Australian Red Cross submission to the Department of Home Affairs on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2025-26

August 2025

About us

Established in 1914 and by Royal Charter in 1941, Australian Red Cross is auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. We have a unique humanitarian mandate to respond to disasters and emergencies. This partnership means governments can benefit from a trusted, credible, independent and non-political partner with local to global networks, who will work to implement humanitarian goals in a way that maintains the trust of government and Australian society.

Australian Red Cross is one of 191 Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) – the world's largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

The Movement is guided at all times and in all places by seven Fundamental Principles: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. These principles sum up our ethics and the way we work, and they are at the core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

We remain neutral, and don't take sides, including in politics; enabling us to maintain the trust of all and to provide assistance in locations others are unable to go. Volunteering is in our DNA, and thousands of volunteers and members support us every day, helping solve social issues in their own communities. All our work is inspired and framed by the principle of Humanity: we seek always to act where there is humanitarian need.

Core areas of expertise for Australian Red Cross include Emergency Services, Migration, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Programs, Community Activities and Programs.

Highlights from our 2023–24 Annual Report:

16,800+
members and volunteers acting for humanity

213,000+
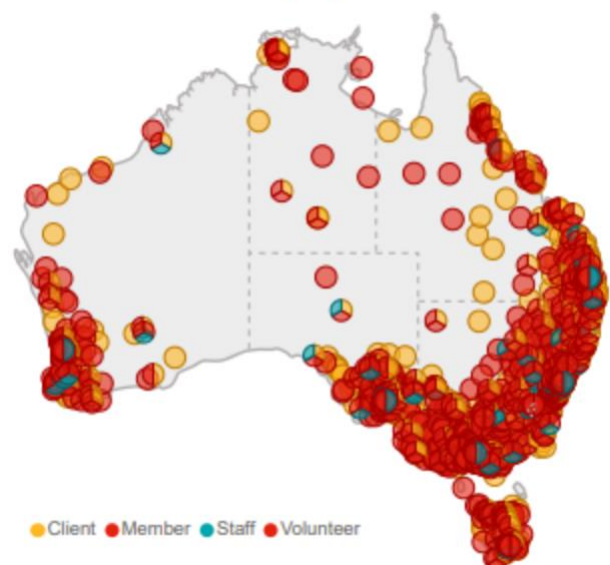Australians supported during 33 emergency activations

78,000+
social support hours delivered

23,600+
people from 129 countries supported through migration programs

Location of Red Cross people and clients

Client ● Member ● Staff ● Volunteer

Purpose

The Australian Government (Department of Home Affairs) is seeking feedback on [Australia's Humanitarian Program 2025-26](#) (the program). Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. We have focused our response on areas where we have extensive migration expertise including in humanitarian settlement in Australia, and that align with the unique humanitarian mandate of Australian Red Cross.

Summary of recommendations

Australian Red Cross recommends that the Australian Government:

Recommendation 1:

Base the composition of the program on need and vulnerability rather than other characteristics, geographical locations, or potential economic factors.

Recommendation 2:

To balance crises overseas, protracted situations, specific cohorts and the region:

- Promote the benefit of resettlement to other states, including within the Asia Pacific region;
- Increase the humanitarian intake levels within Australia;
- Separate the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP) and other complementary pathways to protection from the humanitarian intake, so it is additional to the intake level;
- Continue to allocate emergency intake levels in addition to the annual limits;
- Explore alternative visa options for people looking for safe, regular and orderly migration options to Australia;

Recommendation 3:

To better plan and respond to emergency crises and disasters overseas, including when crises are protracted, develop a consistent and coordinated domestic approach to respond to the humanitarian needs of impacted people. Factors to be included are emergency evacuations, visa types, provision of safe and regular pathways to Australia, and social and financial assistance (including social cohesion, early engagement of impacted communities and access to a safety net, psychosocial support and information) for migrants and diaspora populations in Australia.

