

# Public School Funding Submission

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## Introduction

Founded in 2001, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) is Australia's largest independent aid and advocacy organisation for people seeking asylum and refugees, supporting and empowering people at the most critical junctures of their journey. Our services include legal, casework, housing, medical, education, employment, and emergency relief. Based on what we witness through our service delivery, we advocate for change with refugees and people seeking asylum to ensure their human rights are upheld.

The ASRC welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into Public School Funding. The Victorian Government's decision to delay raising Victoria's school funding to 75% of the Schooling Resource Standard until 2031 represents a **\$2.4 billion reduction in funding** to government schools from what was previously committed.

This may have significant impacts on **students facing barriers from refugee backgrounds, including those seeking asylum**. Students from refugee backgrounds may face major obstacles to learning at school, including **language barriers, experiences of trauma, interrupted education, poverty, housing insecurity, and lack of transport**.

We are concerned that funding cuts will reduce already overburdened teachers' capacity to provide essential support to students from refugee backgrounds. This would have **long-term impacts on their educational outcomes and cause further disadvantage and inequity**. The government must ensure that students from refugee backgrounds are supported so they can thrive at school and rebuild their lives in Australia.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Increase funding to public schools to ensure that teachers, support, administrative and management staff in schools and at the department level across Victoria, can provide additional support to students experiencing disadvantage and the impact of trauma.

**Recommendation 2:** Ensure that funding delays do not impact essential educational support programs offered to students from refugee backgrounds.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Victorian Government advocates to the Federal Government to provide all people seeking asylum with the right to study while they are waiting for the outcome of their protection, tribunal, or court application, or a request for Ministerial Intervention.

**Recommendation 4:** Further resourcing for dedicated roles that provide early intervention and prevent the distress and disadvantage experienced by students seeking asylum and their families from compounding over time, ensuring children at risk do not fall through the cracks.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Federal government for people seeking asylum to have access to work rights and mainstream social support services, including Centrelink payments such as the Special Benefit, for the duration of their protection visa application process, including merits review, judicial review, and ministerial intervention stages.

## Terms of reference: Workforce effects

### Reducing teachers' ability to support students from refugee backgrounds

The reduction in overall resourcing of public schools will be felt most by students who require additional support to learn at school. Overburdened teachers are already unable to provide the 1-to-1 support necessary for students with complex needs. This means students facing the biggest barriers in Victoria are likely to be **disproportionately impacted** by cuts to public school funding.

In Victoria, all students, including those seeking asylum, can attend public schools. This is a critical part of ensuring **equity and prosperity** in the education state. However, many students require additional learning support due to various disadvantages. This may include First Nations students, those with disabilities and students from refugee backgrounds.

Refugees and people seeking asylum have often undergone significant difficulties and trauma fleeing their country of origin and in the process of seeking asylum in Australia - including experiences of conflict, grief and loss and time spent in immigration detention. Once families arrive in Australia, many do not have access to financial support, healthcare, or basic welfare supports due to Federal Government policies impacting people seeking asylum.<sup>1</sup> Without work rights and government support, many of our clients experience food and housing insecurity. Research from the Victorian Government and sector organisations consistently shows that **students from refugee backgrounds are more likely to experience poverty.**<sup>2</sup>

Students from families who are experiencing destitution, structural disadvantage, isolation, trauma, language barriers and have had their education interrupted **require additional support to ensure they can thrive at school.**

The Australian Education Union has warned that funding cuts would reduce public school teachers' ability to meet students' learning and wellbeing needs.<sup>3</sup> The union says these cuts are expected to lead to increases in class sizes, fewer support staff or 1-to-1 support and fewer education resources.

This could lead to a **huge increase in workload and reduced capacity** for teachers, administrative staff, school well-being officers and management to identify and recognise the need to assist students who are seeking asylum with basic access to uniforms, laptops and other basic educational needs through access to the Camps Sports and Excursions or State School Relief funds. Not all schools have wellbeing officers, so delaying funding would be even more devastating for already overburdened teachers.

Teachers are already reporting that they find it difficult to support students with additional needs as they don't have the training, resources, capacity or time. They often rely on education support staff to help navigate students' needs. Students with additional needs frequently require supportive transitions, which provide students and their families with more preparation and orientation so they don't feel overwhelmed.

