



# **JRS Australia**

## **Employment Program**

**An Employer's Guide to Working with  
People Seeking Asylum and Refugees**

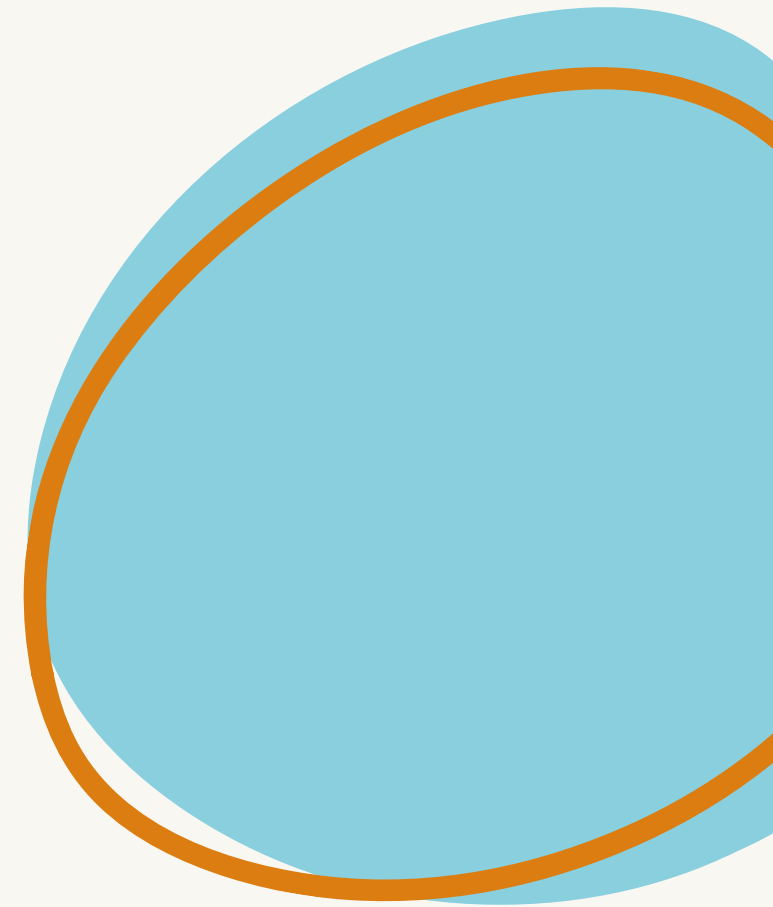
# What is the difference between a person seeking asylum and a refugee?

## PERSON SEEKING ASYLUM

A person seeking asylum is someone who is in need of protection, but who has yet to have their refugee status determined. Every year, around one million people seek asylum globally.

Upon arrival in Australia people seeking asylum apply for protection with the Australian Government through the Department of Home Affairs.

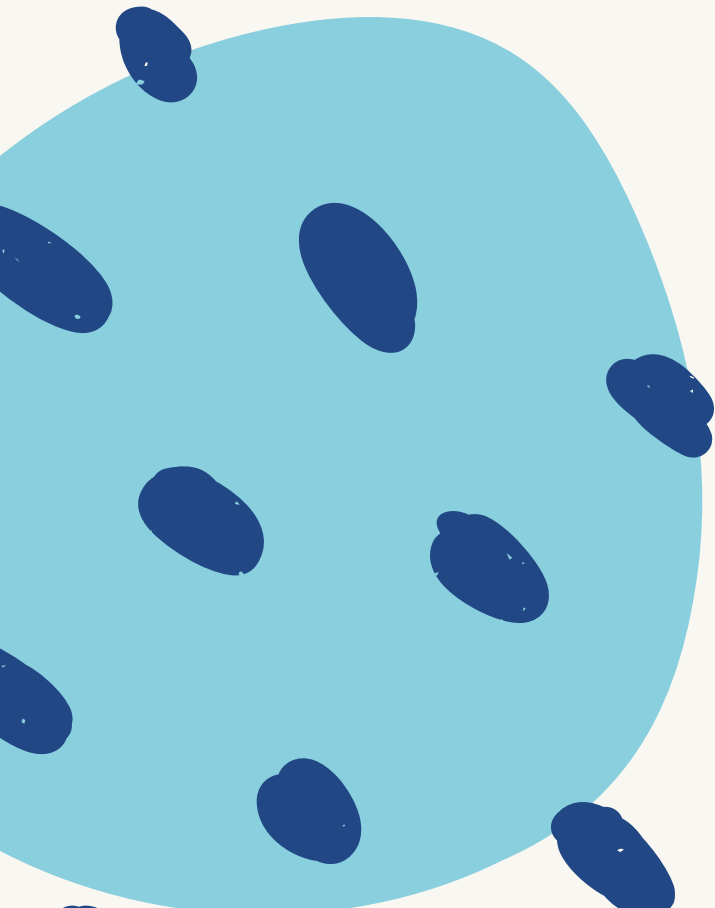
This is Australia's 'onshore' humanitarian program. Once a person's application for protection is approved, they are granted refugee status.



