Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

Response to the Department of Home Affairs

Discussion Paper

“Australia’s Humanitarian Program 2026-27”.

March 2026

About MYAN

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Established in 2007 as a response to the unique challenges faced by multicultural youth, including newly arrived young people settling via the Humanitarian Program, MYAN plays a crucial role in informing policy and enhancing service delivery to foster an inclusive society that values diversity and promotes equitable opportunities for all young people living in Australia.

MYAN collaborates extensively with young people and with government bodies, non-profit organisations, and community stakeholders to create environments where newly arrived young people can realise their full potential, providing a powerful voice in the national dialogue on youth migration and settlement policy and outcomes.

Key aspects of MYAN's work with young refugees:

- Advocacy & Policy: MYAN advocates for the specific rights and interests of young refugees in federal policy, including education, employment, and mental health. Our policy work is informed by MYAN's National Policy Alliance, comprising of 350 members across the youth, settlement, and migration sectors across the country.
- Youth Participation: We facilitate opportunities for young people with lived experience of forced migration to have their voices heard and influence decision-making (e.g., via our national youth advisory groups and FUSE youth leadership summit).
- Settlement Support: MYAN developed the National Youth Settlement Framework, which remains the only tool of its kind globally used to support the specific needs of newly arrived young refugees and migrants.
- Capacity Building: We provide training and resources for organisations and individuals working with refugee youth.

MYAN acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which MYAN partners operate across the country, and pay our respects to all Elders past, and present. We work towards reconciliation with, and self-determination for the First Peoples of this country.

About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Home Affairs' discussion paper "Australia's Humanitarian Program 2026-27." This submission has an intentional focus on children and young people arriving in Australia through the Humanitarian Program and provides a national perspective. The discussion paper presents an important opportunity to reflect on both the gaps and successes of Australia's Humanitarian Program, plan for and implement a program that upholds our global commitments in providing safe haven for those most in need of protection, and ensure that Australia's globally recognised settlement services also meets the distinct settlement needs of children and young people.

In summary

Our response to the discussion paper presents an evidence-based perspective on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2026-27, centring the needs of children and young people who arrive through humanitarian pathways. Children and young people comprise large numbers of displaced people and require explicit, targeted protection and settlement considerations. As the national peak body representing the rights and interests of refugee and migrant youth, MYAN advocates for including young people at the heart of Australia's humanitarian policy and service design. Our submission highlights both the protections they need and the durable settlement supports that maximise social inclusion and long-term community benefits.

Our vision is a more efficient and resilient program that is responsive to our global commitments and can adapt to emergencies while delivering durable settlement outcomes for younger generations. We call for a pragmatic, future thinking Humanitarian Program that prioritises strong protection and durable settlement for children and young people arriving through humanitarian pathways, with timely processing, robust family reunification, and targeted protections for unaccompanied minors, and reforms to manage backlogs while enabling scalable protection responses. Further, we advocate for in-community settlement solutions that are backed by an appropriately resourced wraparound settlement sector which responds to both the immediate needs of children and young people while sustaining long-term settlement outcomes; and commits to ongoing capacity building and data-driven policy delivery to ensure learning and adaptation in line with Australia's global commitments..

Summary of recommendations

- Resettlement: Prioritise the most vulnerable, especially children and young people; expedite evacuation and resettlement from high-need sites (e.g., Papua New Guinea and Nauru); ensure adequate funding to reduce processing backlogs.
- Intake reform: Decouple offshore and onshore components; implement targeted protections for unaccompanied minors; establish a scalable emergency protection framework with contingency quotas.

- Family reunion: Create a dedicated family reunion stream for those already granted protection; reform current pathways to reduce barriers; review "aged out" definitions to maintain family unity.
- Community sponsorship and CSP: Pause CSP to address backlogs; prioritise applications with stable, long-term housing; resume with reformed and improved safeguards and capacity; ensure all non-UNHCR-referral pathways are additive.
- Settlement support and detention reform: Phase out offshore detention completely; reinvest savings into in-community settlement supports and a strengthened settlement sector.
- Monitoring and evidence: Ground all reforms in ongoing data collection, evaluation, and best-practice learning to adapt to emergencies and changing global contexts.

Background: global context displaced children and young people.

Children and young people are among those most vulnerable within the massive flows of forcibly displaced people around the world. **Over 40% of the world's 123.2 million forcibly displaced people are under 18**.[1] While data specifically related to young people aged between12-24 is sparse, we know that children and young people remain dramatically over-represented among the world's displaced people's and refugees. According to UNHCR, more than 2.3 million children were born as refugees from 2018 to 2024 alone, the equivalent of 337,800 children each year.[2] Between 2010 and 2024, the global number of displaced children nearly tripled from around 17.0 million to 48.8 million.[3] The increasing number of children and young people exposed to the lasting and harmful impacts of forced migration remains a key concern for MYAN.

Forced to flee war, armed conflict, ethnic, religious, and political persecution or life-threatening environmental crises, refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people face a range of protection risks, from sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse, to smuggling and human trafficking. Many children are separated from parents during conflicts, becoming unaccompanied minors fleeing alone to find safety, exacerbating their vulnerability. Through it all, children and young people lose critical health, education and protection services.

Key statistics:

[1] UNHCR (n.d) *Refugee statistics* UNHCR Available: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics.
[2] UNHCR (n.d.) *In Refugee statistics – Methodology* UNHCR Available: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/methodology/definition
[3] UNICEF (n.d.) *Displacement. UNICEF DATA* Available at: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/

- Total displaced children: 48.8 million children were displaced by conflict/violence at the end of 2024.[4]
- Internal displacement: 29.4 million children were living in internal displacement due to conflict/violence.[5]
- Refugee children: 19.1 million children were refugees or asylum-seekers.
- Newborn refugees: An average of 337,800 children were born as refugees annually between 2018 and 2024.[6]
- New displacement: Millions more children were displaced by natural disasters and climate change.
- Key drivers: Major crises in Gaza, Sudan, Myanmar, DR Congo, and Afghanistan.[7]
- Low- and middle-income countries host 71 per cent of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection.[8]

Unaccompanied or separated children

There is no comprehensive global figure for unaccompanied and separated children who migrate internationally, are displaced or seek international protection, however what data is available indicates the number is high. For example, in 2022 unaccompanied and separated children lodged an estimated 51,700 individual asylum applications[9] and in 2024 approximately 34,000 unaccompanied minors lodged asylum applications in EU+ countries, however the true scale remains underestimated due to limited reporting and lack of international data collection standards.[10] Data on unaccompanied children is difficult to collect due to their irregular status and high risk of going missing.

Navigating the migration journey without the guidance of parents or caregivers exposes them to increased risk of abuse, trafficking, and exploitation. They must independently access vital services like healthcare and education while overcoming complex legal and cultural barriers. They typically experience disrupted education and may struggle to self-advocate or to navigate the process of seeking refuge and applying for resettlement.[11] Adolescents among these minors often assume adult responsibilities, such as supporting younger siblings or sending money to family. Reuniting with families is fraught with procedural delays and legal hurdles, often resulting in prolonged state care, which can introduce further challenges.

[4] UNICEF (n.d) *Displacement by cause.* UNICEF Data. Available: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/
[5] Ibid.
[6] UNICEF (n.d.) *Child migration and displacement: Displacement* Available: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/
[7] UNICEF (2026) *Child migration and displacement* Available:https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/
[8] UNHCR (n.d.). *Figures at a glance.* Available: from https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance
[9] IOM (2024) *Refugees and asylum seekers*. In World Migration Report 2024. World Migration Report. https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/refugees-and-asylum-seekers
[10] European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (2025) *Data analysis of unaccompanied minors in 2024*. In Asylum Report 2025. https://www.euaa.europa.eu/asylum-knowledge/asylum-report
[11] MYAN (2017) *Submission- Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2017/18 humanitarian program.* Available at myan.org.au

Across the Middle East and Asia region, unaccompanied and separated children are facing heightened uncertainty as the United States—formerly the primary resettlement destination for unaccompanied minors—has suspended key components of its humanitarian intake program, creating a significant backlog of vulnerable cases requiring urgent protection. These children are recognised by UNHCR as protection priorities and already have case managers working with them throughout the region, but without functioning resettlement pathways their situations cannot be regularised or moved toward safety.

Countries such as Malaysia and Thailand continue to host displaced populations, and Thailand is progressing important refugee legislation reforms—efforts that would be greatly strengthened through meaningful regional collaboration. **Australia, as a long-standing UNHCR resettlement partner through programs including the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHM) Program, and as a respected middle power within the Asia and Pacific Refugee Rights Network, is well positioned to share responsibility by expanding intake and supporting neighbours undertaking policy reform.** Taking proactive leadership now would reinforce regional protection systems, support emerging refugee governance structures, and help ensure that unaccompanied children receive the safety, stability and long-term futures they urgently deserve.

An estimated 1,832 unaccompanied asylum seeking minors (UAMs) arrived in Australia between 2008 and 2012. It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics of how many UAMs currently reside in Australia as most would have arrived as teenagers prior to 2014 and many will now be 'aged out' – that is over the age of 18 years and thus no longer considered to be a minor.

