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Australian Government  
Department of Home Affairs



# Discussion Paper

Australia's Humanitarian Program 2025-26

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# Introduction

The Australian Government recognises the importance of engaging with the community to ensure continued support for Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program (the Humanitarian Program) and to provide greater transparency to the public. The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) publishes a Discussion Paper each year to inform the public and seek their views on the management and composition of the Humanitarian Program, including options for diversifying the offshore resettlement component and strengthening Humanitarian Program outcomes.

As part of the consultation process, the Government consults with a broad range of stakeholders including:

- state and territory governments and Commonwealth agencies;
- peak refugee and humanitarian organisations; and
- the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The annual consultation process is critical in informing the composition and policy settings of forward-looking Program Years. The 2024-25 consultation summary has been published on the Department's website.

This paper provides background information to inform written submissions for the 2025-26 Humanitarian Program.

It includes an overview of the Humanitarian Program and information on its key features. Planning for the management and composition of the 2025-26 Humanitarian Program will consider Australia's capacity to facilitate the successful entry and settlement of humanitarian entrants into our society, and expert advice to manage any impact to the Australian community.

## **When providing your submission, you are invited to give particular consideration to the following questions:**

1. What should the composition of Australia's 2025-26 Humanitarian Program be and why? What do you think should be the proportion split between the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (which also includes the Community Support Program) categories in the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program?
2. The Humanitarian Program is under significant pressure from unprecedented demand including as a result of multiple refugee crises across the world and limited global resettlement places. How should the Humanitarian Program respond to these crises while balancing the commitment made for protracted situations, specific cohorts and supporting our region?
3. Due to an increase of interest in the Community Support Program and limited places under the Humanitarian Program, the Community Support Program is oversubscribed with processing times increasing from 6-12 months in 2022-23 to a minimum of 8 years as at June 2025. We understand the Humanitarian Program, while focussed on working age primary applicants, is currently being primarily used for family reunion. What can we do to address this?
4. How can the Government better plan and coordinate responses to emergency humanitarian crises? How can private or community supported initiatives assist people displaced by emergency humanitarian crises?

If you would like to make a written submission on Australia's 2025-26 Humanitarian Program, please email [humanitarian.consultation@homeaffairs.gov.au](mailto:humanitarian.consultation@homeaffairs.gov.au). Submissions close at **5pm on Wednesday, 6 August 2025**.

## Australia's role as a resettlement country

The Government is committed to generous and flexible humanitarian and settlement programs that meet Australia's international protection obligations, and position Australia as a global leader in international resettlement efforts. The Humanitarian Program demonstrates Australia's commitment to global resettlement efforts while providing ongoing economic and social benefits to Australia. It highlights the ways in which humanitarian entrants can enrich Australian society and boost the economy with their skills, talent and diverse cultural vibrancy.

Australia's settlement services for refugee and humanitarian entrants are internationally recognised for their expertise and breadth of support. Australia seeks to support other countries to establish and grow their refugee resettlement programs, particularly on how to successfully settle refugees and humanitarian entrants.

Today Australia continues to contribute to global responsibility sharing, growing support provision, and championing complementary pathways such as community sponsorship, labour mobility and family reunion opportunities, including through:

- progressing 2023 Global Refugee Forum commitments to support other States to establish and grow their own refugee resettlement programs and complementary pathways;
- core membership of the Resettlement Diplomacy Network (RDN);
- establishing the Australian Refugee Advisory Panel (ARAP) in 2023 to provide a formal mechanism for meaningful refugee participation in Australia's engagement with the international refugee protection system.
- co-chair, with Canada, of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) States Network; and
- founding membership and current chair of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility (GTF).

## The Humanitarian Program

The Humanitarian Program has a long history of providing resettlement for refugees and others who are displaced as a result of conflict, persecution and human rights abuses. The Humanitarian Program's intake is drawn from a range of nationalities, ethnic and religious groups, reflecting global displacement arising from conflict and persecution. It operates flexibly to respond effectively to evolving humanitarian emergencies and global resettlement needs. The principles guiding the Humanitarian Program are that:

- we prioritise those caseloads most in need of global resettlement in line with guidance and referrals from UNHCR; and
- we target vulnerable cohorts within refugee populations.

To ensure Australia continues to play its part, the Government will work closely with both the international and domestic community, particularly the UNHCR, as we deliver Australia's humanitarian intake. Consistent with the approach adopted by the UNHCR, Australia will prioritise the most vulnerable cohorts. This will focus on people who are outside their home country and are:

- assessed as refugees by the UNHCR and referred to Australia for resettlement;
- applicants proposed by an immediate family member in Australia; and
- vulnerable cohorts within refugee populations, including women and children, LGBTIQI+ and other identified minority groups.

