

AfP Submission to Australia's new International Development Policy

This submission from Act for Peace focuses on Australia's contribution to resolving the global displacement crisis, which continues to grow exponentially. Act for Peace is the international humanitarian agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia and has been working with refugees and displaced people since its inception in 1948. We work in close partnership with local organisations and people affected by displacement in the Pacific, Asia, Middle East and Africa, collaboratively providing humanitarian assistance and protection for refugees and internally displaced peoples affected by conflict and disasters, and working with a wide array of global, regional, national and local organisations to address the global displacement crisis through joint research, policy development and advocacy to address displacement drivers, find solutions, protect people, address protracted crises, manage disaster risks and strengthen resilience.

Background:

Over the past 8 years, global forced displacement due to conflict and violence doubled, exceeding 100 million people for the first time in March 2022. Over 1% of the world's population is now displaced with many indirectly affected, particularly host communities and neighbouring countries. Since then, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted another regional displacement crisis. At current displacement rates, the number of people displaced globally will double again in 7-8 years.

Without greater investment in prevention and solutions host communities, host states, the humanitarian system and the international protection system will continue to bear an increasing burden as global displacement escalates, and the good will of host states and communities wanes, and populist anti-refugee and IDP sentiment spreads.

On average each year, another 24 million people are displaced by disasters, which are becoming more frequent and intense, with the impact of climate change increasingly resulting in permanent internal and cross-border displacement. As a result, regional governments are increasingly prioritising prevention, management and solutions for climate displacement, and climate displacement is increasingly being prioritised on the agenda of regional and global multilateral forums, including COP27 and the recent Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Recommendations:

1). Australia prioritises resolving the global displacement crisis

Over the past decade much of Australia's focus on displacement has been on assisting displaced people through its humanitarian program, resettling vulnerable refugees in Australia, and border protection in the Asia-Pacific region focused on preventing people smuggling and trafficking. DFAT's expertise and capacity to engage in multilateral efforts to address the global displacement crisis, particularly in prevention and solutions, has steadily eroded since AusAID's merger into DFAT.

In contrast, in the Pacific, Southeast and around the globe, displacement has continued to rise both in terms of numbers of people displaced and in terms of the priorities of regional governments and the international community. The Global Compact of Refugees, and the December 2019 Global Refugee Forum, were both watershed moments in terms of engaging the international community, mobilising political will and support through the global pledging process, and engaging a much wider set of actors in addressing the global displacement crisis. However, the onset of the global COVID pandemic meant a great deal of momentum was lost, and while states, UN organisations, private sector and NGOs have

all managed to progress a myriad of innovative and collaborative multi-actor initiatives, the number of people living in displacement has continued to rise exponentially.

COVID itself has also brought global socio-economic instability, and the rise of nationalism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, host state intolerance, and climate change, among other factors, continues to drive displacement both within countries and across borders. Largescale regional forced displacement situations - from Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar and many other countries - have also severely affected neighbouring host states, contributed to regional instability, and continue to place a heavy burden on the humanitarian system. It is not sustainable and pro-active Australian engagement and support is required to address the crisis.

The Australian government, while often wedged on domestic refugee and asylum issues, now has a golden opportunity to differentiate itself through championing the global displacement crisis. This would be supported by the Australian public, particularly Diaspora communities, demonstrate our concern to the international community and be in the interests of Australia's development partners. It would also enable Australia to have a strong pro-active agenda that addresses Australia's interests in terms of preventing displacement, regional instability, stabilising populations who would otherwise feed irregular migration flows, and supporting Australia's development partners in the Pacific, Southeast Asia and in other regions. Accordingly, we recommend Australia prioritises resolving the global displacement crisis in its new International Development Policy and works with key stakeholders to develop a more nuanced plan articulating Australia's role and key priorities, while strengthening DFAT's expertise and capacity toward this end.

Recommendations:

- 1) Australia prioritises concrete action to resolve the global displacement crisis in its new International Development Policy and strengthens its diplomatic, development and humanitarian capabilities in this area.
- 2) Australia works through multilateral forums and with its development partners to ensure development actors prioritise prevention within development programming, engage earlier and throughout the displacement cycle, and take much greater ownership of durable solutions, particularly local integration and voluntary repatriation.
- 3) Australia invests in protecting and strengthening the international protection system¹ as a core part of its efforts to strengthen the multilateral system and rule of law.
- 4) Australia works with other states to address displacement drivers, including through climate adaptation, preventing and resolving conflicts and persecution, and addressing rising nationalism, authoritarianism and xenophobia.
- 5) Australia prioritises efforts to develop and resource durable solutions through its development program and diplomacy (such as core groups focused on solutions for specific displacement situations).
- 6) Australia contributes its fair share to mitigate the impacts of climate change, and adaptation, including contributing its fair share to loss and damages incurred as a result of the injustice of forced climate displacement.
- 7) Australia prioritises development financing for displacement and engages in existing dialogues developing mechanisms to improve development financing for displacement.

2). End refugee economic exclusion and forced dependence on aid

55% of refugees currently now live in countries where access, work permits, and other barriers limit them from holding jobs or starting businesses.² Refugee displacement rates are also far outpacing the international community's ability to find solutions, resulting in more protracted displacement, heavier

¹ The international protection system refers to the global and regional forums, institutions and processes that work to ensure international refugee, human rights, and humanitarian law, including the Guiding Principles on International Displacement, are respected, protected and strengthened.

² <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2022/7/27/new-study-refugees-restricted-from-working-in-at-least-32-countries-limiting-their-ability-to-support-themselves-and-contribute-to-host-country>

burdens on host communities and developing states, and moves by host states to further curtail freedom of movement and work rights. Refugees are increasingly confined to camps, without permission to work or own small businesses, become more dependent on aid and then are deskilled and deprived of self-esteem and dignity. This places a heavy cumulative burden on an overstretched humanitarian system and scarce donor resources, drives refugees into cities and onward in search of protection and a means to survive.

Recommendations:

1. The Australian government, as part of its commitment to implementing the Global Compact on Refugees,³ champions the economic rights of refugees, including work rights and the right to own businesses, in order to enable refugees to earn incomes, support themselves and their families, become more self-reliant, and better-prepared for future solutions, and to ensure a more cost-effective approach to displacement.

Indicators of success:

1. Australia utilises its diplomatic capability to mobilise the support of other states and multilateral bodies to promote the economic inclusion of refugees.
2. Australia invests in initiatives like the Jordan Compact, which secured work rights for Syrian refugees in exchange for economic incentives and development financing for displacement.
3. Australia encourages development actors to engage earlier in displacement situations and ensures refugees are adequately included in national development plans.
4. Australia invests in livelihoods for highly vulnerable refugee groups trapped in poverty.
5. Australia expands its support for complementary pathways, particularly refugee access to skilled migration programs pending a durable solution.
6. Australia reinvigorates the Bali Process Business and Government Forum's focus on refugee access to work, utilising the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration to scope initiatives.

3). Advance Australia's Pledge on Meaningful Refugee Participation and Leadership⁴

Despite having the right, capacity and desire to participate in decisions being made that affected their lives, displaced people have been routinely excluded from participation in decisions affecting their lives. Consultations are often ad-hoc, limited in nature, and do not anticipate and address the challenges faced by displaced people face and the barriers that exist and prevent meaningful participation and leadership at the local, provincial, national, regional and global levels.

Recommendations:

1. Australia prioritises meaningful participation and leadership (MPL) in its new International Development Policy and Performance Framework in keeping with its Pledge, its commitment to the Global Refugee Compact, and reporting obligations.⁵
2. Australia advocates in multilateral forums to advance MPL of refugees and internally displaced people and mobilises further pledges and support and includes displaced people and Displaced People's Organisations (DPOs) in government delegations.⁶
3. Australia invests in humanitarian and development programs that prioritise MPL.
4. Australia encourages its bilateral development partners and UN and NGO partners to include people affected by displacement and DPOs.
5. Australia creates a purpose-built funding window for a) innovative and transformative MPL initiatives b) humanitarian projects led by refugees and displaced people and c) DPO learning and organisation development.

³ Objective 2 of the GCR focuses on refugee economic rights.

⁴ Refugee Participation Pledge: <https://www.globalrefugeenetwork.org/refugee-participation-pledge>

⁵ Note: Australia has also committed to participation as part of the Grand Bargain.

⁶ Notably in the December 2023 Global Refugee Forum, but also in delegations to UNHCR's Executive Committee, the High Commission Dialogue on Protection and similar displacement-oriented forums.

4). Durable Solutions Displacement:

Much of the international community's efforts to find durable solutions have focused on local integration and resettlement. Australia has been a strong resettlement contributor,⁷ and provider of humanitarian assistance and protection, but greater effort is required to generate pathways to local integration and voluntary repatriation. The right to return and the corresponding obligations of states and the international community to ensure displaced people can return in safety, with dignity and voluntarily, has, however, been neglected. Displaced people have also been historically marginalised in the development and implementation of solutions.

Recommendations:

1. Australia works with regional states, the international community, displaced peoples and civil society to expand the range of durable solutions options available to refugees and IDPs.
2. Australia invests in more cost-effective 'refugee-led preparedness' for voluntary repatriation and reintegration to reduce harm and alleviate the burden on host families, communities and state services in return areas.⁸
3. Australia encourages international development actor ownership of local integration and refugee return and reintegration and explores supportive development financing options.

5). Climate Displacement:

Climate displacement is now a reality in every country where we have programs and partners. Climate change has become an amplifier of a whole range of displacement drivers. At present, there is no international legal framework to protect those forcibly displaced by climate change - whether due to slow-onset desertification and drought; rapid-onset natural disasters; or through intensifying conflicts over scarce resources – or reparations for loss and damage.

Global funding commitments for climate adaptation remain insufficient to meet the USD \$100 billion required, and Australia's commitment (AUD 3 billion over five years over 2020-25) is a fraction of its fair share (calculated at 4 billion per year⁹), leaving critical funding shortfalls for local adaptation.

