Justice for people seeking asylum and refugees

June 2025

> *"As Christians called to love our neighbour, welcome the stranger, challenge unjust systems and offer refuge and care to those who are marginalised and in exile, we have a particular responsibility in our society when it comes to responding to issues related to asylum seekers and refugees."*
> Shelter from the Storm - A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Asylum Seeker & Refugee Policy, 2015

> *"For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in."* Matthew 25:35.

Number of Refugee Places

The number of refugees worldwide has continued to increase. The number of refugees increased from 8.5 million in 1980 to 31.6 million in 2023 and 38 million in 2025. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has identified 2.4 million refugees urgently needing resettlement in 2025.

The Labor Party had promised to increase Australia's refugee intake to 27,000 with an additional 10,000 places for refugees that Australian community groups sponsor. The Labor Government did increase the refugee intake to 20,000 in the 2023-2024 financial year, but has not further increased it.

With the Trump Administration suspending the resettlement of refugees and cuts to refugee resettlement by several European governments, every resettlement place that the Australian Government can offer is now more critical than ever.

Resettlement provides vital life-saving solutions for refugees and tangible support to countries hosting many refugees. It provides hope and practical alternatives to refugees who may otherwise see dangerous onward journeys as the only way out of unsustainable situations in which they and their families are at significant risk.

Family Reunion for Refugees

Many refugees and people forcibly displaced have been separated from their families for years. For refugee communities, family reunion is not only about being reunited with loved ones, but it is often a vital lifeline for people fleeing persecution and war zones. Removing delays and barriers to accessing family reunion pathways are crucial steps to ensuring families can thrive together in safety in Australia.

The Slow Lane of the Fast Track Policy

In December 2014, the Australian Government changed how it determined the refugee claims of people who arrived in Australia by boat. The Government called the new process 'fast tracking'.

There remain 8,000 people who sought asylum in Australia 12 to 15 years ago and whose cases have not been resolved. Of these people, 7,000 arrived in Australia between 2010 and 2013 and had their asylum applications rejected under the fast-track process. Another 920 were sent to detention in Nauru or Papua New Guinea in 2013, but now live in Australia.

The 'fast track' policy removed a fair review process for asylum applications and imposed very short timeframes for lodging applications. The Government of the time also cut 85% of the funding for legal services to assist people with applications for protection. Hence, people often had to lodge their applications without legal advice or support.

National Council of Churches in Australia

Victorian Council of Churches

ACRt AUSTRALIAN CHURCHES REFUGEE TASKFORCE

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of South Australia

Uniting Church in Australia Western Australia

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'Fast tracking' replaced the previous independent merits review system with a new body called the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA). The IAA did not hold hearings to gather evidence from the person claiming asylum. It was generally restricted to assessing information provided by the Department of Immigration. It could only consider new information in 'exceptional circumstances', such as evidence of 'significant torture and trauma', which would have affected the consideration of the asylum claim.

The fast-track process does not provide a proper review process. As a result, there is a higher risk of people needing protection being returned to the country they fled to face persecution.

Keeping People Seeking Asylum out of Destitution
Changes to the Status Resolution Support Services Program since 2017 have contributed significantly to an increase in destitution and homelessness among people seeking asylum in Australia. The Program provides minimal essential assistance to people seeking asylum, including a basic living allowance of $49 per day. Funding for the Program has been cut by 95% since 2017. The number of people assisted by the Program has decreased from 29,000 in 2015 to 1,057 in 2024. Approximately 5,000 people, including children and their families, have been left with no access to a financial safety net to pay for food, rent, utility and medical bills. Forcing people into situations of destitution is proving to be counter-productive to efforts to resolve their asylum claims.

What You Can Do
Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Points to make in your letters:
- Express concern at the growing number of refugees globally who need resettlement.
- Urge that the Government follow through on its commitment to increase the refugee intake to 27,000 people a year, with an additional 10,000 places available to those who receive settlement support from trained community groups through the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot.
- Ask that the Australian Government improve family reunion processes for refugees in Australia by reducing visa fees and simplifying reunion processes.
- Request that the Government grant permanent visas to the approximate 700 people who were held on Nauru or PNG and are now in Australia, but do not have another country to be resettled in.
- Request that the Australian Government provide a pathway to permanent residency for people previously rejected through the fast-track process.
- Ask that the Australian Government expand the eligibility criteria of the Status Resolution Support Services Program to ensure people seeking asylum who are in crisis get access to the basic support they need to stay engaged in the process to resolve their claim for asylum.

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