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Submission to the Department of Home Affairs

Australia's Humanitarian Program 2026-27

Date	28 March 2026
To	Department of Home Affairs
Via email	humanitarian.consultation@homeaffairs.gov.au
Re	Australia's Humanitarian Program 2026-27

Dear Humanitarian Program team,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. My submission is made from practical experience across charitable resettlement work and professional migration practice and with genuine concern for Australia's interest, program integrity, social cohesion and long-term settlement outcomes. Supporting material demonstrates that the views expressed are grounded in practical experience and direct engagement with vulnerable cohorts.

A key concern is that the current framework fails to draw a meaningful distinction between permanent residence and citizenship when conferring eligibility to 'propose' visa applicants under the offshore humanitarian program. This is significant because Permanent Residence is, in substance, is a provisional stage of joining the Australian community during which a person is expected to demonstrate responsible conduct, language proficiency and a commitment to Australian values before being conferred with the responsibilities and privileges that attach to citizenship. 'Sponsorship' under the offshore Humanitarian Program is not a mere administrative act. It is a serious public matter affecting vulnerable entrants, public resources and settlement outcomes.

I believe eligibility to propose and or sponsor in the humanitarian stream should be confined to Australian citizens, with the provision of narrow statutory exceptions. To continue extending sponsorship eligibility to permanent residents, most frequently very recent arrivals, entrenches

ineffective policy settings that compromise incentives for supported settlement and meaningful integration.

The discussion paper confirms that SHP applications may presently be proposed by Australian citizens, permanent residents, eligible New Zealand citizens and organisations, and that substantial backlogs exist.

Question 1: Composition of the 2026-27 Humanitarian Program

The discussion paper states that the 2026-27 Humanitarian Program will remain at 20,000 places and that demand remains exceptionally high, with close to 274,000 applicants on hand, including over 246,000 offshore applications. It confirms the offshore component comprises the Refugee category, the Special Humanitarian Program and the Community Support Program.

I believe a greater portion of offshore places should be directed to genuine cases involved Australian citizens proposers who are close family members of applicants and have demonstrated capacity to support settlement, including meaningful integration.

The current queue is distorted by speculative lodgements, repeated filings, and insufficient consequences for lodgement of weak or non-genuine matters. In practice, allowance is made for low-quality repeat filings, unrealistic sponsorship assertions and the creation of expectations within a queue that cannot be serviced within a reasonable time. Delay then becomes self-reinforcing. The queue expands, confidence falls, and vulnerable families are displaced and subject to disproportionate wait times. This is heightened by absence of any limit on the number of applicants any one person may propose. The discussion paper confirms this; no limitations exist on the number of cases a person may propose under the SHP.

The offshore composition of the program should give priority to Australian citizen proposed, well-supported matters, while preserving remaining capacity for the most compelling cases, particularly UNHCR-referred matters, cases of acute vulnerability.

I do not support further fragmentation of the offshore program through creations of additional ‘sub-streams’ or pilot models within the existing framework, at the expense of the established core Humanitarian Program. I do not believe existing, genuine and decision-ready applications should be

pushed further back in the queue by new programs that, in practical effect, routinely prioritise matters without well-established, available support in Australia ahead of close family reunification matters led by settled Australian citizens.

Further skilled and or enterprising refugees should be encouraged to pursue mainstream migration pathways and not feel confined to refugee-specific or peripheral programs. Policy should avoid creating the impression that a refuge background limits a person to humanitarian entrants' pathways alone. Australia should instead adopt an inclusive approach that welcomes eligible refugees across the full range of visa pathways, including skilled, business, investment and other mainstream streams, wherever the relevant legal and policy criteria are met.

Question 2: Who should be prioritised within the SHP

The Department records that SHP applicants are presently prioritised by closeness of family connection, that SHP applications may be supported by citizens, permanent residents, eligible New Zealand citizens and organisations, and that proposers must pay travel costs and provide initial accommodation and orientation. The Department also records that there are over 184,300 SHP applicants on hand, including more than 80,700 people with immediate or close family in Australia.

The SHP should be more sharply prioritised toward close family reunion led by Australian citizens. Current priorities should change in three respects.

First, proposer eligibility should be narrowed. Sponsorship or proposal eligibility in an offshore humanitarian setting should be confined to Australian citizens, subject only to narrow statutory exceptions. Permanent residence alone should not confer an enduring right to sponsor in this program.