Recommendation 4:

Invest to build social cohesion and social capital within Australia, especially across regional and rural communities, to increase resilience to hazards and disasters. This investment should prioritise expanding specialist support in rural communities, building local capacity for inclusive communities, and fostering community connection and belonging.

Recommendation 5:

Support the Department of Social Services and Department of Finance initiative to implement the Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework to improve regulatory systems; ensuring Community Service Organisations can continue to provide essential services to communities in Australia.

Introduction

Australian Red Cross acknowledges the complexity of balancing humanitarian need, fiscal constraints, and service design. While increasing intake and expanding emergency responses are important goals to be realised, they must be accompanied by realistic funding strategies and system capacity considerations. Alternative approaches—such as increasing productivity through efficient emergency responses, forward planning and ensuring streamlined and appropriate visa routes, as well as building capacity for faster independence, enhancing employment pathways, and increasing sponsor accountability—should be explored.

1. Composition of Australia's 2025–26 Humanitarian Program

1.1. This section addresses the Department's questions: 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?

1.2. When considering the composition of the program, Australian Red Cross position remains that composition should be based on need and vulnerability[1] rather than other characteristics, geographical locations, or potential economic factors. Non-discrimination is one of the most important aspects of protecting human beings in human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law. Delivering support based on people's needs alone and prioritising the most vulnerable at all times supports non-discrimination principles.

1.3. To enable need and vulnerability to be prioritised amongst the humanitarian intake, Australian Red Cross recommends that complimentary pathways are allocated **in addition** to the humanitarian intake, creating space for Australia to accept a greater proportion of UNHCR-identified refugees in need of urgent resettlement.

1.4. Family reunion remains an important factor commonly raised by separated families with Australian Red Cross. The mental health impacts of family separation and missing family are well evidenced.[2] The recent Building a New Life in Australia research also identified the connection between family separation and economic participation.[3] The Project Researching the Impact of Separated and Missing Family (PRISM) aims to better understand the impact of missing and separated family on the psychological and social wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia as well as seeking to identify the role of milestone events relating to the missing (e.g. restoring links) or separated (e.g. family reunification) on psychological and social wellbeing trajectories over time. The findings from PRISM are due at the end of 2025.

1.5. Australian Red Cross recommends that prioritisation is not influenced by how much someone may contribute or cost the economy, especially when it comes to older adults or people with

[1] Australian Red Cross Fundamental Principles: https://www.redcross.org.au/about/fundamental-principles/

[2] Liddell B, Batch N, Bulnes-Diez M, Hellyer S, Kamte A, Wong J, Byrow Y, Nickerson A. 2020. The Effects of Family Separation on Forcibly Displaced People in Australia. Findings from a Pilot Research Project. Australian Red Cross, Carlton, Vic. https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms/documents/stories/unsw-red-cross-family-separation-report.pdf | van Kooy, J. Woldegiorgis, M. & Rioseco, P., (2024). Building a New Life in Australia. Final Report. Australian Institute of Family Studies https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/BNLA-10-year-Report_FINAL.pdf Page 121.

[3] van Kooy, J. Woldegiorgis, M. & Rioseco, P., (2024). Building a New Life in Australia. Final Report. Australian Institute of Family Studies. https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/BNLA-10-year-Report_FINAL.pdf Page 20, 25

medical needs, rather by holistic needs and vulnerabilities. Providing appropriate and alternative routes for families to reunite may reduce pressure on the humanitarian program and improve people's wellbeing. In 2022, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee reported on the efficacy, fairness, timeliness and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions.[4] The Australian Government's response in April 2024 noted the recommendations and indicated that given the passage of time since the report was tabled a substantive response was no longer appropriate.[5] A renewed review of what would be required to reduce family reunion wait times to less than five years, to relieve the pressure on the humanitarian intake, is needed.

1.6. For people seeking protection within Australia, Australian Red Cross notes the importance of funding made available for free legal advice for people considering applying for protection in Australia. Access to information is important to enable people to make decisions and live in dignity. It is hoped that this important support can be maintained, and people in Australia can be on visas that enable them to access the support(s) that they require, including a safety net of cash assistance.

