



Australian Muslim Women's
Centre for Human Rights
Equality without Exception

Submission into Australia's Humanitarian Program 2025-2026

Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights
August 2025

About Us

This submission has been developed by the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR). AMWCHR is an organisation of Muslim women leading change to advance the rights and status of Muslim women in Australia.

We bring 35 years of experience in providing one-to-one support to Muslim women, young women and children, developing and delivering community education and capacity-building programs to raise awareness and shift prevailing attitudes. We also work as advocates - researching, publishing, informing policy decisions and reform initiatives as well as offering training and consultation to increase sector capacity to recognise and respond to the needs of Muslim women, young women and children.

As one of the leading voices for Muslim women's rights in Australia, we challenge the most immediate and pertinent issues Muslim women face every day. We promote Muslim women's right to self-determination by recognising the inherent agency that already exists and bringing issues of inequality and disadvantage to light.

AMWCHR works with individuals, the community, partner organisations and government to advocate for equality within the Australian context. This submission is designed to contribute greater awareness and understanding of the unique challenges and barriers facing newly arrived and migrant Muslim women engaging in Australian society and their specialised support needs throughout their settlement journey - which we know is complex and varied.

Acknowledgements

This submission recognises that gender, race, and religion intersect to create multiple forms of discrimination and violence against Muslim women, particularly in a context of growing Islamophobia. It also recognises that preventing prejudice in all forms is bound to the struggles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Before we can successfully tackle issues within our communities, we must address the ongoing impacts of colonisation, systemic racism, and discrimination in all its forms in this country.

AMWCHR acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands our organisation is located on and where we conduct our work. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present. AMWCHR is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters, and seas and their rich contribution to society.



Introduction

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights is pleased to submit a response to the Discussion Paper on Australia's Humanitarian Program (the Program) for 2025-2026. As a human rights organisation working from and within Muslim communities, many of the women we support have experienced forced migration, persecution, and systemic barriers, both in their countries of origin and upon resettlement in Australia. We therefore welcome the opportunity to provide our expertise to ensure the Australian Government meets our international obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers. This submission outlines AMWCHR's recommendations with regards to the Program for the coming year, with key consideration given to the Program's impact on Muslim women, children, and families in Australia. The recommendations given herein are based on insights formed through working with communities most affected by the Program and are further informed by consultations with our staff and community. We urge the government to consider these recommendations to ensure that policies uphold Australia's international obligations and reflect a genuine commitment to protecting those most at risk.

Response to Discussion Questions

1. What should the composition of Australia's 2025-26 Humanitarian Program be and why? What do you think should be the proportion split between the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (which also includes the Community Support Program) categories in the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program?

The number of refugees and those needing humanitarian assistance has increased drastically in the past decade (Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA], 2023). The UNHCR projects that 2.9 million refugees are in need of resettlement in 2025, with the anticipated number for 2026 dropping to 2.5 million refugees (UNHCR, 2024a; UNHCR, 2025a). However, this is still a significant number given that the disparity between those in need of resettlement and resettlement commitments by host countries continue to grow (UNHCR, 2025a). Further, while the developments in Syria have reduced the number of overall resettlement needs, needs from other countries – including, Afghanistan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Pakistan, Chad, and Uganda – have increased (UNHCR, 2025a). Moreover, the ongoing genocide and man-made mass starvation in Gaza, Palestine (OCHA, 2025) and the severe humanitarian crises in Sudan (OCHA, 2024), as well as the impact of climate change on low-lying countries such as Tuvalu (Tangermann, 2025; UNHCR, 2024b), require special attention in light of their severity and urgency. First and foremost, Australia should respond proportionately to the growing global humanitarian needs on the basis of fulfilling its obligations under international law; and by extension as a demonstration of genuine responsibility-sharing. Second, as a purported 'global leader' in humanitarian resettlement efforts, Australia must not fall behind on these obligations in comparison to other allied nations (RCOA, 2023).

