

ASYLUM SEEKERS

Family First acknowledges the immensely positive and enriching contributions migrants and refugees have made to the development of our nation. Family First recognises that well managed and compassionate intakes of new migrants and refugees, committed to our nation and Constitution, will continue to have a positive impact on our society's growth and prosperity.

The Party recognises and supports Australia's international and humanitarian commitments in regard to asylum seekers whilst also advancing the need to protect Australia's borders from illegal immigration and threats to the security and health of Australians. Family First also recognises the importance of ensuring well managed immigration programs that whilst being supportive of Australia's interests are also compassionate and supportive of families.

Family First sees the promotion of social, economic and political justice as integral to our global responsibilities and integral to removing the causes of the war and the displacement of peoples and will champion a substantial increase in the level of Australian overseas aid.

In addition Family First believes that Australia should seek to advance improvement in the levels of international co-operation and wider recognition of responsibilities to offer asylum and protection to refugees and other displaced persons so as to share the load more equitably amongst nations. Accordingly, Family First will support measures to encourage countries in our region to become signatories to the existing Refugee Convention and to discourage the secondary movement of asylum seekers and curb the criminal and exploitative activity of people smuggling within their jurisdictions.

Family First recognises that many asylum seekers wait for many years in refugee camps and believes in the strengthening of international and Australian agencies and institutions charged with the responsibility of managing and processing the flows of displaced peoples so that refugees may be resettled more quickly. Family First will support measures to improve

and expedite these processes to create fairer and just outcomes within the broader context of movement of displaced persons and asylum seekers around the world.

In regard to the immediate problems facing Australia in its response to asylum seekers who arrive:

1. Family First will strongly support an immediate investigation into what is needed to expedite the processing of applications and will strongly support any Government initiative which will restore Australia's reputation for being a compassionate society. In particular:
 - the Party believes that the process should be reformed to ensure fast processing that accords with principles of procedural fairness and is aimed at quickly and thoroughly ascertaining the substance of the asylum seeker's claims for refugee status.
 - the processing of claims should be aimed at quickly and thoroughly assessing whether, if refugee status is ascertained, the refugee may be able to be resettled in other Refugee Convention signatory countries provided with appropriate settlement outcomes and services. The presence of family and other relations should have a substantial bearing on such resettlement decisions. Those without genuine refugee or humanitarian claims should be quickly returned.
 - assessment of claims should be conducted from the outset by expert staff of the Refugee Tribunal with sufficient training to conduct inquiries fairly and thoroughly and with the capacity to make realistic assessments of the likely circumstances from which the asylum seeker has fled. Family First will support the rights of asylum seekers to seek judicial review but will seek to implement greater efficiency in the appeal system.

2. Family First supports a strictly limited period of mandatory detention only for the purposes of assessment as to health and security risk. The

Party believes that medium security supervised hostel arrangement should be introduced for the more appropriate housing of asylum seekers.

3. All unauthorized arrivals and asylum seekers should be detained temporarily in high secure centres for the purposes of accurately assessing health, identity and security issues.
4. Family First would support the provision of additional resources to ensure detention time is kept to an absolute minimum and the period of detention should also be used to enable the expeditious processing of claims. In this way processing times will be advanced and where the claim has failed, the unauthorized arrival is therefore locatable and available for removal from Australia.
5. Family First believes that as soon as health, identity and security issues have been resolved asylum seekers should be transferred to low security hostel facilities until their claims can be fully processed. Such Hostel facilities, whilst providing more home like living arrangements and more normalised interaction with the wider community, would still provide a more sheltered arrangement for residents and a suitable transition towards fuller integration with the community if refugee status is confirmed. Such hostel arrangement would allow for discrete and reasonable supervision, assistance and monitoring of movements.
6. Family First will support substantial reform of detention and the introduction of hostel facilities. In particular Family First will support:
 - Reform to ensure all facilities are managed publicly and staffed by people with expertise in and sensitivity to the needs of asylum seekers and other unauthorized arrivals.

- The relocation of facilities to locations freely accessible to medical and legal consultations and other community contacts.
- Management of facilities so as to ensure that conditions are humane and appropriate to the needs of asylum seekers who may have suffered from traumatic experiences in their home country or in the process of fleeing.
- Management and design of facilities should be conducive to the needs of unaccompanied children and family groups and provide safe and supportive environments for positive social interactions and meaningful activities such as counselling, the learning of English, and other educational, creative, or recreational activities as well as employment assistance. Every effort should be made to foster good mental health outcomes, self reliance and healthy family life.
- The fostering of a culture of respect and full opportunities for detainees or residents to be fully informed about the application process in general and the progress of their individual application. This would involve adequate access to interpreters and legal advice.
- Full accountability and transparency in regard to the length and conditions of detention and hostel residency and the operation of facilities.
- Family First believes that special care should be taken to ensure that unaccompanied minors who have satisfied security, identity and health checks are placed in the care of suitable foster carers either within the hostel or in the community as would best meet the needs of the minor.

7. Family First believes that once refugee status has been ascertained every effort and support must be given to those applicants who have had their application approved to ensure their transition into the Australian community is managed with sensitivity and compassion. Sufficient support should be provided such that State and Territory and welfare and volunteer organisations are not over burdened.

8. Family First will support the maintenance of a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) system for asylum seekers whilst their refugee claims are being processed [and if granted for up to 2 years after which, if ongoing protection is still required, permanent residency will be provided.]

9. Family First supports the position that applicants not eligible to remain in Australia should be deported as soon as is practicable. However Family First supports the temporary relaxation of deportation rules in regard to those who have suffered long periods of detention and uncertainty under the recent regime so that they have the opportunity to apply for permanent residency if they can demonstrate sufficient integration or contribution to Australian society in regional and rural areas.