

Supported by ARAN, RAR, GFR, & NARN

Letter kit for March/April 2025

Briefing Candidates before the Imminent 2025 Federal Election

Available to download at –

- <https://aran.net.au/resources/letter-writing/>
- <https://ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au/write-a-letter>



WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO WRITE NOW

Immediately before a federal election we have an opportunity to educate candidates old and new.

As a federal election approaches candidates will be discussing the issues Australia faces, hoping to attract voters. New members of parliament can take fresh approaches and bring new perspectives into parliament.

Let's seize this chance while they are listening harder than usual!

Australia's international reputation matters to us. We are in an unpredictable world where repudiation of previous agreements is causing much disquiet.

For more than 2 decades Australia's treatment of people seeking asylum has been found to be in breach of international human rights law and international conventions.

This is an unusually fluid situation for all our letter-writers, but it presents an opportunity for public discussion of Australia's current moral indifference towards refugees and a refreshed chance to change it!

- Write to incumbents and candidates to let them know that you and others care about how Australia treats refugees and people seeking asylum. Let them know that you will be voting for candidates who commit to fair and compassionate refugee policies.
- Send them the Policy Brief below – this provides a comprehensive overview of current issues and necessary actions

WHO TO WRITE TO – *You will need to be proactive about this!*

All current MPs must stand for re-election (unless retiring). Half of all Senators in each state must also stand for re-election

Wikipedia has a useful list of all electorates and candidates, and also a listing of the senators who are standing for re-election in each state. You can find the details **here**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candidates_of_the_2025_Australian_federal_election .

Now that the election has been called, you can use the Australian Electoral Commission website <https://www.aec.gov.au> to **find out whether any additional candidates will be standing for election in your federal electorate**. All candidate nominations must be declared 10 days after the announcement of the election – 10th April.

You can expect to find **contact details** for candidates by checking their party's website for party endorsed candidates, or by looking at each candidate's campaign website or social media. Googling their name should be a big help here!

NOTE: There are more than 30 independent candidates standing supported by Climate 200. You can see electorates in which these candidates are standing here <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/climate-200-s-plan-for-a-second-teal-wave-20241217-p5kyys>

Look for your own state's senators' contact details on

https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian_Search_Results?q=&sen=1&par=-1&gen=0&ps=0 Letters should be sent to state based offices, as senators will not be in Canberra during the election campaign.

NOTES:

- If there are many candidates standing in your electorate, you might choose to write to those you think have the best chances of being elected.
- The sample letter below has been written as if from an individual

If you have a letter writing group, please change the wording from 'I' to 'we' in the appropriate places and ask your friends to sign and print their names below or on additional sheets.

We suggest you print out the Information Brief which appears below the sample letter and give a paper copy to each of your local candidates with your covering letter, or if sending emails, add to the end of your email as an Appendix.

EXTRA INFO: If you are meeting with candidates – you can find other resources here [ARAN Google folder - Shared Election related resources](#)

SAMPLE COVERING LETTER TO ALL ASPIRING CANDIDATES IN YOUR ELECTORATE

Your name and

Address

Date:

To: Candidate for the federal seat of (YY) / Candidate for the Senate for the state of (....)

Dear (Candidate's name),

Congratulations on stepping up to be a candidate in our democratic election process.

Representing the people of (Y) Electorate (or your state as a Senator) is a vital duty to undertake.

I ask you in your preparations for taking a seat in Australia's federal parliament to acquaint yourself afresh with the issues surrounding Australia's treatment of people seeking asylum.

Please approach this issue with an open mind. I ask that you be willing to develop a strong grasp on what has been done in the past under various governments and the impacts our actions have had and are having on people who came to us for help.

If you care about Australia's international reputation, please develop your own ideas of what might be done in the future. You will consider your own ethical and humanitarian values as you work out your position

Crucially, are you aware of people living in your own electorate currently who are caught up and affected by our federal government refugee policies and practices?

I offer you the following Information Brief in the hope it will be useful to you as you get your head and heart around these issues and prepare to answer your potential constituents' questions.

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)

(Your Name)

(Your Address)

If posting or delivering your letter, include a copy of the Information Brief

If emailing – add the brief to the body of your email (attachments are sometime not read!)

