

## Proposal 9

### Justice for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

1. **ENDORSE** the document *Priorities for Change* authored by Justice for Refugees SA and commend it to members, congregations, and agencies in the Synod of SA in their advocacy for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
2. **CALL** On the Commonwealth Government to:
  - a) replace Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) visas with permanent visas;
  - b) give the same access to tertiary education for refugees and people seeking asylum as is given to Australian citizens;
  - c) immediately increase Australia's humanitarian, family reunion and refugee intake to 20,000 with annual increases until 35,000, as well as increasing the intake from Afghanistan to 25,000 excluding the current 449 visa holders here in Australia;
  - d) give urgent priority to processing the immediate family cases of boat arrivals
  - e) end indefinite offshore processing and instead processes all people seeking asylum onshore fairly and quickly in line with its responsibilities under the Refugee Convention.
3. **REQUEST** the Moderator WRITE to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs to inform them of this resolution.
4. **COMMIT** itself and call on members, congregations, organisations associated with the UCA, and agencies of the Synod to:
  - a) continue to provide practical care and support to asylum seekers and refugees in the community and in detention centres as appropriate and where possible;
  - b) continue to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees using '*Priorities for Change*' and '*A Welcoming, Compassionate and Diverse Nation*' in the United Church Assembly statement *Our Vision for a Just Australia*.
  - c) engage and communicate with their local federal members to inform them of the United Church's vision for a Just Australia and to remind them that the United Church seeks a compassionate nation, where every person who seeks refuge here is treated fairly and made to feel welcome and safe –regardless of their country of origin or mode of arrival.

## Rationale

1. Justice for Refugees SA is a grass-roots community organisation with many Uniting Church members amongst its membership. Justice for Refugees SA aims to: 'achieve community support for a just and compassionate approach to refugees that builds on Australian traditions of generosity, openness and fairness.' Endorsing *Priorities for Change* strengthens and amplifies this important organisation within our community and gives Uniting Church members and congregations an easy to grasp resource in this complex area.
2. Approximately 200 asylum seekers and refugees are still detained on Nauru and in Port Moresby. On the mainland - officially all those from off-shore have now been released, but most are still without any long-term settlement option. However, there are some asylum seekers who are still in on-shore detention - some have been for 10 years. Others (refugees & asylum seekers) are being held in detention centres before and after going to court for some misdemeanour that Australians would not be held in jail for e.g., a 2nd breathalyser drink driving offence, an accidental car crash where no one was killed. It is time to end this cruel and unusual punishment of people who have simply exercised their rights under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and legally sought refuge in Australia. Our current treatment of these people is illegal in international law, unjust, and inhumane. Pressure from Uniting Church members and other Australians of good will is an effective strategy aimed at ensuring our government enacts policies that conform with our international treaty obligations and the tenets of human justice and decency.
3. Part of the Uniting Church's vision for a just Australia is: "We are a compassionate nation, where every person who seeks refuge here is treated fairly and made to feel welcome and safe – regardless of their country of origin or mode of arrival" (OUR VISION FOR A JUST AUSTRALIA, the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, July 2021). If every Uniting Church member in South Australia committed to communicating with their federal member, expressing a desire for justice for refugees and asylum seekers, we would strengthen the commitment of those within the Australian Parliament who agree with our aims, and warn those who insist mistreatment, bureaucratic delay, and cruelty are the only options, that they do not have our support.

**Proposers:** Rev Paul Turley  
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Inc: *Priorities for Change*, Justice for Refugees SA



# Priorities for change

Email: [info@justiceforrefugeessa.org](mailto:info@justiceforrefugeessa.org)

