



victorian refugee
health network

State-wide Meeting

April 2026



Acknowledgement of Country



Agenda | 2:00pm – 4:00pm
Chaired by: Sophie Dutertre

Time	Agenda item	Speaker
2:10pm	National Policy Update Overview of Australia's Humanitarian Program	Rebecca Eckard Refugee Council of Australia
2:45pm	AMES Settlement Update	Gerard Murren AMES Australia
3:00pm	Victorian Settlement Data	Samina Hassan Victorian Refugee Health Network
3:10pm	Break (5 mins)	
3:15pm	Rural and Regional Spotlight	Rural and Regional Working Group Representatives VRHN Rural and Regional Working Group
3:30pm	Service Spotlight: Witness to War	Yassmen Yahya Witness to War, STARTTS

National Policy Update and Understanding the Humanitarian Program

April 2026

Rebecca Eckard
Refugee Council of Australia

Key issues and updates

1. Fast track processing & safety net

2. Immigration detention and new laws

3. Offshore processing

4. Humanitarian crises arrivals

5. Refugee and Humanitarian Program

Fast track processing+ and safety net



Refugee Council
of Australia

- Minister has heard communities' concerns about the pace of the current process for people in need of a resolution. It is still **case by case** but the Minister is looking at more efficient ways. People should contact specialised community legal centres (**Refugee Legal**) to get information on their individual case and circumstances.
 - People who arrived by boat 2009-2014 *and* had their protection claims assessed *in Australia* (and refused)
 - “Transitory Group” excluded from consideration at this time (targeted advocacy underway to include)
 - Grants progressing; more complex cases being reviewed
 - RCOA and others looking at post-visa grant support, as very limited settlement support available

Safety net and SRSS

Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS)

- **Medical evidence** for SRSS applications and Continued Eligibility Review (CERs):
Concern about clinical expertise being **undermined** by non-clinical decision-makers
- **SRSS Review** stalled: timeline and scope unclear
 - RCOA raising at meeting next week

Loss of Medicare for people seeking asylum post administrative review

- Issue of people at judicial review (Federal Court) or Ministerial Intervention not being able to renew their Medicare
- Examples in Victoria initially and exploring if happening in other states/territories

Immigration detention

- **1,054 people** held in locked immigration detention facilities, with an average of period of time held **458 days**
- Healthcare Australia (HCA) contracted to provide health services in immigration detention
 - Health provision is focused on **primary health**. Primary health facilities on site and also offered through a virtual care centre
 - Concerns arising again in relation to adequate health provision
 - Incident during medical appointment transfer from Villawood result in **restraints** being used for everyone (no assessment of risk)
- Prohibited Items law now in effect: **seize mobile phones** and searches on people in immigration detention

****Important****
Link people on
Bridging Visa R
(BVR) to legal
support

- ❖ Forced transfers to Nauru: 7 people so far, up to 350 people at risk
- ❖ High Court challenge underway focused on health needs of an individual

Solutions for refugees in offshore processing

- **~900 people remain** – ~100 in Nauru (arrivals in 2023 & 2024), 26 in PNG (plus partners & children), ~770 people remain who were transferred to Australia for medical reasons
- **Insufficient resettlement options** available (>750 places), and concern about people exiting community detention and “engagement”
- **NZ arrangement closed**, people must travel to NZ by June 2026

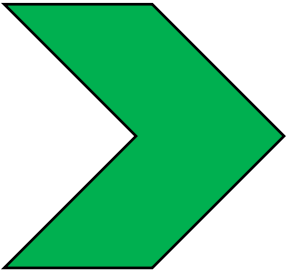
PNG:

- Support via PNG Immigration officers to be provided but **no consideration of medical evacuation**
- Independent health assessments still open for remaining men

Arrivals from humanitarian crises

- Seeing few arrivals from humanitarian crises
- Further advocacy undertaken for people from Sudan (war entering its fourth year)

“**Arrival Control Determinations**”: New law that expanded ministerial powers to block entry for temporary visa holders from overseas. This has been applied to Iranian visa holders from March 2026

- 
- ❖ It would actively **prevent people fleeing war from seeking protection** once they arrived in Australia because they cannot get here
 - ❖ This year marks the **75th anniversary of the Refugee Convention**, and the core obligation is access to asylum



Refugee and Humanitarian Program



This Program year 2025-26

- **20,000 places**, split between ~16,000 overseas and ~4,000 onshore visas: service pressure because of complex needs/multiple issues
- **Reduction in UNHCR-referred places**
- Government still working through Afghan applications, focused on **Locally Engaged Employee (LEE)**
- Increased resettlement from Bangladesh for **Rohingya**
- Increased resettlement for **LGBTQIA+**
- Government considering **future of the Program**
 - **Concerns about reduction in places or shift in composition**

RCOA and others advocating for maintaining/expanding the Program and additional places via complementary pathways

Government's commitments

ALP Platform: The ALP's 2023 National Policy Platform included the aspiration to progressively increase the Humanitarian Program to 27,000 places per year

Australian Government pledges at the Global Refugee Forum

- The Australian Government commits to **gradually increase** Australia's Humanitarian Program commencing from 2023-24, allowing us to highlight the ways in which **humanitarian entrants enrich Australian society** and **boost the economy** with their skills, talent and diverse cultural backgrounds.
- The Australian Government supports the multi-stakeholder pledge on Community Sponsorship and pledges to work with civil society, community, non-government, and refugee-led organisations, to harness the power of all segments of Australian society to **gradually increase community sponsored and other complementary places to 10,000 per year** over time, **additional to the core humanitarian intake.**

This year's consultation

Consultations each
year on plans for the
following year

Short meetings with
Ministers and a
discussion paper and
submission process

Humanitarian Program
composition and
planning numbers
released

But this year, the
Government sought
feedback on the “**longer-
term policy settings to
ensure the
Humanitarian Program
remains sustainable
and best responds to
community needs.**”

- ☐ **Composition:** split between Refugee component and the Special Humanitarian Program/Community Support Program streams
- ☐ Priorities within the **Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)** and limitations on sponsors and requirement of them
- ☐ How to address **rising costs to deliver settlement services**
- ☐ Reform of the **Community Support Program (CSP)**

Current consultation process

DEFENDING AUSTRALIA'S LEGACY:

WHY WE NEED TO SAFEGUARD OUR HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM



Caption

**RESPONSE TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DISCUSSION PAPER ON
THE 2026-27 HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM AND BEYOND**

Read the Refugee Council's [full submission here](#)

1. Protection-focused Program, UNHCR-led priorities
2. Australia as a global leader amidst cuts
3. Ensure protection obligations are not undermined
4. Need for respectful discourse and anti-racism framework requirements
5. Make the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement a permanent program and create a coherent Complementary Pathways Program
6. Reform of the Community Support Program
7. Break the link between the offshore and onshore protection programs
8. Principled framework for humanitarian crisis responses
9. Co-designed family reunion program
10. Building a Humanitarian Program that effectively supports refugees in the Asia-Pacific region

Current consultation process



victorian refugee
health network

Summary of recommendations [\(full submission here\)](#)

1. Uphold Australia's commitment of sharing responsibility to global protection efforts by avoiding any reductions in the Humanitarian Program's resettlement places
2. De-link onshore asylum processes and offshore humanitarian streams within Australia's Humanitarian Program
3. Ensure comprehensive pre-arrival assessments (PAAs) of Humanitarian Program entrants provide accurate, up-to-date information to facilitate effective and efficient onshore health and settlement responses
4. Recognise that Humanitarian Program entrants, particularly those with significant health and disability needs, require timely access to suitably tailored and resourced health and settlement responses
5. Establish facilitated pathways for Humanitarian Program entrants to access institutions (e.g. National Disability Insurance Scheme, MyAgedCare) within Australian society

Where are world's displaced people from?



Refugee Council
of Australia

- **42.5 million refugees** – Syria 5.5mil, Ukraine 5.3mil, Afghanistan 4.8mil, Sudan 2.5mil, South Sudan 2.4mil, Palestinian 1.9mil, Myanmar 1.5mil, Democratic Republic of Congo 1.1mil, Somalia 904,000, Central African Republic 683,500; 6.5 million Venezuelans displaced abroad and 370,000 with refugee status
 - **8.4 million asylum seekers**
 - **67.8 million people internally displaced**
- ~120 million people forcibly displaced**

**1 in 70 people globally
have been forcibly
displaced**

Where do refugees go?

- **The majority of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries**
- **Iran, Türkiye, Uganda, Pakistan, Chad, Colombia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Sudan host millions of people who have fled**
- **Colombia, Germany, Türkiye, Iran and Uganda hosted over one-third of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection (almost 13 million people)**
- **66% of the world's refugees are in long-term displacement or protracted situations (more than 5 years displaced)**

Solutions for refugees

Three durable solutions for refugees:

-  Safe return to country of origin
-  Local integration in host country
-  Resettlement to another country

In 2024:

- 1.6 million refugees were able to return home (highest number in 22 years)
- 188,800 refugees were resettled to other countries – 105,500 to United States (second highest global resettlement in 44 years)

In 2025, resettlement expected to fall by **over 65% because of cuts** in US and Europe (data to be shared in June 2026)

Millions of refugees have no solution in sight

UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) 2026 Priority Resettlement Needs

Region or sub-region of asylum	Total 2026 projected resettlement needs
Asia & the Pacific	806,700
East Horn and Great Lakes	659,400
Middle East and North Africa	322,000
Europe	258,100
West and Central Africa	202,000
The Americas	172,200
Southern Africa	106,000
Total	2,527,185



Refugee Council
of Australia

Three durable solutions for refugees

1. Voluntary return
2. Protection in the country of asylum
3. **Resettlement**

Change in refugee resettlement figures from 2024 to 2025
based on respective countries' 2025 targets

**But
resettlement
places are
decreasing**



Canada

2024 figures: 49,261
2025 targets: 38,500
Decrease: 10,761



USA

2024 figures: 105,531
2025 targets: 0
Decrease: 105,531



World Total

2024 figures: 188,759
2025 targets: 63,600
Decrease: 125,159



Europe

2024 figures: 15,155
2025 targets: <7,500
Decrease: 7,655



Australia

2024 figures: 17,211
2025 targets: 16,000
Decrease: 1,211

Rest of the world

2024 figures: 1,601
2025 targets: <1,600

Providing protection is the core obligation of countries
that have signed onto the Refugee Convention and is
enshrined under international law.

