmark decision found that Australia violated a human rights treaty, and is responsible for the arbitrary detention of people who sought safety here and were exiled to offshore detention, and has a duty of care to them. The Australian Government must be held to account for the safety, health and wellbeing of refugees it has sent offshore and must urgently follow the UN's recommendations to provide crucial reparations.

The introduction of the Migration Amendment Act in December 2024 has paved the way for the Australian Government to now spend even more money to enter into "third country reception arrangements" with foreign countries to remove people from Australia. In February 2025, Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke announced that three people would be removed to Nauru with details of likely exorbitant costs unrevealed. This move sets a dangerous precedent, raising serious concerns about human rights, refoulement and fairness, not to mention the same questions of safety, health and wellbeing.

Snapshot of the current situation

NAURU

There remains a lack of transparency about the treatment, conditions and plan for approximately 100 refugees and people seeking asylum on Nauru who have been detained there from two to eighteen months. History on Nauru is repeating with people reporting physical and mental health deterioration the longer they remain there.

People on Nauru are destitute and lacking in nutrition as they struggle to survive on the meagre \$230 per fortnight allowance. People are arbitrarily and indefinitely detained, and stuck. Some are already being recognised as refugees, however there are currently no resettlement options available to them.

PNG

After being exiled to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (PNG) over 11 years ago, there are 39 refugees remaining in Port Moresby, many with partners and children. Subjected to long term detention, family separation, human rights abuses, medical neglect, deprivation and ongoing uncertainty, the majority are extremely unwell and traumatised.

People are suffering an enduring health and humanitarian crisis. 100% of refugees suffer from physical health conditions, 40% suffer chronic suicidality and a history of suicide attempts, and 20% are at imminent risk of loss of life.

Whilst the Australian Government has recently provided time-limited funding and capacity building support to the PNG Government to reinstate some support to the remaining refugees, they are facing barriers to accessing new healthcare provider Paradise hospital. This precarious situation is causing significant distress and physical and mental health deterioration for the group, and risk of loss of life.

Resettlement to date has been minimal and drawn-out with many refugees too unwell to engage in resettlement processes. Unless they are urgently evacuated to Australia and their resettlement is prioritised, the threat to life and safety becomes more critical by the day.

Recommendation 1.1: Redirect funding from maintaining offshore detention centres to urgently evacuate refugees and their families to safety in Australia.

Recommendation 1.2: Provide refugees and their families with urgent medical care, housing, and social support services in Australia whilst processing their claims for protection.

Recommendation 1.3: End the policy of sending people seeking asylum and refugees offshore, and until that time find and prioritise permanent resettlement options for people, and process resettlement applications swiftly.

Recommendation 1.4: Repeal the mandatory visa cancellation regime and reform the discretionary visa cancellation process to ensure that Australia's international obligations, connection to the Australian community and family unity are afforded greater consideration. This includes not transferring people out of Australia to third countries such as Nauru where they can be subject to chain refoulement.

2. Commit to ending Australia's immigration detention regime

Successive governments have chosen to spend billions of dollars on a wholly unnecessary, inhumane and ineffective policy of holding people seeking asylum offshore and in a network of onshore detention centres, instead of investing in alternatives to detention that are humane and cost-effective.

The total allocation for offshore processing since the policy was reintroduced in 2012 is now \$12.8 billion. This does not include proposed allocation payments made to Nauru and other countries under the recently introduced 'third country reception arrangements' under the Migration Amendment Act 2024. These amounts have not been disclosed.

The most recent budget allocated a staggering \$1.16 billion to maintain an onshore immigration detention regime with \$1 billion annually over forward estimates. With the average time someone spends in immigration detention reaching 472 days when there are clear alternatives available, reform is urgently needed.

The Albanese Government is also spending over \$600 million to hold refugees offshore in Nauru in 2024-2025. This is despite a complete lack of transparency about how many people are being held there, and no information provided to the public as to whether those currently on Nauru are receiving appropriate legal and medical support.

The moral and financial black hole that constitutes Australia's onshore and offshore immigration detention regime has come at the cost of Australia's international standing, the allocation of resources to viable alternatives and the human rights of people seeking safety.

"[The Australian Government] spends so much money for our detention here, but at the end of the day, we get nothing out of that, we are not getting services, we are not getting tangible [outcomes]. What is the point of wasting the resources of the people? The government needs to be logical and take us from this miserable place." A refugee held in PNG for more than a decade

In addition, refugees held offshore in Nauru and PNG should be urgently evacuated to Australia for medical care as well as provided a clear and efficient pathway to permanent resettlement.

The disproportionate spending on the detention of refugees and people seeking asylum is a choice. A choice where the Government decides that harming and traumatising people who came to this country to seek protection is a better use of resources than humane treatment that respects human rights and allows people to live in safety and with dignity.

It's time we end this dark chapter in Australia's history, close down detention centres and redirect that funding to providing support to refugees and people seeking asylum so that they can rebuild their lives in Australia. Offshoring responsibilities towards people seeking asylum and refugees by payment to third countries for undisclosed sums of money goes against our values as a democracy and our obligations under the Refugee Convention and International Bill of Human Rights.