All Humanitarian Program applications are assessed on an individual basis, with applicants required to demonstrate their humanitarian need. Visa grants are subject to rigorous assessment, including health, character and security checks, which are conducted before individuals are granted a visa.

There are two components within the Humanitarian Program: the offshore component, focussing on providing permanent resettlement in Australia to refugees and people in humanitarian need outside their home country (and outside Australia); and the onshore component which is reserved for people who arrive in Australia lawfully, seek Australia's protection and are found to engage Australia's *non-refoulement* (non-return) obligations.

The global humanitarian environment is shifting due to several factors, geopolitical repositioning including multiple international crises and the US' suspension of humanitarian visa and cuts to foreign aid programs. Demand for places under the Humanitarian Program is unprecedented, following record levels of forced displacement, and is expected to continue due to global instability. Australia has limited capacity for humanitarian resettlement and cannot resettle all who apply for a Refugee and Humanitarian visa. There are currently over 300,000 applicants onhand (of which over 270,000 are offshore applicants) under the Humanitarian Program. The Government's commitment includes 26,500 dedicated places allocated to Afghan nationals from 2021-22 to 2025-26. Australia will need to adapt its Humanitarian Program to address the changing pressures in its region and the globe.

To position the Humanitarian Program to be able to respond to these changing global circumstances, consideration will need to be given to the 2025-26 Humanitarian Program to balance support of people who have been displaced long-term with support for those impacted by new conflicts, with a more localised focus in supporting our neighbours within the Asia region.

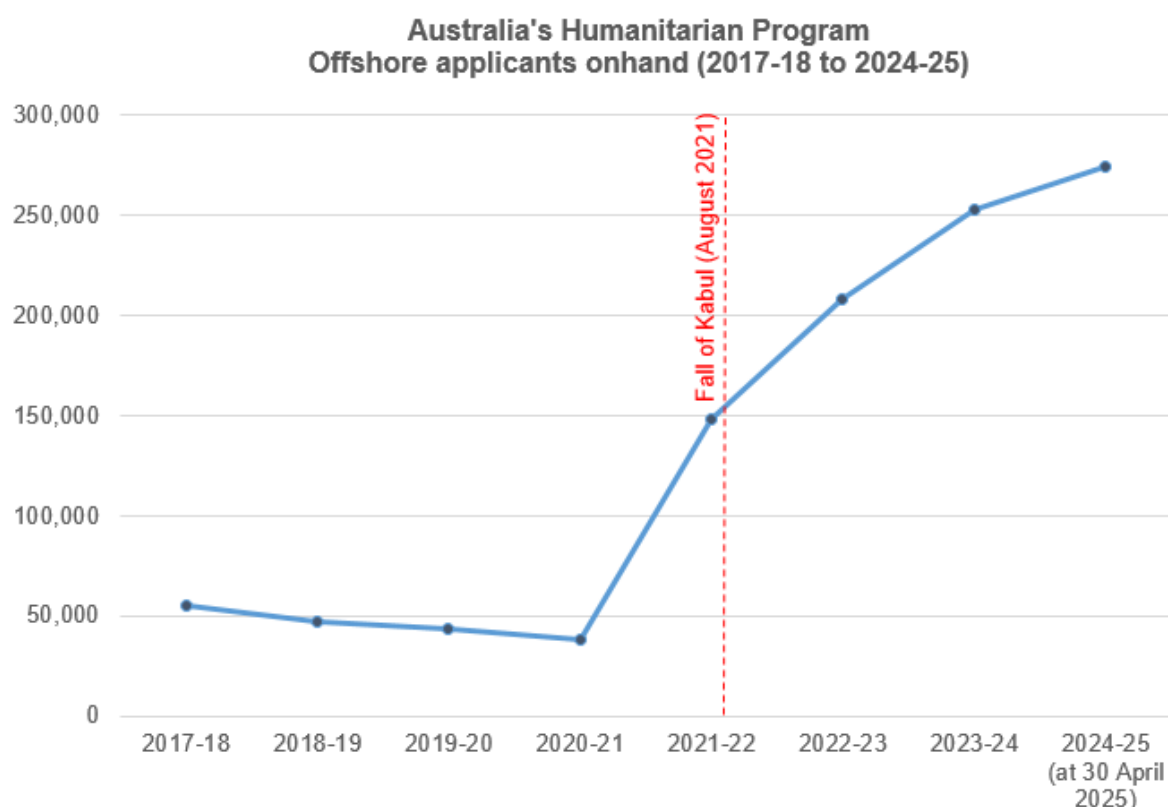


Figure. Offshore applicants onhand under the Humanitarian Program (2017-18 to 2024-25)

### Offshore Component

The offshore component of the Humanitarian Program has three parts:

- Refugee category;
- Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) category; and
- Community Support Program (CSP).

