

Support for newly arrived Palestinians

Guide for Victorian Government departments, service providers and agencies

Since the start of the current Israel-Gaza conflict in October 2023, the Commonwealth Government has issued over 2,200 visas to Palestinians. Although the exact number of Palestinian arrivals in Victoria is not known, it is estimated that there are approximately 150 people in Victoria who have fled Gaza. Most of those who have arrived are understood to be on visitor (subclass 600) visas.

Victoria's Palestinian diaspora communities are small, with approximately 4,000 Palestinian-born individuals residing in Victoria. Many of the individuals and families arriving from Gaza have expressed the need for greater connection to communities, services and referral pathways.

This guide was prepared by the Department of Premier and Cabinet Multicultural Affairs portfolio and summarises the supports available to newly arrived Palestinians fleeing the Israel-Gaza conflict and arriving in Victoria.

The supports and services available to those fleeing the conflict will vary depending on visa type. The two key visa types provided to this cohort include:

- **Visitor (subclass 600) visa** - Palestinian arrivals who hold a visitor (subclass 600) visa are not eligible for Medicare, income support or work rights. In addition, this visa subclass does not grant access to Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) supports.
- **Bridging (subclass 050) visa E** - In February 2024, the [Commonwealth announced a new visa pathway](#) – bridging (subclass 050) visa E for those on visitor visas from Gaza. This visa grants access to Medicare, work and study rights, noting students still remain fee-liable under this visa type, and this visa subclass does not grant access to HSP supports. In the 2024/25 Commonwealth Budget, the Commonwealth Government extended Medicare eligibility to 30 June 2025 for Bridging Visa E holders.

Service guide

Visa support and family reunification

The Commonwealth Government has responsibility for all visa-related issues, including processing applications and provides information regarding [visa options, conditions and application requirements](#).

If individuals have **visa enquiries about family or loved ones in Israel or Gaza**, queries can be directed to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on +61 2 6261 3305 (from overseas) or 1300 555 135 (toll free from within Australia).

Advice on the [specific visa support available to individuals fleeing the Israel-Gaza conflict](#).

Legal support for visa applications

New arrivals may be seeking legal advice or support to apply for family reunification or other visas for family members who remain offshore. Some arrivals may also be seeking assistance in respect to their own visa status, with many holding temporary visas.

Accessing legal support and advice is critical in the submission of visa applications and it is important that individuals are referred to appropriately qualified legal services. The following supports can provide more information:

- The Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs provides advice to individuals who wish to extend their stay in Australia, including [visa options](#) and information regarding [bridging visa E \(subclass 050\)](#).
- [Refugee Legal](#) has a dedicated hotline for individuals impacted by the conflict (Israel-Gaza Legal Hotline – 03 9413 0107), and an information sheet outlining key information on free legal help that is available in English, Arabic and Hebrew ([Israel-Gaza Crisis Information Sheet](#)).
- Migration agents or lawyers registered with the [Office of Migration Agents Registration Authority](#).
- The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's (ASRC) [Human Rights Law Program \(HRLP\)](#) provides free legal advice and services to refugees and people seeking asylum. This includes limited legal assistance, advice, information or representation. The program also offers free weekly legal clinics and regular information sessions and workshops for refugees and individuals seeking asylum. In addition, individuals can access a range of info sheets with general legal and migration information, including a [fact sheet on visa advice and assistance for Palestinians](#). For further information regarding HRLP, contact ASRC's legal team at legal@asrc.org.au or via phone on 03 9274 9889.

Health

The Victorian Government is providing free public health care, including mental health support, for people fleeing the Israel-Gaza conflict. This includes support for those arriving on a visitor visa, who are ineligible for Medicare and do not otherwise receive government-subsidised health services. Further information on refugee and asylum seeker health and wellbeing, including support for people fleeing the conflict [here](#).

As part of this support, newly arrived Palestinians will receive access to care in Victorian hospitals as admitted, non-admitted and emergency patients. This includes fee waivers for:

- [Ambulance services](#)
- [Community health services](#)
- [Dental services](#)
- [Catch up immunisation for children and adults](#)

Individuals fleeing the conflict will also have access to a number of other Victorian health services, including specialised refugee and asylum seeker support. Available services include:

- [Victorian Virtual Emergency Department](#)
- [Priority Primary Care Centres](#)
- [Supercare Pharmacies](#)
- [Maternal and Child Health Services](#)
- [Early Parenting Schemes](#)
- Mental health and wellbeing support, including through [Mental Health & Wellbeing Hubs alongside Partners in Wellbeing](#) and [Mental Health & Wellbeing Locals](#) ('Local Services')

Additional guidance regarding [health services for people fleeing the Israel-Gaza conflict](#).

