

## Community Processing FACT SHEET

### The alternative to the inhumanity of mandatory detention

After initial health and security checks asylum seekers should be processed in the community with access to a safety net.

1. **It works – we’re doing it now!**
2. **It will save billions of dollars.**
3. **It will save people from suffering and self harm.**

**The detention system is broken.** There are currently **5,597** people in immigration detention, of which over 880 are children and **36.3%** of people have been detained for **12 months or more**<sup>1</sup>.

#### Community processing works – we’re doing it now!

- The majority of people seeking asylum in Australia are processed in the community. In the first six months of 2011, 1,500 people were moved from detention centres to be processed in the community and the world did not end.
- Asylum seekers living in the community are supported by friends, family, colleagues, church groups and not for profits such as the ASRC.
- Appropriate management in the community has been found to be more likely to uphold human rights and support wellbeing, improving ability to contribute fully to society<sup>2</sup>.
- No asylum seekers who have arrived by boat have been found to be terrorists so after initial security and health checks, community processing is **low risk**.

#### Community processing is cost effective – we’ll save money.

- Placing people in community is **90% cheaper** than in immigration detention.
- Community Processing = \$11,248. Detention = \$137,317 per person, per year<sup>3</sup>.

#### Community processing is more humane – and we meet our refugee convention commitments

- The **High Court** recently decided that it is illegal to send people to Malaysia as it breaches our international obligations under the refugee convention which Australia is a signatory.
- It is in line with the **Australian Government’s** own Detention Values<sup>4</sup>.
- The **Commonwealth Ombudsman** has criticised the federal government's immigration detention system for failing its own policy goals<sup>5</sup>.
- **DIAC Secretary** Andrew Metcalf is urging a more flexible approach, highlighting the successes of community detention and asked for alternatives to be considered by the Government<sup>6</sup>.
- **Professor Louise Newman** says there is an epidemic of high levels of psychological distress in detention centres. People should be in community housing with adequate levels of support as there is good evidence that people remain settled in the community<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/facilities/statistics/>

<sup>2</sup> International Detention Coalition report – [www.idcoalition.org](http://www.idcoalition.org)

<sup>3</sup> The Red Cross estimates it costs them \$11,248 per year per person<sup>3</sup> for community based asylum seekers. This is in comparison to the cost of \$137,3173 per year per person in immigration detention

<sup>4</sup> DIAC website - <http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/about/key-values.htm> - which state that 'detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time'

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/national/asylum-misery-exposed-by-stats-20110816-1iwk3.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-09-19/newcastle-professor-calls-for-end-to-mandatory-detention/2906016>

## So why does the Government detain people?

With so many logical and proven reasons to process asylum seekers in the community, why are the Government and the Opposition pushing for detention centres. It is based on two flawed arguments -

### Deterrence

There is no proven link between domestic policy and the number of boat arrivals.

- For example, mandatory detention was introduced in 1992 and boat arrivals increased in 1994. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, asylum flows decreased (2002) – correlating to the fact that many believed Afghanistan was safer to return to.
- Evidence of TPVs (resulted in increase in people arriving by boat - In 1999, before TPVs - less than 1000 'unauthorised arrivals' applied for asylum, the year TPVs were introduced. In 2001, when the policy was in full force, the arrivals rose to more than 4000<sup>8</sup>.
- DIAC Secretary Andrew Metcalfe even asked: "Is immigration detention a deterrent?" It has been in place since 1992 and did not stop almost equal waves of boat arrivals in 1999-2001 and 2009-11. He would like community programs expanded as a less costly, more efficient and humane policy<sup>9</sup>.

### People smuggling is not the problem 5,597 people in detention is a problem.

The real problems are part of a bigger, more complex picture made up of factors such as:

- The lack of genuine resettlement options for refugees from Malaysia and Indonesia. Between 2001 and 2009, Australia only resettled 452 people from Indonesia.
- The lack of genuine alternatives for people to seek asylum. The only way some people can seek protection from persecution is by paying people for passage to a safe place, like Australia.
- Australia's low humanitarian intake – we currently take 13,750 asylum seekers, placing us 51st in the world for per capita for taking asylum seekers. The UNHCR is recommending Australia takes at least 20,000 per year.
- The myth of a queue – there is no queue to join.
- Why people leave – looking at push factors and what is happening to cause people to flee.
- The lack of a regional human rights framework.

### We do not have an asylum seeker problem.

- Australia is not being flooded by asylum seekers. The proportion of asylum seekers to the Australian population is .02%. Asylum seekers made up less than 2 per cent of our total immigration intake in 2010. There is no crisis.
- Australia is placed 51st in the world ranking (by the UNHCR) of taking asylum seekers per capita.
- In the past 30 years, we have had 25,000 people seeking asylum arriving via boat.

## What you can do - ACT NOW to make it happen

[www.asrc.org.au](http://www.asrc.org.au)

- Up to date information
- Supporter newsletter
- Chance to donate
- Follow us on twitter @asrc1

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<sup>8</sup> ASRC TPV fact sheet - <http://www.asrc.org.au/media/documents/q-temporary-protection-visas.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/editorial/politics-of-detention-defy-all-reason-20110817-1iy5a.html>