## Refugee Category

The Refugee category assists people who are subject to persecution in their home country and for whom resettlement in Australia is the best durable solution. Australia works closely with the UNHCR, which refers many of the successful applicants for resettlement in Australia under this category. The Refugee category has four subclasses:

- Refugee visa (subclass 200) – For people who the UNHCR has referred to Australia for resettlement.
- In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201) – For people who are still living in their country and have been unable to leave. Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program is designed primarily to assist people who have fled their home country because of persecution and severe human rights abuses, and who have no options for return or for resettlement in another country. This visa subclass is predominantly used for Afghan Locally Engaged Employees who were employed with the Australian Government in Afghanistan.
- Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203) – For people who the UNHCR has referred to Australia for emergency resettlement. This visa is reserved for a few applicants annually whose life or liberty is in immediate danger.
- Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) – For women who do not have the protection of a partner or a relative and are in danger of victimisation. Most Woman at Risk visas are granted to those referred by the UNHCR or proposed by a close family member in Australia.
  - To satisfy the criteria for a Woman at Risk visa, women must not be living with a male person who is over 18 years of age or have protection from a relative nearby.
  - Women who are granted a Woman at Risk visa may not be eligible to propose or sponsor a spouse or de-facto partner under the Humanitarian Program (subclass 202 or 204) or the family program (subclass 820 or 309) for five years.
  - If the application includes a child under 18, the child's other parent or guardian must agree to their migration or the law of the child's home country must permit it.

## Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) Category

The SHP category (subclass 202) is for people outside their home country, subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights, and with family or community ties to Australia.

Applications for SHP visas must be accompanied by a proposal from an eligible Australian citizen or permanent resident, an eligible New Zealand citizen, or an organisation operating in Australia. If the SHP application is successful, proposers must pay for the applicants' travel to Australia and provide initial accommodation and orientation in Australia.

The limited number of SHP places available and the high demand for places (i.e. there are over 175,000 applicants onhand, of which, more than 60,000 are under Priority 2 – Close Family, as at 30 April 2025) mean that there is a lengthy wait time and not everyone is accepted. For example, it is likely to take up to 5 years before the Department completes processing of Afghan applicants who lodged their applications in 2021. Highest priority is given to applicants outside their home country with immediate family members in Australia. Further information on priorities within the SHP can be found on the Department's website: [The Special Humanitarian Program \(SHP\)](#).

## Community Support Program (CSP)

The CSP (subclass 202) is designed to provide a model of private sponsorship for refugees that complements existing Refugee and SHP categories. It enables communities and businesses, as well as families and individuals, to propose humanitarian visa applicants with employment prospects and to support new humanitarian arrivals.



The CSP is intended to harness community support for refugees, including the willingness of the Australian business community to support refugees in practical ways through employment and financial assistance, and increase the chances of strong integration and settlement outcomes.

The CSP is currently heavily oversubscribed with applicants waiting approximately six years or more for processing. The Department is aware of this issue and looking at options to manage the current backlog.

## Onshore Component

The onshore component of the Humanitarian Program is reserved for people who arrive lawfully in Australia and are found to engage Australia's protection obligations because they are either found to be a refugee or meet the complementary protection criteria under the *Migration Act 1958* (the Act). People found to engage Australia's protection obligations must also satisfy health, character and security requirements for the grant of a Protection (subclass 866) visa.

Protection visa applications are individually assessed in accordance with the Act. The relevant provisions in the Act are based upon Australia's interpretation of its *non-refoulement* obligations (obligation not to return) in the *1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol* (the Refugee Convention), the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, and the *1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

On 5 October 2023, the Government announced a \$160 million package, over 2 years, of investments in the Protection Visa (PV) system to ensure it continues to serve its intended purpose: to provide protection to those who are in genuine need and are found meet Australia's protection obligations. This includes funding to significantly reduce the time taken to process a Protection visa, and to boost free legal assistance for prospective applicants.

The Department is committed to exploring further measures to reduce the volume of unmeritorious PV applications.

