

2025 National General Assembly Motion

Motion subject

Supporting People Seeking Asylum within our Communities

National Objective

This motion addresses the Community Services priority area for submission as it recommends reforms in national community services, which would help local governments support the Australia Government to deliver on its national objectives.

The Australian Federal Government has responsibility for immigration policy and providing people seeking protection with a clear and efficient Refugee Status Determination process, with adequate support mechanisms for those in need.

People seeking refugee protection face major barriers in accessing federal-funded support programs. Most are currently ineligible for the Status Resolution Support Services Program, the only Federal support people seeking asylum whilst their application for protection is processed.

Consequently, they rely on support from local governments, community groups for charity or work in exploitative conditions. This places huge burdens on local government and their communities, needlessly places individuals and families in destitution and erodes trust in Government process and institutions. The temporary status of people seeking asylum adds further challenges, including ineligibility to women's refuges, homelessness services and education opportunities.

'Arguably there is no greater obligation upon government than to maintain the trust that citizens have in meeting their community services obligations and promises, particularly to society's most vulnerable.' (2024 National General Assembly ALGA discussion paper).

Summary of key arguments

The Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) Program has become so restricted that it fails to achieve its intended purpose. Financial assistance delivered through the SRSS Program has been cut by 95% (from \$300 million in 2015-16 to \$16 million in 2023-24) and the number of people assisted has dropped to only 1,057 in 2024.

Charities cannot meet the need for material aid and financial assistance. The demand for help far outstrips what local government and charities have been able to provide. Homelessness services are reporting an increase in the number of people seeking asylum sleeping on the streets.

State governments have wound back support in expectation that the Federal Government would step in. After providing short-term assistance to fill the gap created by the Federal government's cuts, assistance for plane arrivals has ended in Queensland and the NSW Government ended its assistance in 2023.

Lengthy delays in visa processing have made the situation much worse. Currently, 2,500 people seeking asylum do not have a valid visa and work rights. The lack of assistance, coupled with extended waiting times for decisions, have led to people waiting for over 11 years without access to basic support during resolution of their asylum application.



Since 2018, the Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum (Taskforce) has been advocating for the rights of people seeking asylum to the Federal Government. Established and chaired by Greater Dandenong Council, the Taskforce is made up of a growing membership of over 40 councils nationwide, who understand that this is an issue of national importance – the advocacy for a fairer and swifter Refugee Status Determination system with adequate support systems in place for individuals and families at risk of destitution.

The Albanese Government's implementation of its 2022 election promise to end temporary protection has enabled more than 20,000 refugees on temporary visas to move to permanent Resolution of Status visas, providing certainty for people who have been living and working in Australia for more than a decade.

However, there are close to 8,000 people waiting for their immigration status to be resolved. They arrived over a decade ago to seek refugee protection yet continue to live without safety and certainty. This includes families with children who are Australian citizens and will be separated from their parents due to temporary visa status.

The 'Fast Track' process, which was intended to expedite decisions, has proven to be unfair, as evidenced by the government's recent abolition of its review component. This inefficient, slow process has left 1,190 people waiting for a primary decision, with average wait times of 864 days. People who have been refused under the Fast Track process are told to engage in return processes even if country conditions have drastically changed.

The prolonged uncertainty and harsh conditions experienced during the asylum process in Australia have led to trauma and isolation and prevents families within our community from gaining the stability that refugee status provides.

Notice of Motion

This National General Assembly calls on the Australia Government to:

1. Acknowledge Greater Dandenong City Council as Secretariat of the Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum on behalf of the following councils that are members:
 - a. Executive Members – Blacktown City Council, Brimbank City Council, Casey City Council, Darebin City Council, Hume City Council, Kingston City Council, Monash City Council, Merri-bek City Council, Wyndham City Council, Yarra City Council
 - b. General Members – Ararat Rural City Council, City of Ballarat, Banyule City Council, Blue Mountains City Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Hawkesbury City Council, Hobsons Bay City Council, Maribyrnong City Council, Moonee Valley City Council, Newcastle City Council, Nillumbik Shire Council, Orange City Council, City of Port Adelaide Enfield, Randwick City Council, City of Whittlesea; and
 - c. Supporter Councils – Albury City Council, City of Greater Bendigo, Cardinia Shire Council, City of Greater Geelong, City of Port Phillip, City of Hobart, Macedon Ranges Shire Council, Queenscliffe Borough Council, Wellington Shire Council, City of Wagga Wagga; and
2. Provide people seeking asylum with a valid visa and the opportunity to work while they await decisions on their protection application, including automating the bridging renewal process. By providing people work rights, they can contribute skills to Australia, remain independent in society and stay engaged in the asylum process.
3. Expand the eligibility criteria of the Status Resolution Support Services program to ensure people's basic needs are met, including health care, accommodation, crisis support, so people in need can live safely and not in destitution and deep poverty.

4. Grant permanent visas to people who have been previously refused a visa via the unfair 'Fast Track' process. Ending the uncertainty, by providing a pathway to permanency to the 7,700 people, will at last resolve the matter, enabling them to rebuild their lives.