History of Refugee Resettlement in Australia

1800s

Lutherans began settling in South Australia from 1839 to escape restrictions on their right to worship within the state of Prussia. During the 19th century, other settlers included Hungarians, Italians and Poles leaving situations of religious and political persecution.

1901-

After Federation, the new Australian nation allowed refugees to settle as unassisted migrants, as long as they met the restrictions imposed by the Immigration (Restriction) Act 1901, the cornerstone of the White Australia Policy. Small numbers of Russian, Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian, Assyrian and Jewish refugees were permitted to settle after proving they met Australia's migration criteria.

1930s

Between 1933 and 1939, more than 7,000 Jews fleeing Nazi Germany were settled. In 1937, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society pioneered the first refugee settlement support services, with financial assistance from the Australian Government. This settlement program was cut short by the outbreak of World War II.



1947

After the war, a much larger refugee program was commenced as Australia launched an ambitious immigration program to meet labour shortages in a growing economy. In July 1947, the Australian Government entered into an agreement with the new International Refugee Organisation to settle displaced people from camps in Europe. In the next seven years, Australia welcomed more than 170,000 refugees, the largest groups being from Poland, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

1950s-
1960s

The majority of refugees were Eastern Europeans fleeing persecution in Soviet Bloc countries. Numbers of humanitarian arrivals increased substantially after the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the Warsaw Pact countries' invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Early
1970s

The refugee intake began to diversify. In 1972, 198 Asians expelled by Uganda's President Idi Amin were settled. Humanitarian settlement from Chile commenced the following year after a military coup deposed the Allende Government. Cypriot refugees began arriving after the Turkish invasion of Northern Cyprus in 1974 and the 1975 war in East Timor brought 2,500 evacuees to Darwin, marking the beginning of a Timorese refugee diaspora in Australia.

**Lyons Govt in
1938**



1975

The fall of the South Vietnamese Government in Saigon in April 1975 began a chain of events which prompted a rethinking and reorganisation of Australia's refugee program.

Late 1970s- 1980s

Australia resettled more than 100,000 Vietnamese refugees from various Asian countries. Only a small proportion, approx 2,000, came directly to Australia by boat to seek asylum. In the early 1980s, the refugee program expanded to an annual intake of up to 22,000, the largest annual intake in 30 years and a level not seen since. Vietnamese refugees made up the bulk of new arrivals, with refugees also from Laos, Cambodia and Eastern Europe and smaller groups of Soviet Jews, Chileans, El Salvadorians, Cubans and members of ethnic minorities from Iraq (Assyrians, Armenians and Chaldeans).

1990s

The Special Assistance Category (SAC) visa was introduced to respond to crises in particular countries, permitting settlement of people in vulnerable circumstances and with connections in Australia. The SAC provided resettlement options for people from the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, East Timor, Lebanon, Sudan, Burma, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Cambodia and members of the Ahmadi religious movement.

2000s

Australia's program shifts to supporting refugees from outside of Europe, focused on the Middle East, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific. Refugees from many places, including Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Bhutan, are welcomed into Australian communities.

Humanitarian Program now

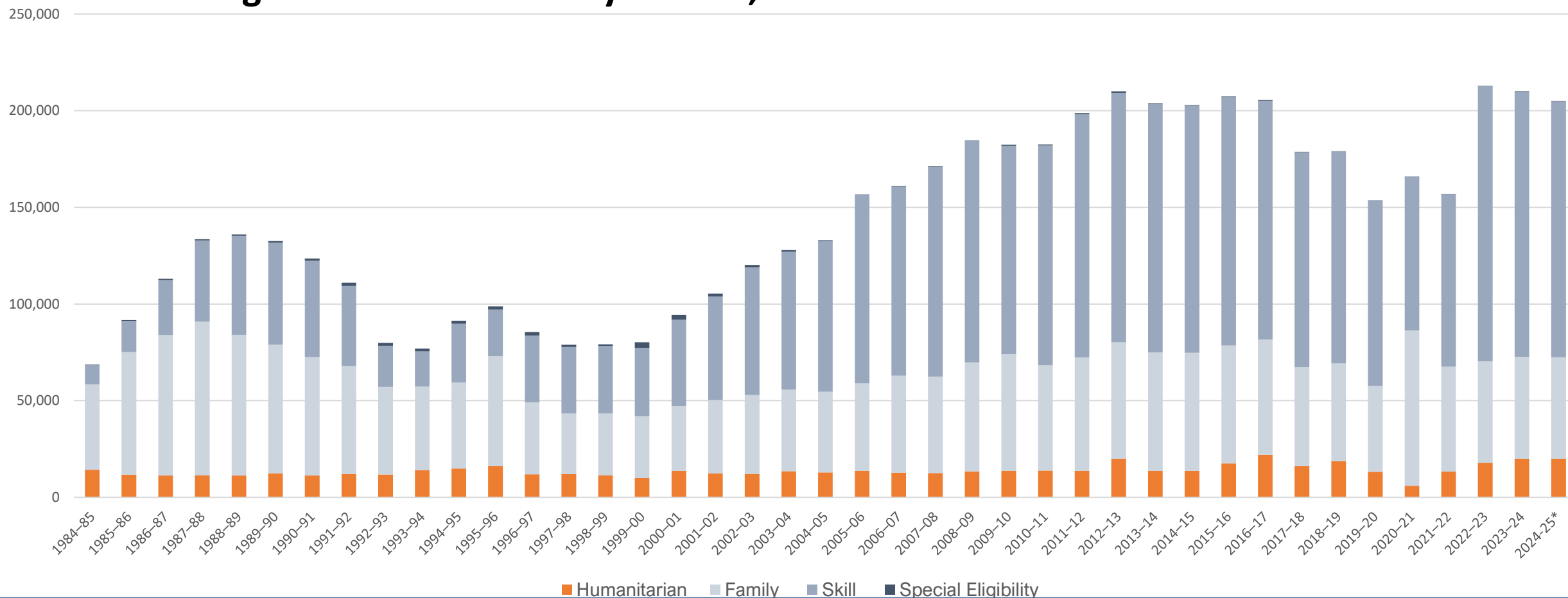
- Morrison Government cut Australia's refugee program by 5,000 places to 13,750 in 2020, then added four-year special intake of Afghan refugees (4,125 places/year) for 2022 to 2026 to take the Program to 17,785
- Albanese Government increased program to 20,000 places in 2023, including Afghan intake
- Late last year, Australia issued the **1,000,000th** permanent humanitarian visa since 1947



Australia's Humanitarian Program

The Humanitarian Program is a tiny portion of over migration. In the last decade, just **6.6%** of the net migration came from the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

Permanent migration to Australia by stream, 1984-2025



Visa Pathways in the Program

Type of pathway	Program or pilot	Current scale / timing
UNHCR-referred resettlement	Refugee <i>Eligibility:</i> Refugees referred by UNHCR <i>Support:</i> Fully supported by government-funded services <i>Visa</i> (subclass, sc): Humanitarian (sc 200, 201, 203, 204)	~8,000-9,000 places per year
Proposer-referred resettlement (a form of named sponsorship)	Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) <i>Eligibility:</i> Refugees and others in humanitarian need with close link to Australia (mostly family reunion) <i>Support:</i> Mostly supported by government-funded services, with proposer cost-sharing by covering airfares, pre-departure medicals, some on-arrival settlement <i>Visa</i> (subclass, sc): Humanitarian (sc 202)	~4,125 places per year

Type of pathway	Program or pilot	Current scale / timing
Community sponsorship	Community Refugee Settlement and Integration Pilot (CRISP) <i>Eligibility:</i> Refugees referred by UNHCR (refugees not linked to Australia) <i>Support:</i> Some cost-sharing between community and government, with on-arrival reception and settlement support for 12 months provided by community volunteers <i>Visa</i> (subclass, sc): Humanitarian (sc 200, 201, 204)	883 total places from July 2022 up to December 2025 (included in the UNHCR-referred intake, not additional)
	Community Support Program (CSP) (a form of named sponsorship) <i>Eligibility:</i> Refugees and others in humanitarian need aged 18-50 who have English skills, job offer or potential for financial independence, are from designated countries, and have an Australian proposer (mostly family reunion) <i>Support:</i> Costs largely borne by proposer who pays for visa processing and migration fees, travel and pre-departure health and on-arrival settlement support. Refugees arriving through the CSP are ineligible for income support for their first 12 months. <i>Visa</i> (subclass, sc): Humanitarian (sc 202)	~2,500 places per year (not additional)

Visa Pathways in the Program

Type of pathway	Program or pilot	Current scale / timing
Education pathway	Refugee Student Settlement Pathway (RSSP) <i>Eligibility:</i> Refugees registered with UNHCR in Malaysia, India or Thailand, aged 18-30 years, have completed secondary school, able to study and communicate in English, be willing to travel to Australia on own. <i>Support:</i> Costs shared by participating universities, pro bono legal services, student welcome groups, philanthropy, government and refugee participants. Student welcome groups will provide on-arrival settlement support for 12 months. <i>Visa (subclass, sc):</i> Humanitarian (sc 202)	20 places in initial pilot (not additional, Included in SHP intake)

Visa Pathways in Program

Type of pathway	Program or pilot	Current scale / timing
Onshore Protection	Onshore Protection (Permanent Protection Visas) <i>Eligibility:</i> People who seek refugee protection in Australia, having arrived on a prior (non-humanitarian) visa, apply for asylum, assessed by Australia and found to be refugees. Distinct from resettlement arrangements. <i>Support:</i> People arrive on other temporary visas without government assistance. Refugees can access government support after the 866 visa grant. <i>Visa (subclass, sc):</i> Humanitarian (sc 866)	4,000 places per year last year and similar allocation likely this year



What do we mean by a 'Complementary Pathways Program for Australia'?