Recommendation 1

Base composition on need and vulnerability rather than other characteristics, geographical locations, or potential economic factors.

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2. Responding to global demand for resettlement

2.1. This section addresses the Department's questions: 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?

2.2. A range of suggestions to balancing crises overseas, protracted situations, specific cohorts and the region are provided below:

2.2.1. **Champion the benefit of resettlement to other nation states, including within the Asia Pacific region:** With 2.9 million people globally predicted to need resettlement in 2025[6] the demand for protection strongly outstrips the capacity of any one nation. Australia has a strong history of leadership in resettlement and, could proactively champion the benefits of resettlement and complementary pathways to protection through proactive diplomatic engagement to neighbours in the Asia Pacific region, driving a regional intake target, including with countries that have reduced their intake.

[4] Commonwealth of Australia, (2022). The efficacy, fairness, timeliness and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/FamilyandPartnerVisas/Report

[5] Australian Government response to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee report The efficacy, fairness, timeliness and costs of the processing and granting of visa classes which provide for or allow for family and partner reunions, April 2024. https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/PDFs/efficacy-fairness-timeliness-and-costs-processing-and-granting-of-visa-subclasses.pdf

[6] UNHCR, (2024). UNHCR Projected Global Settlement Needs Report 2025. https://www.unhcr.org/au/media/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2025 , page 5.

This forms part of Australia's work to implement the Global Compact on Refugees and to support the Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways conversations, which aim to establish a more predictable and equitable framework for sharing responsibility for refugees, requiring international cooperation.[7]

2.2.2. **Increase the humanitarian intake levels within Australia:** Implementing a paced increase to the annual humanitarian intake and improve capacity for additional humanitarian intakes in response to crises and emergencies. Beyond the humanitarian benefits that such a policy decision would reach, Australian Red Cross refers to the readers to the Deloitte / Oxfam Australia (2019) report on the economic impact of increasing intake.[8]

2.2.3. **Separate the CRISP and other complementary pathways to protection from the humanitarian intake, so it is additional to the intake level:** Complementary pathways are designed to complement resettlement pathways to protection. They rely on community spirit and support to ensure newly arrived refugees are welcomed, safe and supported in their settlement journeys. As an organisation that brings people together in times of need, Australian Red Cross has strong experience in the value of social capital and social cohesion in helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. The principles of CRISP, at their core, build social cohesion and social capital. . As such, making them in addition to the humanitarian intake would not only expand Australia's ability to support refugees in Australia, but actively contribute to building welcoming and connected communities and building the resilience of people in Australia for future disasters.

2.2.4. **Continue to allocate emergency intake levels in addition to the annual limits:** Providing additional emergency places reduces disruption for people waiting for resettlement and enables the Australian government to respond at pace to global changes sudden onset and protracted crises. Maintaining a regular intake of resettlement places through the UNHCR program ensures that those identified by UNHCR as most in need can access resettlement, rather than places being allocated in response to new crises.

2.2.5. **Explore alternative visa options for people looking for safe, regular and orderly migration options to Australia:** Mutual burden-sharing across countries to support people impacted by conflict or crisis is an aspiration documented in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). While Australia is not a signatory to this, it demonstrates global standards and good practice for ensuring safe routes through the migration process. The GCM identifies the need for signatories to "*cooperate to identify, develop and strengthen solutions for migrants compelled to leave their countries of origin owing to slow-onset natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation... including by devising planned relocation and visa options in cases where adaptation in or return to their country of origin is not possible*"[9] The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction underscores

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[7] Global Compact on Refugees, (2018). https://www.unhcr.org/au/who-we-are/global-compact-refugees
[8] Oxfam Australia, (2019). Economic and social impact of increasing Australia's humanitarian intake. Deloitte Access Economics. August 2019.

