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2024-25 Humanitarian Program: Community Consultations

Each year, as part of establishing the composition of Australia's Humanitarian Program (Program), the Government seeks public views on humanitarian and resettlement needs. This process involves the Department publishing a [discussion paper](#) and hosting a number of community consultation meetings with the portfolio Minister. The Department received over 70 written submissions from stakeholders in response to the discussion paper.

This document provides a summary of responses to the questions posed in the discussion paper and the broader views received during the annual consultation process.

Summary of feedback to the 2024-25 discussion paper

1. What is the ideal composition of Australia's 2024-25 Humanitarian Program and why? What do you think should be the proportion split between the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) categories in the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program?

Participants in the consultation process (participants) recommended that all places counted within Australia's Humanitarian Program allocations should go to the core (Refugee) component of the Program only. Other humanitarian pathways (family reunion, community sponsorship) should be decoupled from existing allocations. These programs should be implemented based on the principle of 'additionality' to the Program.

It was noted that international law is clear on the right to access asylum — accordingly, onshore protection should be 'demand-driven', and not subject to planning levels or allocations.

Many participants voiced their expectation that Government would meet its 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledges, including to grow the Program over time and provide 10,000 additional complementary pathways places.

Others recommended introducing a permanent and additional linked and unlinked community sponsorship program modelled on the Community Refugee Integration Settlement Pilot which could be scaled up in the coming years.

2. The Humanitarian Program continues to face significant pressure, with demand greatly exceeding available places. While priority is given to cohorts who are outside their home country and have the greatest resettlement need, are there other measures the government could take to increase transparency and avoid giving false hope (for example, through changes to application processes)?

Participants expressed the need for clear and transparent guidelines with explicit eligibility and prioritisation criteria for applicants to help to set realistic expectations about the Program's scope, capacity and limitations. It was suggested the Department could develop a pre-assessment filter based on basic eligibility, and by presenting realistic processing times.

Alternatively, all applications could be completed by, or with the assistance of, NGOs and legal centres who could assist in managing expectations.

Participants recommend having effective and meaningful channels of communication, including a means to obtain / provide regular updates on the status of applications. There is often a significant delay between an application being lodged and the applicant receiving a letter of acknowledgement, resulting in significant uncertainty.

3. How can the Humanitarian Program better respond to future resettlement crises?

Participants called for a clear and consistent response by the Government to humanitarian crises. They recommended that people fleeing crises be given priority, certainty and clarity about the processes, estimated timeframes, and their entitlements to government and settlement services. This includes establishing a baseline package to be activated in response to any crisis.

It was also suggested that visa assessments should include consideration of likely future trajectory of the relevant crises.

Participants recommended that Government:

- increase collaboration with international partners to ensure a more coordinated response;
- increase funding for emergency resettlement programs;
- incentivise community contributions to the Program, for example, via tax incentives, public/private complementary pathway funding programs; and
- introduce measures to support economic aspirations of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing crises via targeted employment programs, mentorship, training (including language training) and small business grants.

4. Scalable complementary pathways for humanitarian entrants require significant financial and in-kind contributions from the private and community sectors. How can the Australian Government best incentivise these contributions and provide the enabling environment for complementary pathways to grow?

To enable an environment for growth, participants strongly recommended the principle of 'additionality' for complementary pathways, rather than treating them as part of the overall Program target.

To encourage contributions, participants recommended providing grants and tax incentives to private and community organisations involved with complementary pathways, while awarding them official and public recognition for their contributions to the society.

Participants highlighted the importance of having a coherent humanitarian and complementary pathways framework. The framework should provide clear objectives and user-friendly processes for clients participating in various community-based humanitarian and resettlement support programs. Participants also recommended that the Government enable additional pathways for *affinity-based* sponsorships and collaborate with various community groups in establishing this avenue.

5. How can Australia best support the economic aspirations of humanitarian entrants to make strong contributions to Australia's economic prosperity?

To succeed economically, participants noted the importance of humanitarian entrants being genuinely welcomed and accepted by local communities. Participants called on Government and prominent public figures to counter demonization of refugees and the broader migrant community.

Participants suggested collective efforts to shift the refugee and migrant narrative to one that recognises the benefits, resilience and diversity that refugees and other migrants contribute to Australian society, and educate the public about the plight of refugees and Australia's role and obligations as a part of international humanitarian efforts.

Participants also recommended that Government:

- establish targeted employment programs, training and small business grants, or access to micro loans and other entrepreneurial support for refugees;
- provide support focusing on successful resettlement, including employment services, job placements, qualification recognition, financial support and mentoring programs; and

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- provide tax breaks for employers hiring humanitarian visa holders.

Participants raised the need for ensuring refugees receive adequate language training, educational support and cultural orientation as well as minimising barriers to recognise their skills and qualifications to enhance their ability to flourish in Australia.