'Complementary Pathways'
**complement government-led
resettlement efforts by:**

Opening up other safe and
orderly migration pathways for
refugees beyond resettlement –
i.e., skilled and family migration

Pulling in resources from the
community and private sector to
enable the government to
expand its resettlement capacity

*Australia has lots
of pilots and
potential...*

**Family Migration
(not protection
sensitive)**

**Community
Refugee
Integration and
Settlement
Program (CRISP)**

**Refugee Student
Settlement
Pathway (RSSP)**

**Train-to-Hire
Pilot**

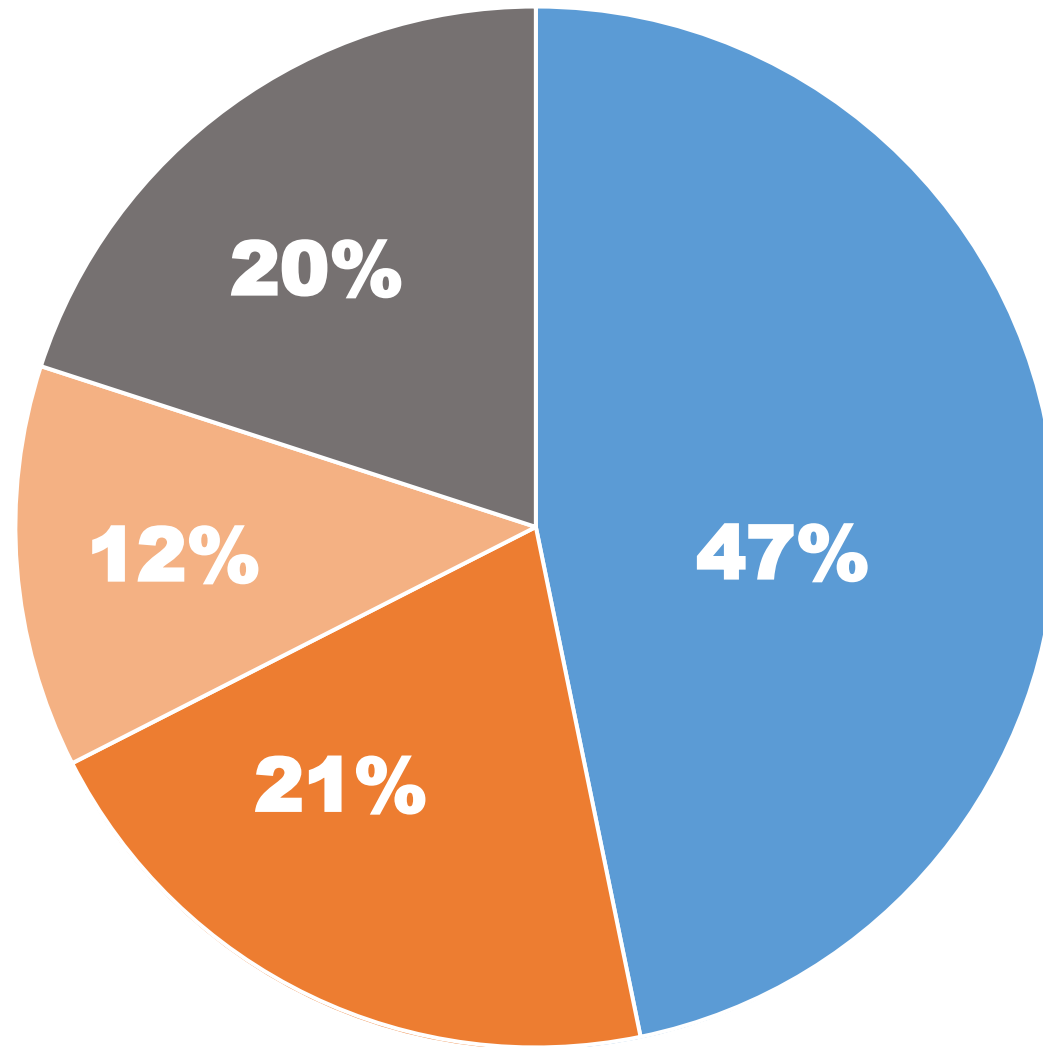
**Skilled Refugee
Labour
Agreement
Pilot (SRLAP)**

**Community
Support
Program (CSP)**

*...only one of
these is a
genuine pathway
that is
complementary*

2024-25
20,000 visas
granted

Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program



- Refugee
- SHP
- CSP
- Onshore

What's next?

- 👤 Home Affairs is considering the feedback and submissions received
- 👤 Ongoing discussions with sector agencies and services, refugee community organisations and community members
- 👤 Raise awareness and understanding about the Humanitarian Program and the people who have helped to build modern Australia
- 👤 Celebrate Refugee Week 14-20 June with **A Million Stories**

Refugee resettlement is one of Australia's great success stories





Refugee Council
of Australia

Questions and discussion



Victorian Refugee Health Network Statewide Meeting – April 2026



Presented by Gerard Murren



Victoria Settlement Data

- Estimated Planning Level 2025-2026

2025-26 Estimated Planning Levels (EPLs)	
Settlement Location	2025-26 EPLs
Melbourne	3,750
Geelong	120
Mildura	65
Shepparton	315
Wodonga	80
Total	4,330

Settlement Updates

- Arrivals for Quarter 4 2025/26 Financial Year
- Arrivals for Quarter 1 2026/27 Financial Year
- Falepili Mobility Pathway Program – Onshore Settlement Support

"We are about helping the Tuvaluan families who are coming here. We want to make it easier for them to settle and get on with their lives"

"We also want them to be able to contribute to Australia because they are capable people."



Arrival Data Q1 2026 - Victoria

Owner	Owner-Case	Clients	Cases
AMES	Total	1012	267
	North	167	39
	South/East	589	153
	West	256	75
	Regional VIC	159	40
	Total	1012	267

Key Health Challenges

- Continued high prevalence of complex, undiagnosed and unmanaged physical health conditions and increasing demand for intensive and specialised support
- High Mental Health and Trauma Related Needs
- Gaps and limitations in health information transfer from offshore to onshore
- System navigation barriers in the early settlement phase
- Social determinant health risks – Material Aid, Housing

Thank You.

Victorian Settlement Data

Samina Hassan
Victorian Refugee Health Network

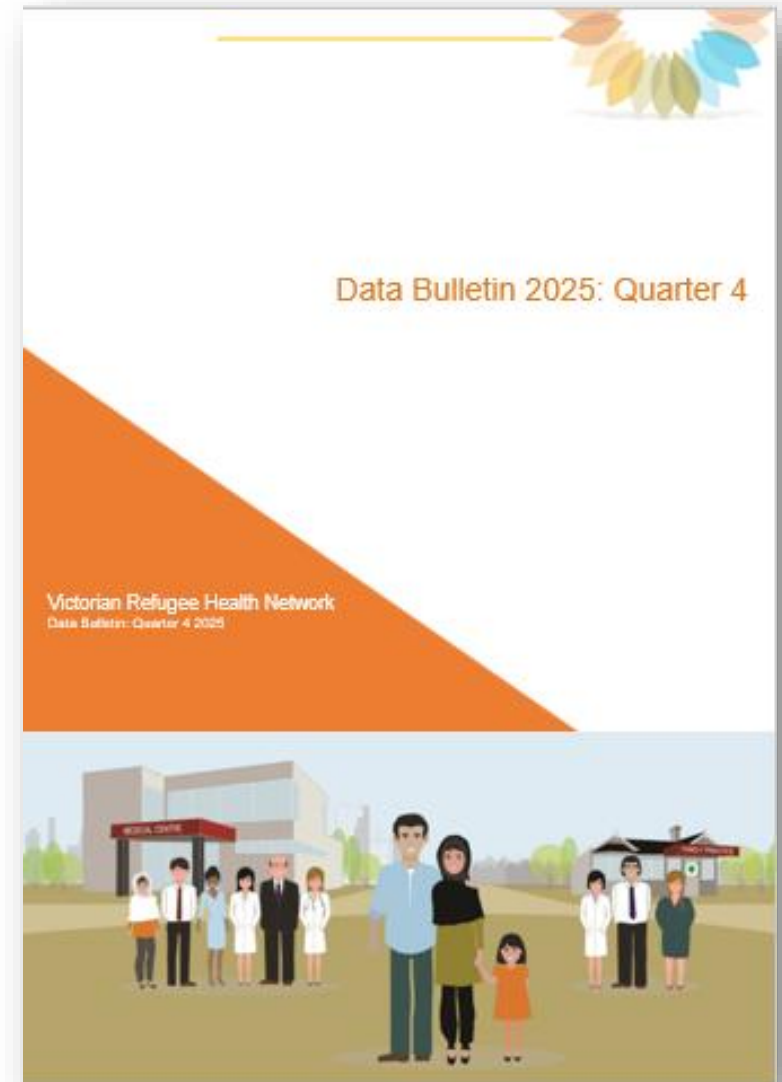


VRHN Data Bulletin

The Victorian Refugee Health Network publishes a Data Bulletin every quarter that outlines settlement data for Victoria:



[https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/resources-referrals-2/? sft tool for clinician=settlement-data](https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/resources-referrals-2/?sft_tool_for_clinician=settlement-data)