Additionally, Australia has a unique responsibility to respond to humanitarian displacement precipitated by colonial agendas, given its own legacies of colonialism (including genocides of Indigenous peoples), institutionalised racism and bias (the White Australia policy, 1901-1966) (Clark et al., 2022), and their ongoing detrimental impacts on people's lives.

Australia has the capacity to increase its contribution to the global refugee and asylum seeker intake, and in doing so, uphold its obligations under international law (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2017). At present, spending on border management to obstruct and divert asylum seekers, and offshore processing, far outweigh the fiscal allocation for the Refugee, Humanitarian, Settlement and Migrant Services (Karp, 2020; RCOA, 2025). Tubakovic and Nethery (2025) note that Australia's commitment to offshore processing has resulted in billions of dollars being spent on the management of 4194 people over the period of 11 years. This is concerning given that the number of asylum seekers arriving on our shore is minimal compared to our capacity to provide safety to those fleeing violence and persecution. The UNHCR has called attention to Australia's 'potential' breaches of its international obligations on numerous occasions (AHRC, 2017) – in particular the 'potential' infringement of the non-refoulement principle which requires state parties to the Refugee Convention to not turn away those seeking asylum. To continue directing vast amounts of resources at border management initiatives, such as towards Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) (Australian Border Force, 2024), that are in tension with humanitarian principles is a curious policy stance to maintain as a 'global leader' in humanitarian displacement effort; especially considering these resources can be better directed towards supporting housing, health care, education, and employment to ease the resettlement process and safeguard humanitarian pathways.

Given Australia's obligations under international humanitarian law, global crises contributing to unprecedented levels of forced displacement, and decreases in levels of commitments from host countries, we are concerned to see that the humanitarian intake for this year has not increased from the previous year. UNHCR's (2025b) analysis of the 2024 global trends in displacement reveal that 73% of the world's refugees and people in need of international protection were resettled by low-and middle-income countries. While Australian politicians often assert, as a truism, that Australia has one of the most generous refugee programs, analyses of statistics between 2013 to 2022 show that Australia was ranked 30th overall, 41st on a per capita basis and 77th relative to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in relation to refugee recognition and resettlement (RCOA, 2023). Relative to their national population, the countries that hosted the largest number of refugees in 2024 include, Lebanon, the island of Aruba, Chad, Curacao, and Jordan (UNHCR, 2025b). It is evident that Australia has more than its fair share of work to do before it can be said to have heeded UNHCR's call for responsibility-sharing and to meet its international obligations.

For Australia to add value to its claim of being a 'leader in international resettlement efforts', AMWCHR believes the humanitarian intake must increase from the current quota of 20,000 places per year. Australia's net migration for 2023/2024 was 446,000 people (ABS, 2024). As a proportion, the Humanitarian Program is a small component of our migration intake, and we therefore have considerable capacity to increase our provision of humanitarian visas.

Once again, as we have done for the past three years, we recommend that the intake be increased to a minimum of 27,000 places per year - the number recommended by the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers and endorsed by the Federal Labor Party (Karlsen, 2016 p. 9; ALP, 2021 p. 123). This target should be met within three years. In 2023, commenting on the Labour government's pledge to increase the intake to 27,000,

On November 9th 2023 the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union treaty was signed to address the impacts of climate change and potential displacement, leading to the creation of the Pacific Engagement Visa (Subclass 192) – Treaty stream. This permanent residency pathway offers 280 places annually for Tuvaluans irrespective of their skill level, occupation, or gender (Department of Home Affairs, 2025) – AMWCHR welcomes this effort. We take this to be a positive example of Australia's capacity to respond (flexibly) to growing humanitarian needs. Further, the decision to look beyond skill and employability of those in need of resettlement aligns with international humanitarian principles. As such, AMWCHR calls on the Government to replicate creation of special visa categories for Palestinian and Sudanese refugees given the magnitude of crises in these countries.

