

HUMANITY: A generous refugee program for those fleeing violence and war

Australia in 2021 had its lowest refugee intake in nearly half a century due to a refugee system that has been dismantled by successive discriminatory and harmful policies.

Australia needs to drastically increase its humanitarian intake, offering additional emergency capacity and abolishing needlessly harmful policies such as discriminatory family reunion prioritisation and preventing people from seeking asylum in Australia while in Indonesia.

Recommendations

1. Increase the size of the Refugee Humanitarian Program (RHP) to at least 30,000 this year and increase the intake to 50,000 within five years.
2. Quotas for family reunion are increased significantly, with a new pathway for additional emergency intake and people arriving by sea are not discriminated against.
3. Reinstate resettlement of refugees who are currently in Indonesia.

Policy Background

Refugee Intake

Australia needs a significant and sustained increase in refugee intake that can respond to crises, offer protection to those in need and contribute to a humane global system.

Australia has a maximum annual intake of 13,750 people in 2022-23, down from the target of 18,750 places in 2019-2020. However, this is only a ceiling. Last year, Australia only accepted 5,947 from across its humanitarian programs, well under the 13,750 cap and the lowest intake in nearly half a century.

With COVID-19 greatly impacting migration Australia would only benefit from increasing its humanitarian intake.

Increasing humanitarian intake to 30,000 within the next year and increasing the intake to 50,000 within five years will be in line with Australia's international obligations and other comparable countries. For example, Canada in 2020-2021 provided 30,082 humanitarian places, and their pre-COVID-19 intake was over 50,000.

Emergency Pathway

Recent crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine and Myanmar have shown that governments around the world need to be able to respond quickly to emergencies. Unfortunately, Australia does not have

the processes in place to respond to these emergencies adequately, offering timely and efficient humanitarian intake.

Australia has an admirable history of providing emergency intake during humanitarian crises, this includes 70,000 additional visas in 1975 for people from Vietnam, 42,000 in 1989 following the Tiananmen Square massacre and 12,000 in 2015 for people affected by conflict in Syria and Iraq.

The Morrison Government listened to community calls and the advocacy of the diaspora of people from Afghanistan and provided an additional humanitarian intake of people from Afghanistan of 16,500 over four years. However, with this announcement coming over 6 months after the fall of Kabul and only a small fraction of applications being processed it is clear that the response was delayed.

We need to have a process ready to go to respond to crises as they occur, and emergency intake with options for family reunion can achieve this.

Reinstate resettlement of refugees who are currently in Indonesia.

In June 2014 the Abbott Government prohibited refugees from Indonesia from ever resettling in Australia. Nearly a decade later the nearly 13,000 refugees (recognised by the UNHCR) in Indonesia without healthcare, right to work or support are protesting their dire situation.

Refugees struggle to access healthcare or work in Indonesia, with some people dying from treatable health issues due to the lack of treatment capabilities and support. When this policy was introduced there were already families who have been living in Indonesia for a decade and have now been there for over 20 years.

Australia must lift the ban on the resettlement of refugees in Indonesia and start resettling people, there is no reason for this arbitrary and punitive ban to continue.

Why change these policies?

- Australia is a generous society but we have closed the door on many people fleeing war and persecution.
- Recent years have seen a significant decline in humanitarian intake, this needs to be corrected.
- Reforming our humanitarian intake system to be fair, compassionate and humane will mean accepting refugees in Indonesia and increasing family reunion.