Mental health and wellbeing

A number of government and non-government services provide access to free mental health and wellbeing support to individuals regardless of Medicare status:

- [Mental Health & Wellbeing Hubs](#) alongside Partners in Wellbeing are providing people in Victoria, of any age with support for a range of issues.
- [Mental Health & Wellbeing Locals](#) are available to anyone aged 26 years and over experiencing mental health or wellbeing concerns.
- [Foundation House](#) is providing tailored trauma-informed support to school communities, including resource sharing, in partnership with the Department of Education.

Maternal and child health

Families can access free maternal and child health services regardless of visa status.

New arrivals enrolled in the [Victorian Maternal and Child Health \(MCH\)](#) service by the City of Melbourne will have access to physical and developmental checks, referrals, and childhood immunisations. Children and families residing in Melbourne's outer suburbs are eligible to receive MCH services.

Housing

The [Housing Establishment Fund \(HEF\)](#) aims to provide support to people experiencing homelessness or housing crisis. HEF support is available to Transitional Housing Management and Homelessness Support program agencies to assist eligible clients to access overnight accommodation or private rental accommodation.

The [Private Rental Assistance Program \(PRAP\)](#) is intended to prevent or end homelessness and housing crises through rapidly rehousing people, supporting at-risk households to sustain affordable and appropriate housing in the rental market, and assisting people who currently live in crisis, transitional or social housing to become independent in the private rental market. A person's visa status does not preclude them from receiving PRAP, provided they are assessed as eligible by a community provider.

A number of community-based organisations are supporting housing and accommodation arrangements for newly arrived Palestinians, including [Palestinian Christians](#), who have provided housing support for 11 families since January 2024.

Material aid

On 2 April 2024, the Commonwealth Government announced [\\$2 million in emergency financial assistance](#) for people who have fled the conflict, arrived in Australia on temporary visas and who are experiencing financial hardship. This support is specifically for cohorts who do not have access to Commonwealth income support.

The [Australian Red Cross \(ARC\)](#) is administering this funding on behalf of the Commonwealth in the form of small cash payments/vouchers to meet basic needs, including food, medicine, and shelter. Additionally, the ASRC provides a [drop-in service](#) for people seeking asylum which provides access to information and services relating to material aid.

Support for families and young people

Place-based support for families and young people

The Victorian Government supports [Community hubs](#) as gateways to services for refugees and asylum seekers and to connect families with each other, with their school, and with existing services.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth has also developed a range of [resources and information](#) for young people and their families about school education in Victoria.

Unaccompanied minors

Unaccompanied minors and their carers are supported through Victoria's [Refugee Minor Program](#). Referrals can only be made by the Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs.

Education

Individuals that hold a visitor visa may be ineligible for some education supports. This includes access to free technical and further education (TAFE), and fee exemption for primary and secondary school education. Some new arrivals have access to other tailored education supports.

Early childhood education

In Victoria, children aged three and four are eligible to access a free kindergarten program at participating services. Families do not need to have Australian Citizenship or Permanent Residency to be eligible for Free Kinder (in line with the [Kindergarten Funding Guide](#) - Page 61).

Kindergarten can be provided in sessional services or integrated into a long day care service. In a sessional kindergarten service participating in Free Kinder, children are able to access up to 15 hours of kindergarten for free. In participating long day care services, fees are charged for all hours of education and care and Free Kinder is applied as an offset to a family's fees. This means that cost will vary based on factors like a family's [Child Care Subsidy \(CCS\)](#) entitlement. It is important to understand the distinction to ensure families would not incur a debt. More information on Free Kinder in [English](#) and in [Arabic](#).

Families can enrol their children in kindergarten by contacting an early childhood education and care service or their local council. Information is available in [English](#) and in [Arabic](#).

Further information on eligibility requirements and funding access is available in [English](#) and in [Arabic](#). For any further queries contact early.years.cald.programs@education.vic.gov.au.

CALD Outreach Initiative

The Department of Education has funded 22 local councils to employ CALD outreach workers. CALD outreach workers address barriers to kindergarten access and participation for children and families from CALD backgrounds. They also support families transition to school, as well as ongoing engagement and participation in education. For a list of participating councils please visit [Supporting CALD families to engage in kindergarten](#).