Settlement Data in Victoria

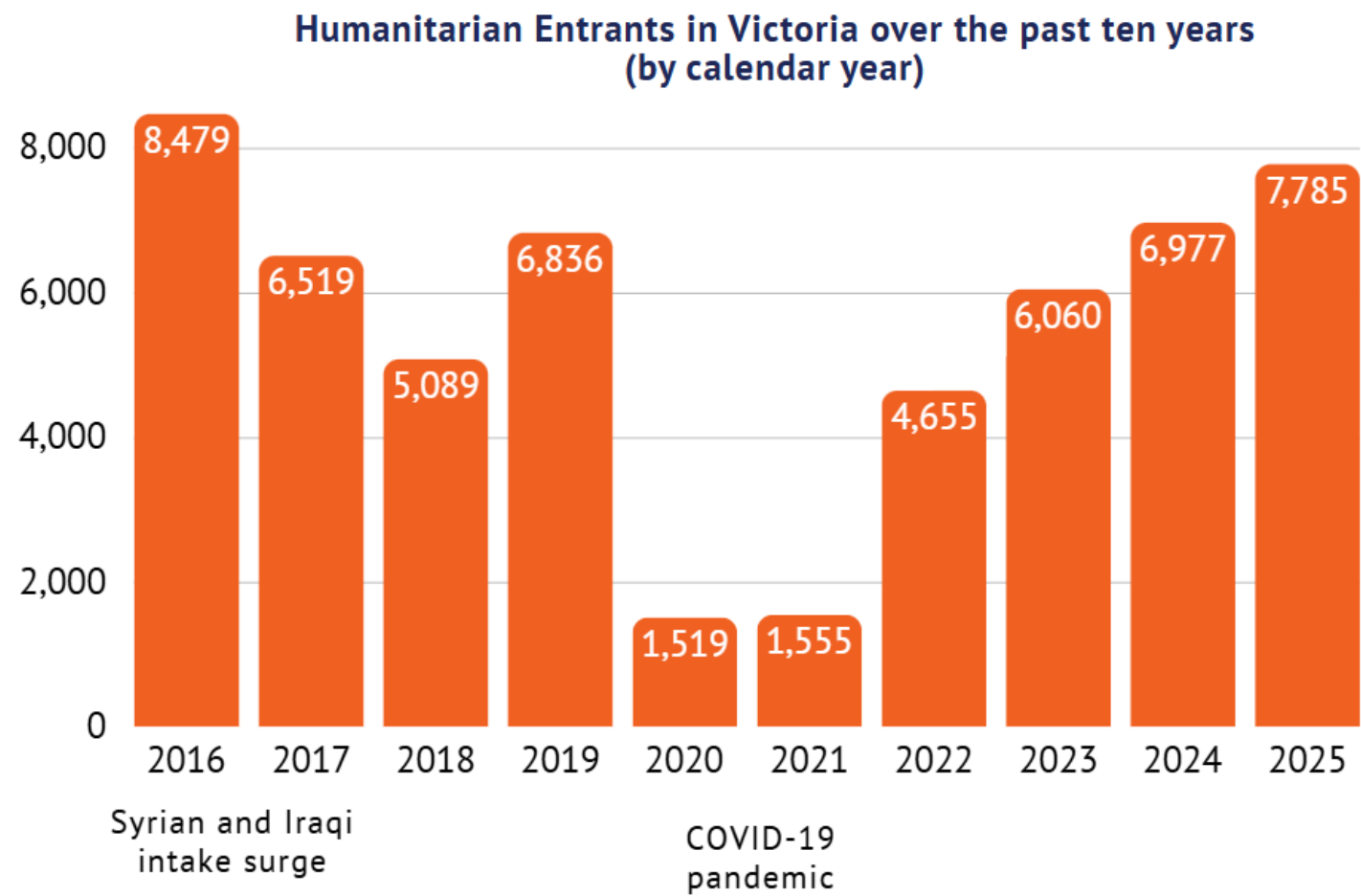
Visa Subclass		Details
200	Refugee Visa	✓ Permanent Stay ✓ With these visas you can move to Australia if you are subject to persecution in your home country. These visas allow you and your family to live, work and study indefinitely in Australia
201	In Country Special Humanitarian	
203	Emergency Rescue	
204	Women at Risk	
202	Global Special Humanitarian visa	✓ Permanent Stay ✓ With this visa you can move to Australia if you face substantial discrimination or human rights abuses and have a proposer and stay in Australia with your immediate family.
851	Resolution of Status (RoS) visa	✓ Permanent Stay ✓ Visa that allows for the permanent resolution of status for certain visa holders, including TPV and SHEV holders who arrived in Australia before 14 February 2023
866	Protection Visa	✓ Permanent Stay ✓ This visa is for people who arrived in Australia on a valid visa and want to seek asylum. It lets you stay in Australia permanently, if you engage Australia's protection obligations and meet all other requirements for the grant of the visa.

* This data does not include those on Bridging visas or temporary protection visas (TPV, SHEV, 449, 786)

Humanitarian Entrants in Victoria: Quarter 4 2025

1,968 humanitarian entrants arrived in Australia in the fourth quarter of 2025 and currently reside in Victoria (as of 4 Jan 2026)

Total of **7,785 humanitarian entrants** who arrived in Australia in 2025 and recorded as residing in Victoria

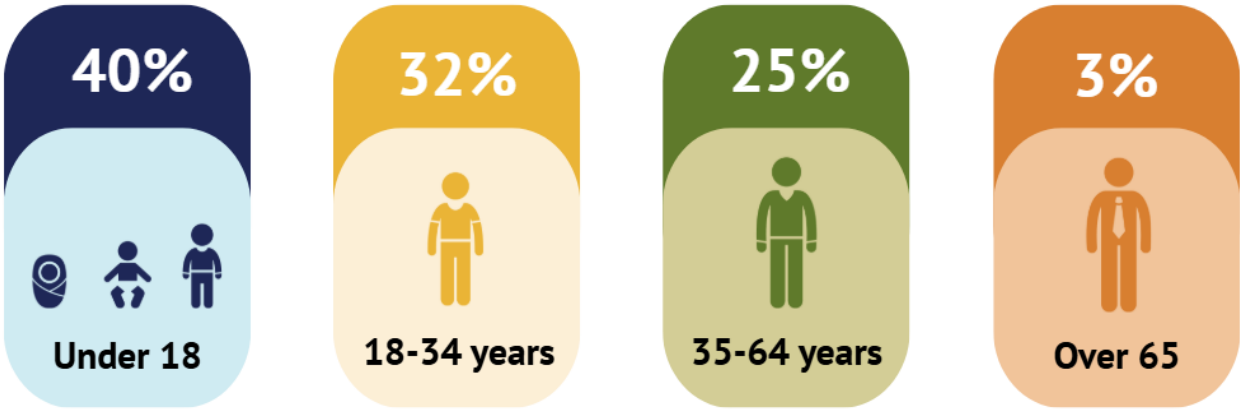


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Humanitarian Entrants in Victoria: 2025

Country Of Birth
Afghanistan
Iraq
Myanmar
Syrian Arab Republic
Thailand
Eritrea
Iran
Pakistan
Malaysia
Congo, Dem Republic Of The
Turkey
Ethiopia
Jordan
Sudan

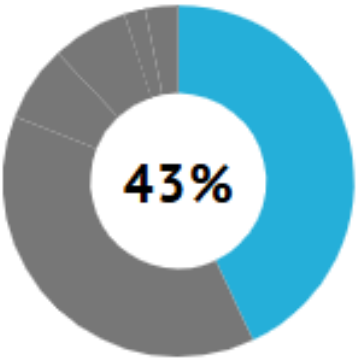
Age groups of humanitarian entrants who arrived in 2025 and settled in Victoria



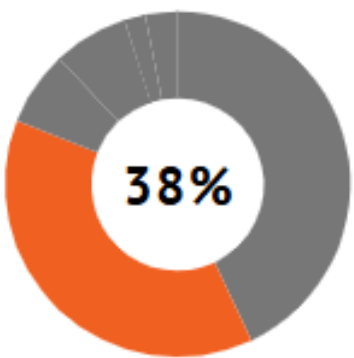
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Settlement areas (LGAs and PHN catchments)

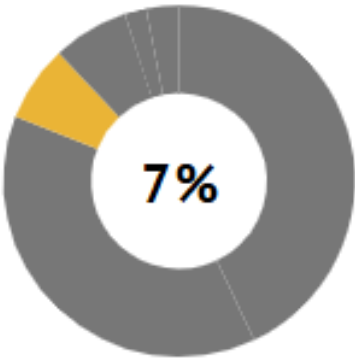
Local Government Area
Hume
Casey
Greater Dandenong
Wyndham
Not Recorded
Darebin
Brimbank
Greater Shepparton
Merri-bek
Melton
Whittlesea
Greater Bendigo
Greater Geelong
Cardinia



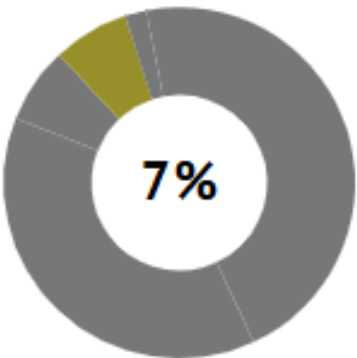
North Western
Melbourne



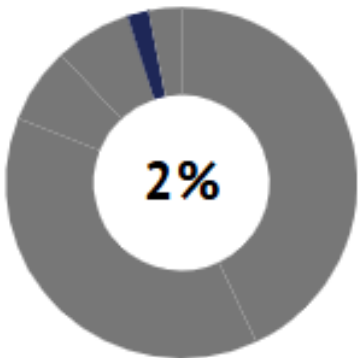
South Eastern
Melbourne



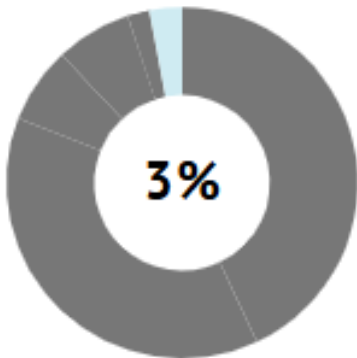
East
Melbourne



Murray



Western
Victoria



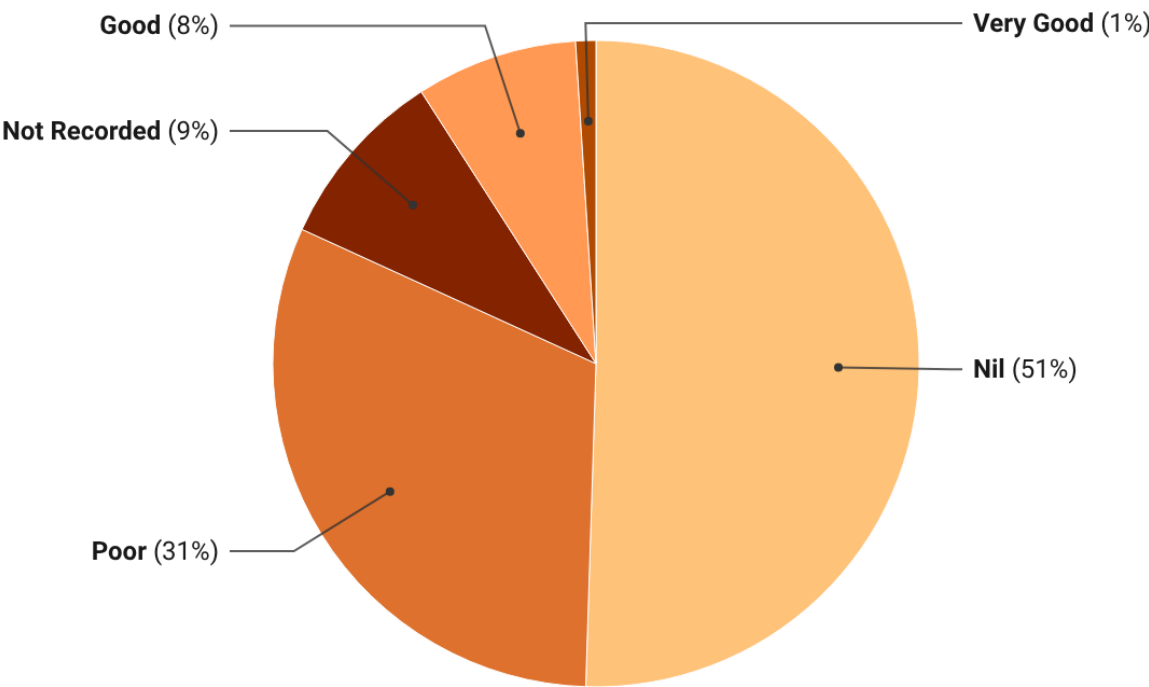
Not
recorded

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Humanitarian Entrants in Victoria: Languages spoken

English Proficiency of people in Victoria with visa subclass (200 series and 866) who have arrived in Australia in the past year

Humanitarian settlers with a Date of Arrival between 01/01/2025 and 31/12/2025 and are currently recorded as residing in Victoria as at 04/01/2026



* Settlement Database data is compiled from a number of sources including Department of Home Affairs, other Commonwealth agencies and service providers.