## REFUGEE

According to UNHCR, a refugee is a person who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country.

Australia also has an 'offshore' humanitarian program, providing resettlement to people who have already been granted refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and are referred to Australia for resettlement.



# How many **people seeking asylum and refugees** are in Australia?

There are many people seeking asylum living in the Australian community.

Some arrived in Australia by plane and others by boat, and all sought asylum after their arrival in Australia.

The way people arrive in Australia affects the conditions of their visas, how their claim for

protection is determined, and what type of visa they will be granted if their protection application is approved.

From 2023-24, Australia granted 16,740 resettlement visas as part of its offshore humanitarian program and 3,250 permanent protection visas for its onshore program.

**As of March 2023, there over**

**100,000**

**people seeking asylum  
living in the Australian community.**



# Where do most people seeking asylum and refugees come from?

## PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

In the past year five years, people seeking asylum who applied for protection visas in Australia and who arrived by plane came from:

- India
- China (Exc. SAR)
- Vietnam
- Indonesia
- Malaysia
- Tonga
- Thailand
- Pakistan
- Ukraine
- Myanmar

## REFUGEES

In 2023-24, more than two-thirds of all refugees came from five countries:

- Afghanistan
- Syria
- Iraq
- Myanmar
- Dem. Rep. of the Congo

While there have been no new boat arrivals since 2013, there are still people living in the community in Australia who arrived by boat and who are waiting for their visa status to be resolved. This includes people from: Iran, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and many people who are considered stateless.

## How long are bridging visas valid?

Once people seeking asylum lodge their application for protection in Australia, they are granted a bridging visa.

If the person arrived in Australia by plane, the bridging visa will come into effect after their entry visa has expired.

The refugee status determination (or application for protection) process can take several years to reach a resolution.

During this time, bridging visas may remain valid until a decision on an application or appeal is made, or they may require renewal every 3 or 6 months depending on the person's circumstances until the application for protection is determined.

Types of bridging visas (BV) include:

- BVA (Subclass 010)
- BVB (Subclass 020)
- BVC (Subclass 030)
- BVD (Subclass 040)
- BVE (Subclass 050 & Subclass 051)

# How long are **protection visas** valid?

People seeking asylum in Australia have the option to apply for three types of protection visas.

The type of protection visa a person can apply for depends on how they arrived in Australia.

\*Please note that temporary visas will be issued to any people who arrive by boat into the future, but as of 13 Feb 2023, current TPV/SHEV holders are now eligible to apply for a permanent Resolution of Status Visa. For more information visit the link [here](#).

## Permanent visas

### Permanent Protection visa (PPV) (Subclass 866)

If approved, this visa allows individuals to stay in Australia permanently.

It includes study and work rights, and access to government services such as Centrelink and Medicare.

## Temporary visas

### Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) (Subclass 785)

If approved, this visa allows individuals to stay in Australia for up to 3 years.

It includes study and work rights, and limited access to government services such as Centrelink and Medicare.

The individual will need to reapply for protection (i.e. another TPV) before the three year expiry date.

### Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) (Subclass 790)

If approved, this visa allows individuals to stay in Australia for up to 5 years.

It includes study and work rights, and limited access to government services such as Centrelink and Medicare. In addition, it requires the individual to work or study in regional Australia.

The individual will need to apply for another selected visa before the five year expiry date.

# Do people seeking asylum have work and study rights?

This depends on the type of bridging visa that the person holds, the conditions of their visa, and the progress of their case within the refugee status determination process (RSD).

A VEVO check can be undertaken by an employer to determine if the person has work rights.

VEVO is a free online service that allows individuals or employers to check a person's visa status and conditions.

JRS Australia conducts VEVO checks of all candidates prior to engaging them with employment support.