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)

[Early Start Kindergarten \(ESK\)](#) gives three-year old children from a refugee or asylum seeker background 15 hours per week of free or low-cost kindergarten and provides them with priority of access to kindergarten. All professionals can advise kindergarten services of a child's eligibility for

ESK. For the contact details of ECIB teams, please visit [Contact an Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#).

Access to Early Learning (AEL)

[Access to Early Learning \(AEL\)](#) is a program which supports eligible 3-year-old children and families who experience multiple barriers to attending kindergarten, by assisting with enrolment and providing in-home learning advice. Referrals are completed by case managers and support professionals.

Primary and secondary school education

Primary and secondary-aged children who have arrived in Victoria on visitor visas can [apply to access temporary education](#) (up to 12 weeks of schooling). It is important to note that this education pathway attracts both tuition and non-tuition fees.

The Department of Education is providing fee exemptions on a case-by-case basis for students arriving from Gaza, including those holding temporary visas.

Students on a visitor visa who have been granted extended stay beyond three (3) months, and have received a bridging visa, are permitted to attend school beyond 12 weeks (the maximum typically allowed under the visitor visa). Although a bridging visa will not come into effect until the visitor visa has expired, Palestinian visitor visa holders (aged 18 and under) will be exempted from restrictions on their period of study while their status is being resolved.

Support is also available for newly arrived students attending government schools to help with the cost of education-related items such as textbooks and uniforms. The support can be accessed by students on temporary visas, as well as students on humanitarian visas (or those who have applied for humanitarian visas and are currently waiting for a bridging visa). Principals or wellbeing officers should apply via the [State Schools' Relief](#) online portal on behalf the student and mention that the student in question has recently arrived from Palestine. State Schools' Relief can provide vouchers that can contribute towards the cost of purchasing textbooks. State Schools' Relief can also provide support with new uniforms, footwear and a range of other essential educational resources, either through the direct provision of items, or if the item cannot be supplied, through a voucher which contributes towards the cost of purchasing the item. Find out more about [help with school costs and fees](#).

Students at government schools are also eligible to apply for the [Camps Sports and Excursion Fund \(CSEF\)](#) if they are need of this support, which contributes to the costs for parents of camps, sports and excursions. For students applying for humanitarian visas, a bridging visa serves as sufficient evidence in the CSEF application process. For students without bridging visas, a letter from an appropriate welfare agency stating the student is a new arrival from Palestine will be sufficient evidence to approve CSEF funding.

Vocational education

[The Asylum Seeker Vocational Education and Training \(ASVET\) program](#) provides eligible asylum seekers exemption from the citizenship and residency criteria typically required for Victorian Government subsidised Skills-First training. The program was recently expanded to increase the range of training providers, eligibility requirements, and available subsidised accredited courses.

Under ASVET, individuals seeking asylum can enrol at technical and further education (TAFE) and courses provided through Learn Local providers. Anyone who has applied for a humanitarian, protection or refugee visa and hold a bridging visa for this purpose are also eligible for the program.

Employment and training

Employment and training supports are available to newly arrived migrants, noting that an individual's work rights are dependent on their visa type. Individuals on visitor visas do not hold working rights. A summary of supports for individuals whose visa types do grant work rights, is provided below.

- Jobs Victoria provide a range of [employment services](#) to newly arrived migrants, people seeking asylum and refugees. This includes training, education and learning opportunities to support jobseekers to become work-ready and secure employment. Individuals can also access employment support through [Jobs Victoria's Work and Learning Centres](#), located in Fitzroy, North Geelong, Morwell, Ballarat and Shepparton.
- [The Reconnect Program](#) is delivered statewide and supports individuals experiencing disadvantage to overcome barriers to education, training and employment. Individuals who hold, or have applied for, a humanitarian, protection or refugee visa are eligible for the program.
- The Victorian Government's [Skills and Jobs Centres](#) provides free career, employment and training services to all Victorians, regardless of visa status. The program offers a range of services, including career counselling, apprenticeship and training pathways, study advice, and job matching to local employment opportunities.

Public transport

Healthcare card holders are entitled to travel concessions in Victoria and can purchase a concession myki and access concession fares.

Individuals seeking asylum are eligible for a [Public Transport Victoria \(PTV\) Asylum Seeker ID](#) and a Concession Myki. This provides recipients a 50 per cent discount on public transportation.

Not-for-profit and charitable organisations can apply to PTV to purchase one, seven or thirty day [travel passes](#) at discounted rates to issue to newly arrived individuals.