

**BACK YOUR
NEIGHBOUR**

Financial impact of Federal policy gaps on Victorian local governments

Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce
Supporting People Seeking Asylum
December 2025

The Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to all Elders past and present. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities.



@backyourneighbour

www.backyourneighbour.com.au

Introduction

Local governments help create safety, belonging and opportunity for all, no matter where people come from.

The Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum is a coalition of almost 50 local governments in Australia and endorsed by over 90 community, faith, education and legal organisations.

The following report was compiled by Greater Dandenong City 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 Victorian 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.



The Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum is a coalition of almost 50 local governments across Australia, representing 6 million residents.



Table of Contents	Page
Financial Impact of Federal policy gaps	3
Material Aid & Emergency Relief.....	4
Social inclusion, employment and education.....	7
Advocacy.....	8

Financial impact of Federal policy gaps

Funding cuts up to 93% to the Status Resolution Support Services program since 2015–16¹, have shifted huge costs from the Federal Government to local municipalities.

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 health care, 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 the program's 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.

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.

What is the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program?

SRSS is a federally-funded program that supports people seeking asylum, who are waiting for the government's decision on a visa application. It has different levels of support, which can include a living allowance (89% of the JobSeeker allowance), casework support and access to torture and trauma counselling.

The number of people receiving support dropped from 29,000 in 2015 to just 1,927 in December 2025.

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

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

Material Aid & Emergency Relief

Councils and local services have stepped in to support people seeking asylum who are facing poverty and destitution in the community.

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 federal support only receive 89% of JobSeeker payments.

Sharon's story

Sharon*, a single mother, receives a \$49 daily payment via the Status Resolution Support Services, but it 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."

**name changed*

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.



The City of Greater Dandenong is home to 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, the Council endorsed a further \$298,000 in funding.

Additionally, the Council delivered grant funding to resource staffing at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's Foodbank in Dandenong. In two years, the Foodbank has seen a 68% increase in the number of people seeking asylum it supports each month (average 436 unique individuals per month in 2024-25).

These services are stretched beyond capacity and rely heavily on donations and community goodwill.

Hasna's story

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, Council staff was able to secure a full waiver from South East Water, offering the family vital financial relief and stability.

**name changed*



Community Connector delivering household essentials to family seeking asylum in the City of Greater Dandenong.

Community Connector programs in Councils

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

Brimbank Council



hosts the **highest number of Bridging Visa holders** in Victoria

employs two full-time Community Connectors

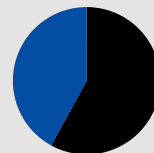


partners with Life Without Borders, Migrant Resource Centre, and Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

Wyndham Council



3,500 enquiries received on housing, food relief or social connection support in 2024-25



58% from individuals from countries of high humanitarian needs

employs six full-time & two part-time staff for Community Connection Services

Maribyrnong Council



\$2,682 fundraising to provide food and material aid for people seeking asylum in 2024-25

Greater Dandenong Council



\$3,300 supermarket vouchers to people seeking asylum in 2024-25



6,000 nappy donations to families

Social inclusion, employment and education

Wrap-around services can achieve meaningful outcomes but sustained impact requires long-term investment and cross-sector collaboration and government commitment.

- Hume City Council offers a comprehensive range of services 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 City Council funds organisations like 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 2024-25 delivered [\\$17,642](#) in initiatives in the areas of health and social wellbeing, [work opportunities and educational programs](#) for people seeking asylum.
- Brimbank City Council, between 2023-2025, 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.
- Merri-bek City Council, from October 2022 to June 2025, funded [\\$267,400](#) to local initiatives supporting refugees and people seeking asylum. The 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.
- Wyndham City Council's Social and Economic Inclusion programs, from 2021-2025, supported [1,375](#) newly arrived refugees and migrants to build job readiness and pathways to employment.



Advocacy

Councils are under mounting pressure from residents to focus on core services—roads, rates, and rubbish—making support for asylum programs uncertain.

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.

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.

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.

Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum

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 48 Councils nationally have invested into advocacy to the Federal Government via the Taskforce's Back Your Neighbour campaign.

The Taskforce asks the Federal Government to resolve protracted cases, issue bridging visas with work rights in a timely manner, and to provide needs-based support.

Sector-wide advocacy has led to the Federal Government granting permanent visas for 20,000 refugees in Australia and \$160 million investment to address visa processing delays.

BACK YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce
Supporting People Seeking Asylum