When it comes to the proportional split between the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program categories in the offshore component of the Program, we believe that an equal split is the most appropriate.

In light of the above, it is AMWCHR's recommendation that:

1. Australia's allocation be increased to a minimum of 27,000 places per year - the number recommended by the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers and endorsed by the Federal Labor Party and Minister Giles' office (Karlsen, 2016 p. 9; ALP, 2021 p. 123). This target should be met within three years.
2. The Department increases capacity to assess visa applications to ensure timely granting of visas and a solution to the current backlog. Increased capacity is also required to attend to the many thousands of people who are currently waiting offshore for transfer to Australia.
3. The composition of the offshore component of the Program be split 50/50 between the Refugee and Special Humanitarian categories.
4. Creation of special visa categories based on urgent humanitarian need for Palestinian and Sudanese refugees – these categories would be in addition to the 27,000 quota, in a similar fashion to the Pacific Engagement Visa (subclass 192), permanent pathways based on need and not on skill level, employability, or economic value. However, the allocation of Palestinian and Sudanese communities should match the urgency and need of the crises – we recommend 10,000 places for those from Palestinian communities and 15,000 for Sudanese asylum seekers, as a proportionate response to these crises with flexible allocation available in future programs to accommodate further developments.

2. The Humanitarian Program is under significant pressure from unprecedented demand including as a result of multiple refugee crises across the world and limited global resettlement places. How should the Humanitarian Program respond to these crises while balancing the commitment made for protracted situations, specific cohorts and supporting our region?

There is an imbalance between the level of States' resettlement commitment to the growing demand of global humanitarian resettlement needs. More than a failure to keep up with obligations under international humanitarian laws, Australia's policies have been framed as increasingly hostile and as a deterrence mechanism for those that are most vulnerable (Altman, 2020). These policies manifest as OSB through its militarisation of border protection and criminalisation of the most vulnerable, indefinite incarceration in offshore detention centres, temporary visas such as the Visa subclass 499 and 786 – all of which obstruct permanent pathways to citizenship. Furthermore, as observed by UNHCR (2025a), refugees undergo the most rigorous vetting processes, often the focus falling on supposed reception capacity and perceived integration potential rather than need or urgency. To illustrate, prioritisation of skills/employability and English-language proficiency has distracted from the traditional focus on resettling the most vulnerable refugees (Hirsch et al., 2019).

We believe that the relentless focus on the economic benefits of refugees and asylum seekers and their capacity for integration have come from ingrained systemic biases perpetuated by media disinformation (Khorana & Thapliyal, 2024). From a Muslim specific context, post-9/11, the MV Tampa and "Children Overboard" events in 2001 were used by the federal government to negatively influence public sentiment about asylum seekers, simultaneously heightening Islamophobia and giving governments the leeway to address boat arrivals as they wished:

In other words, casting all refugees arriving by boat as "Muslim" and therefore undesirable became the go-to disinformation strategy of such media, and especially the publications owned by Rupert Murdoch. They contributed to an ecology of "information disorder" and related anxiety and fear on the asylum seeker issue that has been difficult to dislodge ever since.

(Khorana & Thapliyal, 2024, p.7)

Having been demonised and vilified to this degree through strategic disinformation, coupled with an antagonistic state and public predisposition towards those seeking humanitarian assistance, it is not surprising that refugees and asylum seekers are required to prove their value to host countries. In saying this, AMWCHR is not discounting the value of genuine reception capacity and integration potential. However, in line with UNHCR (2025a), we call on the Australian government to re-shift its focus to ensure that its 'generous' humanitarian program is a fair and tangible solution for the most vulnerable – affirming Australia's commitment to international responsibility-sharing.