Recommendation 2.1: Reallocate funding for immigration detention (onshore and offshore) to supporting people seeking asylum and refugees in the Australian community with housing, access to physical and mental health care and all mainstream social support.

Recommendation 2.2: End the policy of transferring people offshore and urgently transfer people held in Nauru and Papua New Guinea to Australia.

3. Urgently resource the transition to permanency for over 8,000 people failed by the Fast Track process

The Albanese Government came to power due to the Australian public wanting a more compassionate and caring approach to refugees. Promising to provide permanent visas for refugees and people seeking asylum who have been subjected to damaging temporary visas and an unfair visa processing system was a key part of this commitment.

In February 2023, the ASRC commended the Federal Government for providing a pathway to permanency for approximately 19,700 refugees living on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs). It was a turning point for many and an important step towards restoring justice for refugees in Australia.

In May 2024, we welcomed the establishment of the Administrative Review Tribunal (ART), abolishing the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA). Concerningly, no solution has yet been provided by the Government to remedy the injustice faced by the thousands of people who were failed by the IAA and fundamentally-flawed Fast Track process.

“We are refugees who came to Australia seeking safety, but after a decade still do not have a clear pathway to permanent residency. The last government stacked the refugee system against us. They called this system ‘Fast Track’ — but it wasn’t fast and it wasn’t fair.” *A Tamil refugee in Australia for over a decade*

Approximately 8,000 men, women and children who were ignored in the Government’s February 2023 announcement and who have been living in our communities for over a decade, still live with the fear and uncertainty they could be taken away from the towns and suburbs they call home. The ASRC calls on the Federal Government to immediately end this cruelty and provide a pathway to permanency and an opportunity for people to rebuild their lives here in Australia with certainty.

To prevent further harm to newly arrived refugees and people seeking asylum, the ASRC urges the Government to commit to abolishing the temporary protection regime in Australia.

While current temporary protection visa holders have the opportunity to apply for permanent visas, the legislative framework for temporary protection still exists, meaning that certain refugees who arrive in Australia will continue to be subjected to this detrimental regime.

Recommendation 3.1: Urgently resource the transition to permanency for over 8,000 people failed by the Fast Track process, including those stuck in the judicial review processes.

Recommendation 3.2: Abolish temporary protection regime and provide permanent protection to all refugees.

4. Acknowledge family separation and reform family reunion processes

The Australian Government should reform the family reunion process for refugees by prioritising the reunification of ‘aged-out’ adult children with their parents and adopt a broader definition of the family unit. Many refugees are unable to access the Family Stream of the Migration Program due to complex procedures and prohibitive visa fees.

While the introduction of the Resolution of Status (RoS) visa has provided certainty for some individuals on temporary protection visas, many have now been separated from their partners and children for over a decade. Those seeking to reunite with family members continue to face significant challenges and refugees who were previously on TPVs and SHEVs often still have

family members in critical danger. These individuals may be hiding in their home countries or living in unstable conditions in third countries, where their safety is at risk. Circumstances that need attention and reform include:

- Expansion of Family Reunion Options: Even with permanent visas, refugees are restricted from sponsoring their families through the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP), forcing them to rely on the Migration Program, which carries exorbitant fees with some visa processes exceeding \$20,000.
- Expanding the definition of Immediate Family: The current definition of “immediate family” excludes some unmarried adult children, older relatives living with the family, stepchildren of deceased biological parents, and children who were adopted in certain countries.

Recommendation 4.1: Facilitate family reunion for those refugees who have been separated from their family due to lengthy visa processing delays.

5. Provide ongoing work and study rights for people seeking asylum

There are currently thousands of people seeking asylum in Australia who are unable to work due to their visa status. This is despite people seeking asylum being ready to work, contribute to their communities and rebuild their lives here in Australia.

While there is no clear data on how many people seeking asylum in Australia have work rights, the ASRC estimates that as many as 20% of people seeking asylum and refugees on bridging visas at any given time are without work rights. **Of the 7,000 people seeking asylum who access services at the ASRC, the vast majority are without work and study rights.**

The Government’s refusal to provide people with the right to work on an ongoing basis prevents people seeking asylum to find employment and steady income. Short-term bridging visas, which often last only for 3 to 6 months before renewal is required, are a disincentive for employers to hire people seeking asylum. In addition, study and work rights are sometimes mutually exclusive conditions on bridging visas, meaning people cannot upskill or participate in training to effectively contribute to their workplaces and further their careers.

By not providing work rights, people seeking asylum are also at risk of exploitation by unscrupulous employers underpaying workers and forcing people to work in unsafe conditions. This can lead to increasing rates of modern slavery in our communities.

By the Government granting work and study rights to people seeking asylum and their families while they await a final outcome for their Protection visa application, more people could become financially independent and less reliant on government-funded services. This in turn would alleviate pressure on the budget, permitting these resources to be reallocated to other needs.

The impacts of people being denied the right to support themselves leads to poverty and can result in destitution and homelessness. It also creates further pressure on the charity sector,

already struggling to meet the growing demand for services in the midst of a cost-of-living and housing crisis.