## Snapshot of major humanitarian resettlement groups over time

The 2025-26 Program will maintain our long-term commitment to a generous and flexible program while also taking account of the challenges associated with effectively responding to the global humanitarian crises.

Post World War II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eastern Europe and Central Europe</li> <li>• The Balkans and Baltic states</li> </ul>
1960s and 1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Europe</li> <li>• Central and South America</li> <li>• Lebanon</li> </ul>
1980s and 1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eastern Europe</li> <li>• Latin America</li> <li>• Middle East, Asia and Africa</li> </ul>
Recent Arrivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle East and Afghanistan</li> <li>• Central Africa</li> <li>• Horn of Africa</li> <li>• Asia</li> </ul>

For further statistical information on the Humanitarian Program, see:

<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/visa-statistics/live/humanitarian-program>.

## Emergency Humanitarian Crisis Response

Australia's visa and resettlement responses to emergency humanitarian crises are part of coordinated whole-of-Government efforts and support broader international responses. Each humanitarian crisis is different, and the Government response is based on the circumstances of the crisis, and the relevant needs of people who are impacted.

We are committed to responding flexibly to changing international humanitarian needs, including providing appropriate support for the travel and resettlement of refugees and others requiring Australia's protection. The Government has responded to global humanitarian crises by creating agile visa responses to support vulnerable cohorts across the globe.

Australia's Humanitarian Program continues to face significant pressure and some recent emergency responses to humanitarian crises have been facilitated outside the Humanitarian Program.

### Afghanistan

Since the fall of Kabul, there were 10,000 places allocated to Afghan nationals within the offshore Humanitarian Program between 2021-22 and 2024-25. Further, 16,500 places for Afghan nationals have been allocated and will be delivered over four years (4,125 places per year between 2023-24 and 2025-26). This brings the total number of places available to Afghan nationals under the Humanitarian Program to 26,500 until 2025-26.

### Ukraine

- The Government is considering options to support Ukrainian nationals on temporary visas who did not accept the Australian Government's offer of temporary humanitarian stay before 31 July 2022.
- The Minister for Home Affairs is making, on a case-by-case basis, an offer of permanent stay in Australia to Ukrainian subclass 786 visa holders by inviting them to apply for a Resolution of Status visa.
- As at 30 April 2025, there are 8,047 Ukraine nationals currently in Australia, including:
  - 1,850 Temporary (Humanitarian Concern) (subclass 786) visa holders,
  - 24 Temporary Humanitarian Stay (subclass 449) visa holders and
  - 1,769 Resolution of Status (subclass 851) (RoS) visa holders.

### Palestinian and Israelis impacted by conflict

The Government has made a temporary humanitarian stay pathway available on a case-by-case basis to Palestinian and Israeli temporary visa holders currently in Australia who cannot return home. This includes provision of a Temporary Humanitarian Concern (subclass 786) visa which will be granted for three years.

## Program size

As refugee situations around the world increase in scope, scale and complexity, Australia is committed to finding sustainable global solutions, including through growing our overall Humanitarian Program.

The Government will maintain a program of 20,000 places in 2025-26 to ensure we deliver on our global resettlement commitments, and continue to benefit from the significant contributions of humanitarian entrants, who enrich Australian society and contribute to the economy with their skills, talent and diverse cultural vibrancy.

Program statistics and reporting for the 2024-25 Humanitarian Program will be published on the Department's website when available.

## Complementary pathways

In line with our commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees and Global Refugee Forum pledges, Australia is piloting ways to provide complementary pathways for refugees and other displaced people, including refugee labour mobility, community sponsorship and education pathways.

### Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot

Designed and delivered in collaboration with Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot (the Pilot) is a practical example of how businesses in Australia can harness refugee talent to address skills shortages, while providing complementary pathways for refugees and displaced people to find safety and stability in Australia.

The Pilot will run until 30 June 2025, with an allocation of 500 primary places (plus the members of each candidate's family unit).

- Since the Pilot started in 2021, as at 15 May 2025, 150 skilled refugees-displaced people have been granted permanent residence in Australia, along with 189 of their family members.

Through concessions to standard skilled visa eligibility requirements, the Pilot significantly reduces barriers faced by skilled refugees and displaced people when trying to access skilled visas.

This provides real opportunities for people to resume their careers and rebuild their lives, while also providing Australian employers and communities highly sought after skills that boost our economy and enrich our society.

The Pilot is a skilled program, meaning that:

- allocated permanent places are drawn from the skilled stream of the Department's permanent Migration Program, not from Australia's Humanitarian Program; and
- sponsoring employers provide settlement support, with input and coordination from TBB
  - some Pilot candidates have been also supported by community sponsor groups.