POLICY BRIEF - REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

The importance of having a positive policy on refugees and people seeking asylum

For years Australia was regarded as a model country in its welcoming of refugees and people seeking asylum and was proud of its practice and the positive values that this reflected. Refugees have made and continue to make a rich contribution to the Australian community. Asylum seekers and people from refugee backgrounds are present in all parts of our society and community. This welcoming spirit and the diversity it nurtures, enrich our whole community. Sadly, this spirit of welcoming has been set aside in preference for a negative narrative that refugees and people seeking asylum are a threat and a burden to Australia. Not only has this harsh approach resulted in significant harm to those subject to the policies it has given rise to, it has also bred division and hate that undermines the cohesion of Australian society and diminishes us all.

DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXT

Refugee – person who is “forced to flee their own country and seek safety in another country. They are unable to return to their own country because of feared persecution as a result of who they are, what they believe in or say, or because of armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder.”

<https://www.unhcr.org/au/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugee>

Asylum seeker – a person who is seeking protection as a refugee

Seeking asylum is not illegal, regardless of mode of arrival. The right to seek asylum is guaranteed in international law through the UN Refugee Convention, an international treaty which Australia signed in 1951.

Migrant – a person who chooses to move to another country, usually for work, education or family reasons.

Australia's acceptance of refugees is administered under the Humanitarian Program, as part of the Immigration and Citizenship area of the Department of Home Affairs. The Humanitarian Program is one stream of the overall migration program. Humanitarian entrants, i.e. refugees, comprise less than 10% of total migration. The other major streams are skilled migration and family reunion.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ISSUE AND WHY IT IS A CONCERN

There are 3 main issues underlying the need for reform in refugee and asylum policy:

- The gross human rights abuses inherent in the current system, in contravention of Australia's international obligations.
- The lack of integrity and transparency in: a) the application and assessment processes, b) the outsourced contracts for and delivery of services, especially in relation to the detention facilities, and c) the development of policy and legislation.
- The exorbitant cost to the Australian taxpayer

In contrast to the first 50 years of Australia's refugees and asylum policy, the period since 2001 has seen both major political parties criminalise and demonise refugees, implementing increasingly harsh policy – purely for base political purpose. Without regard for human rights, rule of law, fairness or Australia's international obligations, the Coalition and Labor have engaged in a race to the bottom in who can be toughest on refugees. Successive governments have done little to address the widespread misunderstanding in the community about refugees, and in fact have exploited and encouraged the false notion that refugees are dangerous criminals and pose a threat to national security. Refugee policy is now implemented under considerable secrecy.

This has resulted in refugee policy that is intentionally cruel, has caused serious mental and physical harm to thousands of men, women and children, is widely condemned by human and legal rights bodies, and is exorbitantly expensive to the Australian taxpayer.

PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE

1. Immigration detention

- a. End offshore detention & evacuate those being held in PNG (approximately 50) and Nauru (approximately 100) to the Australian mainland.
- b. Limit mandatory immigration detention to the shortest possible time for health and security checks only.
- c. Return the conditions of immigration detention from the current prison-like conditions to those appropriate to its administrative, not punitive, purpose.

2. Adequately support asylum seekers living in the Australian community while they wait for a decision on their claims and for refugees on bridging visas.

- a. Restore SRSS (Status Resolution Support Services) to all people awaiting determination of their refugee status.
- b. Ensure that all refugees and people seeking asylum have the right to work, to study, and have access to income support and medical care.

3. Provide permanent protection to people whose claims were denied under the unfair Fast Track system (approximately 8000), and for those who were subjected to offshore detention and have no other safe resettlement option (approximately 1000).

4. Respect the principles of family unity by:

- a. Restoring family reunion rights for all refugees, regardless of their mode of arrival
- b. Reforming family reunion through the Migration Program to better support access by refugee families.

5. Repeal or significantly amend the draconian legislation passed in November 2024 which enables the Australian Government to deport people who will not be granted a permanent visa to any country which will accept payment from Australia to accept them.

This practice, which has already commenced, clearly places people at risk in regimes which may not protect their rights and wellbeing. There are concerns that people seeking asylum may be forcibly returned to places of danger. This is a further iteration of Australia's widely criticised practice of 'offshoring' responsibility and failing to fulfill our obligations under the UN Refugee Convention. The newly legislated approach approximates people trafficking, and is a new low in Australia's treatment of people seeking asylum and potentially others who fail to meet requirements for permanency in Australia.

