

Community-based asylum seeker entitlements fact sheet

What is the difference between community-based asylum seekers and those in community detention?

Community-based asylum seekers

Asylum seekers who arrive by plane in Australia on a valid temporary visa, such as a student, work or tourist visa, are permitted to live in the community while their application for a protection visa is processed. Once the visa on which they arrived expires they are placed onto a bridging visa until found to be a refugee and granted permanent residency. This applies to virtually all asylum seekers who arrive by plane and is referred to as *community-based processing*

Every asylum seeker who arrives by boat is initially detained inside an immigration detention centre in accordance with the policy of mandatory detention. However, at the Department of Immigration's discretion, asylum seekers in detention can be moved into community processing and onto a bridging visa for the duration of their protection visa application. For up to date statistics on community processing click [here](#)

Asylum seekers placed in community detention

The government also has a process of *community detention* for a select group of asylum seekers which differs from those who live in the community on a bridging visa as described above. These asylum seekers can be placed back into detention at any time and can be subject to supervision arrangements including curfews.

Only asylum seekers who are deemed 'most vulnerable' by the Department of Immigration, such as unaccompanied minors and children with families, can be released from detention and placed into community detention. The expansion of this program was announced in October 2010 as¹ the number of children detained – over 1000 – reached record breaking levels.² Consequently, grave concerns were expressed for the health of children who were being subjected to prolonged and indefinite detention.³

Asylum seekers do NOT receive Centrelink payments.

- No asylum seekers or refugees in detention receive monetary payments from the government.
- No community based asylum seekers or those in community detention have access to any welfare entitlements provided by Centrelink.
- No asylum seekers have access to public housing or a healthcare card.
- They are not entitled to employment support such as Job Services Australia beyond stream 1 (basic internet access).
- Asylum seekers do not have access to free English language classes or resettlement services.

What financial support do asylum seekers in the community receive?

Community processing

Community-based asylum seekers who are vulnerable and assessed as 'unfit to work' are eligible to receive a payment of \$217 p/w through either the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) or the Community Assistance Scheme (CAS) which is distributed by the Red Cross and funded by the Department of Immigration. This is equivalent to 89% of the newstart allowance. Those on CAS are also eligible for an additional \$53 p/w rental assistance. As of July 2012, only 29 per cent of clients at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre were eligible for either ASAS or CAS.⁴ The remainder receive no financial assistance from the government whatsoever and are reliant upon the charity and goodwill of the community to supplement their income for day to day expenses such as housing, food, travel and health costs.

Community detention

Asylum seekers in community detention, who are deemed the most vulnerable, are provided with accommodation as well as an allowance of \$171 per week because they are not allowed to work and therefore unable to support themselves. The allowance is used to cover all day-to-day expenses such as food, transport costs, utility bills, school books etc. The standard of accommodation is basic, not luxury. According to Kate Pope, First Assistant Secretary of DIAC, it is equivalent to what a “poor university student” might live in.⁵ These asylum seekers are transitioned into the community and onto a bridging visa when the government assesses that it is beneficial to do so or after they are found to be refugees.

Asylum seekers do NOT receive more welfare entitlements than other Australians.

Asylum seekers living in the community are eligible to receive *maximum* of \$217 per week in income assistance (plus some may receive an additional \$50 in rent assistance) from the Red Cross and funded by the Department of Immigration.