The Government will consider outcomes of the Pilot to inform decisions regarding the future of any complementary refugee labour mobility program.

### Refugee Student Settlement Pathway Pilot

Designed and delivered in collaboration with SkillPath, the Refugee Student Settlement Pathway (RSSP) is a new pilot program allowing refugee students to migrate to Australia to take up tertiary education opportunities commencing in 2026. The pilot proposes to test a new community sponsorship model that empowers non-traditional actors in refugee protection, including universities to play an active role in the settlement of young refugees who can pursue their education in safety at Australian universities and make long term contributions to the Australian community and economy.

This pilot was co-designed through an extensive process with a consortium of interested universities as well as the NGO sector and refugee representatives. Applications for the pilot are closed and 20 students have been selected by SkillPath for the first intake of the program. Selected students were located in Malaysia, India and Thailand.

Students must be registered with the UNHCR, 18-30 years of age and able to meet course requirements for a Bachelor or Masters level course at a participating university in Australia. SkillPath prioritised courses based on Australia's projected skills shortages, including nursing, civil engineering, IT professions and other priority domains.

Future intakes under the pilot will be considered by Government each year until enough evidence has been gathered to consider whether the program could be made permanent. These places are within the Humanitarian Program.



## Settlement

Australia has a long and proud tradition of resettling migrants and refugees and vulnerable people in humanitarian need. The Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) supports humanitarian entrants integrate into Australian life by building the skills and knowledge they need to become self-reliant and active members of the community. These services are delivered in each state and territory by contracted service providers with extensive experience working with humanitarian entrants.

HSP clients receive a package of support tailored to their individual needs, strengths and goals. Support generally includes airport reception, short term accommodation, a package of basic household goods, assistance to find long-term accommodation in the private rental market, access to mainstream and specialist support services, and support to connect with the local community. Clients also participate in an orientation program to develop their understanding of Australian values, laws and systems and acquire the life skills needed for independence.

The Government also delivers a range of targeted programs to support [Settling in Australia](#). In addition to the Adult Migrant English Program and programs to support women and young people, this includes the Settlement Engagement Transition Support (SETS) program, which is a long standing settlement program aimed at improving social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being and community connectedness.

## Humanitarian Integration and Settlement Program (HISP)

The Government is reforming the way settlement services have been delivered over the past few years. The new Humanitarian Integration and Settlement Program (HISP) will build on existing settlement services provided through the HSP but with some enhancements that will provide more flexibility for providers to deliver support to clients, based on the needs, strengths and aspirations of clients, facilitated through a mixed funding model to provide flexibility to service providers to tailor settlement services to their clients' needs.

The HISP was proposed following an extensive consultation process that included feedback from peak settlement organisations, settlement service providers, refugee and humanitarian organisations, and people with lived refugee experience. It also followed a Request for Information (RFI) process in late 2023 that sought feedback from the settlement sector, and other interested parties, on delivery model options and costings for the provision of settlement services for refugee and humanitarian entrants.

The HISP will provide a greater focus on the provision of good settlement outcomes in areas critical to the successful settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants, as outlined in the [Refugee and Humanitarian Entrant Settlement and Integration Outcomes Framework](#) (Framework).

The development of the HISP was informed by the Framework, which was announced on 16 October 2023 by the then Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Andrew Giles MP, and builds on the strong foundation of Australia's world-class settlement services.

The Framework will help to:

- improve our settlement services
- enhance positive settlement outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants
- guide government agencies delivering settlement services from planning through to programs and evaluation.

The Framework comprises eleven interrelated domains and two underpinning principles. These outline a structured approach to good settlement and integration outcomes. Each domain and principle reflects an area critical to successful settlement and integration. Preliminary indicators have been developed to measure progress against the domains outlined in the Framework.

### **Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP)**

In early 2025, the Government announced that CRISP would become a permanent part of Australia's Humanitarian Program from 2026 and provide a dedicated settlement pathway for un-linked refugees: those without family links in Australia and referred here for resettlement by the UNHCR. The pilot commenced in 2022 and the majority of refugees settled under the pilot reported that they felt welcome in their communities and found it easy to settle in Australia.

Refugees arriving through the CRISP are helped to settle by a group of trained community volunteers, rather than the Government's settlement service providers. Community Support Groups provide a range of practical and in-kind settlement and integration support, including help with finding housing, work and learning English.

As at 22 April 2025, 611 refugees have been settled under the pilot.