Children and young people arriving in Australia via the Humanitarian Program

Australia has a well-established and well-regarded humanitarian resettlement program that has consistently included large numbers of children and young people. A noteworthy evolution in Australia's settlement service system is the development of youth specific settlement programmes to support positive settlement outcomes for young people; a response made in recognition of the complexity of adolescent development. The National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF) developed by MYAN remains the only settlement framework specifically developed for young people. The NYSF highlights how young people have different settlement needs from those of children and adults, due to complex intersections related to identity, age, culture, role in the family, and educational and employment pathways.

In 2025, young people aged between 12-24 made up 32.2% of the arrivals via the Humanitarian Program migration stream, with children aged under 12 making up 19% of the program numbers.[12] **They will likely spend most of their lives in Australia highlighting the necessity for the Australian Government to employ an age-sensitive and child-centred approach to humanitarian protection and settlement**.

[12] MYAN Australia (2025) *National Data Snapshots* Available: https://myan.org.au/our-work/data-reports/

Young refugees play a crucial role in the success of Australia's migration and settlement programs. They are aspirational and bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Their meaningful engagement in the Australian educational system and workforce enhance the country's social and economic landscape. They bridge cultural divides, enrich local communities, and help foster a more inclusive society. Their presence underscores the importance of investing in youth-focused initiatives within the Humanitarian Program, including complementary pathways, ensuring that the next generation of refugees can continue to thrive and contribute meaningfully to Australia's future.

Response to the Discussion Paper

1. *What should the composition of Australia's 2026-27 Humanitarian Program be and why? There are 20,000 places for both onshore and offshore components of the 2026-27 Humanitarian Program and very high demand under all streams. What should be the proportion split between the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (including Community Support Program) streams in the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program?*

We recommend that offshore (UNHCR-referred) processing should adopt a 50/50 split between Refugee (subclass 200) and Special Humanitarian Program (SHP), including the Community Support Program (CSP). Within SHP/CSP, we recommend implementing a triage to prioritise the most urgent cases and those with strong family or community links.

Onshore processing should be uncapped and decoupled from offshore processing to reduce delays and provide greater certainty for applicants, and interim supports should be expanded to uphold protection and practical needs throughout the processing period.

MYAN reiterates our stance that the Humanitarian Program:

1. Prioritise protection needs while safeguarding program integrity

- Prioritise UNHCR-referred refugees based on acute protection needs, with heightened focus on women and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risk, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and those from protracted displacement.
- Preserve the integrity of Australia's humanitarian program and its international protection obligations. If expanding the total number of places is not feasible, the selection framework must remain firmly anchored in humanitarian need.

2. Balance offshore and onshore considerations

- A measured, dual-track approach is essential. MYAN maintains that offshore protection should address the most urgent risks, while onshore applicants should not be left in limbo.
- Urgently improve administrative efficiency to expedite processing, expand interim material and psycho-social support for prolonged onshore delays, and scale up community-based initiatives to uphold Australia's humanitarian commitments.

3. Respond with urgency to the scale of global displacement

- The global refugee crisis remains acute: UNHCR reports over 100 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, with more than 42 million classified as refugees requiring protection and potential resettlement.[13]

- Prolonged processing times undermine mental health, physical well-being, and social integration. Offshore UNHCR-referred applicants often face immediate threats and depend on resettlement for survival. Research indicates that the longer a person waits for a decision on their asylum application, the more likely they are to develop, or experience an exacerbation of, acute mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[14]

- In Australia, more than 70,000 people are in the onshore refugee/asylum seeker cohort, with over 30,000 actively waiting for an initial protection visa decision as of mid-2025. These applicants face significant uncertainty and, in many cases, limited access to essential services due to temporary status which exacerbates prolonged socio-economic stress and mental health decline.

Offshore component: proposed structure and priorities

MYAN recommends a balanced and intersectional offshore allocation that mitigates protection risks while ensuring a credible pathway for those already in Australia with prioritisation given to UNHCR-referred cases facing the most acute risks, including:

- *Women and girls at risk.*
- *Children and adolescents at risk.*
- *Survivors of severe trauma, torture, or violence.*
- *Individuals at risk due to sexual orientation or gender identity.*
- *Those at immediate risk of refoulement.*

We urgently recommend that a reassessment and prioritisation of the evacuation and resettlement of individuals including children and young people in Papua New Guinea and Nauru to alleviate pressure and address humanitarian need efficiently.