Chart: Victorian Refugee Health Network • Created with Datawrapper

Languages spoken – Top 10
Dari
Arabic
Pashto
Hazaragi
Karen
Farsi (Afghan)
Tigrinya
Burmese / Myanmar
Karen S'gaw
Swahili

70+ unique languages reported in 2025

* This data does not include those on Bridging visas or temporary protection visas (TPV, SHEV, 449, 786).

Statistics for people seeking protection

Department of Home Affairs

<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/visa-statistics/live/humanitarian-program>

SNAPSHOT: 1 MAR 2026 – 31 MAR 2026

Total number of protection visa lodgements made onshore during the period: **2,041**

Total number of individuals granted a Final Protection Visa during this period: **300**

Countries of origin for individuals who were granted a Protection Visa during this period:

Pakistan

China

Malaysia

Myanmar

Bangladesh

Papua New Guinea

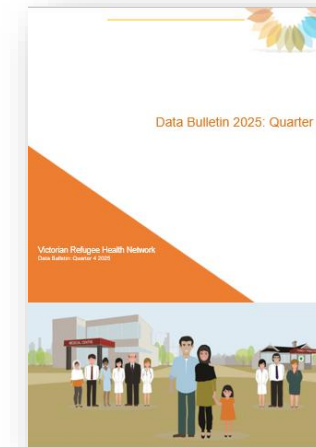
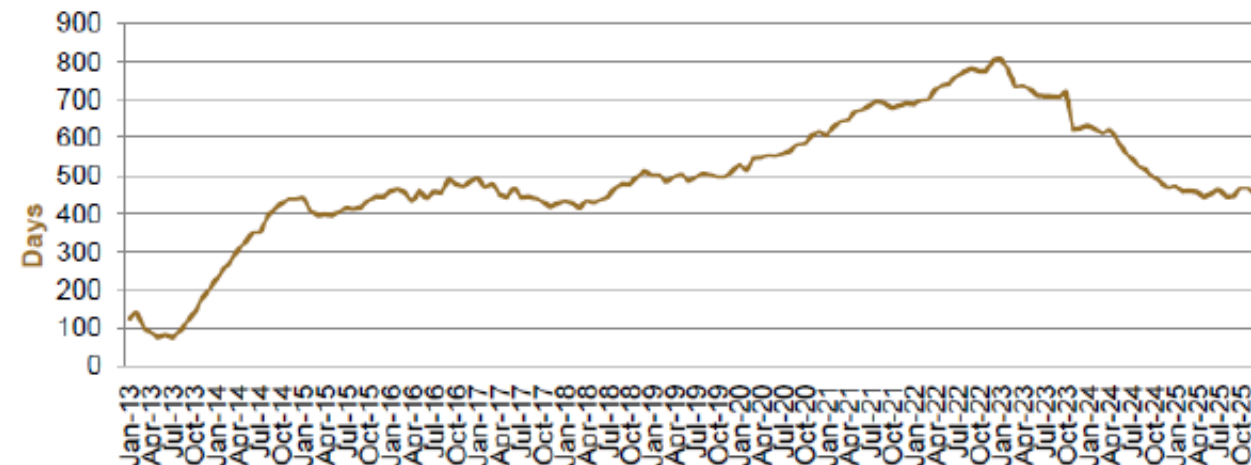


Figure 1. Average Number of Days of People in Held Immigration Detention Facilities



Refugee Council of Australia

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/asylum-community>

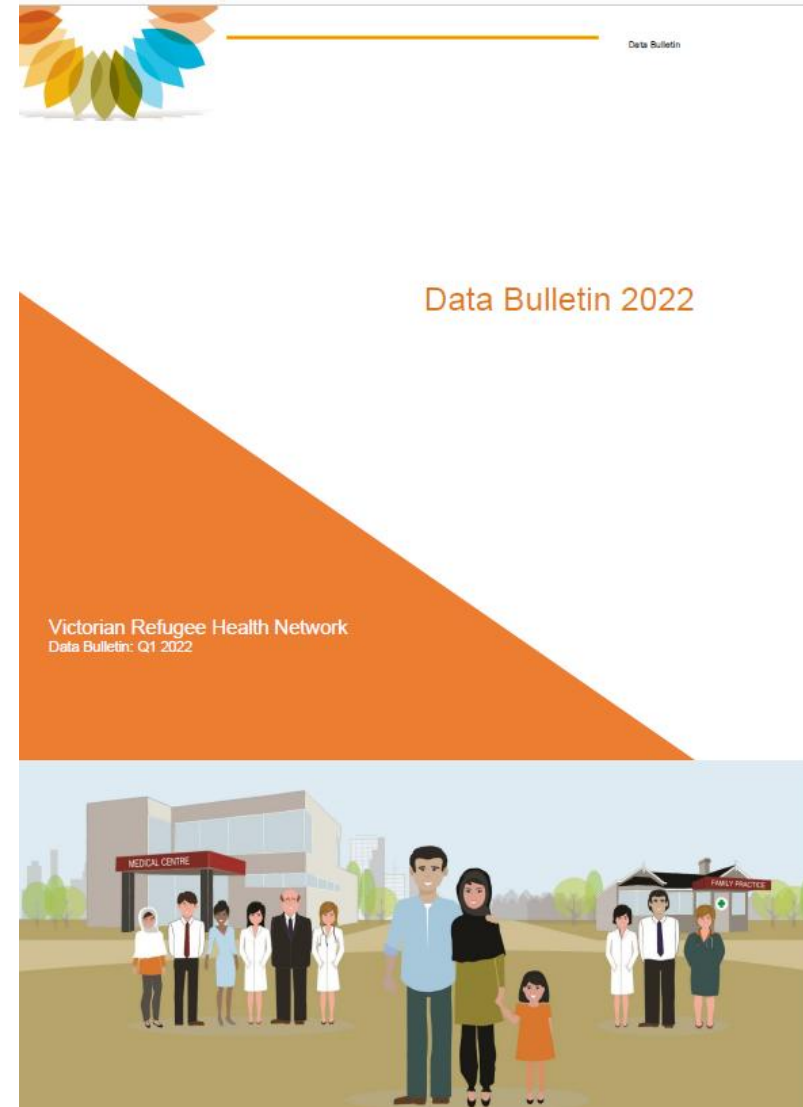
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The Victorian Refugee Health Network publishes a Data Bulletin every quarter that outlines settlement data for Victoria:



https://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/resources-referrals-2/?sft_tool_for_clinician=settlement-data

hassans@foundationhouse.org.au





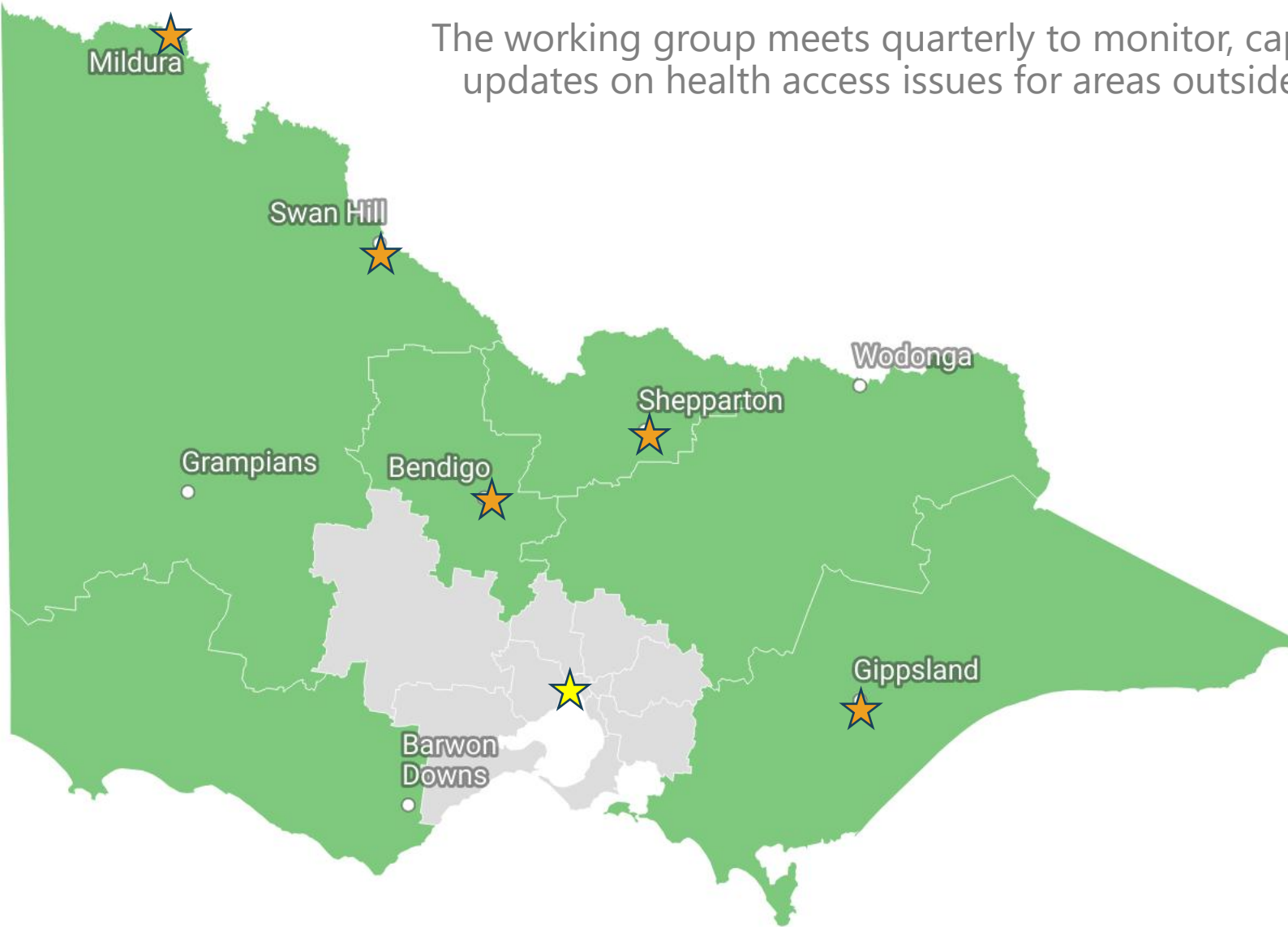
victorian refugee
health network

Rural/Regional Working Group

April 2026

Rural/Regional Working Group

The working group meets quarterly to monitor, capture and have regular updates on health access issues for areas outside metropolitan areas.