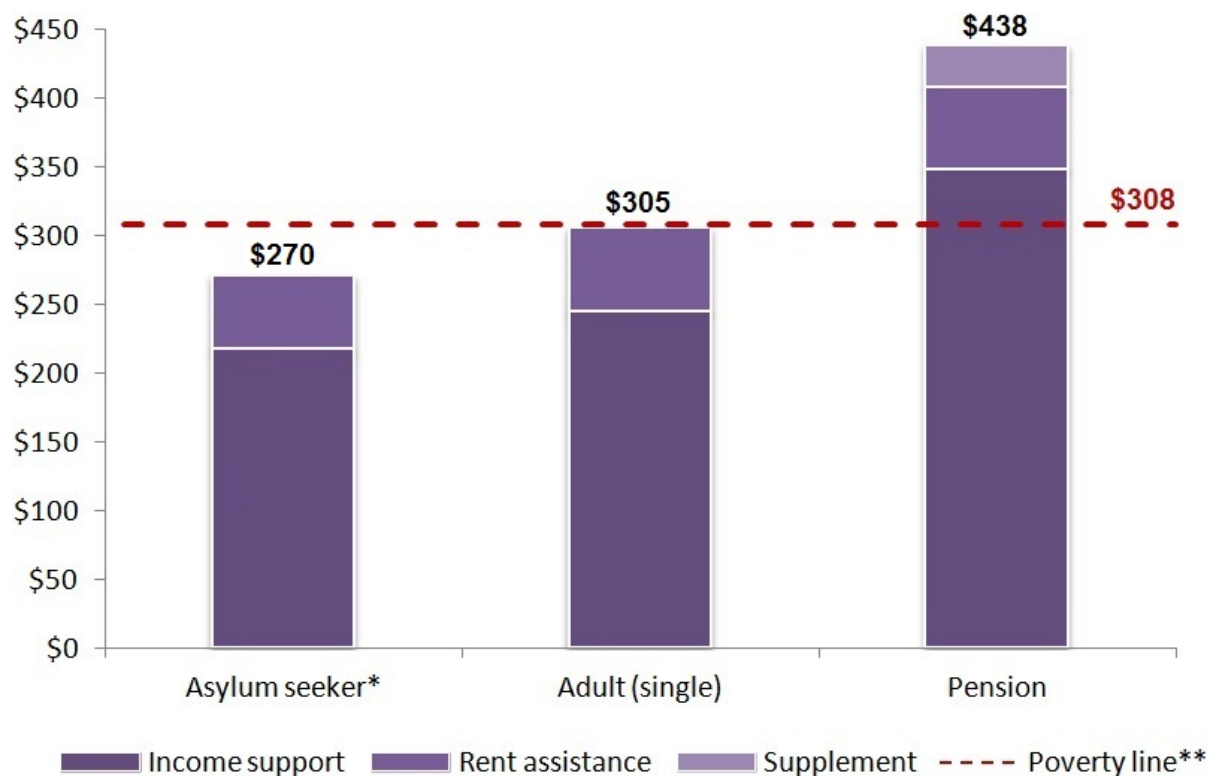
In comparison, a single unemployed or low income Australian is eligible to receive \$305 p/w (\$245 plus \$60 rent assistance).

The pension for a single Australian adult is \$438 p/w including rent assistance and the pension supplement.

This places asylum seekers who are eligible for income assistance well below the poverty line (see graph below).

Once asylum seekers are granted refugee status, they are entitled to the same rights and incur the same responsibilities as other Australians. No more, no less. While there have been a number of concerns raised within parts of the Australian community that more assistance is provided to refugee entrants than to other Australians such as pensioners or the homeless, as the Department of Immigration clearly states on its website, “there is no truth to these claims.”⁶

Australian welfare entitlements vs community-based asylum seeker assistance (p/week)



* Denotes asylum seekers living under community-based processing and with access to income support. Note that only a minority of these asylum seekers receive any income assistance at all. As of June 2012, only 29% of the 1253 clients at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre were eligible for any type of income support from the Department of Immigration.

** Poverty line accurate as of December 2011 'Poverty Lines: Australia (December Quarter 2011)', Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, <http://melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/publications/Poverty%20Lines/Poverty-Lines-Australia-Dec-2011.pdf>; Centrelink payments accurate as of 20 March 2012, see <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>.

References

¹ Chris Bowen media release, 'Government to move children and vulnerable families into community-based accommodation', 18 Oct 2010, <http://www.chrisbowen.net/media-centre/media-releases.do?newsId=3793>.

² Samantha Maiden, 'Julia Gillard locking up more children in detention than John Howard,' *Courier Mail*, 30 January 2011, <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/national/julia-gillard-locking-up-more-children-in-detention-than-john-howard/story-e6freooo-1225996704418>.

³ Australian Human Rights Commission media release, 'Hot, dusty, remote location should not be used to detain children', 15 Feb 2011, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2011/11_11.html.

⁴ As of June 2012, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre was serving 1253 clients of which only 365 were receiving any income assistance.

⁵ Senate Estimates, Legal and Constitutional Affairs (13 February 2012), p. 85, http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Committees?url=legcon_ctte/estimates/add_1112/index.htm.

⁶ DIAC, 'Fact Sheet 98 – Settlement Services for Refugees', <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/98services.htm>.