

Preamble

The following report was compiled by Greater Dandenong Council in response to the motion passed at the MAV State Council in May 2025, to gain further insight into the impact of systemic gaps in Federal refugee policy on Victorian local governments.

Local Government plays a vital role in working with State and Commonwealth Governments to enhance community wellbeing. It supports people seeking asylum and refugees through direct services and/or partnerships with community organisations.

The presented data and anecdotal evidence were gathered from member Councils of the Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum and highlight the financial costs local governments incur in supporting people seeking asylum.

Financial impact of Federal policy gaps on Victorian Local Governments

Today, **thousands of people seeking safety living in Victoria remain locked out of essential services** due to restrictive visa conditions.

Many are denied the right to work and access to healthcare, forcing them into extreme poverty, unstable housing and severe mental health distress caused by prolonged visa uncertainty.

The Federally-funded **Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)** program, a vital safety net for people seeking asylum and experiencing hardship – is now largely **inaccessible due to the narrow eligibility criteria**.

Despite its original intent to provide short term support for basic needs, the limited access and payments are inadequate to survive on, seeing more people forced into destitution.

Funding cuts up to 93% to the SRSS program since 2015-16, have shifted significant costs from the Federal Government to local municipalities¹. The number of people receiving support dropped from **29,000 in 2015 to just 1,057 in 2025**.

In 2019, annual costs to the community were estimated between \$35–\$53 million across Victoria². Up to **80% of people cut off from SRSS** are at risk of **destitution**, relying on overstretched local resources.

Councils are facing significant fiscal challenges due to rate capping and rising costs. Under higher financial pressures and shifting political priorities, programs that support people seeking asylum are often among the first to be reduced or discontinued.

Material Aid & Housing

Rent related poverty and homelessness affect people seeking asylum at higher rates given that many receive no government benefits, and those that are eligible for SRSS support only receive 89 per cent of JobSeeker payments.

Sharon receives SRSS but the \$49 daily payment is inadequate to meet the costs of living, with all of it going towards rent. Support from her local Council and food bank has enabled her to survive. In her words: "These are not just policy oversights — these are real-life struggles that trap families in limbo and pain. Behind every visa number is a real human being — a mother like me."*

Municipalities with high refugee settlement and intake often coincide with high numbers of people seeking asylum. As a result, these communities experience particularly pronounced impacts, as they continue to support individuals from both legacy cohorts and recent arrivals.

¹Refugee Council of Australia. [Thousands of people seeking asylum living in poverty](#)

²Refugee Council of Australia. [An unnecessary penalty: Economic impact of SRSS changes](#)

*name changed



The City of Greater Dandenong is home to 705 Bridging Visa E Holders (June 2024), one of the most concentrated cohorts of people seeking asylum in Victoria.

In 2018, **Greater Dandenong Council endorsed \$328,333 in unallocated funding to support 12 local material aid agencies** to meet the demand for their services. This funding included a designated officer to coordinate the program, as well as, \$130,000 in direct grants. For the 2019-20 financial year, Council endorsed a further \$298,000 in funding.

More recently, Councils have created **Community Connector programs to meet growing needs**. These programs link vulnerable cohorts to emergency accommodation, rent assistance, transport, health care, childcare and material aid, but with little or no government funding.

For instance, Wyndham City Council's Community Connections and Care Services team, comprising six full-time and two part-time staff, received 3,500 requests for housing, food relief or social connection support in 2024-2025FY. **58 per cent of those requests were from individuals from countries of high humanitarian needs** e.g. African, Middle Eastern, Asian (Myanmar).

The City of Brimbank, which hosts the highest number of Bridging Visa holders in Victoria, employs **two full-time Community Connectors** who provide on-the-ground support to refugees and people seeking asylum, in partnership with Life Without Borders, Migrant Resource Centre, and Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

In the 2024-25FY alone, Maribyrnong City Council delivered \$2,682 in its fundraising, food and material aid initiatives for people seeking asylum.

Between October 2024-June 2025, Greater Dandenong Council's Community Connector program **distributed \$3,300 in supermarket vouchers to asylum-seeking families** and facilitated over 6,000 nappy donations. In 2024, the program also assisted 600 individuals with clothing and provided food parcels to people sleeping rough (See Appendix).

Hasna and her young children, seeking asylum and ineligible for government support, faced severe financial hardship. With a chronically ill husband, Hasna's cleaning job couldn't cover monthly rent. Their situation worsened with a \$6,700 water bill. After weeks of advocacy, the Community Connector was able to secure a full waiver from South East Water, offering the family vital financial relief and stability.*

Greater Dandenong Council provides grant funding to resource staffing at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Dandenong Foodbank. In two years, the **Foodbank has seen a 68 per cent increase in the number of people seeking asylum** it supports each month (average 436 unique individuals/month in 2024-25). These services are stretched beyond capacity and rely heavily on donations and community goodwill.

Social inclusion, employment and education

Hume City Council offers a comprehensive range of services and supports for refugee communities, including immunisation and kindergarten enrolment, English language programs, maternal and child health services, concession leisure centre memberships and targeted employment opportunities.

Casey Councils funds organisation South East Community Links **\$5,000 per annum** to deliver citizenship pathway and social inclusion sessions for newly arrived women from refugee and asylum backgrounds.

Maribyrnong City Council in the 2024-25 financial year has delivered \$17,642 in initiatives in the areas of health and social wellbeing, work opportunities and educational programs for people seeking asylum.

Between 2023-2025, Brimbank has funded over \$81,500 to support local services and organisations to deliver programs supporting social cohesion, resilience, and empowerment for refugees and people seeking asylum communities.



From October 2022 to June 2025, Merri-bek City Council has funded \$267,400 to local initiatives supporting refugees and people seeking asylum. In 2024, Merri-bek City Council in partnership with Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre delivered a **\$10,000 social cohesion project improving civic participation for people seeking asylum without work and study rights.**

From 2021-2025, Wyndham Council's Social and Economic Inclusion programs supported **1,375 newly arrived refugees and migrants** to build job readiness and pathways to employment.

Bass Coast Shire Council has played a key role in the settlement of Karen refugee families, working through a multi-agency approach to provide essential support including **accommodation, schooling, English language education, and employment opportunities.**

These initiatives underscore the potential of comprehensive employment services to deliver meaningful outcomes. However, they also reveal that sustained impact requires substantial investment, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term funding commitments.

Advocacy

The welfare and wellbeing of people seeking asylum, once a federal responsibility, has increasingly shifted to local communities, service providers, and councils. However, ongoing cuts to the SRSS program mean **local communities cannot meet the demand for support.**

Councils are under mounting pressure from residents to focus on core services—roads, rates, and rubbish—making support for asylum programs uncertain. With limited revenue streams and escalating fiscal constraints, these initiatives are often the first to be reduced or discontinued.

Without council support, people seeking asylum who are already vulnerable, face heightened risk of crisis: potential increased rough sleeping, deteriorating mental and physical health, rising poverty, family violence, and more emergency hospital presentations. This crisis is a direct result of Federal Government policy, and they must take responsibility by working collaboratively with Councils to address it.

In 2018, Greater Dandenong Council led eight other Victorian councils to establish the *Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum*. Since then, **a total of 47 Councils** (28 Victorian) have invested into advocating to the Federal Government about this humanitarian crisis through the Taskforce's 'Back Your Neighbour' campaign.

The Taskforce asks the Federal Government to issue bridging visas with work rights in a timely manner, enabling people to support themselves, and to broaden SRSS eligibility based on need, for those at risk of destitution and homelessness.

Appendix