The Humanitarian Program must uphold the SHP's core purpose to support vulnerable individuals with close ties to Australia who cannot access UNHCR channels. Given extensive backlogs, we recommend implementing a structured triage system categorising applications by urgency, risk, and

[13] UNHCR (n.d.) *Figures at a glance. Overview* About UNHCR Available: https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance

[14] Shahzad A, Katona C, Glover N (2025) *The psychological impact of spending a prolonged time awaiting asylum.* Eur J Psychotraumatol. 2025 Dec;16(1):2506189. doi: 10.1080/20008066.2025.2506189. Epub 2025 Jun 10. PMID: 40493425; PMCID: PMC12152982.

family reunification needs, ensuring rapid processing of the most critical cases and reliable access for those with community or family links.

Considering the current CSP application backlog, we recommend extending the pause on the acceptance of new applications and for those applications that are being assessed prioritising applicants with guaranteed long-term housing arrangements to optimise outcomes and resource allocation.

Onshore component: recommendations and safeguards

MYAN recommends that onshore protection visas be decoupled from offshore processing to reduce cross-track delays and provide greater decision clarity for applicants. This decoupling is essential given evolving displacement dynamics and the number of resettlement places.

We recommend prioritisation be considered for the approximately 1,000 individuals (including children) who were medically evacuated to Australia from Nauru and PNG between 2013 and 2024, who are currently in community detention or on bridging visas with limited rights and ongoing uncertainty due to prolonged detention. These cases warrant immediate, targeted consideration.

Ensure that all people in Australia awaiting onshore decisions have access to practical and material support (via SRSS or mainstream services such as Special Benefit) to provide stability while outcomes are determined. This is particularly important if offshore processing takes precedence or delays persist.

A protection-centric, balanced approach ensures Australia meets its humanitarian obligations and maintains program legitimacy on the international stage. By combining a triaged offshore assessment with uncapped onshore processing, the program can more effectively reduce backlogs, shorten waiting times, and deliver timely protection and support to the most vulnerable individuals and families. The proposed structure supports longer-term policy goals, including the potential for measured, orderly adjustments to humanitarian places as circumstances permit, while safeguarding vulnerable populations.

We recommend the following next steps:

1. Develop and publish a formal triage framework for offshore SHP and CSP cases, including explicit criteria for urgency, risk factors, and family reunification priorities.
2. Establish strong and transparent safeguards to preserve SHP integrity and ensure it remains a pathway for vulnerable people with Australian ties who cannot access UNHCR channels.
3. Implement enhanced interim supports onshore (SRSS and access to mainstream services) to provide stability for all onshore applicants during processing, including scenarios where offshore entrants are prioritised.
4. Institute ongoing monitoring and evaluation of backlog trends, protection outcomes, and community ties to inform iterative policy adjustments.

5. Prepare communications and briefing materials that explain the rationale for the offshore/onshore split, triage criteria, and safeguards, to assist engagement with stakeholders and Parliament.

2. *Who should the Government prioritise within the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)? Should existing priorities1 change? Should there be changes to who can sponsor an applicant? Should proposers carry greater responsibility for providing settlement support to those they sponsor?*

The government must preserve the SHP's integrity while accelerating protection for the most vulnerable. MYAN believes that the SHP must remain tightly aligned with its core objective to support vulnerable people with close ties to Australia who face significant protection concerns and lack access to formal refugee pathways (e.g., UNHCR). Given the current backlog, we advocate for a triage approach that prioritises urgency, risk factors, and family reunification needs to ensure timely protection for the most at-risk individuals. We also emphasise the central role of family reunion in protection and settlement outcomes and call for reform of family reunification pathways to be simpler, fairer, and more culturally responsive. Priority should be given to applicants with demonstrable ties to Australia and acute protection needs who can access essential settlement supports.

The SHP exists to provide protection to vulnerable individuals with close Australian links who lack other formal channels. In periods of backlog, a triage system is essential to process the most urgent cases first, based on:

- urgency of protection needs
- risk factors (including exposure to harm)
- family reunification significance and potential for successful settlement.

We recommend establishing a transparent triage framework within the SHP to categorise and prioritise applications by these criteria, with explicit timeframes and accountability measures.

