



Refugee Council  
of Australia

## **2023-24 FEDERAL BUDGET: WHAT IT MEANS FOR REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION**

### **KEY POINTS:**

- *The Budget papers make no comment on the size of the 2023-24 Refugee and Humanitarian Program, with indications from the Government that an announcement could follow in June*
- *Offshore processing is estimated to cost \$1.65 billion over the forward estimates, despite approximately 30 people remaining on Nauru*
- *Spending on border management and enforcement continues to outpace that of humanitarian settlement spending by more than double*
- *The five-year limit on access to settlement support has been removed, opening up options for assistance for people who need it*

### **HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM**

Despite months of speculation about whether the Albanese Government would announce an increase in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program in line with Labor's commitment to expand it ultimately to 27,000 places per year, the 2023-24 Budget includes no information on the program's planning levels for coming years. RCOA understands that announcement of the size of the 2023-24 program may come next month after the Government's community consultation process closes on 31 May. Until then, the annual program remains at 17,875 places (13,750 in the core program and 4,125 places in the additional intake of Afghanistan nationals), the level announced last year.

The Government has changed the language in relation to delivering the Humanitarian Program for 2023-24 from a "planning ceiling" to a "planning target". The term "ceiling" first appeared in the Budget papers in 2018. Despite assurances at the time that the number of Refugee and Humanitarian visas allocated in the Budget would be filled each year, 13,825 places were left unfilled between 2019-20 and 2021-22.

### **SETTLEMENT SERVICES**

The Government will remove the five-year maximum duration of eligibility for services under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program, the National Community Hubs Program and Youth Transition Support services to ensure continued support for refugees and migrants who have been in Australia for longer than five years and have unresolved settlement related needs.

\$9.1 million in 2023–24 has been allocated to extend existing Youth Transition Support services for 12 months to 30 June 2024 to continue settlement services for young refugees and migrants to improve their employment outcomes.

The Government will introduce an improved delivery model for the Adult Migrant English Program from 1 January 2025 within existing funding, to improve English language, employment, and settlement outcomes for migrants by providing flexible tuition options, introducing a national curriculum, supporting professional development for teachers, and enhancing client support and performance management.

### **ONSHORE DETENTION AND COMPLIANCE**

Onshore detention and compliance is budgeted to cost over \$1.365 billion in 2023-24, an increase of \$74 million on spending in 2022-23. More than \$1.1 billion is budgeted for detention and compliance for each of the three years of the forward estimates.

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The Refugee Council of Australia  
is the national umbrella body  
for refugees, people seeking asylum  
and the organisations and individuals  
who support them • Founded 1981

## **OFFSHORE PROCESSING**

Offshore processing is budgeted to cost \$1.5 billion over the forward estimates to 2026-27, despite only approximately 30 people remaining on Nauru and the Government's commitment to resettle all people to third countries. From July 2012 to June 2024, the Australian Government has spent \$12 billion on the policy of offshore processing. See Appendix B for further information. In total, approximately 4,183 people have been sent offshore during this time. The Budget papers also note that the Home Affairs Department is "at risk" of failing to meet its 2022-23 performance measure of resettling 95% of the 150 refugees due to go from offshore processing to New Zealand this year.

## **BORDER SURVEILLANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

The Government spent over \$1.67 billion dollars on Border Enforcement and Border Management in the last year alone, double its spending on Refugee, Humanitarian, and Migrant Settlement Services. A similar budget of \$1.665 billion is allocated for next year.

The Government will provide \$17.9 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to increase the Australian Border Force's Airline Liaison Officer Program. This program has the effect of preventing people seeking asylum by air, among other things.

The Government will also provide \$37.4 million in 2022–23 for Australian Defence Force deployments, which include undertaking additional surveillance in support of the Department of Home Affairs' Operation Sovereign Borders.

## **ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM**

Payments made through Services Australia for Asylum Seeker Support for 2022-23 are expected to be \$15 million, less than half of the \$36.9 million allocated in last year's Budget. For 2023-24, \$37 million has been allocated. Spending on this vital program has been cut by 95% since 2015-16, from \$300 million to just \$15 million. See Appendix C for further information.

## **HEALTH AND TORTURE AND TRAUMA SERVICES**

The Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma has been allocated \$136 million over 4 years (and \$36 million ongoing) to support the mental health of survivors of torture and trauma before moving to Australia on humanitarian grounds and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Other additional health allocations include:

- \$15.3 million has been allocated to establish a Primary Health Network (PHN) Multicultural Access Program to support multicultural communities to access primary care services.
- The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) will establish the Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative with \$2.5 million in seed funding to ensure that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities have a voice in the design and implementation of the Government's *Strengthening Medicare* reform agenda.
- CALD communities will receive practical mental health tools and culturally safe services through an extension to the Embrace Suicide Prevention Pilot (\$0.8 million).
- Research to develop a 10-year update report on the state of multicultural mental health in Australia will also be funded to support longer-term strategies to support CALD communities (\$0.4 million).
- The Government has allocated \$4.7 million over the next year to partner with community leaders, bicultural educators, service providers and health experts to boost vaccinations.

