



Refugee Council of Australia

THE 2008-09 BUDGET IN BRIEF: What it means for refugees and those requiring humanitarian protection

Immigration

Restoring full protection to refugees

- Temporary Protection Visas and Temporary Humanitarian Visas will be abolished by 1 October 2008. The new permanent visa category created for these individuals will be known as the Resolution of Status Visa (RoS – subclass 851). When the new provisions come into effect, TPV- and THV-holders who have applications for a permanent protection in the pipeline will be automatically considered for the RoS visa. Any person whose TPV/THV is approaching expiry is advised to apply immediately for a further protection visa. After 1 October, TPV- and THV-holders can apply directly for a RoS visa.
- Importantly, the 90-day processing timeframe does not apply for the RoS; DIAC has undertaken to process all claims rapidly, subject to the meeting of health, security and character checks.
- RoS visa holders will be eligible for all the same entitlements as permanent protection visa holder, including access to the Adult Migrant English Program.
- The abolition of temporary protection will save the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs \$10.5 million over four years.
- While individuals holding a Temporary Humanitarian Concern visa (subclass 786) are excluded from the new provisions, the Minister has since asked DIAC for advice on how these visa holders' situation can best resolved.

A modest increase in the offshore refugee and humanitarian intake

- Australia will increase its total numbers for the refugee and humanitarian protection migration program by 500 to 13,500 in 2008-09. These 500 places will be allocated to refugees and humanitarian migrants from Iraq. It is anticipated that this additional intake will contribute \$4.6 million to Commonwealth government revenue over four years, partially offsetting the cost of \$35.3 million over four years.
- In addition, up to 600 places (separate from the 13,500 places mentioned above) will be available for resettlement of Iraqis who have assisted the Australian military. \$42 million over four years spread across a number of departments is being provided to cover the costs associated with this intake of 600.
- From 2009-2010 the government will increase its total intake under the program to 13,750 places. The additional 750 places over 2007-08 levels will be specifically for humanitarian entrants. The additional contribution to revenue is expected to be \$12.1 million over four years, partially offsetting the initial cost of increasing the program of \$85 million over four years.

- \$13.7 million over four years will be dedicated from existing resources to “increase Australia's operational and liaison capability in relation to immigration matters in the Middle East region”.
- \$13 million will be spent on travel costs (6,500 individuals) and medical testing costs (12,000 individuals) for refugees and humanitarian entrants in 2008-09.

Community Care Pilot, case management and ASAS

- \$5.6 million will be provided for the CCP and case management until June 2009, representing a renewal of funding at the same level for 12 months. There is no recurrent funding in the budget for this scheme. It is important to note that in some States case management for people in detention and case management through the CCP are drawn from the same budget line item.
- Funding for the Red Cross Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme will increase from \$5.2 million to \$7.1 million in 2008-09. It is estimated that 2,750 people will be helped through ASAS in the coming year.

The general migration program

- The budget statement covering the immigration and citizenship portfolio accounts for the projected economic benefits of increasing Australia's level of migration that can then be balanced against costs associated with investment in and service provision related to various aspects of the program. This manner of accounting more accurately reflects the true cost of the migration program to the Australian economy.
- The general migration program will increase from 152,800 to 190,300 places in 2008-09. This increase of 37,500 places will comprise 31,000 places in the skill stream and 6,500 places in the family stream. This in turn will bring the total economic intake stream to 133,500 places with family migration being 56,500 places.
- In the days following the budget the Minister for Immigration announced that as part of lifting Australia's total migration intake, a substantial number of temporary work visas for unskilled migrants will be issued.

Staffing and reform for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship

- The Government will provide \$50.0 million over four years to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to complete reforms to departmental operations in response to the findings of the *Palmer* and *Comrie* reports.
- A further \$37.1 million will be contributed to reforming IT systems further to the recommendations of the *Palmer* and *Comrie* reports.
- 46 DIAC staff will be cut from its Australian-based operations associated with overseas posts (this is likely to include staff from the offshore protection branches of DIAC based in Australia). A further 179 staff will be cut from settlement services in 2008-09.
- 7 staff will be cut from the MRT-RRT.