A VEVO check can be undertaken by an employer to determine if the person has work rights at:  
<https://online.immi.gov.au/lusc/login>

Most people seeking asylum in Australia have study rights which allows them to undertake English classes and Vocational Education Training (VET) through TAFE or private registered training organisations (RTO).

However, tertiary education is a challenge due to their visa duration and as they will often need to pay fees in advance, similar to fees paid by international students.

Some people do not have the right to study and this will be noted as part of their BV conditions.

# What support services are available for people seeking asylum in Australia?

Generally, people seeking asylum who are engaged in the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process have access to Medicare, access to counselling services and in very limited cases, access to social welfare (income support).

The Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) is a temporary payment paid at 89% of the JobSeeker payment amount.

SRSS may also include casework, medical, and/or income support to eligible people.

Eligibility is severely limited to only those with children under 5, people who are over 70, or those who are unable to work for health reasons.

However, often even those who meet the eligibility criteria face barriers to accessing the program due to difficulty in demonstrating their eligibility to the Department of Home Affairs.

Participation in JobActive programs and access to wage subsidies requires eligibility for Centrelink services, which people seeking asylum do not have.

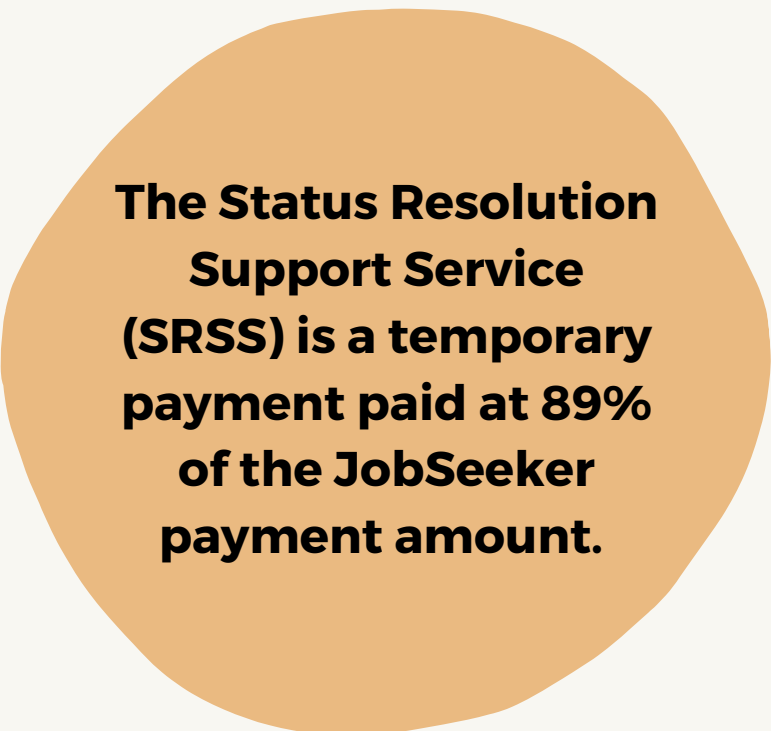
However, during the 2021 lockdown in NSW people seeking asylum and temporary visa holders

with work rights were able to access the COVID-19 Disaster Relief and leave payment if they had lost work or had their hours reduced due to the NSW health order.

This meant that people seeking asylum were given fortnightly payments to assist in covering living expenses.

However, those with no previous employment or work rights, and those participating in the informal work economy were not eligible for this payment.

Hence, many people seeking asylum often rely on community groups and organisations such as JRS Australia for access to emergency relief, food, welfare, health and housing support.



**The Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) is a temporary payment paid at 89% of the JobSeeker payment amount.**

# What are the barriers to employment for people seeking asylum and refugees?

## **Duration of visas**

The length of a person's bridging visa often prevents people seeking asylum from obtaining permanent or secure employment.

More often, preference is given to those on permanent visas and/or Australian citizens. However, employers can carry out VEVO checks to verify work rights and the visa status of those they employ at any time.

## **Lack of local experience**

Refugees and people seeking asylum come to Australia with many years of work experience across various sectors overseas.

However, due to previous barriers mentioned, their experience often goes unrecognised or is undervalued in the Australian job market.

Obtaining recognition of overseas qualifications in Australia takes time and sometimes money, and may require further study.

In most cases, refugees and people seeking asylum can transfer their skills and experience to current employment opportunities, thus acting as a stepping stone towards recognition of their previous qualifications.

