Refugee Council of Australia

2 March 2026

Hon Angus Taylor MP
Leader of the Opposition
18 Hill Street
Camden NSW 2570

Dear Mr Taylor,

On behalf of the Refugee Council of Australia, we would like to congratulate you on your recent election as Opposition Leader.

We note that the Liberal Party is in the process of reviewing its immigration policy. We would be keen to engage with you, your team and Senator Jonathon Duniam as Shadow Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration to share the ideas and perspectives of the Refugee Council of Australia, our member organisations and supporters.

Since the 2025 election, we have had several discussions with the previous Shadow Minister for Immigration, Senator Paul Scarr, on issues related to the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Senator Scarr accepted our invitation to speak at our organisation's Annual General Meeting in Sydney in November.

In December, we sent you and other members of the Federal Parliamentary Liberal Party a two-page brief (attached) outlining 10 reasons why the Liberal Party should support maintaining the Refugee and Humanitarian Program at its current level of 20,000 places a year even if overall migration numbers change. Over the past decade, the Refugee and Humanitarian Program has made up just 6.6% of net overseas migration but its positive impact nationally and internationally has been more significant than its modest contribution to national migration numbers would suggest.

As noted in this brief, in government the Liberal Party has played the major role in the development of the modern Refugee and Humanitarian Program and has issued 595,000 of the 1,000,000 permanent humanitarian visas issued by Australian governments since 1947. The three peak years for refugee arrivals were 1949-50 when the Menzies government was elected, 1980-81 during the Fraser government's response to the Indochinese refugee crisis and 2016-17 during the previous Coalition government's special intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. The 1,000,000 refugee arrivals, their children and grandchildren have contributed substantially to every aspect of our nation's life, responding to the opportunity to start again in Australia with entrepreneurialism and ambition.

The Turnbull and Morrison governments were responsible for three of the most significant recent innovations in migration pathways for refugees – the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot launched in 2021, the Community Refugee and Integration Settlement Pilot (CRISP) which began in 2022 and the Community Support Program which was developed from a pilot to an ongoing program in 2017.

The attached brief also notes the positive international impact of Australia's resettlement and complementary migration pathways for refugees – a contribution which is even more meaningful at a time when some other nations have turned away from the international sharing of responsibility. Australia's continuing role in resettlement is greatly appreciated by many nations which host significant numbers of refugees. It is also critical to regional strategies to provide constructive alternatives to irregular movement for refugees seeking enduring protection.

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The Refugee Council of Australia
is the national umbrella body
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and the organisations and individuals
who support them • Founded 1981

Aspects of the current national debate about immigration are causing distress for many Australians who feel their contribution to the nation is being diminished and dismissed by some political representatives and public commentators who are advocating for immigration policies which discriminate on the basis of race, religion and national origin. It is essential that the Federal Coalition, as the recognised alternative government, does not promote policies which discriminate in this way or appear to do so. Not only would policies perceived to be discriminatory undermine the Liberal Party's efforts to regain support in culturally diverse electorates, but it would also undermine national harmony in a nation which is more ethnically and religiously diverse than it has ever been.

As you know, the Refugee Council of Australia has been engaging with governments since 1981, representing the views and ideas of a national network of organisations and individuals involved in all aspects of refugee-related policies and programs. Our network brings together Australians of all backgrounds and faiths who participate in some way in welcoming and supporting people who have been forcibly displaced. Our collective wish is to see national policies reflect the positive spirit of welcome for which many Australian communities are well known.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further with you and members of your team at any time.

Yours faithfully,



Adama Kamara and Paul Power
Co-Chief Executive Officers

cc. Senator Jonathon Duniam, Shadow Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration

Refugee Council of Australia

10 REASONS WHY THE LIBERAL PARTY SHOULD NOT CUT THE REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM

As the Federal Parliamentary Liberal Party finalises its immigration policy, here are 10 reasons why the Refugee and Humanitarian Program should be excluded from any cuts and be maintained at its current level of 20,000 places a year. Committing to maintaining the Humanitarian Program would send a positive message to Australians of all backgrounds and to Australia's regional neighbours.

1. The Humanitarian Program's impact on migration numbers is minimal

In the 10 years to June 2024, the Refugee and Humanitarian Program contributed only 6.6% to Australia's net overseas migration – 158,594 humanitarian visas issued compared to net overseas migration of 2,425,871.[i] The pattern in the previous decade was the same – humanitarian visas were 6.7% of net overseas migration in the 10 years to June 2014. If the Liberal Party is planning to cut migration because of issues related to housing supply and the economy, including the Refugee and Humanitarian Program in the cuts will have a minimal impact on overall migration numbers.

2. The Liberal Party has an impressive legacy in supporting refugees

In November 2025, the Australian Government announced that it had issued the 1,000,000th permanent refugee and humanitarian visa since Australia's post-war refugee resettlement program began in 1947. Most of these visas – around 595,000 – were issued under Coalition governments. The three peaks of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program have been:

- 89,199 visas in 1949-50 during the Chifley and Menzies governments' response in Europe;
- 22,545 visas in 1980-81 during the Fraser Government's resettlement of Indochinese refugees;
- 21,968 visas in 2016-17 during the Abbott and Turnbull governments' extra Syrian and Iraqi intake.

The most significant reform of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program was undertaken by the Fraser Government, which replaced ad hoc arrangements with a planned annual program in 1977 and established a national network of migrant resource centres to offer specialised settlement support.