Local-level community and faith leaders in the Pacific have made clear representations as to the policy responses they seek from Australia and other nations, including at the October 2022 Kioia Talanoa, which resulted in the [Kioia Climate Emergency Declaration 2022](#), which was endorsed by the Pacific Conference of Churches and many other CSOs including Australia's First Nations communities. The declaration seeks 'to ensure our communities' have access to resources for climate adaptation, mitigation, relocation, resettlement and human security amidst the climate emergency.'

Pacific communities 'have the Indigenous knowledge and understand their context; they are willing to do what it takes to adapt to the impacts of climate change. But they need help, and they need it now...' - PCC General-Secretary Rev James Bhagwan¹⁰

Given the deep importance of Christian faith across the nations in the frontline of climate change in the Pacific, addressing these challenges at a theological level is an important element of supporting resilience and adaptation. Through the Church Agencies Disaster Network (CANDO), churches in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG have collaborated to develop a 'Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate' and resources, which provide underpinnings for belief and behaviour change relating to disaster preparedness and response.

⁷ Including Dept of Home Affairs taking a lead role in 'complementary pathways', which refers to expanding refugees access to student, tourist and work permits as options pending a durable solution.

⁸ Act for Peace has shown that [refugee-led return preparedness and reintegration](#) can have enormous cost-benefits and substantial benefits for returning refugees, host communities and government authorities.

⁹ www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-ACT-004-Climate-Finance-Report_Digital.pdf

¹⁰ www.oikoumene.org/news/pacific-conference-of-churches-calls-for-less-talk-more-action-as-cop27-begins

This crucial resourcing gap both in overall adaptation funding, and in funding specifically earmarked for mechanisms that are accessible for local and community-level adaptation, is a key challenge that should be addressed in Australia's new Development Policy.

Recommendation

1. Australia develops a stronger knowledge base to inform action to address climate displacement in the Pacific and Southeast Asia.
2. Australia significantly increases funding for climate adaptation and prioritise investment in local-level community-based adaptation initiatives and resilience strengthening, with greater flexibility and streamlined funding mechanisms, allowing partners to pivot and respond to changed weather patterns and disasters.
3. Australia expands options for people displaced by climate change in the Pacific to move in a safe, dignified and voluntary manner as a means to adapting to climate change.
4. Australia recognises the role of faith communities and traditions in providing resources that enable local communities to make sense of, and adapt to, the challenges of climate and environmental change¹¹ and invests in them.
5. Australia commits to mutual and respectful dialogue with local civil society and faith actors – including Australian First Nations voices - who are calling for climate action.

6). Addressing Forced Displacement in and from Myanmar in South and Southeast Asia

Myanmar's crisis¹² continues to have a heavy impact in Australia's immediate region and should be given special consideration in Australia development plans and diplomacy. Not least because of the human impact of the current crisis, and its impact on regional peace and security, but also because it is in danger of it becoming a failed state on Australia's doorstep. The illegal military junta is losing what territorial control it has left at an increasing rate and is incapable of governing the country. Resistance forces are making major territorial gains and, in coordination with the National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic administrative departments and civil society organisations, delivering vital government services to civilians in areas across the country liberated from military control. Now that the NUG now has the greatest claim to effective control of Myanmar,¹³ Australia cannot continue to engage on the assumption that the military has effective control.¹⁴ Australia must develop a strategy for the provision of humanitarian and development assistance in areas not controlled by the military's State Administrative Council (SAC), including support for the 1.3 million displaced people since the attempted coup, mostly to non-SAC-controlled areas.

Recommendations:

1. DFAT provides proportionate humanitarian assistance, protection and development assistance in areas not controlled by Myanmar's State Administration Council.
2. Australia prioritises humanitarian assistance and protection for people affected by forced displacement, particularly in non-SAC controlled areas, and in affected regional states.
3. Australia continues to advocate for, and provide, assistance and protection for Rohingya refugees in the region while developing and expanding options for durable solutions.

¹¹ Such as the CANDO, DFAT AHP-funded, 'Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate'.

¹² Myanmar's people are engaged in a historic struggle to overthrow Myanmar's oppressive military regime following the military attempted coup in February 2021 after the military got only 6% of federal elections votes. Allied resistance forces loyal to the National Unity Government (NUG) have been waging a highly effective campaign of non-violent and armed resistance against Myanmar's military.

¹³ On 5 Sept 2022, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) reported that the junta has stable territorial control in 22% (72 of 330) of townships in Myanmar, comprising only 17% of Myanmar's land area. The report also noted that the regime's governance functions, and administrative capacity were collapsing throughout the country, with much of Myanmar's townships now becoming contested territory, and resistance forces having effective territorial control in 39% of townships. Armed resistance has been most endemic in the military's Bamar heartland, particularly in Magwe and Sagaing Regions, as well as parts of Kachin, Kayin, Mon, and Rakhine States. On 7 Sept, NUG acting president Duwa Lashi La stated that the regime had lost control of half of the country, with the NUG having formed over 300 PDF battalions, and township public defence forces in 250 of the country's townships.

¹⁴ Effective control is a key criterion applied by states and international actors to determine whether to recognise an entity as the government of another country and how to engage with it.