[9] Objective 5, United Nations General Assembly, 2018

displacement as a disaster risk and identifies planned relocation as a relevant policy tool in addressing disasters and climate change.

2.3. In the Red Cross Movement's experience, **regular pathways can reduce human risks involved with irregular migration**. The Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab is conducting qualitative research on separations and disappearances across 19 countries. Initial findings from data collected with migrant children and young adults highlights the risks and consequences of involuntary separation of children, with insights shared on methods to prevent separation.[10] The recommendations include the value of safe and regular migration routes.

2.4. Within regular visa options, support based on need rather than visa type would be beneficial – for example, ensuring that **dependents can also access the settlement supports they need**. Australia has a range of regular visa options available to people seeking a safe place to live, for example, entering as a skilled migrant or on a partner visa. There is often an expectation (or requirement) that the lead visa applicant will support dependents, however that may not always be possible, and dependents may sometimes benefit from services that they are not aware of because they are not linked into refugee supports (for example, information about accessing education or refugee health services). Providing alternative visa options that are outside of the humanitarian intake but carry some of the benefits of a humanitarian visa, may help alleviate the demand on the humanitarian program while creating other routes for protection.

Recommendation 2

To balance crises overseas, protracted situations, specific cohorts and the region:
- Promote the benefit of resettlement to other nation states, including within the Asia Pacific region
- Increase the humanitarian intake levels within Australia
- Separate the CRISP and other complementary pathways to protection from the humanitarian intake, so it is additional to the intake level
- Continue to allocate emergency intake levels in addition to the annual limits
- Explore alternative visa options for people looking for safe, regular and orderly migration options to Australia

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3. Responding to emergency humanitarian crises

3.1. This section addresses the Department's questions: 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?

3.2. The Australian Government's response to the crisis in Ukraine included several good *practice examples, as* demonstrated in the extract from our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the response in Ukraine, below:

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[10]Cubas, M. A., Bhardwaj, S., Robins, S., Stockwell, J., (2025). Separation of children: causes, impacts and mitigation strategies. Forced Migration Review 75**.** Dangerous journeys: Saving lives and responding to missing migrants and refugees https://www.fmreview.org/dangerous-journeys/ariascubas-bhardwaj-robins-stockwell/

> *Case study: Australian Government response*
>
> *The Australian Government rapidly activated an established pathway for people to arrive through regular, safe and orderly migration channels to Australia: Visitor Visa (Subclass 600) / Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) Visa (Subclass 449) / Temporary (Humanitarian Concern) visa (Subclass 786).*
>
> *Safety net and settlement support were available to people who arrived before 31 July 2022 through the HSP, linking people to essential services to meet their basic needs. This included access to Medicare, Centrelink payments, employment support services and paid interpreter services.*
>
> *The Department of Home Affairs maintained an active role in responding to queries from community and service providers throughout the response.*
>
> *Existing Ukrainian community and diaspora groups were supported by the government and community sector to provide coordinated support to new arrivals. The HSP providers worked closely with these groups to link people to services and share technical and specialist knowledge about settlement and services available.*
>
> *Media messaging from government was positive, contributing to building a welcoming environment for people arriving from Ukraine. It was important that messaging focused on people, civilians, needs and supports for those communities.*

[extract, Australian Red Cross submission to Australian Parliamentary Inquiry[11]]

3.3. System design and readiness lessons learnt from the Ukraine response, and subsequent responses, can be used to support proactive future program design. Lessons include the need to:

3.3.1. **Strengthen the Australian Government Plan for the Reception of Australian Citizens and Approved Foreign National Evacuated from Overseas AUSRECEPLAN and include a requirement to activate and work with humanitarian settlement program (HSP) providers in resettlement**, and Australian Red Cross as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. HSP providers should be engaged to support the resettlement of incoming groups, even if those groups are not yet eligible under current HSP visa pathways. This ensures new arrivals receive essential information and referral pathway upon arrival, similar to the initial psychological first aid support provided by Australian Red Cross to people arriving from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel prior to HSP eligibility being confirmed. It also ensures that providers are prepared and able to stand up rapidly in response to emergency activations.

