

Committee Secretariat  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Re: Migration Amendment (Removal and other Measures) Bill 2024**

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum (Taskforce) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the proposed Migration Amendment (Removals and Other Measures) Bill 2024.

The Taskforce coordinates joint national advocacy by Australian Local Governments to address policies and issues affecting people seeking asylum in our local communities.

We are a coalition of over 40 Local Governments nationally, encompassing about six million residents across Australia. We have the support of community services, community groups, peak bodies, policy experts and thousands of individuals to call for dignity and certainty for people awaiting on refugee determination.

Specifically, the key goals of our campaign urge the Federal Government to:

- 1) Providing everyone with a valid visa inclusive of work, travel, and study rights.
- 2) Expanding the eligibility criteria for the Status Resolution Support Services and simplifying the application process to ensure access to essential healthcare, income and housing support.
- 3) Ensuring an independent, timely and fair application and merits review process for all humanitarian applications.
- 4) Offering a fair review process for individuals who have received negative refugee determinations under the 'Fast Track' system.
- 5) Allocating resources to expedite the processing of asylum applications and appeals backlog.
- 6) Abolishing temporary visas and replacing them with permanent protection visas and pathways to citizenship for all humanitarian arrivals.

The Taskforce appreciates steps taken by the current Government to provide permanency to some temporary visa holders and acknowledgement of an unfair 'Fast Track' assessment process. However, the Taskforce wishes to offer its strong opposition for the proposed amendment, which we believe places people's lives at risk and goes against Australia's values of democracy and fairness.

The Taskforce expresses the following grave concerns about the proposed Bill:

- The amendment further punishes the 10,000 victims of the Fast Track system, whose claims for protection have never been properly or fairly addressed.

The Taskforce has been advocating for a fair review process for individuals who have received negative refugee determinations under the 'Fast Track' system. We know that there are a large number of people currently in indefinite immigration detention have been denied visas through the defective fast-track process, which has been subject to extensive international criticism.



If passed into law, the legislation will mean these people are forced to return to regimes where they may be harmed or killed or be detained in prison for refusing to comply with removal, irrespective of whether people have serious and legitimate claims for protection.

Criminal charges for failure to comply with directives, with penalties including imprisonment criminalise people seeking asylum and needlessly prolong detention.

- The Bill allows the Minister the discriminatory power to impose a broad travel ban by preventing visa applications from citizens from designated 'removal concern countries', restricting their ability to seek asylum in Australia.

The potential implications are broad for the substantial Iranian and Afghan communities in Australia who seek refuge from ongoing conflict and endured long-standing separations with their families in Iran and Afghanistan.

This dangerously expands the powers of the Minister with no adequate safeguards and transparency, which is contrary to Australia's international obligations.

- The prohibition on visa applications and Minister's 'removal pathway direction', will separate families, for example require compliance with removal direction by a parent regardless of the impact for their children, spouse or other family members.

For example, the Panahi family in Melbourne fled Afghanistan due to persecution and arrived by boat in Australia. Despite the challenges faced including ten years on temporary visas, the Panahi children have finally been granted permanent residency. Their father holds a Bridging Visa E and lives with a debilitating medical condition – he could potentially be separated from the rest of the family.

The Bill will further aggravate the trauma, isolation and mental health impacts for refugees and people seeking asylum, who have already experienced long and arduous journeys to Australia.

Family unity and community support networks allow people to maintain a sense of purpose and foster resilience in a new country, which should be protecting them but instead, this legislation does the opposite and exposes vulnerable people to more harm.

This will tarnish Australia's reputation as a welcoming, democratic and 'fair-go' country.

The attempt to make the proposed amendments to the Bill without proper consultation and due scrutiny of the severe implications must be abandoned and should instead focus on fair, equitable and humane solutions for people needing our protection and support to rebuild their lives in Australia.

The Taskforce thank the Committee Secretary for your time and consideration and we would be pleased to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,

Administrator  
Local Government Mayoral Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum

