



30 March 2026

Department of Home Affairs

Dear Secretary,

**RE: Discussion Paper - Australia's Humanitarian Program 2026-27**

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia ("the Society") welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Home Affairs' discussion paper on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2026–27.

As one of Australia's largest charitable networks, the Society draws on decades of direct support to people seeking asylum and refugees across the country. The Society's approach is grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, especially the principles of human dignity, solidarity and the common good, and informed by the experience of our members and services, including through the Vincentian Refugee Network. We have been heavily involved in supporting refugees since settling refugees from Vietnam in the mid-1970s.

The Society is concerned that this year's discussion paper places strong emphasis on sustainability, waiting times and costs in ways that may foreshadow a shift away from government-supported, protection-based resettlement. We do not support any reduction in Australia's Humanitarian Program, nor any move away from prioritising protection need and UNHCR-referred resettlement within it.

**Composition of the Humanitarian Program**

The Society continues to support increasing Australia's Humanitarian Program to 27,000 places per year, with an additional 10,000 places for complementary pathways.

While the discussion paper states that the Government will maintain the program at 20,000 places in 2026–27, this should be treated as a floor rather than a ceiling. In a context of record global displacement and shrinking international resettlement opportunities, Australia should expand its contribution through a staged increase over time.

Within the offshore component of the program, UNHCR-referred Refugee Category places should remain central and continue to be allocated on the basis of protection need. The Special Humanitarian Program should remain available for people with close links to Australia, but it should not displace the core protection role of the Refugee Category. Likewise, complementary pathways such as the Community Support Program and the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Program should be additional to the core humanitarian intake, not absorbed within it.

The Society also reiterates that the onshore protection visa program should be uncapped and decoupled from the offshore Humanitarian Program. People found to engage Australia's protection obligations should not be counted against offshore resettlement places.

**Principles for a strong Humanitarian Program**

Australia's Humanitarian Program should remain:

- protection-focused,
- non-discriminatory,
- responsive to emerging crises,
- supportive of family unity,

- transparent and accountable, and
- part of Australia's international responsibility-sharing efforts.

These principles should guide both the 2026–27 program and any longer-term policy settings.

The Society is particularly concerned that references to sustainability or community expectations could be used to justify narrowing access, prioritising people seen as easier or cheaper to settle, or shifting settlement burdens onto families and communities. A humanitarian program must remain first and foremost a protection framework.

### **Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)**

The Society recognises the importance of the SHP in providing a pathway for people with family and community links to Australia.

However, we do not support any approach that makes proposers responsible for substantially greater settlement support as a condition of access. Many proposers are themselves former refugees, low-income households, older family members, or people already providing significant informal support. Expanding their obligations would risk making the SHP less accessible and more inequitable.

Reform of the SHP should instead focus on:

- supporting family unity,
- improving transparency and fairness in decision-making,
- reducing documentary, financial and procedural barriers,
- increasing processing capacity to address the backlog, and
- maintaining government responsibility for core settlement support, while recognising the important complementary role of family and community networks.

### **Community Support Program (CSP)**

The Society agrees that the CSP requires substantial reform, but not in ways that weaken protection or make resettlement more dependent on private financial capacity.

A redesigned CSP should:

- be additional to the core Humanitarian Program,
- not reduce UNHCR-referred resettlement places,
- be co-designed with refugee communities, civil society and delivery organisations,
- reduce costs and administrative complexity,
- address the current backlog as a priority,
- include safeguards against settlement precarity, and
- ensure appropriate support on arrival, including employment assistance and access to safety nets.

The current model places very heavy financial and practical burdens on proposers and entrants. Long delays can also mean that employment opportunities lapse, supporters' circumstances change, and people arrive into far more difficult conditions than originally anticipated. A future CSP should not operate as a de facto premium pathway for those with greater means.

### **CRISP and complementary pathways**

The Society welcomes the decision to make CRISP a permanent part of Australia's Humanitarian Program from July 2026. Community-led settlement can play a valuable role, particularly for refugees referred by UNHCR who do not already have links to Australia.

However, CRISP should remain additional to the core Humanitarian Program. Community support should expand Australia's protection capacity, not redistribute existing places away from others in need.

The Society also supports the continuation and careful development of other complementary pathways, including skilled and education-based initiatives, provided these remain genuinely complementary and do not erode the central protection focus of the program.

### **Settlement and integration support**

The Society strongly submits that rising settlement costs should not be used to justify reducing program places or shifting responsibility away from government.

A well-functioning Humanitarian Program depends on properly funded settlement support. Community and diaspora networks make an important contribution to successful settlement outcomes, but they should complement, not replace, accessible government-funded services.

To strengthen settlement outcomes, the Society recommends:

- greater investment in housing, material aid, casework and social support,
- trauma-informed and community-led service models,
- strong coordination between government-funded services and community supports, and
- sustained support for English language learning, employment pathways and long-term integration.

### **Emergency and crisis response**

The Society supports a more coherent framework for responding to emerging humanitarian crises. While flexibility is necessary, ad hoc responses outside the Humanitarian Program can create inconsistency and inequity.

Australia should maintain sufficient flexibility to respond to emergencies quickly and fairly, while ensuring such responses do not displace longer-term resettlement commitments.

### **People seeking asylum and offshore processing**

Although this discussion paper concerns the Humanitarian Program, the broader integrity of Australia's protection framework remains highly relevant.

The Society continues to call for:

- urgent resolution and resettlement for people affected by offshore processing arrangements, including those in Papua New Guinea and Nauru,
- greater certainty and support for people transferred to Australia who remain on temporary status,
- review of eligibility settings for Status Resolution Support Services,
- access to Medicare, work rights and study rights for people awaiting status resolution, and
- community-based alternatives to detention.

Immigration detention should be used only as a last resort, for the shortest possible time, and subject to clear legal limits.

### **Conclusion**

Australia's Humanitarian Program should remain grounded in protection, fairness and international responsibility-sharing. The Society does not support any reduction in the program, nor any shift away from needs-based resettlement.

We recommend that the Australian Government:

- increase the Humanitarian Program to 27,000 places per year,
- provide 10,000 additional complementary pathway places,
- retain a strong UNHCR-referred Refugee category at the centre of the offshore program,
- decouple and uncap the onshore protection program,
- reform the SHP in ways that support family unity without shifting core settlement responsibilities onto proposers,
- redesign the CSP so that it is fairer, lower-cost, better supported and additional to the core intake,
- ensure CRISP and other complementary pathways expand, rather than replace, Australia's protection capacity,
- properly fund settlement and integration support,
- maintain fair and flexible responses to emerging crises,
- develop a national emergency response framework for people displaced by emerging crises, and
- urgently resolve the situation of people affected by offshore processing and strengthen support for people seeking asylum in Australia.

On behalf of the Society's National Council and the Society's Members, volunteers and employees, I thank the Department for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

Yours sincerely,



Mr P. Toby oConnor  
**Chief Executive Officer**