

Media Release

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The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's initial response to the Federal Budget 2023-24

The Albanese Government has some targeted support in the Federal Budget for people seeking asylum and refugees, but still maintains a deeply unfair, unjust and unequal system that excludes people in the community from accessing their basic rights.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre will issue a more detailed press release tomorrow.

Key Points

- No increase in the humanitarian intake.
- No mainstream social support for people seeking asylum and continuing the Morrison Government's insufficient 'asylum seeker support'.
- Spending nearly \$2 billion on holding refugees offshore and the onshore detention regime.
- Budget to support the pathway to permanency for people on TPV/SHEV.
- Targeted support schemes for refugees, specifically concerning torture and trauma support as well as people experiencing family violence.

Universal Social Support

The Albanese Government has not only maintained the Morrison Government's devastating cuts to social support funding to people seeking asylum but has underspent its estimates from last year by over half.

The Albanese Government despite slating \$37 million last year for asylum seeker support, only spent \$15 million. This follows a trend with 2021-22 seeing only \$16.6 million in funding on asylum seeker support, despite the Morrison Government slating \$33 million. Only \$37 million is slated for 2023-24, down from \$300 million in 2015-16.

Prevented from accessing mainstream social support that others in the community enjoy, the limited social support via Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) provided to people seeking asylum is less than JobSeeker payments, with only 2% of people seeking asylum receiving this insufficient amount.

Humanitarian Intake

There has been no change to historically low levels of refugee intake.

This is despite the Albanese Government winning the election with a policy of increasing the humanitarian intake to 27,000 places over four years, as well as an additional 5,000 places for community sponsorship. This is the second budget under the new Government that has not seen an increase.

It also comes at a time when more than 100 million people are forcibly displaced globally.

Not only has Albanese maintained the Morrison Government's humanitarian intake maximum of 13,750 people, but in 2021-22 this ceiling was not even met, providing 13,307 resettlement visas, which comes after the historically low intake of 5,947 places in 2020-21.

The ASRC will feed into the current Humanitarian Program review with the hope that will lead to an expanded program, however, increasing the intake cannot be delayed any longer.

Targeted Support

The ASRC welcomes the targeted support introduced in this budget that will positively impact people seeking asylum and refugees. These include:

- \$10.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to support visa holders experiencing domestic and family violence;
- \$38.2 million to extend the current Escaping Violence Payment (EVP) and Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot (TVP) to January 2025;
- \$24.3 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to pilot an additional referral pathway for the Support for Trafficked People Program and restructure the program;
- \$8.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$2.0 million per year ongoing) to establish an Anti-Slavery Commissioner;
- \$18.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to improve safety in international child abduction cases for women and children fleeing violence;
- \$9.1 million in 2023–24 to extend existing Youth Transition Support services;
- and, \$136 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$36 million ongoing) to support the mental health of survivors of torture and trauma.

Detention Regime

The Albanese Government will also spend a staggering \$1.4 billion in 2023-24 to maintain a cruel onshore immigration detention regime with \$1 billion annually over forward estimates. With the average time someone spends in immigration detention reaching 732 days and clear alternatives, reform is urgently needed.

The Albanese Government is spending \$485 million to hold refugees offshore in Nauru in 2023-24. Over \$1 billion will be spent until 2026-27 to maintain this uniquely cruel system. This follows a recent

agreement with the US private prison company, MTC, to operate on Nauru, currently accused of pandemic profiteering and unlawful use of solitary confinement, amongst various other instances of negligence and excessive use of force. This figure does not include PNG, where there are still around 80 refugees held.

Fair and efficient humanitarian application process

ASRC welcomes the Albanese Government's announcement that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) will be abolished and that \$63m of funding over 2 years will be provided to support 75 additional members to address the unacceptable wait times people currently face.

While the Albanese Government will maintain the broken and unfair Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA), this only extends to \$4 million of funding in 2023–24 pending the establishment of a new federal administrative review body. ASRC hopes that this is the end of a cruel system that should have never been created, which has denied thousands of people seeking asylum a fair and effective process.

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