Access to safety for refugees and asylum seekers should not depend on assessments of their perceived economic contributions or assimilability – supporting the protection of human lives should come from an ethical and human rights standpoint. Nonetheless, the economic benefits of resettling refugees have been well established. According to Deloitte Access Economics for Oxfam Australia's (2019) report, gradually expanding Australia's humanitarian migrant intake levels from its 2017-18 levels (16, 250 visa grants) to 44,000 per year could boost the size of Australia economy by \$37.7 billion over the five consecutive decades – impact on GDP potentially exceeding \$4.9 billion annually between 2018-19 and 2067-68. Additionally, this projection also shows that an additional 35,000 full-time equivalent jobs can be sustained annually for the next fifty years. Similar to these findings, Parson's (2013) review of the literature highlight that refugees make significant contributions to the Australian economy; moving beyond labour force participation, they include entrepreneurial activity, developing international trade links, as well as social and civic contributions through community participation and volunteering. According to the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA, 2025), refugees are more likely to establish businesses and entrepreneurship that create employment opportunities compared to native-born individuals; they highlight the critical role of migrants in Australia's economic growth with the government predicting migrant-led business could contribute \$1.5 trillion to the economy in less than three decades. Moreover, increase in migrants joining the workforce do not detract from the local workforce, but rather complements it – thus leading to job creating for local workers (OECD, 2023).

As such, resettlement of refugees should be approached from a (firstly) humanitarian and (secondly) strengths-based point of view. Given Australia's capacity, the urgency of needs, and economic benefits of increasing the nation's intake, we recommend increasing Australia's quota. With an increased intake, Australia can respond to both established/protracted situations, as well as emerging global crises. This can be achieved through complementary pathways to relieve pressure on the humanitarian program as well as increasing annual humanitarian migrant intake to 27,000. Currently, though the government attempts to promote Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) and Community Support Program (CSP) as complementary pathways for refugee protection, they are not "in addition" to the HSP – as announced in the New York Leaders' Summit on Refugees (Hirsch et al., 2019). Therefore, AMWCHR does not believe the situation calls for a balancing act, but rather to ensure that the CRISP and CSP pathways are truly complementary pathways to humanitarian resettlement as a way to relieve the pressure on the humanitarian program.

We recognise that it is not possible to provide humanitarian visas to all applicants, nonetheless, Australia has the capacity to make a significant difference in the lives of thousands more people at risk by raising the caps in conjunction with increased resourcing for settlement services, as well as establishment of visa schemes based on vulnerability.

In light of the above, it is AMWCHR's recommendation that:

1. The Government work to reframe public perception of refugees and asylum seekers, working towards political support for increased placements as well as abolishing antagonistic policies demonising vulnerable peoples – thus shifting the current focus on economic value/capacity of refugees towards assessments of needs and/or urgency.
2. To make CRISP and CSP genuine complementary pathways – this entails allocation of places in addition to the HSP and not detracting from it to relieve the pressure on the humanitarian program.
3. Funding for community services most suitable to provide support for newly arrived communities so that they are able to provide wrap around supports to facilitate and foster successful resettlements.

3. Due to an increase of interest in the Community Support Program and limited places under the Humanitarian Program, the Community Support Program is oversubscribed with processing times increasing from 6-12 months in 2022-23 to a minimum of 8 years as at June 2025. We understand the Humanitarian Program, while focussed on working age primary applicants, is currently being primarily used for family reunion. What can we do to address this?

AMWCHR expresses concern towards the framing of utilisation of CSP as a family reunion pathway as problematic. Due to an insufficient number of family reunion pathways in Australia for refugees, the CSP has become a costly yet fast-tracked way for people desperate to get their family to safety. Feedback provided by Approved Proposing Organisations (APOs) tell us that 90 per cent of CSP applications come from individual family members (Hirsch et al., 2019). This is not an indicator nor an invitation to enforce further restriction on humanitarian entrants and/or their families. AMWCHR sees this as an opportunity to address the long-standing lack of family reunion pathways as well as visa processing times in Australia.