Justice for Refugees SA: Policy Priorities for 2022	Points to consider
<p>✦ <b>Replacing Temporary Protection Visas with a pathway to permanency.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All people seeking asylum want a safe place to live permanently so they can care for their children and have a chance to rebuild their lives free from danger.</li> <li>• It is legal under international law to seek asylum. It is an issue of basic human rights. Australians can and should give people seeking asylum this opportunity.</li> <li>• In many of the home countries from which refugees and people seeking asylum have been forced to flee, there is no process to apply for a visa. This is most clearly demonstrated by the current situation in Afghanistan under the Taliban.</li> <li>• The current system of Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) do not provide a clear pathway to permanency. The lack of a pathway to permanency prolongs uncertainty, psychological distress and financial insecurity. There are approximately 24,500 refugees in Australia who face uncertainty about their future which adds to pre-existing trauma.</li> <li>• Temporary visas make all aspects of life more difficult – security of employment, accessing social security and health support and access to further education. A more effective pathway to permanency will provide refugees with the means to rebuild their lives and contribute as members of the Australian community. Australian history provides many previous examples of refugees making Australia an economically stronger, fairer and culturally richer society.</li> </ul>
<p>✦ <b>Improving access to tertiary education for refugees and people seeking asylum.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A thriving economy needs a skilled workforce. Tertiary education is a way to enable people seeking asylum to contribute significantly to the Australian economy. The Australian Government currently requires those on temporary visas to pay international student fees to study at a tertiary level. These fees are prohibitively expensive – designed for an overseas market of students with greater financial resources. This excludes most people seeking asylum.</li> <li>• The Australian Government has the power to extend to refugees and people seeking asylum a tertiary education fee structure similar to that of domestic students. This would be a more effective use of human resources to benefit the Australian economy. Such a policy change would contribute to their wellbeing and maximise their contribution to the community as they prosper and thrive.</li> <li>• The University of Adelaide offers refugee scholarships. Some other tertiary institutions also provide scholarships. The retention and success of graduates of these programs demonstrate the importance of widening such opportunities.</li> <li>• Our country is currently experiencing a significant shortage of skilled workers. We should be allowing refugees and people seeking asylum, who are already living in Australia, the opportunity to reach their full potential by pursuing tertiary studies.</li> </ul>



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Justice for Refugees: Policy Priorities 2022	Points to consider
<p>✦ <b>Increasing Australia’s humanitarian, family reunion and refugee intake overall, as well as increasing the intake from Afghanistan to 20,000.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research by the Refugee Council of Australia indicates that Australia’s refugee program is the lowest it has been in 45 years. The global number of refugees is increasing. We need to provide commensurate assistance.</li> <li>• Recently the number of visas for people seeking asylum from Afghanistan has increased from 3,000 to 31,500 over a 4-year period. 145,000 applications have been lodged however to date no visas have yet to be processed.</li> <li>• There has been no cap on visas allocated to refugees from the current conflict in Ukraine. Refugees from Ukraine will enter Australia on visitor visas and then be eligible for a 3-year temporary Humanitarian Visa. This has not been offered to any other refugee groups.</li> <li>• Increased resources to expedite approval process for refugee status, and pathways to permanency, would assist in matching Australia’s humanitarian commitment with the need.</li> </ul>
<p>✦ <b>Ending indefinite offshore and onshore detention for refugees and people seeking asylum.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is now time to end offshore detention and closed detention in Australia. Detention is not the way we would want to be treated if we were seeking asylum. It was also initiated by historical circumstances that are no longer relevant.</li> <li>• For many people seeking asylum from unsafe conditions, there is no process to seek a visa to leave their home country. It is a basic human right to seek asylum and it is not illegal to do so.</li> <li>• The problem of maritime arrivals has been addressed due to boat turn-backs. The policy of the current Australian Government relating to offshore detention of people assessed as refugees, but who arrived by boat, contravenes the 1951 Refugee Convention to which Australia is a signatory.</li> <li>• Damage to the psychological and physical wellbeing of people held indefinitely in detention is documented by health professionals.</li> <li>• Maintaining the current policy is economically wasteful when considering the contributions that refugees make to the Australian economy.</li> <li>• Research has shown that offshore detention is not economically viable. The Department of Home Affairs’ own 2021 figures showed that significantly more than \$573,000 per person per year was being spent keeping an individual in offshore detention. According to figures contained in the Home Affairs Budget portfolio statements for 2021-22, the budgeted expenses for offshore detention amount to \$812 million this financial year. With a current occupancy rate of 219 people across PNG and Nauru, the amount per detainee is approximately \$3.7 million dollars.</li> </ul>