3. The party can send a positive signal to multicultural electorates it has recently lost

In the 61 Federal electorates where more than 20% of voters speak a language other than English at home, the Liberal Party holds just four seats while Labor holds 54 and Independents three. Since the 2019 election, the Liberal Party has lost 15 of those seats (Reid, Menzies, Banks, Bennelong, Chisholm, Bradfield, Swan, Sturt, Tangney, Aston, Kooyong, Deakin, Hughes, Hasluck and Bonner) while the four remaining Liberal seats are now all classified as marginal (Mitchell, Berowra, La Trobe and Goldstein).[ii]

Many people in these electorates will be looking closely at the Liberal Party's immigration policy, trying to interpret whether the key message is about economic sustainability and the housing market or a return to a more discriminatory migration policy. A clear way of demonstrating that any cuts to migration are not aimed at discrimination or exclusion would be to exempt the Humanitarian Program from planned cuts.

4. Refugee entrants are more entrepreneurial than skilled migrants and other Australians

While many humanitarian entrants need support with language learning and upskilling upon arrival in Australia, in the long run humanitarian entrants are more likely to establish small businesses than other migrants and the Australian-born population. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that, in 2022-23, 16% of humanitarian entrants who have been in Australia for 10 years or more earned income from their own unincorporated businesses, compared to 13% for skilled migrants and 11% for the total Australian population. In the first five years in Australia, 9% of humanitarian entrants earn income from their own business. This increases to 14% for those in Australia for 5-10 years and 16% after 10 years.[iii]

As refugee communities establish themselves in Australia, they foster new trade links. Trade between Australia and Vietnam, for example, was minimal in 1980 but in 2024 was valued at $28.8 billion.[iv]

5. Refugee entrants are younger than other migrants – and contribute for decades

As most humanitarian entrants are children and young people, the Humanitarian Program makes an important demographic contribution as the Australian population ages. ABS statistics for 2017-18 show that the median age of

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new permanent humanitarian visa entrants was 22.7 years – 14.6 years younger than for the Australian population (37.3 years). The median age for permanent skill visa entrants was 30.6 years and for permanent family visa entrants was 30.5 years.[v] Australia's most significant study of the economic and social contributions of refugees showed that the gap in labour force participation between newly arrived humanitarian entrants and other Australians converges over time, with their children achieving higher tertiary qualifications and labour force participation than the national average.[vi]

6. Australia can strengthen its international leadership role at a time of great need

While the global refugee population has grown to 38 million for the first time, refugee resettlement has been cut in the United States and key European states. Global resettlement places have dropped from 189,000 in 2024 to fewer than 68,000 in 2025. Australia now has the second largest resettlement program (after Canada) and will offer a quarter of all places globally this year. By not cutting its refugee program, Australia is sending a positive message of international cooperation to nations hosting large numbers of refugees across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

7. Refugee resettlement is critical to regional stability and border management

If Australia is to contribute to a reduction in irregular movement in the Asia-Pacific region, our nation must continue to offer practical assistance – through resettlement, international development assistance and diplomatic cooperation – to nations and communities hosting large refugee populations. Cutting the refugee program will send a message to host nations that they are on their own, undermining efforts to protect refugees where they first seek help and increasing the pressure for refugees to move on elsewhere.

8. Skilled labour migration of refugees could be expanded to meet needs in critical sectors

The Morrison Government pioneered the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot in 2021, providing a pathway for Australian businesses to propose eligible refugees for skilled visas, with support facilitated by Talent Beyond Boundaries. As of October 2025, 223 refugees outside of Australia have secured jobs with Australian employers through this pilot program. The Liberal Party could propose making this pilot an ongoing program and supporting the program to be even more effective in matching skilled refugees with employers unable to fill vacancies, including in such critical sectors as construction, health and aged care.

9. Community sponsorship of refugees could be developed further

The Turnbull and Morrison governments also developed the two current models of community sponsorship – the Community Support Program (CSP) which enables private sponsors in Australia to nominate refugees with English skills and potential job offers; and the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) which matches trained groups of community volunteers with refugees nominated by UNHCR. Both programs involve substantial financial contributions from sponsors but remain within the 20,000 places of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program – despite Labor pledges in its party platform and at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum to make community sponsorship additional. The Liberal Party could differentiate itself from Labor not by cutting refugee numbers but by doing what Labor has promised and not delivered – making these community-funded places additional (e.g. through a small allocation of 3000 places p.a.).

10. Millions of Australians have a personal connection to the Refugee program

The often-polarised political debate in Australia about refugees ignores the fact that people who were once refugees and their descendants have become a significant part of the Australian population over the past 80 years. With one million permanent refugee and humanitarian visas issued since 1947, there are millions of Australians who are connected to the refugee program personally or through their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. The Liberal Party has the opportunity to connect with these Australians by speaking positively about the ways in which people who were once refugees have made the most of the opportunity of a new life in Australia. In doing so, the party can clearly differentiate itself from intolerant and xenophobic political movements in Australia and internationally.

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[i] Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, National, state and territory population March 2025; Refugee and humanitarian entrants 2014-15 to 2023-24, Department of Home Affairs, Australian Migration Statistics, 2023-24 (Table 3.0)

[ii] Data on electorate demographics drawn from Your Electorate dashboard published by Australian Parliamentary Library. Compared with 2019 Federal Election divisional results and 2024 Federal Election division results on AEC website

[iii] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Migrant Settlement Outcomes (2025), released 30/6/25

[iv] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Vietnam country brief (accessed 13/12/2025)

[v] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 3101.0 - Australian Demographic Statistics, Jun 2018

[vi] Hugo, Graeme, Vas Dev, Sanjugta, Wall, Janet, Young, Margaret, Sharma, Vigya, and Parker, Kelly (2011). Economic, social and civic contributions of first and second generation humanitarian entrants, University of Adelaide.