3.3.2. **Review any crisis-activation decision making matrix** to ensure any crisis or protracted crisis is assessed against criteria which determine when a humanitarian

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[11] Australian Red Cross, (2024). Submission to the Inquiry into Australian support for Ukraine. https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms/publications/australian-red-cross---submission-to-the-inquiry-into-australian-support-for-ukraine.pdf, p9.

response is activated, rather than awaiting advocacy from concerned community members or refugee support organisations.

3.3.3. **Formalise a consistent immediate response visa pathway** whereby immediate response can be rapidly activated, in addition to humanitarian caps. Where temporary visas are used, ensure progress to permanent solutions are timely acknowledging the negative impact temporary resettlement has on people's mental wellbeing.

3.3.4. **Improve eligibility and access to settlement and mainstream services for temporary visa holders.** If temporary visa pathways are used to respond to urgent humanitarian crises, eligibility for and access to settlement and mainstream services should be standardised. This would enable people to travel to Australia quickly while also benefiting from access to services (such as education, health and settlement support across geographic locations, including regions) and a safety net. For example, consideration could be given to the role for community to sponsor people on temporary stay visas, the benefits and risks of community–led interest free loans, what happens if a community sponsor and beneficiary relationship falls apart, and what wraparound supports are and can be available. Relevant to the question of social security on arrival in Australia, the Migration Pathway to Nation Building Inquiry final report (Inquiry Report)[12], recognises that more people would benefit from settlement support access.[13] Irrespective of the method or circumstances of someone's arrival in Australia, or visa type they are on, people have different settlement needs and "*some may require more support than others*".[14] This support could contribute to economic and social participation, and reduce pressure on other visa types which may off a broader support package.

3.3.5. **Address barriers to emergency humanitarian resettlement by ensuring evacuation support.** For example, if someone has been granted a visa however is unable to leave a country in which they are residing.

3.3.6. **Build public awareness of the reason why a humanitarian response is helpful.** Australian Red Cross experience in responding to previous crises is where communities understood and sympathised with people's experience, they were more welcoming. Australian Red Cross' In Search of Safety (ISOS) Program is an example of how communities (via school children) can increase their understanding of what it might be like to be a refugee. Furthermore, at the local level, our experience is that community and local state actors who were mobilised and actively engaged in a response built their understanding and awareness around sensitivities and humanitarian needs, providing responses that better met community needs. A coordinated approach across governments, departments, and media helps to inform the public of cohorts and why they are coming, helping to build support when there may be a peak demand on services.

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[12] Parliament of Australia, (2024). Migration, Pathway to Nation Building. Joint Standing Committee on Migration. September 2024. Canberra. https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/RB000214/toc_pdf/Migration,PathwaytoNationBuilding.pdf
[13] Ibid, para 8.55, p.243
[14] Ibid, para 8.56, p.243

3.3.7. **Ensure a nationally consistent approach to grants and supports:** Australian Red Cross has noted differing impacts resulting from state and territory policy decisions. In responding to humanitarian emergencies (e.g. Afghan, Ukrainian, OPT, and Israeli cohorts), a coordinated whole-of-government approach is essential to ensure consistent national support. Variability in response, such as some jurisdictions providing grants while others could not, highlights the need for greater alignment. Coordination through existing avenues, such as the Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group (SOSOG), could help alleviate pressure and ensure effective engagement across all levels of government.

3.3.8. **Review global and domestic disaster laws and regulations** to ensure they are fit for purpose in the changing climate and continue to be responsive to future displacement and relocation needs.

3.3.9. **Establish a cross-departmental working group with DFAT to identify future causes and threats to displacement**, including in the region, and identify solutions (for example, the impacts of climate change, or protracted conflicts, and culturally safe ways to support forced relocation)

3.3.10. **Leverage the humanitarian auxiliary role of Australian Red Cross to harness global to local data and evidence** to support government decision making and interactions with diaspora populations in Australia.