Family reunification is central to protection, wellbeing, and positive settlement. Due to the forced nature of the refugee experience, young people are often separated from their families through circumstance, not by choice. Compounding the trauma of family separation, upon arrival in Australia, current policies and processes mean that young humanitarian migrants can remain separated from family members for years or sometimes indefinitely.[15] There is a direct, well-documented link between family reunion, mental health, social cohesion, and successful settlement for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.[16] Yet barriers to family reunification remain persistent and significant. Separation can have lasting negative economic, social, and psychological effects on

[15] MYAN (2014) *Submission to DIAC Australia's Humanitarian Program 2013-2014* Available at: myan.org.au
[16] MYAN Australia (2021*) Submission to the Inquiry into the Efficacy, Fairness, Timeliness, and Costs of the Processing and Granting of Visa Classes, which Provide for or Allow for Family and Partner Reunions* Available: https://myan.org.au/documents/submission-to-the-inquiry-into-the-efficacy-fairness-timeliness-and-costs-of-the-processing-and-granting-of-visa-classes-which-provide-for-or-allow-for-family-and-partner-reunions/

individuals and their broader communities. Immediate actions can reduce harm and improve outcomes by modernising and simplifying family reunion processes.

Reform is required as definitions of family often reflect Western, nuclear-family norms and do not capture the diverse and extended networks common among migrant communities[17]. Refugee experiences frequently involve forced separation, complex kinship structures, and reconstruction of families after trauma who depend on each other for mutual support and survival.[18] Current rules can exclude adult children who are over 18 or "no longer dependent" despite ongoing protection needs and can hinder sponsorship of adult relatives who are central to family support networks.

MYAN recommends the following interim reforms to the SHP and the Migration Program to improve access and reduce barriers for family reunion:

- Create a dedicated humanitarian family reunion program for individuals who have gained protection in Australia, placed outside of the standard Humanitarian and Migration Programs, to expedite access for those most in need.
- Reform the Migration Program to make it less of a financial and administrative deterrent for refugees to apply for family reunion to increase the number of places available in the offshore program and maximise the benefits of family reunion.

In the interim:

- Waive application fees for SHP-related family reunion cases and ensure access to settlement services on arrival and implement means testing to exempt eligible individuals and families from the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period.
- Expand family reunification criteria to be culturally sensitive and situation-specific, recognising extended and non-traditional family networks, including for 'aged out' adult children who are still dependent and at risk.
- Remove discrimination against proposed SHP sponsors based on historical modes of arrival (including those arriving by boat on or after 13 August 2012, including unaccompanied minors at arrival).

Until reform is complete, MYAN recommends implementing a triage system that prioritises:

- Young refugees and humanitarian entrants with strong Australia-based ties, given the vital role of family reunion in their mental health and integration.
- Applications for aged-out adult children (particularly single women) where they remain dependent and at risk, to enable reunification with parents or adult siblings.

[17] Gifford, S.M. and McDonald-Wilmsen, B. (2010) *Refugee resettlement, family separation and Australia's humanitarian program.* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

[18] UNHCR (2011) *Protecting the Family: Challenges in Implementing Policy in the Resettlement Context* Annual Tripartite Consultations On Resettlement, Geneva, 20-21 June 2001

- Women and children at risk facing compounded challenges requiring urgent intervention.
- Survivors of torture and trauma whose health is at risk without timely support.
- LGBTQ+ individuals facing persecution or risk in their home countries.

Reducing waiting times for these groups yields measurable benefits to mental health, safety, and successful settlement, reinforcing Australia's human rights commitments. By refining the SHP's priorities and reforming family reunification pathways, Australia can:

- Protect those most at risk and with credible links to Australia.
- Improve settlement outcomes for vulnerable entrants.
- Reduce backlogs through targeted, efficient processing.
- Demonstrate leadership on humanitarian protection and human rights.

Further considerations to maintain integrity of the program:

- Ensure culturally aware processes that recognise diverse family structures and community ties.
- Maintain high standards for protection screening and background checks; monitor settlement support delivery to prevent gaps in care.
- Collect and publish anonymised outcome data to track improvements in protection timeliness, family reunification rates, and settlement success.
- Engage with MYAN, young people, and relevant stakeholders, including refugees, migrant communities, settlement service providers, and child protection experts, to refine policy details.

3. *Global instability and rising cost of living pressures are resulting in increasing costs to deliver settlement services. How do we ensure that settlement services continue to support the most vulnerable humanitarian entrants in this context of finite resources, without compromising on long-term settlement outcomes?*

While resources are finite and households are grappling with rising costs of living, investment in settlement initiatives remains essential. To sustain support for the most vulnerable humanitarian entrants, MYAN recommends that settlement service design and delivery maintain and enhance an intentional focus on the rights and needs of young people aged 12–24 and embed youth-centred planning across all services. Young humanitarian entrants remain among the most vulnerable cohorts, with needs spanning safety, education, language, housing, mental health, and social inclusion.

Reform is required across several areas to maximise both impact and outcomes and ensure value for money. Without deliberate prioritisation and reform, finite resources risk compromising their long-term settlement outcomes, including across education attainment, labour market participation, financial independence, and independence from services. Targeted, forward-looking investment supports safe transitions from crisis to stability, builds skills for the job market, and reduces long-term

dependence on welfare support. It lowers the risk of social marginalisation, unemployment, and cycles of socio-economic disengagement that can fuel social unrest. Underinvestment creates greater exposure to protection risks, exposure to crime and exploitation, and social fragmentation, with costs that compound over time.

Suggested policy principles to guide reform:

- Youth centred design that prioritises education continuity, language development, mental health support, housing stability, and early workforce entry in funding decisions.
- Age-appropriate pathways that distinguish between 12–17 and 18–24 cohorts, tailoring supports to developmental stages and transition points.
- Integrated, coordinated, youth-friendly service models that blend education, health, housing, language, and employment supports.
- Ensure culturally responsive access and targeted outreach for individuals with fragile family networks and streamlined processes for larger households.
- Building strong evidence base through consistent data collection, benchmarking, and research on effective youth settlement outcomes.
- Establish nationally consistent, age-disaggregated data collection to monitor outcomes, inform funding decisions, and enable longitudinal analysis.

We recognise the critical role of the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS), Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), and Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP in empowering young humanitarian entrants and vulnerable migrants toward independence and social participation. Service providers contribute to this goal by providing a diversity of tailored services, resources, and support systems that address the unique challenges faced by young people in these groups and support them through the settlement process, exemplifying the collective expertise and deep understanding of our partner organisations in youth settlement service delivery. However, challenges persist.

This stems from rigid program structures that fail to account for the complex, tailored needs of youth, particularly those with interrupted education or trauma. Key issues include lack of place-based services particularly in certain regional areas, inconsistent youth-specific services, language acquisition barriers, and poor integration between mainstream and specialised youth services.

Australia can strengthen youth-focused approaches in settlement services like SETS, HSP and AMEP by adopting a coordinated, place-based approach that maximises available resources and rising costs. MYAN recommends:

1. Embedding regional planning with robust local capacity assessments to map gaps in health, education, housing and employment supports, ensuring services are targeted where they are most needed.

2. Fostering closer collaboration between mainstream and settlement services through centralised case management, shared data, and co-funded pilots that reduce duplication and unlock economies of scale.
3. Map and invest in mainstream services traditionally underutilised by refugee young so these services are equally equipped with the skills and resources to work with refugee young people, including mental health, sexual and reproductive health and LGBTQ services, those in regional and rural areas, as well as areas with less concentration of new arrivals.
4. Investing in capability-building for mainstream providers to sensitively support multicultural young people, so entry barriers are lowered and outcomes in education, employment and wellbeing are improved.
5. Ensure that new AMEP contracts allow for new business models that embed youth-specific models of delivery across Australia.
6. To improve efficiency and equity, shift toward flexible, outcome-driven funding that promotes collaboration and reduces duplication. This could include pooled regional funds, shared governance, and "gate-keeping" reduction through streamlined eligibility and common intake processes.
7. Emphasise scalable, evidence-informed models such as regional hubs that coordinate services.

We further recommend that the SETS program formally include youth settlement as a distinct success indicator within SETS outcomes. A youth specific indicator would ensure attention to vulnerable populations (including young women at risk, LGBTQI+ young people, and unaccompanied minors), promoting equity in outcomes and accountability for program impact This change would provide clearer measurement of long term integration, wellbeing, and agency for young migrants and refugees, support more targeted program design, and generate long term cost savings through improved settlement trajectories.

Finally, centre youth voice and safety in policy design and delivery. Incorporate ongoing youth-led feedback loops, address barriers like racism and discrimination, and align services with young people's lived experiences and regional realities. By combining targeted regional planning, cross-sector collaboration, capability-building, and authentic youth engagement, Australia can contain to sustain impactful settlement outcomes for refugee youth within budgets.

4. *The Community Support Program (CSP) needs to be reformed. It is heavily oversubscribed, with around 20,000 applicants on hand and an extended wait time of around 8 years, and is no longer delivering its original intent to resettle humanitarian entrants who are job-ready and able to become self-sufficient within 12 months. – What should a redesigned CSP look like? – What attributes should new CSP applicants have and why? – What kind of delivery model should a new CSP have?*

The CSP holds significant potential to expand the nation's resettlement capacity, yet it is severely oversubscribed and misaligned with its original objective of resettling humanitarian entrants who are job-ready and self-sufficient within 12 months. A redesigned CSP is required to increase efficiency,

improve outcomes, protect the humanitarian purpose, and genuinely add capacity to Australia's Humanitarian Program. Immediate actions are needed to address backlog, cost barriers, governance, and equity to enable a more effective, scalable, and inclusive CSP.