A range of topics raised in our discussions, including but not limited to:

- Impacts of short-term funding
- Access to GPs
- Resourcing and staff
- Optometry
- PALM Scheme
- Mental health access and literacy
- Transportation

PALM Scheme

What is it? The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme allows eligible Australian businesses to hire workers from 9 Pacific islands and Timor-Leste when there are not enough local workers available.

Rural and Regional Working Group:

- Small subset of PALM Scheme workers are seeking protection
- Very limited to no interpreters in community languages
- A number of STI presentations with limited access to medications and health info
- Inaccurate induction for workers
- Accommodation, food supply, fuel shortages and cost of living impacting population dramatically



[Improving PALM : The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme - The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute](#)

Mental Health Support for Regional/Rural Schools

Case Study

Student X is a 17 year old student who lives and goes to school in a small regional town, approximately 1-1.5 hours from a major regional hub.

*He is a student from a refugee-like background, and his **trauma has been compounded by family separation, loneliness and now by living in inadequate conditions** on a farm where his father works. Due to his age, Child Protection will not open a case for him.*

*Student X's school **doesn't have a Mental Health Practitioner** despite repeated recruitment attempts, as there have been no suitable applicants. A quotation from an external service provider was untenable for the school.*

*Whilst it would generally be expected that a student of this age would be able to catch public transport to visit the "local" mental health service provider in person, due to the **infrequency of the bus**, this is not possible. Student X's **Dad cannot drive him** without taking time off work - an option which is **not financially possible for the family**.*

*Student X, who has conversational English proficiency, **does not feel comfortable talking over the telephone or using video conferencing**.*

*Student X says that he has never felt comfortable telling anyone about what he thinks or feels, but **his teachers made him feel safe enough to open up**.*

Mental Health Support for Regional/Rural Schools

Additional Information

Quotes from schools in the regions...

- Across the **Hindmarsh Shire**, there are currently no viable local mental health or wellbeing services equipped to meet the needs of refugee-background students...
- Referring refugee or refugee-like background families to appropriate mental health and support services within the **Mallee region** can be very challenging...
- Whilst we mostly have appropriate mental health referral pathways in **Shepparton**, we have found that there is not always an appropriate interpreter, or if there is, waiting for an interpreter adds an additional wait time that makes accessing the service inequitable.

Referral pathways:

- *If schools do not have a Mental Health Practitioner: Regional Phone Counselling Services through Headspace - with interpreters*
- **Bendigo** will be appointing a Youth Counsellor
- Foundation House works with regional/rural counsellors to see if referring a youth client to them is appropriate. If it is not, then the regional/rural team will work to assist in facilitating an appropriate referral to another service.

'[E]ven when schools are genuinely committed to supporting refugee-background students, their efforts are constrained by persistent structural and systemic barriers that limit their capacity to provide meaningful support.'

- Jamal Al-Deen, T. (2026). Unsettling inclusion: refugee-background students and the cultural politics of regional schooling. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2026.2657792>

Witness to War

Witness to War National Hotline

Here to listen, support and inform.
Confidential. Culturally safe.



National
Support



Culturally Safe
& Inclusive



Trauma-Informed
Care



Always was Always Will Be, Aboriginal Land

- I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Country we meet in today, the Darug people.
- As a person with lived experience of being a refugee, I offer my deep gratitude for the connection to the Country I have been gifted.



Image source: Aboriginal Heritage Office, 2024
(<https://www.aboriginalheritage.org/history/clans-of-sydney/>)

Witness to War (W2W) – A National Response

In November 2023, the *Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT)* launched Witness to War (W2W) as a national initiative supporting people across Australia.

W2W supports individuals affected by the emotional and psychological impact of global conflicts, including when these impacts are felt, reactivated, or compounded by events within Australia.

FASSTT agencies respond to the often unseen mental health impacts of war and displacement, supporting communities affected by conflict across Australia.

Why a National Crisis Response Became Necessary

Since October 2023, we've seen a shift across Australia

- Constant exposure to global conflict through media and lived connections.
- Reactivation of trauma among people with lived experience of war and displacement.
- Growing anxiety across diverse communities.
- Collective fear following violent incidents within Australia.
- Rising distress linked to uncertainty, safety concerns, and social tension.

When Global Conflict Becomes Local Trauma

Global conflict does not remain geographically distant; it activates lived trauma across diaspora communities and the broader Australian population.

This was not a contained international event, but a transnational psychological impact.

For many individuals, exposure reactivated prior experiences of war, displacement, and insecurity.

As local acts of violence unfolded, perceptions of safety were further destabilised.





How Witness to War Responds

- National multilingual hotline with in-language, culturally matched support.
- Immediate, trauma-informed emotional support, no need to “explain everything.”
- Delivered by bicultural workers, counsellors, social workers, and psychologists who understand lived experience and community context.
- Responsive risk assessment and coordinated referrals when needed.
- Free, confidential, and accessible without referral.

Target Group

- Individuals affected by overseas conflict, including those with family or loved ones impacted.
- People with lived experience of war, displacement, or refugee-like experiences.
- Communities in Australia with cultural or personal ties to conflict-affected regions.
- Individuals experiencing distress from ongoing media and social media exposure.
- People impacted by serious incidents within Australia, including broader community distress.
- Open to anyone in Australia, no referral or eligibility requirements.

How the Response Works in Practice

- Operating nationally, five days a week (9 am–8 pm).
- Delivered by trained bicultural staff and clinicians.
- Immediate emotional support and de-escalation.
- Responsive risk assessment based on individual need.
- Warm, coordinated referrals to appropriate services.
- Ongoing coordination across services and sectors.

W2W also functions as a strategic listening post, capturing real-time distress signals and emerging community needs.

WITNESS TO WAR

1800 845 198, Monday to Friday across Australia

ACT, NSW, VIC, TAS: 9:00am -8:00 pm

South Australia: 8:30am – 7:30 pm

Queensland: 8:00 am – 7:00 pm

Northern Territory: 7:30 am- 6:30 pm

Western Australia: 6:00 am- 5:00 pm

WHAT THE SERVICE CAN OFFER



INCIDENTAL/ACCIDENTAL
COUNSELLING



INFORMATION PROVISION



REFERRALS



ASSIST WITH NAVIGATING
EXISTING SERVICE SYSTEM



ADVOCACY

What happens when your client contacts W2W?

When a client contacts W2W:

Calls are managed by trained bicultural support workers and counsellors, matched based on language, cultural context, and level of need.

Where possible, clients are matched with a worker who speaks their language.

Immediate emotional support and de-escalation are provided.

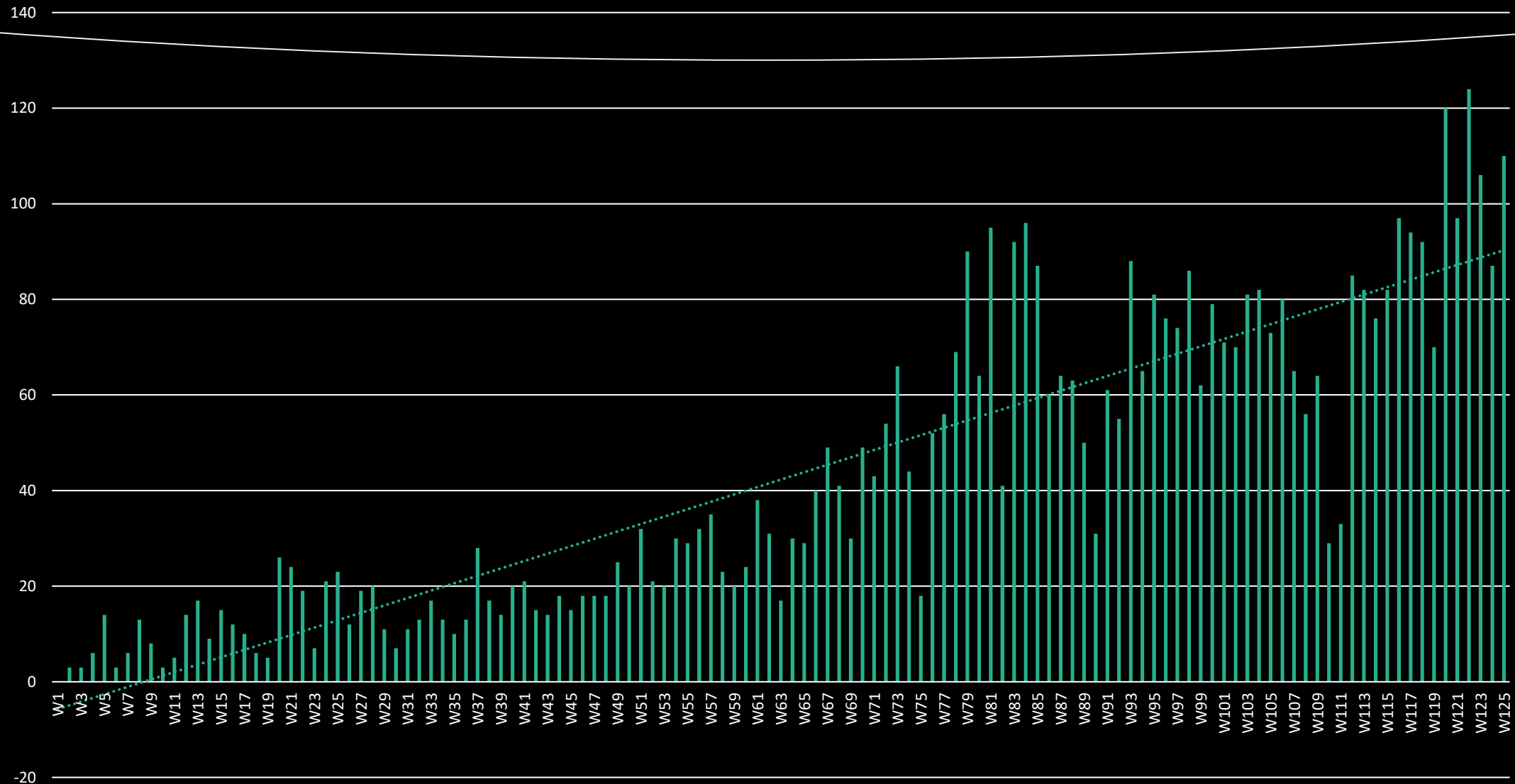
A brief risk assessment is conducted where needed.

