



**CAPSA**  
CATHOLIC ALLIANCE FOR PEOPLE  
SEEKING ASYLUM

**Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2023-24**

*January 2023*

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## About the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) is an alliance of individuals, organisations, schools and parishes from across the Catholic community who advocate for the fair and humane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia. Jesuit Social Services and Jesuit Refugee Service Australia co-convene CAPSA and are supported by an Advisory Group representing peak Catholic bodies and services across Australia.<sup>1</sup> Many organisations that form part of this Advisory Group work directly with refugees and people seeking asylum who have been negatively impacted by Australia's immigration detention system.

The overarching goal of CAPSA is to advocate for a more just and humane system for people seeking asylum, in order for them to find welcome and safety in Australia. This is primarily through engagement with the Catholic community, working alongside people with lived experience of seeking asylum, and taking part in high level discussions with politicians and decision-makers. Our focus of change centres around engaging with communities, ensuring that our actions and efforts are informed by those with lived experience, and utilising our resources to effectively engage with members of parliament and policy makers.

In terms of scope and reach, CAPSA currently has just under 4,000 members across all Australian states and territories, including individuals, schools, congregations, parishes and Church organisations. Through education programs, forums, workshops, information stalls, actions, petitions, lobbying and many other tactics, we aim to shift public debate on this issue by showing its moral imperative through a Catholic lens.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the CAPSA Advisory Group Members listed below:

[Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office](#)

[Australian Catholic Social Justice Council](#) (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference)

[Australian Catholic University](#)

[Caritas](#)

[Catholic Health Australia](#)

[Catholic Mission](#)

[Catholic Religious Australia](#)

[Catholic Social Services Australia](#)

[Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace](#)

[National Catholic Education Commission](#)

[St Vincent de Paul Society](#)

## Introduction

CAPSA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Federal Government's 2023-24 Budget. We believe that through this budget, the Federal Government has the opportunity to provide tangible, positive change – including permanent protection and sustained financial and community support – to the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia.

These changes would not only provide life-saving support to individuals and families who have suffered under harsh and restrictive policies, but it would also provide the Government with an opportunity to repair Australia's poor reputation in this space within the global community.

CAPSA welcomes the Federal Government's restated commitment to deliver upon its election promise to abolish Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) and establish pathways to permanent protection for all who are owed it. We urge delivery of this commitment at the earliest opportunity, with confirmation of arrangements including mechanisms and timeframes for phased and full implementation no later than the 2023-24 Budget.

CAPSA also welcomes the Government's commitment, announced in the October 2022 Budget, to provide targeted funding for services and programs that will assist temporary visa holders to access support if they experience domestic violence. We also commend the Government's additional provision of support to those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, particularly through the allocation of temporary visas, and encourage measures to ensure that scaled support is also provided to ensure pathways to safety for people fleeing other major humanitarian crises. Despite these welcome measures, CAPSA is deeply concerned that the Federal Government has committed to spending \$632.5 million on offshore processing in 2022-23, given the incontrovertible evidence of the devastating harm arising from this policy to date.

CAPSA hopes that this Budget will enable the fulfilment of all welcomed election promises, providing permanent protection where owed and prioritising the humane treatment of all refugees and people seeking asylum.

## *Summary of recommendations*

### Support refugees and people seeking asylum to rebuild their lives in the community

**Recommendation 1:** Ensure the transition of TPV and SHEV holders to permanency begins as soon as possible but no later than the 2023-24 Budget. Further, this should be facilitated through adequate funding across visa processing, community assistance and support, swift family reunion and support during the transition to permanency, including free legal assistance.

**Recommendation 2:** Devote adequate resources and make the required administrative changes to the SRSS program so it can provide ongoing support to those who need it most. This would include revising the eligibility criteria to be based on need, rather than employability and other factors.

**Recommendation 3:** Reverse the ministerial discretion preventing children medevaced from offshore detention to attend university and provide sufficient funds to allow for the supported resettlement of the Medevac cohort in Australia, including independent legal and psychosocial support.

### A more generous Humanitarian program

**Recommendation 4:** Expand Australia's Humanitarian Program beyond the ALP's current stated goal of 27,000 to sustainably address the escalating demand and longevity of crises such as those unfolding in Afghanistan and Myanmar.

**Recommendation 5:** Continue to provide targeted and sustained funding to ensure that visa processing, including in the humanitarian program, continues to occur expeditiously.

### End indefinite detention and resettle those offshore permanently in Australia

**Recommendation 6:** Reverse the previous Federal Government's decision not to resettle refugees from Indonesia who registered with UNHCR after July 1 2014.