The CSP currently grapples with a backlog of around 20,000 applicants, facing an eight-year wait time. This significant delay not only jeopardises the wellbeing of applicants but also strains the capacity of sponsors and undermines the program's credibility, diminishing its potential as a valuable complement to the core Humanitarian Program.

High upfront visa fees and settlement costs exacerbate inequities, especially for smaller community groups and diaspora organisations eager to sponsor family members. Furthermore, the convoluted regulations surrounding Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs) and their processes add unnecessary complexity and financial strain.

The CSP also encounters critical challenges that limit its effectiveness. A primary concern is the issue of additionality, where sponsorships are often counted within the existing humanitarian intake rather than creating additional places. Additionally, the program's high costs—stemming from hefty visa fees and expensive settlement requirements—place a significant financial burden on both sponsors and refugees alike.

Considering these challenges, the CSP must be redesigned to be genuinely additional to the core Humanitarian Program, expanding resettlement capacity while ensuring faster processing, lower barriers to participation, and stronger settlement outcomes. The current backlog within the CSP is one of the most pressing issues, as it not only delays the resettlement process but also creates uncertainty and stress for those involved. To address this, it is recommended that the Department:

1. Continue to pause new applications to focus on processing the existing backlog efficiently.
2. Ensure there is adequate funding provided by the Treasury to address the administrative backlog.
3. Prioritise existing applicants who can demonstrate secure long-term housing.

MYAN recommends the following features for a redesigned CSP:

1. Merge the best of the CSP and Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Program (CRISP) to create a stronger, unified, community-led sponsorship structure and permanently address high costs and backlogs.

2. Align CSP objectives with the humanitarian priorities, including protection, family reunification, and community sponsorship engagement where appropriate.

3. Establish clear governance and reporting to verify additional capacity and prevent displacement of those who would have been resettled through traditional channels.

4. Implement targeted processing improvements to shorten backlogs and reduce application pauses.

5. Integrate housing assistance and settlement planning into the CSP intake and case management.
6. Maintain ongoing engagement with community stakeholders, sponsors, and sector partners to inform policy design and identify bottlenecks.
7. Review and reduce up front visa fees and essential settlement costs which are a barrier for many sponsors, particularly considering current cost of living pressures.
8. Design affordable sponsorship pathways, focusing on support for smaller community groups and diaspora organisations without compromising safeguards.
9. Establish clear, publicly available regulations for Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs) with streamlined compliance requirements.
10. Implement evaluation mechanisms to inform adjustments and demonstrate impact against stated objectives.
11. Develop key indicators (e.g., time-to-resettle, employment outcomes at 6–12 months, housing stability, sponsorship retention) to measure success and drive policy refinement.

Recommended next steps

- Convene a cross-agency working group (Policy, Home Affairs, Treasury, DHS settlement services) to finalise CSP redesign parameters and guardrails.
- Engage a broad set of stakeholders, including APOs, diaspora organisations, community sponsors, and settlement service providers, to co-design the new framework.
- Secure targeted resourcing to clear the backlog and support streamlined processing.
- Publish updated APO guidelines, sponsorship criteria, and settlement support requirements.

5. Are there other reforms you would suggest to program eligibility or prioritisation, or to the onshore protection and/or offshore program more broadly?

Additional considerations

Phasing out of offshore detention: We urge the Government to permanently phase out offshore processing and to reinvest the savings into community-based asylum seeker and refugee support that is fair, transparent, and accountable. The current offshore detention regime is financially exorbitant, morally indefensible, and strategically untenable for Australia's long-term national interests. Taxpayers have shouldered a staggering cost, with offshore processing consuming well over a decade and tallying in the vicinity of billions of dollars. In the 2024–25 Budget alone, approximately $604.4 million was allocated to offshore processing, equating to roughly $6 million per detainee on Nauru; highlighting a policy trajectory that is not only fiscally wasteful but also misaligned with the everyday

pressures Australians face from the cost of living crisis, including housing, healthcare, and education.[19]

The evidence consistently demonstrates that offshore detention is markedly more expensive than processing asylum claims in the community, with estimates indicating it costs roughly ten times more to detain someone offshore than to support them within the community during the processing period.[20] This stark cost differential underscores a fundamental misallocation of public resources and an opportunity to achieve better outcomes for people seeking protection, while delivering superior value to taxpayers. A community-based model also offers better prospects for family unity, continuity of education for children, and integration into local communities, which in turn strengthens social and economic participation. The overarching objective is a humane, cost-conscious, and sustainable approach that recognises the dignity and rights of every person while delivering measurable benefits to Australian taxpayers and communities.