Research has shown that family reunion can have a significant positive influence on resettlement experiences for humanitarian migrants (Gardener & Costello, 2019). Looking at the impact of family separation, we see from our work with newly arrived Palestinian communities that it can have devastating and far reaching psychological and social impacts. Anecdotally, we know that women have been separated from their children, partners, and/or parents who have either been unable to leave Gaza or have been unable to reunite with their families/partners in other parts of the world due to restrictive conditions imposed by their temporary humanitarian visas. This has led to profound debilitating effects on their capacity to lead fulfilling lives. According to Gardener and Costello (2019), those experiencing family separation or waiting for family reunification – often without updates or clarity – in Australia, were more susceptible to mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as being less likely to engage in education or job training. Furthermore, our anecdotal experiences and literature point to gender disparity in settlement experiences with the effects of family separation felt to a greater degree by women (Gardener & Costello, 2019; UNHCR, 2025a).

In these cases, women are more likely to be unemployed single parents who face compounding barriers and risk factors in the resettlement period (Gardener & Costello, 2019); and hence in greater need of family reunion to ensure successful integration and good mental health. Therefore, family reunion is a significant determinant of successful resettlement of humanitarian migrants in Australia.

The right to family life is affirmed and enshrined under several international law instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As such, UNHCR encourages states to "...preserve the integrity of family groups in the course of resettlement..." (UNHCR, 1983). Hence the framing of the issue requires a shift to centre the lack of feasible alternative pathways to family reunification. There is currently no family reunion stream for humanitarian migrants with those on temporary humanitarian visas subject to heavy restrictions. The Family Stream under the Migration Program is not accessible to humanitarian entrants and extensive waiting periods are incompatible with the urgency faced by those needing immediate protection. Therefore, AMWCHR, echoing Oxfam Australia's recommendations (Deloitte Access Economics for Oxfam Australia, 2019; Gardener & Costello, 2019), recommend the establishment of Humanitarian Family Reunion Program that allows for an additional 10,000 places annually as a way to ensure refugees have accessible visa pathways for family reunification.

In light of the above, it is AMWCHR's recommendation that:

1. The Department increases capacity to assess visa applications to ensure timely granting of visas and a solution to the current backlog. Increased capacity is also required to attend to the many thousands of people who are currently waiting offshore for transfer to Australia.
2. That the Department provides regular updates to applicants on the status of their applications to allow individuals and families to plan for their future, manage expectations, and reduce the stress of visa insecurity.
3. Creation of Humanitarian Family Reunion/Reunification Program that allows for 10,000 places annually – as per Deloitte Access Economics for Oxfam Australia's (2019) proposal and Oxfam's recommendations (Gardener & Costello, 2019).

4. How can the Government better plan and coordinate responses to emergency humanitarian crises? How can private or community supported initiatives assist people displaced by emergency humanitarian crises?

In anticipation of emergency situations, such as with the crisis in Gaza, the government must increase their capacity to provide humanitarian assistance in the face of unique circumstances. Firstly, as mentioned above, an increase in the overall humanitarian intake to 27,000 (which excludes complementary pathways, family reunion pathways, and

specialised pathways for Palestinian and Sudanese communities) allows the government the flexibility to respond to unforeseen humanitarian crises in a timely manner.

Additionally, the government should address the restrictions placed on humanitarian entrants by temporary visas that can hinder their resettlement process.