6. Resettlement Options for those currently held offshore

- a. Immediately transfer the 10 seriously mentally ill men from PNG to medical facilities in Australia for urgently needed medical treatment.
- b. Promptly find permanent, safe resettlement options for the other 30 other men in PNG who have endured 12 years of offshore detention.
- c. Those who wish to should be evacuated to the Australian mainland while their resettlement arrangements are made.
- d. Expedite the processing of the protection claims made by the people currently being held on Nauru, and promptly provide safe, permanent resettlement for those who are found to be refugees.

7. Increase Australia's Intake of Refugees

- a. Over the next 3 years, increase the annual intake in the Humanitarian Program from current 20,000 to 27,000.

- b. Increase the **CRISP (Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot) Program**, now a permanent program's capacity to 2,000 places by 2027-28.
- c. Make **CRISP** sponsored places additional to the Humanitarian Program.

BARRIERS TO CHANGE

The only real obstacle to change is political will, and the dearth of positive political leadership. No additional funding is required. No new legislation is required. Because of the high cost of the immigration detention system under the present regime, there would be great budget savings if the recommended changes were made. (See Government Expenditure section for further details)

How can barriers be overcome

In the previous term of Parliament, the community independents in the House and Senate have had an important role in trying to hold the government to account and to maintain sensible, constructive debate about the issue. The community independents have strengthened significantly the Crossbench efforts to restore humane, effective refugee and asylum policy.

LABOR, COALITION, GREENS POSITIONS

Coalition

Between 2013 and 2022, the Coalition government oversaw an increasingly harsh regime of offshore detention for all people seeking asylum who had arrived by boat. Conditions of offshore detention were unsafe, unhealthy and inhumane. At least 13 people died in offshore detention as a result of suicide, murder and medical negligence. Incidents of assault and self-harm were rife. This has been substantiated by numerous inquiries and reports conducted by the Australian Parliament, Australian Human Rights Commission, the UN, Amnesty International and many legal and medical bodies. Similarly, the conditions of onshore immigration detention became more prison like, unsafe and lacking in proper health and welfare services.

The Coalition supports indefinite immigration detention, contrary to the decision of the Australian High Court that indefinite detention is unlawful. <https://www.hrlc.org.au/human-rights-case-summaries/2024/05/28/high-court-ruling-in-asf17-v-commonwealth-of-australia>

The Coalition supports temporary protection visas.

Overall, the Coalition is committed to continue all the policies and practices of its 2013-2022 term of office. In addition, in the lead-up to the 2025 election, it has made specific commitment to:

- reduce humanitarian intake to 13,750 (<https://dantehan.com.au/2024/12/18/labors-immigration-failure/>)
- strengthen detention laws (in attempt to contravene High Court ruling that indefinite detention is unlawful) <https://www.liberal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/The-Priorities-of-a-Dutton-Coalition-Government.pdf>

LABOR

In Opposition during the period of the Coalition Government from 2013 -2022, the ALP was highly critical of the Coalition's policy and treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum, citing the unacceptable cruelty and exorbitant financial cost. In the 2022 election campaign it promised to: "deal with the complex issue of those seeking Australia's protection by giving expression to the values of compassion, justice, human rights, fairness and generosity. (ALP National Platform 2023) The newly appointed Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil declared that refugee policy had been a political football for too long, and that it would end on her watch.

The [ALP national platform](#) extensively outlines policy aligned with the objective in the quote above. In government, however, the Albanese Government has not acted consistently with that platform. Rather,

they not only continue the previous government's cruelty and punitive practices, they have introduced even harsher measures and granted the Minister extensive unfettered powers in an attempt to circumvent the decisions of the 2023 Australian High Court finding that indefinite immigration detention is not lawful.

It should be recognised that the Albanese Labor government has made some significant positive reforms. It has abolished Temporary Protection Visas and granted permanent visas to almost 20,000 people as a result. However, it has done nothing to set aside the unfair decisions made under the Fast Track assessment process. Consequently, up to 9,000 people continue to live with uncertainty and constant fear of deportation despite having lived in and contributed to the Australian community for 12 years or more.

GREENS

- **End offshore detention** on Manus Island and Nauru, bringing refugees to safety and freedom in Australia, and ensuring we create a fairer and safer system that helps more people and meets our international obligations
- **Increase Australia's humanitarian intake** to 50,000 per year
- Push for **a faster, fairer, and more affordable family reunion visa system** that actually reunites families
- Provide **additional humanitarian places for refugees** from Afghanistan and protect Afghan citizens already in Australia
- **Establish a regional solution** for people seeking asylum
- Introduce a **7 day limit for onshore detention** and provide fair support for people seeking asylum
- **Abolish Temporary Protection Visas** and reintroduce Permanent Protection Visas for refugees
- Provide 10,000 places per year to a **Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program**, which are in addition to places provided to the Government-funded Humanitarian Program intake

Source: <https://greens.org.au/campaigns/close-the-camps>

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE AND RELEVANT DATA

It is difficult to determine the exact financial cost of Australia's asylum seeker policy because expenditure ranges across a number of government programs and portfolios. Sources detailing expenditure in this area of policy are listed in *The cost of Australia's refugee and asylum policy: a source guide* from UNSW's Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law.

<https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/law/kaldor/resources/2024-05-factsheet/2024-05-cost-of-australia%27s-refugee-and-asylum-policy.pdf>

Cost of Immigration Detention

"Onshore detention and compliance is budgeted to cost over \$1.365 billion in 2023-24, an increase of \$74 million on spending in 2022-23. More than \$1.1 billion is budgeted for detention and compliance for each of the three years of the forward estimates."

"Offshore processing is budgeted to cost \$1.5 billion over the forward estimates to 2026-27, despite only approximately 30 people [now approximately 100 in January 2025] remaining on Nauru and the Government's commitment to resettle all people to third countries. **From July 2012 to June 2024, the Australian Government has spent \$12 billion on the policy of offshore processing.**" source: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/federal-budget-summary/> includes link to original source documents) In contrast, allowing asylum seekers to live in the community while their claims are being assessed (as historically been the practice) is vastly less expensive.

- immigration detention facility: \$505,176 per person per year
- community detention: \$54,798 per person per year
- living in the community on a bridging visa: \$2575 per person per year

source: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/detention-australia-statistics/10/> (includes link to original source documents)

In addition, Australian government is continually making compensation payments immigration detainees for such matters as unlawful detention, breach of duty of care, and medical negligence. Many of these settlements have been made out of court so the amounts are unknown. To date, compensation payments are believed to be in the tens of millions of dollars.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

End offshore detention & Evacuate PNG and Nauru to the Australian mainland

Since 2012, people seeking asylum who arrive by boat have been subject to mandatory detention in harsh conditions on remote Pacific islands of Papua New Guinea and Nauru, and are denied resettlement in Australia. (The punitive treatment of people arriving by boat is not accorded to asylum seekers arriving by plane.) The abuse, neglect, and lack of transparency in Australia's offshore immigration regime have been exhaustively documented. (see references)

This is not history. There are currently around 50 men still being held in PNG, 13 years after being sent there by the Australian Government. All have serious physical and mental health problems as a result of their detention which are not being adequately treated in PNG. Some are so ill that they are unable to care for themselves, and too incapacitated to be considered for resettlement.

There are currently around 100 asylum seekers detained on Nauru, in almost total secrecy. Some have now been held on Nauru since September 2023. As far as is known no resettlement options are available to them. Three men with criminal convictions have been granted long term visas on Nauru after payment was made to the government of Nauru by Australia.

Limit the time of mandatory immigration detention for people seeking asylum, and improve conditions

Immigration detention is meant to be for administrative purposes for essential health and security checks only.

Immigration Detention should not be used for punitive purpose or be managed in a highly securitised, prison-like manner, as it now is.

In November 2023, the High Court of Australia ruled that indefinite immigration detention is not lawful. <https://www.hrlc.org.au/human-rights-case-summaries/2024/05/28/high-court-ruling-in-asf17-v-commonwealth-of-australia>

Adequately support asylum seekers living in the community and for people on temporary bridging visas

SRSS (Status Resolution Support Services) is a federal government program to support people seeking asylum while their application is being processed, in existence since 1992. The SRSS budget has been cut by 95% since 2015 (by Coalition government), and the eligibility criteria so restricted that most asylum seekers are not eligible. This has left thousands of people impoverished, many homeless, and entirely dependent on community charities or individual Australians.

"Payments made through Services Australia for Asylum Seeker Support for 2022-23 are expected to be \$15 million, less than half of the \$36.9 million allocated in last year's Budget. For 2023-24, \$37 million has been allocated. Spending on this vital program has been cut by 95% since 2015-16, from \$300 million to just \$15

million.” Source: Assistance for people seeking asylum in 2023/24 Federal Budget Summary
<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/federal-budget-summary/>

Permanent protection

Historically, Australia has granted all refugees permanent protection visas. In 1999, the Howard Coalition government introduced Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for asylum seekers who arrive by boat. TPVs are short term only and restrict the rights of their holders.

Access to permanent residency is a key critical factor in the building of Australia as a successful multicultural nation. Granting permanent residency with a pathway to citizenship builds social cohesion by allowing people to commit to a secure future in Australia and by their feeling valued as a member of the Australian community.

In 2024 the coalition government introduced a Fast Track System for assessing claims for asylum. This new system did not provide a fair, thorough and robust assessment process. The ALP acknowledged this, and in the 2022 election campaign promised to end it, which it has done. However, the Albanese government insists that the decisions made under the unfair Fast Track system be upheld.

Lack of transparency regarding contracts for immigration detention

For many years there have been serious concerns about the integrity of the commissioning of contracts for the management of immigration detention centres, and the suitability of the selected providers.

The latest is in relation to the new contract for management of the Nauru detention operation.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/dec/17/immigration-detention-subcontractor-spotless-facility-services-accused-price-fixing-adf-contracts-ntwnfb>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/an-under-investigation-company-and-its-role-with-asylum-seekers-on-nauru/gwna4g8vww>

The 2023 Richardson *Review of Integrity Concerns and Governance Arrangements for the Management of Regional Processing Administration* by the Department of Home Affairs identified a lack of proper due diligence in procurement processes and inadequate information sharing between agencies with the Department of Home Affairs. It also found that the department had contracted companies which were under investigation by the Australian Federal Police, as well as an enterprise suspected of corruption.

Increase Australia's Intake of Refugees

Providing a safe pathway for people fleeing war and persecution is the most effective way to prevent people from having to resort to dangerous means to seek safety. Australia is a wealthy country with an advanced economy, well-placed to be more generous in taking a fair share of the high number of displaced people in the world today. Those defending Australia's hardline policies on refugees often claim that Australia has the most generous refugee program in the world. However, according to an analysis of UN statistics, Australia ranks 30th overall in recognition and resettlement of refugees, 41st on a per capita basis and 77th relative to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Global-Trends-2013-22.pdf>

Australia's Migration allocation for 2024/25:

- Skill stream 132,000 places
- Family stream 52,500 places
- Humanitarian Program 20,000 places

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/the-federal-budget-what-it-means-for-refugees-and-people-seeking-humanitarian-protection/>

REFERENCES - Key sources of research and information about refugee policy in Australia:

- Refugee Council of Australia <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>
- Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW <https://www.unsw.edu.au/kaldor-centre>
- Human Rights Law Centre <https://www.hrlc.org.au/>
- Asylum Insight <https://www.asyluminsight.com/>

Accountability & transparency

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/australia-responsible-arbitrary-detention-asylum-seekers-offshore-facilities>

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/11/i-felt-less-human-not-human-at-all-australia-faces-moral-crossroads-over-nauru>

<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/richardson-review/richardson-review-report.pdf>

<https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/school-of-social-and-political-sciences/our-research/comparative-network-on-refugee-externalisation-policies/blog/secretcy-and-abuse-in-australias-immigration-detention-systems>

Australia's refugee intake stats

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/is-australias-response-to-refugees-generous/>

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Global-Trends-2013-22.pdf>

Conditions of Detention

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/last-resort-national-inquiry-children-immigration>

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/10/the-nauru-files-2000-leaked-reports-reveal-scale-of-abuse-of-children-in-australian-offshore-detention>

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/NauruandMamusRPCs/Report/c07

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/australia-responsible-arbitrary-detention-asylum-seekers-offshore-facilities>

<https://www.amnesty.org.au/island-of-despair-nauru-refugee-report-2016/>

Cost of Offshore Detention

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/operation-sovereign-borders-offshore-detention-statistics/7/>

(includes links to Budget Papers & DHA stats)

<https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/law/kaldor/resources/2024-05-factsheet/2024-05-cost-of-australia%27s-refugee-and-asylum-policy.pdf>

<https://www.equityeconomics.com.au/report-archive/at-what-cost>

https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/sites/kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/files/Policy_Brief_11_Offshore_Processing.pdf

Fast Track Assessment

https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-adobe-websites/kaldor-centre/2023-09-research-briefs/2023-09-Research-Brief_Fast-track_final.pdf

Priorities for Change

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/RCOA-Key-Points-on-2024-25-Discussion-Paper.pdf>

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/pathways-protection-human-rights-based-response>

https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-adobe-websites/kaldor-centre/20023-09-kaldor-principles/2023-09-Kaldor_Centre_Principles_for_Australian_Refugee_Policy_Summary_Mar22.pdf