A deliberate, well-resourced transition plan is essential to realise these benefits. We advocate for a staged closure of offshore facilities, and a commitment to repatriation where feasible, accompanied by robust support for individuals transitioning into community-based processing within Australia or accredited temporary accommodation in the community. This plan should include: a comprehensive continuity of care framework to safeguard health and mental health needs; a transparent accounting mechanism to monitor and publicly report spending and outcomes; and independent oversight to ensure compliance with human rights standards and ethical practice. Investment priorities should focus on scalable community-based processing hubs, legal assistance, culturally appropriate case management, social housing pathways, health services, and language and settlement supports.

By reallocating funds from offshore detention centres to these core supports, Australia can reduce outcome disparities for asylum seekers and refugees, expedite fair determinations, and strengthen social cohesion. The cost savings generated through the transition can support the funding of generalised settlement support programs and preventative and early-intervention programs that address the social determinants of wellbeing for former detainees, reducing reliance on emergency responses and crisis services.

Emergency response: The Humanitarian Program operates within a fixed intake and policy levers tied to broader humanitarian objectives. In an international context characterised rapidly changing crises, this structure can delay protection, create ad hoc migration pathways, and risk inconsistent treatment of asylum seekers. We recommend that the government establish a contingency pool that can be mobilised beyond the 20,000 annual cap, with a clearly defined maximum cap that can be adjusted via ministerial directive during humanitarian crises alongside a framework that activates during acute

[19] ROCA (2025) *Ending arbitrary and indefinite offshore detention Nauru, PNG and deportations* www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Ending-arbitrary-and-indefinite-offshore-detention.docx.pdf

[20] Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Save the Children Australia, & GetUp! (2019) *At what cost? The human and economic cost of Australia's offshore detention policies 2019*. Footscray, Victoria: Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

protection emergencies to provide timely, predictable, and rights-compliant access to protection and humanitarian support, independently of the annual intake.

A formalised emergency response framework should be introduced to ensure Australia can guarantee more organised, uniform, and fair responses for those at imminent risk, by delineating entry points, service accessibility, and community collaborations allowing affected individuals to find safety while the situation in their home country stabilises, have access to refugee determination or complementary pathways where applicable, and reducing the risk of the situation becoming overly politicised.

Supporting children at risk: We recommend the introduction of a separate and additional program tailored specifically to protect children at risk in response to the growing number of unaccompanied minors across the Middle East and Asia who are recognised by UNHCR as protection priorities but have limited resettlement pathways. This program should be backed by a robust evidence base, clear protection outcomes, and sustainable funding to ensure timely assistance and durable solutions. UNHCR identifies unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) as among the most vulnerable, with elevated risks of exploitation, trafficking, and harm during displacement and transit. Strengthening targeted programs directly addresses these elevated risk profiles.

Complimentary pathways: MYAN emphasises the critical importance of expanding complementary pathways for refugees as a part of Australia's humanitarian efforts. This approach aligns with Australia's commitment to increasing community-sponsored and complementary places to 10,000 annually by 2030, as pledged at the Global Refugee Forum. Complementary pathways, such as labour mobility, education, and family reunification, provide viable alternatives for refugees, enhancing their access to durable solutions while leveraging the goodwill and resources of non-government actors. However, Australia lacks a unified framework for complementary pathways. Existing pilots and programs are being developed independently, often with limited resources. By implementing a coherent Complementary Pathways Program, Australia can foster social cohesion, boost economic prosperity, and strengthen its global leadership in refugee resettlement. We recommend:

- The development of a coherent policy framework to integrate all complimentary pathway initiatives effectively.
- All complimentary pathways places must be in addition to UNHCR-referred Refugee and SHP places.
- Expanding the Refugee Student Pathway and evaluating for further expansion.

Boost foreign aid and support for UNHCR: Low- and middle-income countries host 71 per cent of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection. Recognising the essential role foreign aid plays in assisting those forcibly displaced around the globe, we recommend that the Australian Government:

- Reinstate Australia's overseas aid program to its previous levels, acknowledging the importance of aid in supporting countries that are shouldering the burden of displaced populations.

- Boost financial support to UNHCR to enhance its capacity to respond to global displacement more effectively.

Conclusion

MYAN recognises the strengths of the proposed Humanitarian Program for 2026-27 and appreciates the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to global humanitarian efforts. MYAN sees Australia's Humanitarian Program as a demonstrably strong and essential commitment to protecting the world's most vulnerable children and young people. We value the opportunity to respond and to be informed by the program's direction, and we commend the ongoing efforts to uphold global humanitarian standards while strengthening Australia's settlement outcomes for refugee youth.

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