Warm referrals and coordinated support are arranged as appropriate

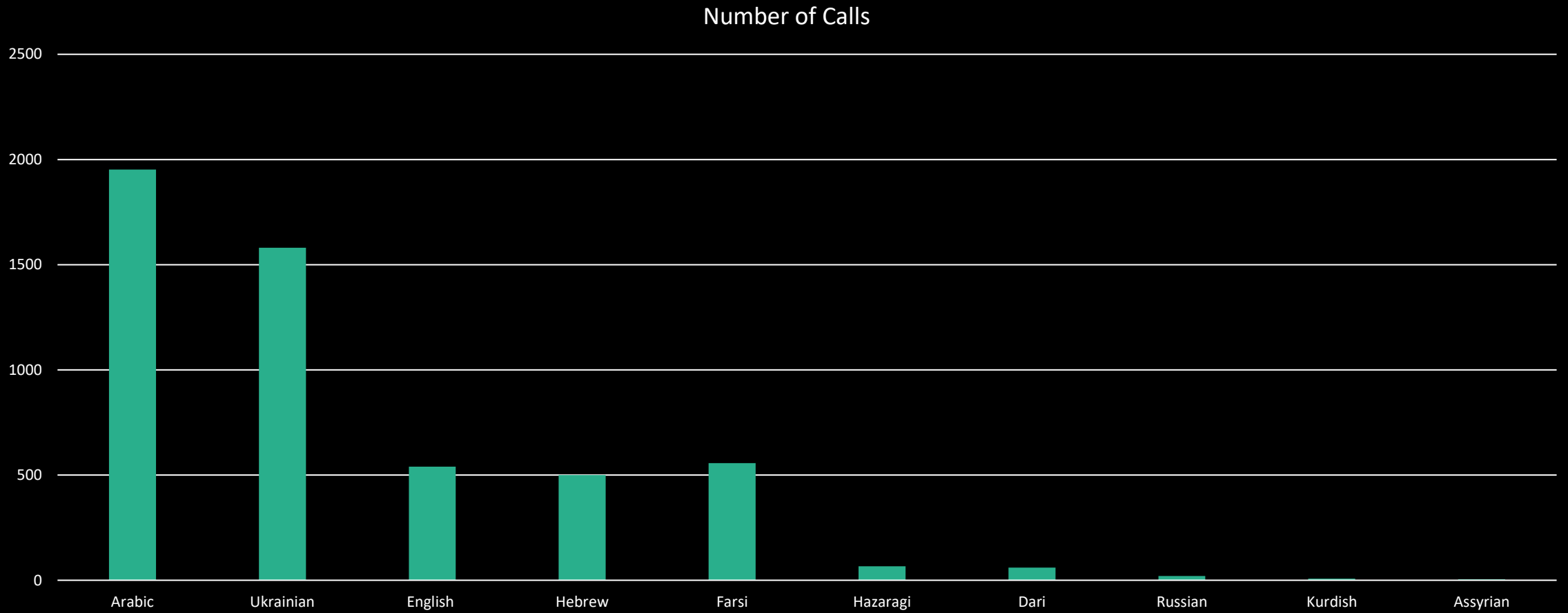
Calls since commencement

5287 Calls

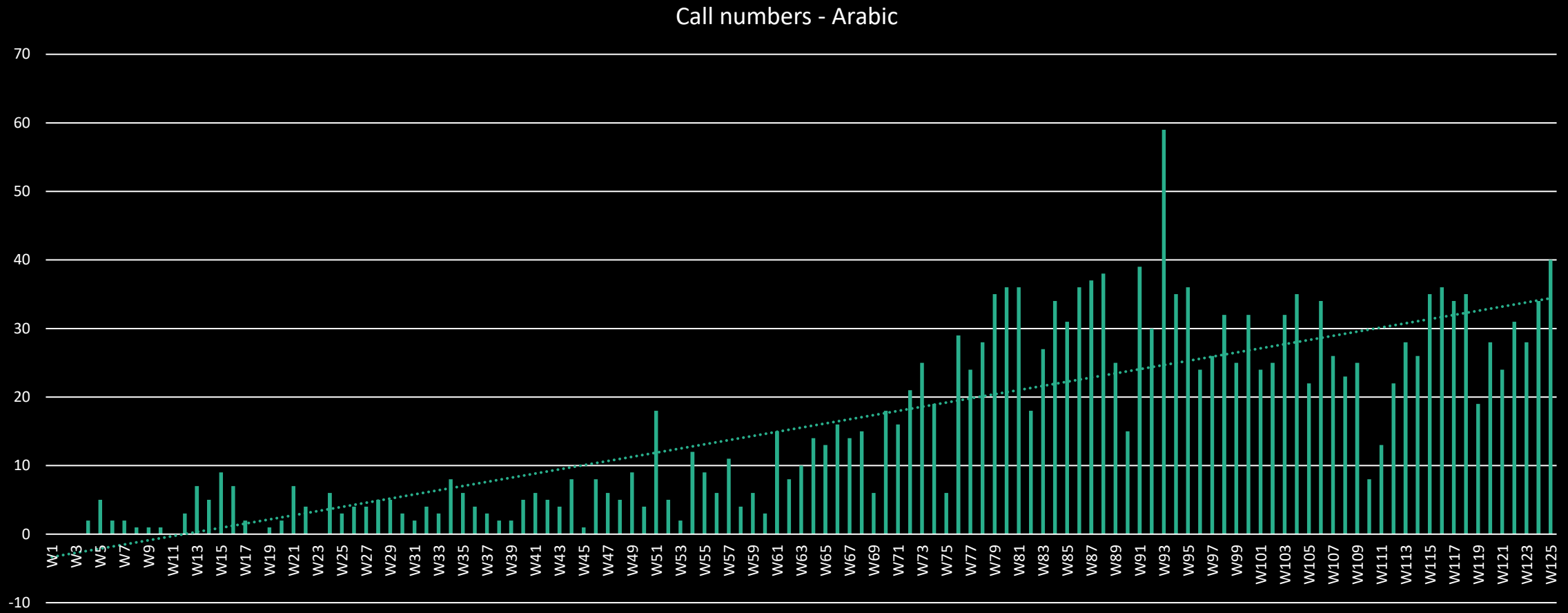
Number of calls



Calls since commencement - languages



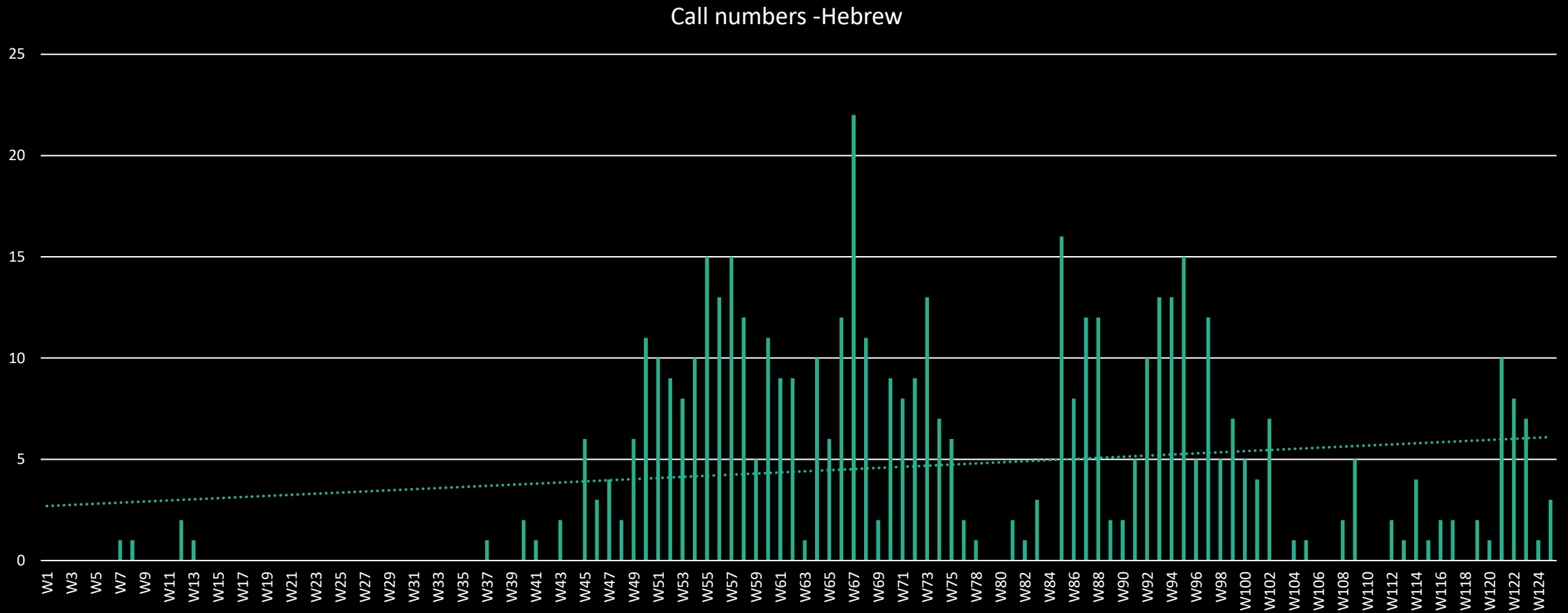
Calls since commencement - Arabic



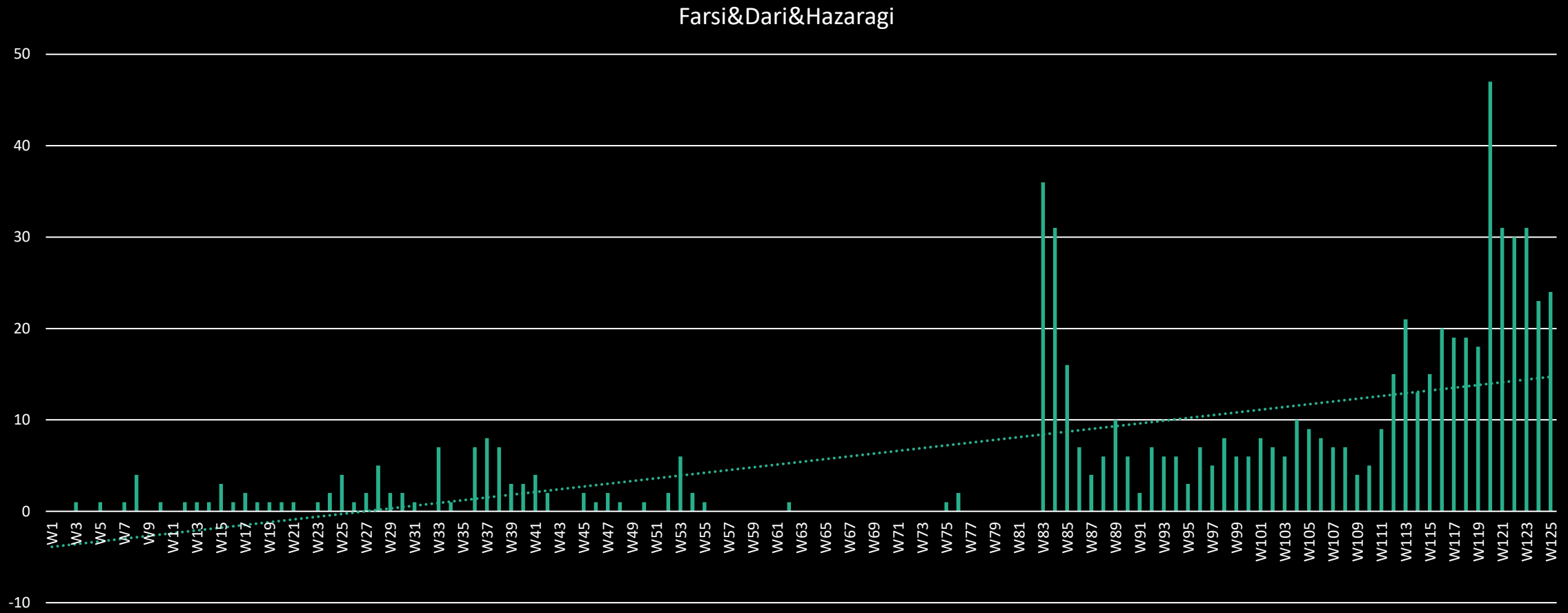
Calls since commencement - Ukrainian



Calls since commencement - Hebrew

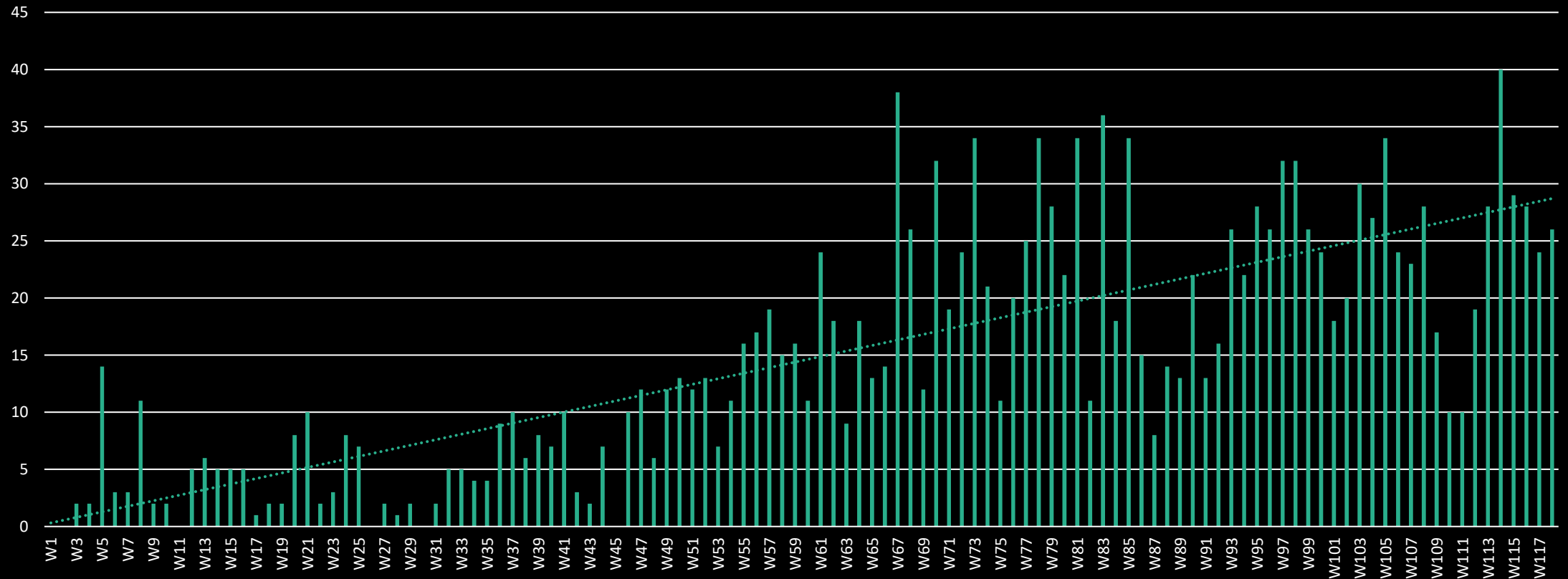


Calls since commencement – Farsi/Dari/Hazaragi



Accidental Counselling

Accidental Counselling



Access to W2W

Open to anyone living in Australia.

No referral required.

No visa or eligibility restrictions.

Free and confidential service.

HOW TO CONTACT

- Witness to War Hotline
1800 845 198
- <https://www.fasstt.org.au/witness-to-war/>
- www.startts.org.au



Any
Questions ?



THANK YOU





شاهد على الحرب

خط هاتف وطني ساخن متعدد اللغات للأشخاص المتأثرين بالنزاعات خارج أستراليا
لدينا أكثر من 30 عامًا من الخبرة في مساعدة الناجون من الحرب وصدمات اللجوء
نحن هنا للاستماع إلى مخاوفك وتقديم المعلومات حول الدعم المتاح
يمكننا أيضًا مساعدتك في ربطك بالخدمات التي يمكنها مساعدتك أنت وعائلتك

مكالمة مجانية 1800 845 198

من الاثنين إلى الجمعة في جميع أنحاء أستراليا

ACT, NSW, VIC, TAS: 10am - 7pm
South Australia: 9:30am - 6:30pm
Queensland: 9am - 6pm
Northern Territory: 8:30am - 5:30pm
Western Australia: 7am - 4pm

يمكننا التحدث معك باللغات التالية:
العربية | اللغة العبرية
الفرنسية | الأوكرانية | الانكليزية
وفي اللغات الأخرى بمساعدة مترجم

هذه الخدمة مقدمة من قبل:







עד למלחמה

מוקד טלפוני ארצי רב לשוני לאנשים שהושפעו או נפגעו מהסכסוכים ברחבי העולם
יש לנו למעלה מ-30 שנות ניסיון לסייע לפליטים ניצולי מלחמה וטראומה
אנחנו כאן כדי להקשיב לדאגות שלך ולספק מידע על תמיכה זמינה
אנחנו יכולים גם לעזור ביצירת קשר עם שירותי תמיכה נוספים לך ולמשפחתך

שיחה חינם 1800 845 198

מי שני עד שישי ברחבי אוסטרליה

ACT, NSW, VIC, TAS: 10am - 7pm
South Australia: 9:30am - 6:30pm
Queensland: 9am - 6pm
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Western Australia: 7am - 4pm

נוכל לדבר איתך בשפות הבאות:
ערבית | אנגלית | אוקראינית | דארי |
ובשפות אחרות עם מתורגמן.

שירות זה מוצע על ידי:







شاهد جنگ

خط تلفني ملي چند زبانه برای کسانی که از درگیری های خارج از کشور تأثیر پذیر شده اند