Recommendation 5.1: Provide ongoing work and study rights for people seeking asylum for the duration of the refugee status determination process.

6. Ensure universal safety and mainstream social support for all refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia

People seeking asylum in Australia are systematically excluded from mainstream social support systems that others in the community can access. Without this vital support, people are prevented from rebuilding their lives, integrating into the community and engaging effectively with the protection visa application process. In particular, as many people seeking asylum are not granted the right to work, access to mainstream social support is critical for their survival.

Through the Australian Labor Party (ALP) National Platform, the Albanese Government has [committed](#) to providing people seeking asylum “access to funded migration assistance, and to appropriate social services, including income, crisis housing, healthcare, mental health, community, education and English as a Second Language support during the assessment of the claim for protection”.

ASRC advocates for this to be provided through mainstream social support services through Centrelink. However, over recent years there has been a substantial decrease in the current, and insufficient, “transitional allowance” provided to people seeking asylum through Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS).

The support provided through SRSS can be indispensable, in particular the specialist counselling and casework, however the income support is wholly inadequate to meet the costs of basic necessities such as housing and food. 12% of people who are receiving SRSS do not receive income support at all and are denied the right to work and access to Medicare, a clear example of policy choices enforcing poverty and poor health outcomes.

This situation has put a disproportionate and unsustainable workload on state governments and, in particular, charities to fill the vacuum left by the Federal Government.

Since [SRSS were cut](#) in 2018, ASRC has continued to see a sharp rise in the demand for its services. Over recent months, the ASRC has seen a 45% increase in the demand for our community food program as people are forced into poverty and destitution without adequate support .

The demand for housing support remains critical, with growing numbers of ASRC members facing homelessness, in housing distress or at imminent risk of homelessness. ASRC members are unfortunately just a small sample of a national crisis of increasing housing insecurity facing refugees during their time in Australia.

The lack of affordable housing and worsening housing crisis impacts significantly on refugees and their families being able to live safely and with dignity in the community. Refugees and people seeking asylum already experience greater barriers to accessing secure housing for several reasons including lack of work and study rights, language barriers and discrimination.

While cost of living pressures have clearly played a role in the increased need for housing, food and utilities support, these very issues have also reduced the capacity of [charities](#), including the ASRC, to meet growing need at the same time as the Federal Government is withdrawing from its responsibilities.

Despite the clear and urgent need for universal safety and mainstream social support for all refugees and people seeking asylum, in the 2024-25 budget estimated expenditure on payments for Asylum Seeker Support administered by Services Australia was just \$16.4 million in 2023-24, less than half of the \$36.9 million allocated in the previous year's Budget. For 2024-25, just \$17 million has been allocated.

Spending on this vital program has been cut by 95% since 2015-16, from \$300 million to just \$16 million.

Far too many people are still excluded from accessing vital healthcare services, with 100% of people who access ASRC's GP clinic not having Medicare. There is also a clear lack of any Government support for people seeking asylum who live with disabilities, many who came to Australia seeking safety from persecution in their home countries.

The ASRC hopes to see more investment in future budgets which ensures all refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia are able to access healthcare through Medicare, to maintain their dignity, health and safety while waiting for visa outcomes.

Recommendation 6.1: Provide people who have sought asylum access to mainstream social support services, including Medicare and Centrelink programs such as Special Benefit, public housing, specialist services as well as work and study rights.

Recommendation 6.2: Prioritise providing specialist support for people seeking asylum who live with disabilities.

Recommendation 6.3: Re-establish funding SRSS to at least to pre-2018 levels of \$300 million and expand eligibility.

7. Increase Australia's humanitarian intake

The ALP won the election with a policy of increasing the humanitarian intake to 27,000 places per year plus an additional 10,000 complementary places. However, the Albanese Government to date has only taken small steps towards meeting those commitments.

The 2021-2022 budget omitted this policy entirely, maintaining the Morrison Government's humanitarian intake maximum of 13,750 people. The final number of humanitarian visas

provided that budget year was 13,307 visas – which came after the historically low intake of 5,947 places in 2020-21.

The ASRC welcomed the increase in places maintained in the 2024-2025 budget. However, it was disappointing that the Special Humanitarian Intake, which is separate from the Humanitarian Intake, had been **included** as part of the reported increase. Further, despite the growing numbers of displaced people worldwide as a result of man-made conflict and natural disaster, the places are yet to be filled.

With Australia still failing to adequately respond to its global responsibility and the number of people displaced globally continuing to rise, increasing the humanitarian intake cannot be delayed any longer.

The ALP's commitment to “a humanitarian migration program that reasonably responds to international humanitarian crises as they arise” demands a robust and appropriate response to the devastating loss of life, violence and breach of human rights occurring in conflicts globally.

The impact of ongoing war and displacement continues to impact people and families and it is critical Australia is prepared to provide safety to those brought here as a result of the escalating violence and enable them to live with dignity.

In light of this, the Government should increase the Humanitarian Intake to at least 50,000 places per year.

Recommendation 7.1: Increase Australia's humanitarian intake to at least 50,000 places per year.