Detention

- \$120 million (down from \$142 million in 2007-08) will be spent on detention operations, including \$85.8 million for new detention contracts.
- \$1.1 million will be spent by DIAC on scoping, feasibility studies and new designs for the redevelopment of the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. The Department of Finance

and Deregulation has allocated \$40.1 million over three years as a capital investment for the redevelopment of Villawood IDC.

- DIAC is budgeting for 250 individuals in detention to have access to the Immigration Advice and Applications Assistance Scheme (IAAAS) in 2008-09.
- A Reconnecting People Assistance Package (RPAP) will be available to “eligible individuals who have been adversely affected as a direct result of their inappropriate immigration detention within Australia”. \$400,000 has been allocated to RPAP for 2008-09.
- It is intended that the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre be commissioned and ready for operation by November 2008. It is unclear exactly how much more money will be allocated to the construction aspects of this centre, because this money is bundled in with the total \$50 million allocated for DIAC’s “assistance to other countries in our region in countering people smuggling and illegal people movements” in 2008-09.
- \$23 million has been budgeted for processing of protection applications made by asylum-seekers held on Christmas Island, as well as payment for their care and accommodation in 2008-09.
- There is no reference in the budget to measures for addressing the issue of detention debts.

Border security and regional security measures

- In 2008-09, DIAC will spend \$518.7 million on border security, compliance and detention compared with \$551.4 million on all settlement services associated with the refugee and humanitarian program. This compares with the 2007-08 expenditure of \$557.7 million on border security, compliance and detention, and \$489.2 million on settlement services.
- In addition to the \$518.7 million from DIAC for border security, compliance and detention, other government departments have budgeted for:
 - \$144 million in 2008-09 for investigating border crimes and international crime networks. This includes people smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking and other transnational crime.
 - \$398 million over four years for border enforcement plus \$387 million over four years for maritime interception activities, including an additional \$1.1 million to Defence to continue providing aerial surveillance in Australia's northern waters “to deter unauthorised arrivals” and disrupt people smuggling operations, bringing the total spent on northern interception activities to \$49.4 million in 2008-09. A further \$4.9 million over two years will be allocated to Customs to cover “replacement strategies” for surveillance vessels.
 - \$8.4 million over four years will be provided for intelligence purposes relating to illegal foreign fishing operations in the Southern Ocean.
 - \$245 million over four years will be spent on a National Security, Air Security Officer Program. (A \$1.5 million cut will be made to the budget for airport liaison officers in 2008-09.)
- Money for “initiatives to address the situation of displaced persons and promote sustainable returns” will be more than doubled in 2008-09 to \$16.5 million.
- The \$7.5 million spent last year on the “management and care of irregular immigrants project in Indonesia” has not been renewed, although it is unclear what the future of this project will be.
- \$2.6 million over three years will be given to the Indonesian government to fund a “partnership between the Indonesian and Australian immigration agencies that will strengthen Indonesia's capacity to protect its borders by rebuilding Indonesia's movement alert list system at five major ports and the immigration headquarters in Jakarta.”

- \$34.1 million over four years will be provided to the Australian Federal Police, in part to assist in “strengthening the counter-terrorism capabilities of regional law enforcement partners”.
- \$216.9 million over five years will be given to the Australian Federal Police to increase overall police numbers as well as retention rates.
- \$5.1 million over four years from 2007-08 will be spent on the establishment of an Asia-Pacific Centre for Civil-Military Cooperation in Queanbeyan, New South Wales. “The Centre will provide training and will liaise with Australian and international government and non-government organisations to help Australia to develop future responses to stabilisation, reconstruction and peace building needs in the Asia-Pacific region.”
- A Pacific Police Development program will receive \$80 million over four years.
- Through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade the government will allocate some funding to “strengthen whole-of-government efforts for regional cooperation on people smuggling” and promote human rights internationally within the \$376 million line item, “Protection and advocacy of Australia’s international interests through the provision of policy advice to ministers and overseas diplomatic activity”. This figure has not been disaggregated.
- \$1 billion will be provided in 2008-09 as an overseas military operations reserve fund.