Students from refugee backgrounds also often require regular student support group meetings and interpreters. Teachers need adequate time to identify students' needs and goals and provide these supports. If less funding is available, there is a risk that the services needed to engage students **may not be prioritised.**

Delayed funding increases mean that schools may not be able to hire Multicultural Education Aides, and trauma-informed approaches and relational safety may not be prioritised. Teachers are already time poor, and schools are under-resourced, **particularly schools in lower socioeconomic areas where the majority of people seeking asylum are located.** Providing a trauma-informed approach in schools requires training, resources, additional quiet spaces and safe adults that the student can go to if they feel overwhelmed.

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<sup>1</sup> ASRC. <https://asrc.org.au/policy-safety/>

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Government, 2011, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/refugeestatusreport.pdf>; MYAN, 2025, <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/National-Education-Roundtable-Briefing-Paper-Education-and-students-from-refugee-and-migrant-backgrounds.pdf>; Victorian Refugee Health Network, 2023, [https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/VictorianRefugeeHealthNetwork\\_Submission\\_Inquiry\\_into\\_Early-Childhood-Engagement-of-CALD-Communities.pdf](https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/VictorianRefugeeHealthNetwork_Submission_Inquiry_into_Early-Childhood-Engagement-of-CALD-Communities.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> AEU, 2025.

<https://news.aeuvic.asn.au/state-budget-leaves-members-and-their-students-behind/#:~:text=The%20announcement%20in%20the%20May,hold%20rallies%20around%20the%20state.>

These funding delays are likely to **further widen the education gap that already exists for many minority groups**. Students from refugee backgrounds and other disadvantaged cohorts risk falling even further behind on basic skills such as reading and writing, because public schools have less capacity to provide individual support for complex needs, including recognising and responding to the specific needs of students seeking asylum.

This could have significant, **life-long consequences** on students from our community. It could also have consequences on the Victorian economy and wider society, with students dropping out of school and increasing mental health issues. Refugees have much to contribute to Victoria, with **77% of the people who gained employment through the ASRC's employment program working in the most in-need industries in 2024-25**, including construction and childcare. Many of the young people we work with have a strong desire to study at university. Without educational support, students experiencing disadvantage will be unable to contribute to their full potential in the future.

### Impacts on programs for refugees and students seeking asylum

The ASRC appreciates the Victorian Government's recognition of the additional support students from refugee backgrounds require through equity programs. While programs such as the Camp Schools Excursions Fund (CSEF) and State Schools Relief (SSR) have been funded separately and are not likely to be directly affected by the funding delay, there is an anticipated overall decline in school resources, which could affect these programs.

Delaying funding impacts all schools, potentially constraining their ability to deliver extra supports like EAL classes and wellbeing services. EAL and other supports for students of refugee background rely heavily on recurrent funding for staffing and specialist services. Whilst funding for refugee support programs may not specifically be removed, schools' capacity to meet all demands may be weakened, especially considering **growing enrolments, teacher shortages, and general resource pressures**.

The Australian Education Union Victorian Branch has warned that delayed funding undermines the capacity to support students with additional needs.<sup>4</sup> The ASRC is concerned that funding delays will affect resources for **staffing, support services and equity-targeted programs** that students from refugee backgrounds require.

Students from refugee backgrounds often require extra resources like EAL teaching, settlement support, mental-health and wellbeing services. **A delay in funding increases the risk that those supports will be under-resourced**. With less funding overall, schools will struggle to sustain all supports, especially when there are multiple demands at once, like language and wellbeing needs.

A reduction in the capacity of essential programs provided by the Victorian Government to support students from refugee backgrounds would result in **widening learning gaps**, causing further disadvantage and inequity. This would have long-term impacts on **social inclusion, mental health, and educational outcomes**. Without these additional supports, students from refugee backgrounds risk falling behind.

A report by the Victorian Government found that key facilitators of high-quality care for students from refugee backgrounds included **staff who had received training on working with refugees, language services and bilingual staff**.<sup>5</sup> Key barriers included inadequate language

<sup>4</sup> AEU, 2025. <https://news.aeuvic.asn.au/opinion/delayed-funds-are-failing-us-and-our-students/>

<sup>5</sup> Victorian Government, 2011. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/refugeestatusreport.pdf>

support. The government must ensure that delaying funding increases to government schools does not impact these essential programs that ensure students from refugee backgrounds can reach their full academic and social potential.