**Recommendation 7:** Invest in the creation and implementation of policies that ensure immigration detention is only used as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible duration – in line with international standards.

**Recommendation 8:** End offshore processing and ensure swift resettlement for all affected people owed protection; in Australia, otherwise wherever that is least damaging for and preferred by them. Allocate funds to ensure appropriate financial, psychosocial, legal and community support to all affected people as they consider their futures and resettlement options.

## ***A. Support people seeking asylum and refugees to rebuild their lives in the community***

### ***Transition to permanency***

For over a decade, more than 19,000 refugees and people seeking asylum who arrived in Australia by boat have lived in uncertainty and fear. With limited access to financial and medical support, as well as no right to family reunification, many temporary visa holders and their families have experienced isolation, hardship and extraordinary anguish.

CAPSA sees the 2023-34 Budget as an opportunity for the Federal Government to fulfil its election promise and to ensure that TPV and SHEV holders are transitioned to permanent status in Australia.

In particular, we call on the Federal Government to prioritise the following:

- Funding to expediate the process and facilitate visa processing;
- Ensuring that the established pathway structure provides adequate social, financial and community support for those transitioning to permanency.
- Facilitating accelerated pathways for family reunion;

**Recommendation 1:** Ensure the transition of TPV and SHEV holders to permanency in Australia begins as soon as possible but no later than the 2023-24 Budget. Further, this should be facilitated through adequate funding across visa processing, community assistance and support, swift family reunion and support during the transition to permanency, including free legal assistance.

### ***Fix Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)***

Funding cuts and changes to the SRSS program, which supports refugees and people seeking asylum awaiting the outcome of their applications, has meant that only a handful of people who are in need receive support, leaving thousands of eligible people unable to afford food, rent and medicines.

CAPSA also supports the recommendations made by Refugee Council of Australia in relation to SRSS.

**Recommendation 2:** Devote adequate resources and make the required administrative changes to the SRSS program so it can provide ongoing support to those who need it most. This would include revising the eligibility criteria to be based on need, rather than employability and other factors.

### ***Support for refugees and people seeking asylum Medevaced from offshore detention***

For the eight months that the Medevac scheme was in operation, 192 refugees and people seeking asylum were transferred for medical treatment from offshore processing locations to Australia.<sup>2</sup> Reports have indicated that many transferees faced significant problems in accessing necessary care

<sup>2</sup> Refugee Council of Australia, Offshore Processing Statistics (Report, 4 October 2020); Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Parliament of Australia, AE20-216 - Medical Transferees (Answer to Question on Notice No 216, 2 March 2020).

once they arrived in Australia.<sup>3</sup> Coupled with the onset of COVID-19 and the Government's use of Alternative Places of Detention (APODs), transferees faced prolonged detention inside hotel rooms, a deterioration in both physical and mental health, and limited access to support services.<sup>4</sup>

CAPSA remains deeply concerned for the limited financial, administrative and wellbeing support available to this cohort upon release from detention. This lack of support has been coupled with sustained pressure from the Government to relocate and leave Australia, pressuring a cohort already struggling to engage meaningfully with such a major life decision due to compounding trauma. We urge the Government to allocate funds that would allow for the permanent resettlement of the Medevac cohort in Australia, as well independent legal and psychosocial support to enable members of the cohort to make informed decisions.

**Recommendation 3:** Reverse the ministerial discretion preventing children medevaced from offshore detention to attend university and provide sufficient funds to allow for the supported resettlement of the Medevac cohort in Australia, including independent legal and psychosocial support.

## ***B. A more generous Humanitarian Program***

### ***Expand annual intake beyond ALP's stated goal of 27,000***

Since 2018-2019, Australia's yearly humanitarian intake has decreased annually.<sup>5</sup> This is despite the fact that globally, conflict and persecution continue to uproot the lives of millions. In the last 12 months, we have seen ongoing conflict and persecution continue across Afghanistan, Ukraine, Myanmar and other countries.

In response to the growing number of people displaced around the world, CAPSA urges the Federal Government to expand Australia's Humanitarian Program beyond the 27,000 places annually that the ALP promised during the 2022 campaign. This would help rebuild the humanitarian program and allow for an adequate response to growing global protection needs and ensure the program remains non-discriminatory, prioritising the resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees. In addition to the clear moral imperative to offer vulnerable people a chance to rebuild their lives, the case to pursue a more generous humanitarian program makes economic sense for Australia.<sup>6</sup>

**Recommendation 4:** Expand Australia's Humanitarian Program beyond the Federal Government's current stated goal of 27,000, in order to sustainably address the escalating demand and longevity of crises such as those unfolding in Afghanistan and Myanmar.