## **WOMEN'S SAFETY**

There is increased support for migrant women and women on temporary visas. The Government is extending the current Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot to January 2025. It is also committing \$10 million to expand the family violence provisions within the Migration Regulations 1994 to most permanent visa subclasses. The provisions aim to ensure that visa applicants, including secondary applicants for permanent visa subclasses, offshore temporary Partner visa applicants and Prospective Marriage visa holders, do not feel compelled to remain in a violent relationship to be granted a permanent visa.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW SYSTEM**

The Government will reform the Commonwealth administrative review system following a review later this year, which will include abolishing the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) and establishing a new review body. The Government will provide \$89.5 million over 5 years from 2022-23 (and \$1.5 million per year ongoing) for this reform, which includes:

- \$63.4 million over two years from 2023-24 to appoint additional full-time members to address the backlog of AAT cases,
- \$14.4 million over 5 years from 2022-23 (and \$1.5 million per year ongoing) for the Attorney-General's Department to manage the transition to the new administrative review body, and
- \$11.7 million over two years from 2022-23 to develop a modern case-management system for the new administrative review body.

As part of this reform, the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA) will continue to be funded for 2023-24 at a cost of \$4 million but has not been funded in the forward estimates. The Government noted that the future of the IAA will be considered pending the establishment of a new federal administrative review body.

## **PERMANENT VISAS FOR TPV AND SHEV HOLDERS**

As previously announced, refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) will be given a permanent Resolution of Status visa. The Government estimates that this transition will increase payments for government services and benefits by \$732.5 million over 5 years from 2022–23. However, RCOA believes this Treasury estimate is a gross miscalculation of the actual likely expenditure, as refugees on TPVs and SHEVs already had access to most government services and many are well-established in the Australian workforce.

## **MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP**

\$124.47 million is allocated to Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship in the next financial year, a slight decrease to the \$130.39 million spent in 2022-23.

## **INCREASED MIGRATION AGENT ASSESSMENTS**

Migration agents will be required to undergo further background checks through AusCheck to assess whether they are a 'fit and proper person', subject to the passage of legislation.

## **MIGRATION PROGRAM**

For the 2023–24 permanent Migration Program, the Government will return the planning level to 190,000 places and will allocate 137,100 places (around 70 per cent) to the Skill stream, with Partner and Child visas to remain demand-driven.

The Government has allocated \$125.8 million over 4 years to continue implementing outcomes from the Jobs and Skills Summit to strengthen the migration system. This includes \$75.8 million over two years to extend the current visa processing resources to improve existing visa processing systems. Visa application charges will rise by 6% above regular CPI indexation, as well as 15% for select visitor and temporary visa subclasses and 40% for business innovation and investment visas.

## **ANTI-SLAVERY COMMISSIONER**

The Government will provide \$8.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$2 million per year ongoing) to establish an Anti-Slavery Commissioner to work across Government, industry and civil society to support compliance with the *Modern Slavery Act 2018*, to improve transparency in supply chains and help fight modern slavery in Australia and abroad.

## **OVERSEAS HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE**

Australia's baseline Overseas Development Assistance funding has increased slightly from \$3.991 billion spent in 2022-23 to \$4.075 billion allocated in 2023-24. Within this, \$479.4 million is allocated to "humanitarian, emergencies and refugees", a \$9 million increase on the current year. Despite the small overall increase in the aid budget, Australia's overseas development assistance in 2023-24 will be 0.19% of gross national income, a historic low. For more detail, see the [Australian Council for International Development's Budget analysis](#).