The following outlines the education support programs that have enormous benefits for refugees and people seeking asylum, and must be protected from any impact of funding delays.

### Refugee Education Support Program (RESP)

The RESP supports government schools to implement strategies that improve achievement, engagement, and well-being outcomes for students who are refugees.<sup>6</sup> RESP has had positive impacts on the educational outcomes of students, and assisted teachers in meeting the well-being needs of students in **a culturally safe and trauma-informed way**.<sup>7</sup>

### English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Many students from refugee backgrounds who are English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners access targeted support and programs to help them learn English in government schools. Students who are refugees make up a large proportion of EAL learners in Victoria, so any reduction in the capacity of this program would have **severe consequences for our community**.<sup>8</sup>

### Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF)

The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund allows students seeking asylum to attend school camps, excursions, and sports and outdoor education programs.<sup>9</sup> This ensures that students from families experiencing financial hardship can still participate in extracurricular activities. The ASRC appreciates the Victorian Government's recent increase in funding to this program.<sup>10</sup> This is **an essential part of ensuring social inclusion** and helping students from refugee backgrounds rebuild their lives in Australia.

### State Schools Relief (SSR)

This provides much-needed basic necessities for students experiencing disadvantage, such as uniforms and footwear. These services are essential for students who are refugees or seeking asylum, many of whom are **experiencing poverty and housing insecurity**.

### Capacity to support graduating students seeking asylum

At the ASRC, we often see that schools do not have the capacity to provide career advice to students seeking asylum who, due to visa restrictions, are unable to attend university. Delayed funding increases may further reduce schools' ability to assist students at this **critical point in their lives** as they graduate and try to find tertiary education or training.

Many people seeking asylum on bridging visas have **no right to study at higher education institutions**. For those who can study, people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas are **not eligible for any type of government loan** for university, including HECS-HELP.

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<sup>6</sup> Victorian Government. <https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/supporting-students-refugee-backgrounds>

<sup>7</sup> Foundation House.

<https://sifr.foundationhouse.org.au/about-us/refugee-education-support-program-resp/#1623732328008-797a7510-8975>

<sup>8</sup> Victorian Government, 2011. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/refugeestatusreport.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Victorian Government. <https://www.vic.gov.au/camps-sports-and-excursions-fund>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

This particularly impacts young people graduating from High School, many of whom are **high-performing students who would usually go on to study at university**. ASRC regularly works with young people who have achieved a very high ATAR but are unable to pursue their preferred career path, and instead go on to complete vocational education or work in industries where qualifications are not required. This also causes them to contribute to the workforce below their true potential.

### **Case Study**

Ashif is 21 years old and arrived in Australia with his family in 2013. At that time, he was 9 years old. He completed most of his schooling in Australia. When he graduated from Year 12, Ashif had dreams of becoming a civil engineer. All of his friends went on to university, but because of the up-front cost, he was unable to do so. Instead, he got a job at a local car yard. He now makes good money as a car salesman to support his family, but still hopes that when he receives permanent residency, he can study to pursue his preferred career path and one day contribute to solving Australia's housing crisis.

Without the ability to access or afford tertiary education, many students seeking asylum have limited options after high school. They require support from schools to establish new career pathways. However, teachers **do not have the capacity to provide this type of individualised support** to assist in navigating such a complex system. This will potentially worsen with funding delays.

Students who are seeking asylum should be able to study while they are waiting for the outcome of their protection visa. This would allow them to contribute to Victoria's economic productivity to their full potential while they are awaiting a visa outcome, and in the future, if they are found to be refugees.

**Recommendation 1:** Increase funding to public schools to ensure that teachers, support, administrative and management staff in schools and at the department level across Victoria, can provide additional support to students experiencing disadvantage and the impact of trauma.

**Recommendation 2:** Ensure that funding delays do not impact essential educational support programs offered to students from refugee backgrounds.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Victorian Government advocates to the Federal Government to provide all people seeking asylum with the right to study while they are waiting for the outcome of their protection, tribunal, or court application, or a request for Ministerial Intervention.