## **Restricted access to employment support**

Even when people seeking asylum hold work rights, they have restricted access to employment support and other welfare services, which limits their access to technology and the resources to search for a job, develop and update a resume and cover letter, and submit a job application.

## **Lack of social networks**

Without connections to the community and/or an awareness of employment opportunities, access to work is limited. Well-informed job-seeking approaches require "local know how," exchanged through formal and informal networks.

## **Proficiency in English**

Many jobs require basic proficiency in spoken English. English is a second language for most people seeking asylum, and not everyone has had the opportunity to learn English in their countries of origin. Of those people seeking asylum who can speak English fluently, many do not have the commensurate literacy skills.

However, there are English language programs offered through TAFE and community organisations to improve English language proficiency.



# How can Employers Support People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

JRS Australia works closely with employers who are committed to creating meaningful and inclusive employment opportunities for people seeking asylum.

We value partnerships with organisations that:  
Share our commitment to supporting people seeking asylum to access safe, fair, and sustainable employment.

Understand the barriers faced by people seeking asylum in the Australian job market, and are willing to work collaboratively to reduce these challenges.

Have supportive and well-resourced Human Resources processes in place.

Can nominate a dedicated contact person to liaise with JRS Australia regarding job opportunities and candidate referrals.

Are able to provide additional support throughout recruitment, selection, and onboarding to ensure a positive and successful experience for all involved.

JRS is currently working with approximately 200 refugees and people seeking asylum who are actively seeking employment, majority looking for full time work and some for part time.

Many participants have an Australian accredited qualification (e.g. Cert-Masters level) and some also have existing local experience.

The snapshot below represents their interest's areas of work and qualifications.

We currently have participants who seeking employment in the following areas:

- Cleaning/domestic and or commercial
- Hospitality/ Barista, food server, and or cashier.
- Warehousing/ pick and packer
- Construction/ labourers
- Aged Care
- Disability /Support work
- Child Care
- Administration and Accounting, Finance, and Engineering

At JRS our clients are:

- Refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants.
- Age Bracket: Varies (18-60 years).
- LGA: Cumberland, Parramatta, Canterbury-Bankstown, Liverpool and Fairfield.
- Duration in Australia: 5-8 years.

# Why Hire People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

## Skilled and Capable Individuals

Many people seeking asylum and refugees arrive in Australia with qualifications, experience, and practical skills across a range of sectors.

They are highly motivated to contribute, learn, and gain experience in the Australian workforce.

## Contributing to diverse and high-performing workplaces

Research has consistently shown that diverse and inclusive workplaces foster innovation, improve team performance, and contribute to stronger organisational outcomes.

## Retention and reliability

Studies show that employees from refugee backgrounds often have higher retention rates and lower absenteeism.

For example, a recent study of 26 companies in the United States found that 73% reported lower turnover among refugee employees

## Building stronger communities

Employment plays a critical role in supporting individuals to re-establish their livelihoods and participate fully in civil society.

Hiring people from refugee backgrounds contributes to building stronger, more resilient communities — both locally and globally.

## Cultural and linguistic benefits

Employees from refugee backgrounds bring valuable cultural knowledge and language skills that can help organisations better connect with diverse communities and improve services to customers from multicultural backgrounds.

# JRS Australia

## Employment Program

The JRS Australia Employment Program works to address these barriers to employment, supporting refugees and people seeking asylum to access meaningful work.

The program covers various topics that prepare refugees and people seeking asylum in becoming ready for employment, including:

- Resume development
- Workplace expectations
- People's rights and responsibilities at work
- How to look for potential employment
- Practicing vital interview skills

The JRS Australia Employment Program has been able to assist over **900 clients** by providing job readiness skills including resume building, interview workshops, and job opportunities.

Many of these clients have now been able to find **meaningful work** and are continuing their journey towards safety and independence in Australia.

The program has also been working to **bridge the digital divide** that so many refugees and people seeking asylum face.

### For more information:

Visit JRS Australia Employment Program:  
<https://aus.jrs.net/en/employment-assistance/>

Contact:  
[employment@jrs.org.au](mailto:employment@jrs.org.au)

# Resources

Australia Government: Department of Home Affairs (DHA). (2021). IMA Legacy Caseload: Report on Processing and Status Outcomes. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/ima-legacy-caseload-may-2021.pdf>

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