Throughout the ongoing crisis in Gaza, we have observed a trend of temporary humanitarian visas being granted to fast-track protection of refugees. This involved Palestinians being granted a Visitor Visa (Subclass 600) for durations of 3, 6, or 12 months, before being moved to a Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) (Subclass 499) visa, followed by Temporary Humanitarian Concern (Subclass 786) visa – with the Subclass 786 valid for three years. Currently, Palestinians are unable to apply independently for visas (Visitor visa Subclass 600, or temporary humanitarian visa Subclass 499 and Subclass 786), instead the process requires immediate family members living in Australia to apply for a Visitor visa (subclass 600), or an invitation from the Government for temporary humanitarian visas. Humanitarian visas should secure the protection and resettlement of those seeking protection from the Australian government; this series of temporary visas offer no permanent resolution to refugees. Interlocutors from the newly arrived Palestinian communities have expressed that uncertainties regarding their visa situation, and restrictions imposed by their temporary visas (often barring access to essential supports (including health, education, employment, and housing) have prevented families from establishing long-term safety, security, and stability. If applicants and those requiring urgent humanitarian resettlement assistance meet the criteria for a permanent humanitarian visa, we wonder why there is diversion – and arguably a coercion – towards these temporary pathways. As such, AMWCHR expresses grave concern towards government's reliance on and promotion of temporary humanitarian visas as they have been known to undermine the aims of the humanitarian program, as well as cause significant distress to those seeking assistance. Furthermore, we caution against an over reliance on temporary humanitarian visas and oppose a shift towards these measures if this is something we can expect to see in the program more broadly.

AMWCHR has observed that temporary protection visas impede the aims of humanitarian resettlement. Newly arrived humanitarian migrants in our community programs have highlighted that it is extremely challenging for them to find employment due to a number of compounding barriers including visa status, English-language proficiency, and access to transportation. In the absence of proper resettlement supports, this has forced many in the community to accept risky cash-in-hand employment where they are subject to poor working conditions, underpaid, provided limited training, and no work cover in cases of work-related injuries. We have come across families where primary earners have acquired permanent disabilities whilst on insecure and risky employment that has pushed these families into further socio-economic precariousness.

AMWCHR recognises the value of utilising the private sector to fulfil their social responsibilities by providing employment training and opportunities, facilitating access to housing, providing pro bono legal services, financial support for humanitarian entrants, and partnerships with NGOs to expand community led initiatives.

While CRISP and CSP facilitate collaboration to some extent, there is much scope for improvement. For example, CSP can be exclusive in terms of employability and the capacity of sponsoring communities. This means that these humanitarian visa schemes exclude the most vulnerable amongst those in need of resettlement assistance. More explicitly, CSP's heavy emphasis on skills, employability, and English-language proficiency can disadvantage women in primary carer roles, as well as children, older people, people with disabilities, and those with limited formal education. As we have emphasised in our 2022 and 2024 submission into Australia's Humanitarian Program (2022-2023 and 2024-2025 respectively), the prioritisation of skills, employment, and English-language skills serve to both exclude women from humanitarian pathways such as CSP and place added pressure on women to achieve economic productivity whilst navigating the challenges of resettlement as a humanitarian entrant. Hence, permanent humanitarian pathways that look beyond skills and economic productivity are crucial for migrant women in need of urgent resettlement. Additionally, if visa applications are guided by the financial capacity of sponsors/community groups, this can skew humanitarian assistance in favour of those with the most means – this goes against the core principles of humanitarian resettlement. With regards to CRISP, it is crucial for the government to be cautious of the possibility of exploitation of humanitarian entrants by sponsors due to the power imbalance between the two groups (Wills & Lenard, 2025). Additionally, we also stress on the importance of funding community services who are best placed to work with newly arrived communities – i.e., expanding the role of private sector should not lead to the privatisation of service delivery for communities.

Another concern that we have observed in the government's response is the offloading of responsibility on to communities and individuals. We acknowledge that private and community supported initiatives are an integral part of refugee resettlement, however, these supports should not be a substitute for government services or government funded services. Established Palestinian communities and individuals were responsible for the provisions of supports including financial assistance, housing, employment, clothing, and food, due to lack of appropriate services and visa restrictions – resulting in an enormous toll on communities. Private and community supported initiatives do not operate at a capacity to service all those in need, this left newly arrived Palestinian families in extreme housing insecurity, poverty, and isolation.