<sup>3</sup> Public Interest Advocacy Centre (December 2021). Healthcare denied: Medevac and the long wait for essential medical treatment in Australian immigration detention. 5. ([Weblink](#)).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Refugee Council of Australia (11 May 2021), 'The Federal Budget: What it means for refugees and people seeking humanitarian protection', Refugee and Humanitarian Program ([Weblink](#)).

<sup>6</sup> Deloitte Access Economics and Oxfam Australia (August 2019) Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake ([Weblink](#)).

### ***Increase funding to meet processing need***

Since its election in May 2022, it is clear that the new Federal Government has had a significant backlog of visa applications to process. We note and appreciate the work that the Government has done to address this backlog efficiently. Further, CAPSA welcomes the Government's October Budget commitment to fund \$42.2 million over two years to increase visa processing capacity.

However, we remain deeply concerned for the thousands of visa applicants who await an outcome, particularly those who face imminent danger or who are seeking family reunification. As a priority, the Federal Government must provide targeted and sustained funding to ensure that applicants affected by conflict can be processed and resettled in Australia as soon as possible.

**Recommendation 5:** Allocate targeted and sustained funding beyond the October 2022 Budget two-year commitment period, to ensure that visa processing continues to occur expeditiously.

### ***Provide a tangible solution for those in Indonesia***

As a result, Indonesia now hosts over 13,000 refugees and people seeking asylum who are waiting to have their applications heard to resettle in Australia and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Although some applicants have become active members of their communities, many are not allowed to gain formal employment or access health services, partly because Indonesia is not party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.<sup>8</sup> Indonesia is fast becoming a protracted refugee situation, right here in Australia's backyard and mainly due to the Australian policy not to resettle refugees registered with UNHCR after 1 July 2014.

CAPSA is concerned for the safety and wellbeing of the refugees and people seeking asylum who remain stranded in Indonesia. As a priority, the Government must reverse its standing decision not to resettle refugees from Indonesia who registered with UNHCR after July 1, 2014. Further, targeted resources should be allocated to establish a humane resettlement strategy, both to Australia and third-party states, whilst working alongside IOM, UNHCR and the Indonesian Government.

**Recommendation 6:** Reverse the previous Federal Government's decision not to resettle refugees from Indonesia who registered with the UNHCR after July 1, 2014.

## ***C. End indefinite detention and resettle those offshore***

### ***End indefinite and arbitrary detention***

Indefinite detention has significant, long-term impacts on the health and wellbeing of detainees. Many in offshore detention either developed mental health and other medical conditions, or saw pre-existing conditions worsened, scarring them for life.

<sup>7</sup> The Lowy Institute. (28 June 2022). Years of living statelessly: refugees in Indonesia. ([Weblink](#)).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



CAPSA urges the Federal Government to invest in the creation of policies that ensure immigration detention is only used as a measure of last resort, that children and adults with children are never placed in closed immigration detention, and that Australia imposes a time limit of the shortest possible duration on any mandatory immigration detention.

**Recommendation 7:** Invest in the creation of policies that ensure immigration detention is only used as a measure of last resort, and that impose a time limit of the shortest possible duration on any mandatory immigration detention, in line with international standards.

***End offshore processing, resettle those detained offshore and provide adequate support***

Research, reporting and above all, personal accounts, have shown Australia's offshore processing regime has caused immeasurable suffering to over 4,000 refugees and people seeking asylum since it was reintroduced in 2012.<sup>9</sup>

We call on the Federal Government to end all policies facilitating Australia's regime of offshore processing. As a priority, those who remain detained offshore should be provided with assistance to resettle in Australia ideally, otherwise a willing third-party state. Those who are resettled in Australia should be provided with adequate financial and community support to rebuild their lives and integrate into the community.

**Recommendation 8:** End offshore processing and ensure swift resettlement for all affected people owed protection; in Australia wherever that is least damaging for and preferred by them. Allocate funds to ensure appropriate financial, psychosocial, legal and community support to all affected people as they consider their futures and resettlement options.

We appreciate the Government receiving our recommendations for the next Federal Budget. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss the points raised with you further.



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<sup>9</sup> Barnes, J. Suffering to Save Lives: Torture, Cruelty and Moral Disengagement in Australia's Offshore Detention Centres. (2022) *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Vol 34, Issue 4. ([Weblink](#)).