3.3.11. **Endorse the Global Compact on Regular, Safe and Orderly Migration (GCM)** to support focus on the creation of regular, safe and orderly migration routes, enabling people to avoid dangerous journeys. As a named implementing partner of the GCM,[15] the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement sees the GCM as an important step for improving protection and assistance for migrants.[16]

3.3.12. **Build welcoming communities**, develop diaspora engagement and invest in building resilience through social capital and cohesion. This needs to include supporting the capacity of community associations, including where an evacuation may dramatically expand diaspora groups in Australia.

3.3.13. **Establish, in collaboration with community and community sector organisations, practical solutions to external challenges**, such as limited housing stock, availability of culturally respectful, inclusive and accessible holistic health and support services, and availability of education and employment services.

Recommendation 3

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[15] See paragraph 44 of the GCM,
https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180713_agreed_outcome_global_compact_for_migration.pdf
[16] International Federation of the Red Cross, (2019), The Global Compact for Migration: From words to action.
https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/Movement-Messages-GCM.pdf

> To better plan and respond to emergency crises and disasters overseas, including when crises are protracted, develop a consistent and coordinated domestic approach to respond to the humanitarian needs of impacted people. Factors to be included are emergency evacuations, visa types, provision of safe and regular pathways to Australia, and social and financial assistance (including social cohesion, early engagement of impacted communities and access to a safety net, psychosocial support and information) for migrants and diaspora populations in Australia.

4. Additional feedback part 1: Focus on building welcoming communities, social capital and social cohesion, including across regional locations

4.1. **Community resilience is increasingly recognised as critical to withstanding and adapting to the impacts of overseas events**, especially considering the growing frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters, social dislocation, and systemic challenges.[17] Central to this resilience are the often overlooked but vital dimensions of social capital and social cohesion.

4.2. Disasters are not only physical events-they are profoundly social in both impact and response. They disrupt trust, deepen existing inequalities, and disproportionately affect those already facing exclusion and disadvantage. At the same time, communities with strong relational networks, inclusive systems, and shared identity experience less harm and recover more effectively.[18] Everyday **social cohesion** enables proactive cooperation in times of crisis and strengthens everyday community life. Empirical evidence consistently shows that communities with stronger **social capital** experience faster recovery and reduced long-term harm compared to those with fragmented or weak networks.[19]

4.3. The importance of social cohesion and multiculturalism was recognised in the Migration Pathway to Nation Building Inquiry final report (Inquiry Report),[20] and the Multicultural Framework Review's recommendations.[21]

4.4. Australian Red Cross knows that social capital and social cohesion play a vital role in building resilient communities. However, social capital is not inherently inclusive. Bonding ties can form insular groups that exclude others, and inequitable service networks can reinforce existing social inequalities.[22] It is vital therefore that **community voices are included in the planning and response to disasters and crises.** If they are not, marginalised groups may be forced to act independently or without substantial institutional or community support which further

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[17] International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), (2014). IFRC framework for community resilience. Geneva: IFRC; Every, D., McLennan, J., Reynolds, A., & Trigg, J. (2019). Australian householders' psychological preparedness for potential natural hazard threats: An exploration of contributing factors. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, *38*

[18] Australian Business Roundtable (ABR) for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities, (2021). Special Report: Update to the economic costs of the social impacts of natural disasters in Australia.

[19] Daniel P. Aldrich and Michelle A. Meyer, *"Social Capital and Community Resilience," American Behavioral Scientist* 59, no. 2 (2015): 254–269, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764214550299.