In circumstances where people have relocated to Australia under dire circumstances, regardless of visa and legality of entrance, the government must provide necessary supports to those coming from crisis and conflict zones. As we know from the Palestinian migrants on temporary visas, this gap in the Australian humanitarian program has meant that people are left without access to crucial supports in the most sensitive phase of their resettlement journey. One way to do this effectively and in a meaningful way is by, as we have iterated, funding of community organisations and use of their specialist skills and community knowledge. We strongly encourage a holistic service provision approach where federal, state, and local governments work in tandem with community service providers as well as private sector sponsors to facilitate strategic investment and coordinate planning to ensure the success of humanitarian resettlement.

In light of the above, it is AMWCHR's recommendation that:

1. The Department realise the 'generosity' and 'flexibility' of the existing humanitarian program so that is better able to absorb unforeseen demand.
2. The government allocates further funding to expatriate those from Palestinian and Sudanese communities to Australia, as well as provide increased supports and establish/enhance appropriate settlement assistance on arrival.
3. That all Palestinians who have been granted temporary visas be immediately given full working and Medicare rights, as well as the option to be moved on to permanent visas.
4. That there be increased investment in community organisations to support refugee communities in their resettlement journey, including to identify and work towards employment and economic goals.

Additional feedback on the Program

- The Humanitarian Program must explicitly prioritise women and girls who face heightened risks of gender-based violence and persecution based on gender and religion. Muslim women often face compounded vulnerabilities in both crisis zones as well as displacement and resettlement contexts. We recommend an increase to the Women at Risk visa (subclass 204) and increased resettlement allocations for women and girls fleeing gender-based and religious persecution. We also urge the government to recognise the restrictions placed on vulnerable women through this visa. Further review of the strict health requirements under the Migration Act 1958 that discriminates against women (and families) with disabled children. People with disabilities and families with disabled family members frequently have their visa applications denied because they are unable to meet the health requirements (DPOA, 2018).
- Muslim communities' experiences of resettlement are characterised by racism and Islamophobia. We recommend increased funding for community support and settlement programs to be delivered by Muslim-led organisations such as AMWCHR. We also wish to see transparent data on visa allocation and grants. This is not unwarranted given the ingrained systemic bias against Muslims in Australia with previous governments having been open about biased allocation of humanitarian visas (SBS News, 2017). As the highlighted MV Tampa and 'Children overboard' incidents show, scare mongering and demonisation of migration from Muslim-majority countries is common throughout Australian society. Similarly, the representation of Sudanese/South Sudanese communities in the Australian media are yet another example of such vilification, albeit one that intersects with race and racialisation (Weber et al., 2021; Farquharson et al., 2018). A longitudinal analysis by Farquharson et al., (2018) over a six-year period (2007-12) showed that news media coverage pertaining to Sudanese Australians were predominantly focussed on crime, with people framed either as perpetrators or victims. These media narratives serve to further reinforce the notion that crime and violence are a product of ethnic 'otherness'.

For clarity, 'ethnic crime', though it has a well-cemented place in Australian media, is not supported by empirical evidence (Farquharson et al., 2018). Regardless, the repercussions of these discourses in the media have far-reaching consequences; in the current context, media framing of communities impact public discussions which ultimately influence public policy. Hence, we are concerned that these narratives/discourses may discourage Government intake of Muslim and/or Sudanese/South Sudanese refugees.

- Most recently, we have also seen scare mongering and open anti-Palestinian racism directed towards Palestinians who have entered Australia in the past 22 months. Institutionalised Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism, particularly around migration, is likely to be influencing assessment processes for visa applications. We wish to see transparent data released by the Department, disaggregated by religion, ethnicity, gender, and country of origin to monitor and address systemic racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Palestinian racism. We continue to be disheartened by biased and racist public and political sentiment that encourage a ban on refugees – particularly targeted campaigns towards Gazans (which involves rigorous security checks by ASIO lasting more than 11 months).

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