## APPENDIX A

**SPENDING IN 2023-24 BUDGET – DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

<b>DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS</b>	<b>2022-23 (estimated actual)</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26</b>	<b>2026-27</b>
<b>1.5 Regional Cooperation</b>	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
External expenses	69,533	72,749	33,742	34,618	35,484
Departmental expenses	38,701	40,337	39,318	39,893	40,441
<b>Total</b>	<b>108,234</b>	<b>113,086</b>	<b>73,060</b>	<b>74,511</b>	<b>75,925</b>
<b>2.1 Migration</b>					
Departmental expenses	392,776	345,502	328,491	323,951	327,337
<b>Total</b>	<b>392,776</b>	<b>345,502</b>	<b>328,491</b>	<b>323,951</b>	<b>327,337</b>
<b>2.2 Visas</b>					
External expenses	0	0	0	0	0
Departmental expenses	432,408	455,550	418,054	418,411	422,011
<b>Total</b>	<b>432,408</b>	<b>455,550</b>	<b>418,054</b>	<b>418,411</b>	<b>422,011</b>
<b>2.3 Refugee, Humanitarian, Settlement and Migrant Services</b>					
External expenses	619,024	553,643	520,117	524,648	516,166
Departmental expenses	181,038	181,374	184,527	182,388	181,869
<b>Total</b>	<b>800,062</b>	<b>735,017</b>	<b>704,644</b>	<b>707,036</b>	<b>698,035</b>
<b>2.4 IMA Offshore Management</b>					
External expenses	569,083	442,764	331,626	296,085	302,345
Departmental expenses	41,998	42,957	42,936	43,404	43,796
<b>Total</b>	<b>611,081</b>	<b>485,721</b>	<b>374,562</b>	<b>339,489</b>	<b>346,141</b>
<b>2.5 Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship</b>					
External expenses	16,529	11,472	5,549	488	499
Departmental expenses	113,863	113,006	104,838	105,335	105,787
<b>Total</b>	<b>130,392</b>	<b>124,478</b>	<b>110,387</b>	<b>105,823</b>	<b>106,286</b>
<b>3.2 Border Management</b>					
External expenses	12,772	8	8	8	8
Departmental expenses	435,818	457,830	434,899	437,668	446,786
<b>Total</b>	<b>448,590</b>	<b>457,838</b>	<b>434,907</b>	<b>437,676</b>	<b>446,794</b>
<b>3.4 Border Enforcement</b>					
Departmental expenses	1,225,273	1,197,260	1,026,607	1,033,630	1,043,632
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,225,273</b>	<b>1,197,260</b>	<b>1,026,607</b>	<b>1,033,630</b>	<b>1,043,632</b>
<b>3.5 Onshore Compliance and Detention</b>					
External expenses	938,785	1,025,856	751,977	762,882	779,762
Departmental expenses	352,294	339,370	340,669	343,426	347,226
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,291,079</b>	<b>1,365,226</b>	<b>1,092,646</b>	<b>1,106,308</b>	<b>1,126,988</b>
<b>SERVICES AUSTRALIA – PAYMENTS ON BEHALF OF DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS</b>	<b>2022-23 (estimated actual)</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26</b>	<b>2026-27</b>
<b>Payments on behalf of Dept of Home Affairs</b>	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Asylum Seeker Support	15,000	37,020	0	0	0

## OFFSHORE MANAGEMENT BUDGET ALLOCATIONS 2012-2024

Since Australia's offshore detention centres were reopened by the Gillard Government in 2012-13, successive governments have spent **\$12.1 billion** on offshore detention and processing arrangements and **\$11.6 billion** since the current version of offshore processing began in 2013-14. Below is a year-by-year breakdown of the actual spending on this disastrous policy.

There are approximately 30 people who have been subject to offshore processing who remain on Nauru, and around 85 people in PNG. The Morrison Government ended the official relationship with PNG in December 2021, and it is not clear if any of the \$485.7 million is going to PNG or just to the operation of offshore processing on Nauru.

<b>OFFSHORE MANAGEMENT BUDGET ALLOCATIONS</b>			
	<b>Budget announced before year begins(\$mil)</b>	<b>Estimated actual cost reported as year ends (\$mil)</b>	<b>Difference (\$mil)</b>
2012-13	--	2,106.4	2,106.4
2013-14	2,867.4	721.0	-2,146.4
2014-15	826.7	912.6	85.9
2015-16	810.8	1,078.1	267.3
2016-17	880.5	1,082.9	202.4
2017-18	713.6	1,482.0	768.3
2018-19	759.9	1,157.5	397.7
2019-20	525.6	961.7	436.0
2020-21	1,186.4	818.8	-367.7
2021-22	811.8	700.7	-111.1
2022-23	632.5	611.1	-21.4
<b>Total: July 2012 to June 2023</b>	<b>10,015.3</b>	<b>11,632.7</b>	<b>1,617.4</b>
<b>2023-24 budget allocation</b>		<b>485.7</b>	
<b>TOTAL – July 2012 to June 2024</b>		<b>12,118.5</b>	
<b>TOTAL – July 2013 to June 2024</b>		<b>10,012.06</b>	

APPENDIX C:

**ASYLUM SEEKER SUPPORT PAYMENTS**

These are the payments to people seeking asylum supported by the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) Program, administered by Services Australia on behalf of the Department of Home Affairs. The purpose of the SRSS Program is to support people to resolve their immigration status, and the financial payments help people with no other form of income. The payments are capped at 89% of the JobSeeker rate.

\$300 million dollars was spent in 2015-16, and cuts to the Program have seen it shrink to just \$15 million last year. This represents a 95% cut to this vital program.

**ASYLUM SEEKER SUPPORT PAYMENTS ADMINISTERED BY SERVICES AUSTRALIA**

	Budget announced before year begins (\$mil)	Estimated actual cost reported as year ends (\$mil)	Difference between spending and budget (\$mil)	Change in spending on previous year	
				\$mil	%
2015-16	**	300.0			
2016-17	170.0	191.1	21.1	-108.9	-36%
2017-18	245.8	139.8	-106.0	-51.3	-27%
2018-19	122.9	93.4	-29.5	-46.4	-33%
2019-20	52.6	39.5	-13.1	-53.9	-58%
2020-21	19.6	35.2	15.6	-4.3	-11%
2021-22	33.4	16.6	-16.8	-18.6	-53%
2022-23	36.9	15.0	-21.9	-1.6	-10%
2023-24	37.0				

**Total decline in spending between 2015-16 and 2022-23: \$285 million (95%)**