## Terms of reference: Student outcomes

## Need for early intervention support

Policies that prevent people seeking asylum from working or accessing mainstream social support and affordable housing can force families into destitution. This places undue pressure on students from refugee backgrounds, many of whom are already struggling with the impact of trauma, language barriers, interrupted education and resettling into Australia.

At the ASRC, we see a need for **early intervention support for young people seeking asylum to address these obstacles to their learning**. As discussed previously, any delay in funding that reduces teachers' capacity to provide additional support will disproportionately impact students experiencing disadvantage.

Children and young people seeking asylum carry a distinct and often unrecognised burden in Victoria. In many families we support, **children are the ones holding everything together**. They interpret for parents, help navigate complex bureaucratic systems, complete paperwork, advocate at appointments, and often provide emotional support for parents who are overwhelmed by trauma, poverty, visa insecurity or who are experiencing family violence. This reversed family dynamic places children in roles far beyond their developmental stage and leaves them without the dedicated, individualised support they need to thrive.

Children also experience **chronic disruption in education and early childhood education**. They frequently experience social isolation, disconnection from broader family and community, and struggle with feeling different from their peers due to their visa status. Housing insecurity and repeated short-notice relocations mean many children are forced to move schools mid-term, interrupting their learning, relationships and sense of safety. These disruptions have immediate impacts on well-being and long-term impacts on **social inclusion, mental health, and educational outcomes**.

## Supporting families seeking asylum navigate the education system

The government must **ensure that the school system is accessible to multicultural communities**. The ASRC has recently created a Schools Coordinator role, as so many of our clients were struggling to understand this complex system. This involves families understanding their rights to access local schools and available funding, language barriers in the enrolment process, the ability to travel to school, digital literacy and access to the internet, navigating school platforms, communicating with teachers via email, and understanding a very structured school environment.

**With funding delays, schools will be less able to support multicultural families to navigate these systems and processes.**

In the past financial year, the ASRC provided **564 education advisory appointments**. Through our education and humanitarian support programs, the ASRC sees a clear need for further support for students from refugee backgrounds to thrive at school. Delaying funding to public schools at a time when students from refugee backgrounds urgently need support will have significant consequences on students' educational outcomes and long-term impacts on their lives.

## Housing insecurity and transport affordability

Many students seeking asylum experience housing insecurity and issues accessing affordable transportation. This can **significantly limit their ability to access quality education**. Having

to move schools due to housing insecurity is a **major issue** for our clients. This disrupts students' learning and ability to form social connections and resettle.

The Victorian Government found that **housing instability, transport issues and financial stress** are significant factors affecting people's ability to engage with education services.<sup>11</sup> Having their education and social development **repeatedly disrupted** further reduces students' ability to achieve educational outcomes.

This increases the need for additional support programs to **ensure that students experiencing housing insecurity do not fall behind at school**. Delays to funding that reduce schools' resources and teachers' capacity may mean that when students seeking asylum are forced to move schools, there are even fewer supports to facilitate an easier transition.

People seeking asylum often experience housing insecurity as a result of Federal Government policies that prevent people from working and accessing mainstream social support. People seeking asylum who are on temporary visas are also **ineligible for public housing in Victoria**, as the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) eligibility requires proof of identity and Australian Citizenship or permanent residency.

**In 2024-25, the ASRC provided over 20,000 nights of shelter for people seeking asylum, which was significantly less than the demand for housing support. This includes supporting over 150 children with accommodation.**

Without access to subsidised housing, work rights, financial support, or an Australian rental history, there are often few housing options for people seeking asylum. This means that people are often **moving between short-term or insecure housing, forcing students to move schools**.

### **Case Study**

Nabila\*, Arif\*, and their three children arrived in Australia with the intention to lodge for protection. At the time, Nabila was 6.5 months pregnant, and their other three children were all under the age of six. The family arrived on a Tourist visa and had exhausted their funds within the first month in Australia.

When they arrived at ASRC, they were homeless and had nowhere to sleep that night. While the family had recently lodged for protection through Refugee Legal, they were still waiting for their Bridging Visas to come into effect.