Settlement and associated services

- Unaccompanied humanitarian minors will receive an additional \$1 million in 2008-09 for supervision and welfare support.
- There will be an additional \$2 million available in the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) in 2008-09.
- \$87.6 million (up from \$73.6 million in 2007-08) will be contributed to the IHSS program. This includes funding for the Complex Case Support Network (the total figure is not disaggregated).
- An additional \$9.5 million funding has been granted to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) in 2008-09.
- The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters Ltd (NAATI) will receive an additional \$20,000 from DIAC in 2008-09.
- \$40 million will be provided for an Employment Pathways Program within the Adult Migrant English Program over four years. This will be a pilot scheme that will “provide additional English language tuition hours to those migrants most in need”. The total resources dedicated to AMEP for 2008-09 will be \$205.6 million (up from \$175.9 million in 2007-08).
- \$9.2 million is earmarked for Traineeships in English and Work Readiness, a vocational English program for newly arrived migrants (including refugees) for training linked to work placements.
- The Schools English as a Second Language program will have an increase in funding from \$92 million to \$167 million for 2008-09. From 1 January 2008, the per capita rate for newly arrived humanitarian entrant students was doubled.
- \$3.7 billion will be provided over three years commencing for the establishment of an integrated employment services network as an alternative or modification of the existing Job Network. The new initiative will commence in July 2009. \$400,000 will be spent on advertising associated with the employment programs in 2008-09.
- \$755,000 will be provided to FaHCSIA to support victims of trafficking.
- \$1.3 billion will be spent in 2008-09 by FaHCSIA on various policies to address the nation-wide housing crisis. Measures include a Social Housing Subsidy Program (SHSP) pilot project that

will subsidise the recurrent costs of financing additional rental accommodation for low and moderate-income earners (253 residences).

- A new multicultural centre will be built in Mirrabooka, Western Australia in 2009-10 at a cost of \$1 million.
- \$14.2 million for four years will be provided to DIAC to continue the national action plan for social cohesion, harmony and security. This money will provide “for projects with community organisations that help promote integration, wider community engagement and participation by Muslims in social, sport, arts and other cultural and civic activities. It will also provide continued support for ongoing dialogue with the Muslim community and fund further research into the causes of social disharmony within the Australian community”. Total funding for social cohesion projects will be \$20 million in 2008-09.
- The Government will provide \$1.7 million over four years to support activities that help reduce violence against women and children.
- \$1.7 million will be allocated over two years from 2007-08 to assist local community organisations in Lismore in New South Wales, Gumdale, St George and Aspley in Queensland, and Epping North in Victoria to provide a range of community services.
- \$79.5 million will be spent on the new citizenship requirements, an increase of \$1.3 million in 2007-08. The budget allocation includes \$3.8 million for “citizenship test preparation” distributed among 33 programs.

Overseas aid and multilateral assistance

- Australia’s overseas development assistance as a proportion of gross national income will be 0.32% in 2008-09, up from 0.3% in the previous financial year. The UN’s recommendation is 0.7%.
- \$1 billion in aid will be provided to PNG and the Pacific (including \$26.6 million for Nauru), \$1 billion for East Asia (including more than \$460 million for Indonesia and \$16 million for Burma), \$114 million for South Asia, \$164 million for Afghanistan, \$116 million for Africa (a 16% increase), \$313 million for Iraq (of which \$238 million is debt relief), and \$31 million for Palestine and the Middle East.
- Of the total overseas aid budget, the largest component will be dedicated to governance measures.
- \$314 million will be provided for “humanitarian, emergency and refugee programs” in 2008-09. The core contribution to UNHCR will be \$9.9 million, up from \$8.3 million the previous year but still well below the 2000-01 core funding of \$14.3 million. The International Refugee Fund will receive \$15 million and IOM will receive \$762,000.

Broader human rights measures

- \$2.8 million over two years from 2007-08 will be provided to facilitate national public consultations regarding “the recognition and protection of human rights and the recognition of civil responsibilities”.
- HREOC will have their staffing levels reduced by 13% in 2008-09 on 2007-08 levels.