

People Seeking Asylum

Pope Francis has expressed particular concern for people fleeing war and persecution, whom he calls on us to welcome and protect.

In the last decade, the Australian Government has failed to welcome or protect people, arriving here by boat, who have sought asylum in our country, despite being entitled to seek protection as refugees under international law.

Since that time, Australia has spent over \$8 billion on offshore processing for people seeking asylum. After nine years, there are still 200 people held against their will in PNG and Nauru.

In Australia, about 20,000 refugees are still on temporary visas after a decade and can't bring their families here. Thousands more people seeking asylum are enduring the fast-track refugee assessment process, condemned as unfair by the Australian Human Rights Commission, and many are denied Government financial support if they are unable to work.

In Australian detention centres, hundreds of others, many brought here for medical treatment, are held indefinitely when they could live safely in our community.

Recently, Australia has also become less welcoming of refugees arriving under our Humanitarian Program. In 2020 the Government reduced the annual program cap by 5,000 to 13,750.

The Australian Government's initial offers to help Afghan nationals were within the overall humanitarian cap. The 2022 Federal Budget includes an additional 16,500 humanitarian places (above the cap) for Afghan nationals over the next four years. This announcement is welcomed, although concerns remain about the four-year time period. Instability, conflict and crisis will continue to occur throughout the world and the Australian Government must act quickly and be open to accepting additional humanitarian places when crises arise.

Recommendations:

The Federal Government should:

- accept 20,000 refugees annually under our humanitarian program
- recognise the ongoing need to offer additional places above the humanitarian intake in response to crises as they arise
- give permanent protection and family reunion rights to all refugees
- end the unfair fast-track assessment process and fund an adequate safety net for people seeking asylum
- end offshore processing and make detention in Australia a last resort.

In NSW:

483 people

are still in immigration detention centres and immigration transit accommodationⁱ

126 people

are in alternative places of detention (APODS) or community detention

806 people

are in the 'fast track' cohort, still waiting for their applications to be finalisedⁱⁱ

ⁱ Department of Home Affairs (2021) Detention and Community Statistics Summary, Table 2, 31 October 2021

ⁱⁱ Department of Home Affairs (2022) IMA Legacy Caseload Report on Processing Status and Outcomes, Table 4, March 2022