Arif was very concerned about how he would support his wife and children prior to his work rights being instated. The family were advised to present to Launch Housing, which was able to provide two weeks of crisis accommodation.

During these two weeks, the ASRC supported the family to access the Foodbank, our internal health program, and make a referral to the Royal Women's Hospital for Nabila's care. After these two weeks funded by Launch Housing, ASRC continued to support the family in crisis accommodation until they found a longer-term housing option.

Over the next few weeks, the ASRC reached out to all possible contacts that may have properties or any short-term options, given that Nabila would be due to give birth within the next month. Our internal Health program had been concerned that Nabila is unable to access a GP in the community

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

as she did not have a fixed address and was not yet eligible for Medicare. Following up on many ads on Gumtree, Facebook and other sites, the ASRC found a landlord who was willing to accept the family for the lease.

Unfortunately, this tenancy did not proceed as the landlord requested four months' rent upfront and bond, which was beyond what ASRC could commit to. Luckily, the same day, another property came up, and the owner, who was very aware of the circumstances our clients faced, having been a refugee himself, was happy to accept the family for the property he owned and was leasing. The family met the owner, Tran\*, who kindly offered to support Arif in finding employment through his community networks. The family can now finally settle and prepare for the baby.

This case study demonstrates the many barriers families face when trying to access affordable accommodation when they first arrive in Australia. Finding a property that is affordable and safe for a family when they have no income or rental history is extremely difficult, given the current shortage of rental properties.

Transportation is also a major issue for many of our clients, as many do not have a license or a car. Public transport is sometimes not accessible and often takes too long. In the last financial year, the ASRC provided **1,690 Myki top-ups** for our clients. When students seeking asylum are forced to move, they may be unable to afford transportation to continue attending that school and be forced to move schools.

Delays to funding may reduce schools' capacity to support students who are experiencing housing insecurity and are forced to move schools. Issues with housing security and transportation affordability create **compounding obstacles** that prevent students seeking asylum from forming social connections and achieving their academic potential.

### Access to NDIS allied health services

Furthermore, students seeking asylum are unable to access NDIS services as this is only available to Australian citizens or permanent residents.<sup>12</sup> This means that students seeking asylum who have additional needs due to a disability are unable to access essential allied health early interventions, which can greatly impact their engagement at school.

Delaying funding means that schools are less likely to be able to provide students with disabilities with the additional and specialist support required. Without access to NDIS services and reduced capacity of schools and teachers, students seeking asylum with disabilities will be severely disadvantaged.

**Recommendation 4:** Further resourcing for dedicated roles that provide early intervention and prevent the distress and disadvantage experienced by students seeking asylum and their families from compounding over time, ensuring children at risk do not fall through the cracks.

<sup>12</sup> Victorian Refugee Health Network.

<https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/resource/national-disability-insurance-scheme-ndis/>

**Recommendation 5:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Federal government for people seeking asylum to have access to work rights and mainstream social support services, including Centrelink payments such as the Special Benefit, for the duration of their protection visa application process, including merits review, judicial review, and ministerial intervention stages.

## Conclusion

Delayed increases to public school funding will **disproportionately impact students experiencing disadvantage** who need additional support to thrive at school. Teachers are already overburdened and unable to provide the 1-to-1 support that students with complex needs require. Delayed funding increases are likely to further reduce schools' resources and capacity to provide trauma-informed support to students from refugee backgrounds, including people seeking asylum.

These delayed funding increases are likely to **particularly impact under-resourced schools in low socioeconomic areas** where students seeking asylum often live.

This has the potential to further widen the education gap that already exists for students from marginalised communities and have **life-long consequences, causing further disadvantage and inequity**. Students from refugee backgrounds **already experience significant obstacles to learning**, including language barriers, the impact of trauma, mental illness, interrupted education, poverty and housing insecurity.

Without essential support programs, students may fall further behind, drop out of school or experience mental health issues. This not only significantly impacts students and their families but also the broader Victorian community, as students are unable to reach their full potential and contribute to Victoria's economy.

At a time when schools and teachers are overburdened and urgently need further support from the government, a delay in increasing schools' funding could have **devastating effects** on students from refugee backgrounds who require additional support to thrive at school.