Secondly, proposer suitability screening is inadequate and should be strengthened. The present framework imposes settlement obligations on proposers, yet it does not require, for example, an Australian Federal Police (AFP) clearance or any other safeguarding material necessary. That is a serious policy defect. A person with a serious criminal history, including family violence, coercive control, sexual offending, child-safety offending, serious violence, exploitation or serious dishonesty, should not be entrusted with settlement support of vulnerable humanitarian entrants. Every proposer should,

without exception, including in existing matters, be required to provide an AFP clearance and any additional safeguarding information required.

Thirdly, proposer priority should be tied to demonstrated contribution and verifiable settlement capacity. The present policy framework does not adequately distinguish between proposers with a clear record of responsible conduct, employment, contribution, community engagement, stable accommodation and successful settlement support.

Proposers should also carry greater practical responsibility for settlement where they seek the benefit of proposer-based priority. The Department already recognises that proposers bear travel and initial settlement obligations. That principle should be strengthened, not diluted.

A more disciplined approach would not only improve practical settlement outcomes but would also promote social cohesion and reinforce public confidence that the program is being administered in a principled, orderly and credible manner.

Question 3: How can settlement services support humanitarian entrants

The Department records that rising costs and finite resources are placing pressure on settlement services. It identifies the Humanitarian Settlement Program, Settlement Engagement and Transition Support, AUSCO and the transition to HISP as key parts of the current framework. The Department also records that SHP and CSP entrants receive more limited Assisted Passage support because proposers are expected to support their applicants.

The preferable policy approach is to prioritise the SHP framework on family-led sponsorship by established Australian citizens with the demonstrated capacity to support and assist the integration of their relatives. Public settlement resources should be used only in rare and acute cases rather than dispersed in a manner that weakens program discipline. In cases of sponsor-driven entry, it is both reasonable and principled to expect that those seeking the admission of family members that they will provide practical support for their settlement and reduce pressure on public settlement services.

Settlement services should remain concentrated on the most vulnerable entrants, particularly those without strong family support, UNHCR-referred cohorts, emergency cases and entrants with acute settlement needs.

Question 4: Reform of the Community Support Program

The Department records that the CSP is heavily oversubscribed, with around 20,000 applicants on hand and wait times of around eight years, that it no longer delivers its original purpose of resettling job-ready entrants capable of self-sufficiency within 12 months, and that the program is presently paused to prevent further growth in waiting times.

The current structure involving multiple associations and federations invites inconsistency and perceived affiliation-based influence, reducing confidence that cases are handled on merit.

The program should be managed by a neutral, disciplined and operationally coherent organisation. In my view, the International Organisation for Migration remains the only body capable of delivering that degree of neutrality and operational discipline across clients.

Further, where APOs have accepted matters beyond reasonable capacity or allocation, legislation should require full refunds or informed written consent from affected clients. Vulnerable refugees should not be left in an indefinite fee-based process because intermediaries accepted more matters than the system could realistically process. A prolonged queue of vulnerable refugees should not become an open-ended income model.

Question 5: Other reforms to program

In addition to the reforms already proposed, I request consideration of the following matters.

First, an application charge comparable to other visa pathways should be introduced for proposer-driven offshore refugee (SHP) and onshore Protection (subclass 866) applications. A filing fee is not inconsistent with compassion. It is an integrity control. The absence of a meaningful financial threshold encourages speculative conduct, low-quality repeat filings and the clogging of departmental resources by matters that are weak, unprepared or non-genuine.

Secondly, Annual queue-maintenance measures could be introduced. If a proposer-driven application remains dormant for a defined period, for example two consecutive years, and no exceptional circumstances are shown, it should lapse. Circumstances change, wars end, families relocate, settlements occur elsewhere. Dormant files should not remain indefinitely in the system and displace genuine applicants seeking timely assessment.

Thirdly, The Department pause further offshore applications. A program presented as functional should ordinarily aim for decision-making within approximately 12 to 24 months. It is unfair to applicants, supporters and the Department itself to maintain an appearance of accessibility where actual delivery is now approaching ten years. The first obligation must be to restore order, clean the queue and redesign the pathway.

Fourthly, our humanitarian framework should be refocused away from expansion and back toward integrity, safe sponsorship, genuine need, disciplined triage and citizen-led family reunification with real settlement support.

Fifthly, Policy development should not ignore external drivers of displacement. Broader settings, including international sanctions and related geopolitical measures, can worsen civilian hardship and increase displacement pressure. Policy development, including support of sanctions, should consider the extent to which such settings contribute to civilian harm and refugee flows.

Sixthly, I do not support the imposition of separate numerical limits or allocations between onshore and offshore cohorts. The program should remain merit-based, with applications assessed according to their individual circumstances rather than by rigid cohort distinctions.

In Conclusion

I thank the Department for the opportunity to provide this submission and trust that it will be of assistance, in whole or in part.

Yours faithfully,

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