[20] Parliament of Australia, (2024). Migration, Pathway to Nation Building. Joint Standing Committee on Migration. September 2024. Canberra. https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/RB000214/toc_pdf/Migration,PathwaytoNationBuilding.pdf

[21] Department of Home Affairs, (2025). Multicultural Framework Review, Towards Fairness – a multicultural Australia for all. https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/multicultural-framework-review/Documents/report-summary/multicultural-framework-review-report-english.pdf, page 16

[22] Jan W. van Deth and Sonja Zmerli, "Introduction: Civicness, Equality, and Democracy—A 'Dark Side' of Social Capital?" American Behavioral Scientist 53, no. 5 (2009): 631, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209350827.

entrenches social disparity. Across our programs, **practices that build trust as infrastructure, shift power to communities, remove access barriers and provide trauma-informed, inclusive caring systems and spaces have impact**. Often there are challenges that limit community resilience, such as undervalued social support services (particularly in regional and remote settings), funding insecurity, inconsistent measurement and evaluation and an underuse of digital tools. In regional and rural locations, access to specialist support for refugee communities can be especially challenging (e.g. refugee health, housing, interpreters, access to transport, employment programs, social infrastructure).

4.5. Schools, sports clubs, and community organisations can play a pivotal role in cultivating inclusion through shared spaces for cross-group collaboration. The Australian Red Cross Connected Women program creates a space for cross-cultural connection, as the In Search of Safety (ISOS) Program builds understanding amongst school-aged children of what it is like to be a refugee in Australia.

4.6. By building and focusing on social cohesion in Australia, the Department of Home Affairs can support the settlement program, and broader routes that people harness to seek protection in Australia, to create strong and resilient communities.

4.7. Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to support the newly established Office for Multicultural Affairs within the Department of Home Affairs, in building social cohesion, social capital and welcoming communities.

Recommendation 4

- Invest to build social cohesion and social capital within Australia, especially across regional and rural communities, to increase resilience to hazards and disasters. This investment should prioritise expanding specialist support in rural communities, building local capacity for inclusive communities, and fostering community connection and belonging.

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5. Additional feedback part 2: Recognise the need for regulatory reform to secure Community Sector Organisation viability

5.1. The Department of Social Services, recognising the need for regulatory reform to ensure Community Sector Organisation viability, led a public consultation on a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector[7], which recognises a number of intersecting policies, including the Blueprint for the Not for Profit Sector. A **Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework** (the Framework) has now been established, designed to address challenges community service organisations face in providing services in Australia.

5.2. Grant agreements limit costs in a variety of ways: they may require a percentage cap on administrative or overhead costs, be inconsistent between departments, lack clarity on what constitutes indirect costs, or not cover or account for other costs such as monitoring and evaluation, volunteer recruitment and management, training, support and retention (full volunteer lifecycle), increasing costs of compliance and safeguarding, investment in technology and IT systems, management of cybersecurity risk, and data privacy.

5.3.

> *Case study: Volunteering policy*
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> **Volunteers** play a crucial role in the work of the Australian Red Cross, including through the Settlement Program, providing essential support to communities in crisis and addressing pressing social challenges. They bring diverse skills, energy, and compassion, helping to extend our reach and impact. Voluntary service is one of the fundamental principles that underpin the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.
>
> However, the CSO sector is struggling to maintain our current volunteering cohorts. Increased cost-of-living pressures, competing demands on time, inflexible arrangements to volunteer and a lack of understanding about opportunities all complicate the volunteering experience.
>
> The volunteering system can be strengthened through;
> a) Greater investment in volunteer infrastructure including investing in the Australian Red Cross volunteer workforce,
> b) Streamlined compliance processes, and
> c) A reinvigoration of the culture of volunteerism framed through a humanitarian and community-led lens.

5.4. Supporting the implementation of the **Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework** across Department of Home Affairs contracts and areas of influence, will help the CSO Sector to be efficient and sustainable.

> **Recommendation 5**
>
> - Support the Department of Social Services and Department of Finance initiative to implement the Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework to improve regulatory systems; ensuring Community Service Organisations can continue to provide essential services to communities in Australia.

Conclusion

As Auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, a member of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Global Movement, and a Humanitarian Support Program provider in Australia, Australian Red Cross provides the insights and evidence in this submission to support the government in its role in global resettlement.

We welcome the opportunity to explore these recommendations further.

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