ما بیش از 30 سال تجربه کمک برای اشخاص که از جنگ نجات یافته اند و یا هم پناهندگان که آسیب های روانی دیده اند. داریم
ما اینجا هستیم تا به نگرانی های شما گوش دهیم و معلومات و خدمات موجود را برای شما ارائه دهیم. ما همچنین می توانیم به شما و خانواده شما را به خدمات و ارگان های دیگر جهت همکاری معرفی کنیم

تماس رایگان : 1800 845 198

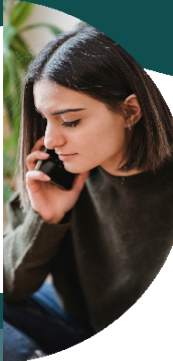
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Western Australia: 7am - 4pm

ما می توانیم با شما به زبان های زیر صحبت کنیم:
عربی | عبری
داری | اوکراینی | انگلیسی
و به زبان های دیگر با مترجم به شما صحبت می توانیم

میشود ارائه دهنده های ارگان توسط خدمات این:







СВІДОК ВІЙНИ

Національна багатомовна телефонна гаряча лінія Для людей, які постраждали внаслідок збройних конфліктів за кордоном
Ми маємо понад 30 років досвіду у наданні допомоги вижившим від наслідків війни та травмам біженців.
Ми тут, щоб вислухати ваші турботи та надати інформацію про наявну підтримку.
Ми також можемо допомогти вам підключитися до служб, які можуть Допомогати вам і вашій родині.

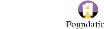
Безкоштовний дзвінок 1800 845 198

Monday to Friday across Australia

ACT, NSW, VIC, TAS: 10am - 7pm
South Australia: 9:30am - 6:30pm
Queensland: 9am - 6pm
Northern Territory: 8:30am - 5:30pm
Western Australia: 7am - 4pm

Ми можемо розмовляти з вами наступними мовами:
АРАБСЬКА | ІВРИТ
ДАРИ | УКРАЇНСЬКА | АНГЛІЙСЬКА
іншими мовами з перекладачем

Цю послугу пропонує:



STARTTS Head Office
152-168 The Horsley Drive, Carramar NSW 2163
(02) 9646 6700
www.startts.org.au

 **fasstt**
The Forum of Australian Services
for Survivors of Torture and Trauma

Thank you

- Presented by
- **Yassmen Yahya**
- STARTTS
- 152-168 The Horsley Drive
- Carramar NSW
- (02) 9646 6700
- www.startts.org.au



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We would love to hear
from you

Complete our feedback form



https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SW_April26

Let us know about:

- Feedback on today's meeting
- Topics you would like covered in future meetings
- Speaker opportunities



victorian refugee
health network

Thank you

Receive our monthly e-bulletin



Join the Victorian Refugee Health Network to be involved in the Network's pieces of advocacy and networking opportunities.