



ASYLUM SEEKER FACT SHEET AND MYTHBUSTER 2010

25 KEY FACTS TO HELP STOP THE FREEZE ON HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

MYTH 1: We no longer have children in detention.

FACT 1:

- The Federal Government has broken one of its key 2007 election promises as there are still children in detention.
- As of the 22nd July 2010, there are 651 children in immigration detention¹.

MYTH 2: We no longer have many asylum seekers in detention centres, now that there is a Federal ALP Government.

FACT 2:

- Australia has as many people in detention now as we did under the Howard Government.
- As of the 25th of June 2010, Australia had 4,116 people in detention²

MYTH 3: It makes good financial sense to keep Christmas Island open to process asylum seekers.

FACT 3:

- The Gillard Government has committed to spending \$973.6 million dollars on Christmas Island for the next 5 years.
- That same amount of money would fund the entire budget of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre for the next 540 years.

MYTH 4: The Gillard Government invests an equal amount of money in caring for asylum seekers in the community as it does to keep asylum seekers in detention.

FACT 4:

- For every \$1 the Gillard Government gives the Red Cross to care for community based asylum seekers, it will spend \$30.41 dollars to keep asylum seekers in detention centres over the next 4 years.
- That's \$1.441 billion dollars on detention compared to \$47.4 million dollars to the Red Cross Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme

MYTH 5: Australia is being flooded by asylum seekers coming by boat and has lost control of its borders.

FACT 5:

- In the last 34 years (from 1st January 1976 to 19th May 2010) we have had a total of 23,540 people come by boat to Australia seeking asylum. That's an overall average of 692 asylum seekers a year³.
- At this rate it would take 145 years to fill the MCG once with asylum seekers coming by boat.

MYTH 6: Australia is one of the most generous countries in the world when it comes to the number of refugees we accept into our country.

FACT 6:

- According to the UNHCR there were some 43.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2009. This includes 15.2 million refugees, 983,4200 asylum-seekers (pending cases) and 26 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- When we look globally here is how we sit in comparison to the top 10 refugee receiving countries in the world:⁴

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF REFUGEES HOSTED 2009
Pakistan	1,740,711
Iran	1,070,488
Syria	1,054,466

¹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), Immigration figures

² DIAC, <http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/facilities/statistics/>

³ Parliamentary Library, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/bn/sp/BoatArrivals.htm>

⁴ UNHCR (2009) Global Trends, <http://www.unhcr.org/4c11f0be9.html>

Germany	593,799
Jordan	450,756
Kenya	358,928
Chad	338,495
China	300,989
Vietnam	339,300
Eritrea	209,200
Australia ⁵	22 548

MYTH 7: The freezing of the processing of Afghan asylum seeker cases is lawful.

FACT 7:

- The suspension policy involves discrimination on the basis of country of origin and nationality. Accordingly, the policy infringes the principle of non – discrimination contained in Article 3 of the Refugee Convention, as well as other instruments such as Article 26 of the ICCPR and Article 2 of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination.
- Furthermore, the prolonged detention of persons for the duration of the suspension of processing of their refugee claims amounts to arbitrary detention in contravention of Article 9 (1) of the ICCPR.⁶

MYTH 8: Asylum Seekers in the community receive four times the income from Centrelink that Australian Aged Pensioners do.

FACT 8:

- No asylum seekers are eligible for Centrelink payments of any kind⁷
- A small percentage of asylum seekers get access to the Red Cross Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme for a limited period of time. This scheme provides for an income that is 89% of what a person would get if receiving Newstart Allowance.
- Permanent refugees are eligible to receive Centrelink benefits just the same as any Australian permanent resident.

MYTH 9: The majority of asylum seekers come by boat to Australia.

FACT 9:

- In Australia, the vast majority of asylum seekers applying for protection arrive originally by air with a valid visa and then apply for asylum at a later date while living in the community. Estimates vary, but it is likely that between 96 and 99 percent of asylum applicants arrived by air originally.⁸

MYTH 10: Australia takes its fair share of the world refugees and displaced people.

FACT 10:

- This year, we will receive just 0.03% of the world's refugees and displaced people. That is 13,750 of the 43.3 million refugees and displaced people in the world.

MYTH 11: Australia already takes too many refugees.

FACT 11:

- Last year Australia provided just 13,507 places in total for refugee and humanitarian entrants to Australia. This figure includes all people who we receive onshore and offshore by air and sea.⁹ For 2009-10, Australia plans to take 13,750 refugees, an increase of only 243 from last year.¹⁰
- When compared to all permanent arrivals through migration (including temporary residents given permanency), the Refugee and Humanitarian Program is 6.6% of the overall migration program, close to its lowest level in 35 years.¹¹

⁵ UNHCR uses onshore protection numbers over 10 years for industrialised countries. Australia took a total of 13 500 refugees (onshore & offshore) in 2009.

⁶ Human Rights Law Resource Centre, <http://www.hrlrc.org.au/files/Suspension-Policy-Joint-Opinion-20-05-10.pdf>

⁷ DIAC, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/letters/letters09/e091022.htm>

⁸ Parliamentary Library, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/sp/AsylumFacts.htm>

⁹ DIAC Annual Report (2008-09), <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2008-09/pdf/>

¹⁰ DIAC, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/60refugee.htm>

¹¹ Refugee Council of Australia, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/Intake%20Sub%202010-11.pdf>



MYTH 12: Asylum Seekers are placing Australia at risk of an unsustainable population boom.

FACT 12:

- In 2009 the Department of Immigration granted 4,338,427 permanent and temporary visas, refugees and humanitarian entrants made up just 0.31% of all visas granted for the year.¹²

MYTH 13: Australia is being flooded by asylum seekers compared to other Industrialised Countries.

FACT 13:

- In 2009, Australia received 6170 asylum applications, just 1.6% of the 377,160 applications received across 44 industrialised nations.¹³

MYTH 14: We have more people seeking asylum by boat due to the Labor Party being soft on asylum seekers.

FACT 14:

- Most number of asylum seekers to come by boat in a calendar year to Australia¹⁴

YEAR	NUMBER OF PEOPLE	GOVERNMENT
2001	5,516	Howard
1999	3,721	Howard
2000	2,939	Howard
2009	2,750	Rudd

MYTH 15: Australia gets more asylum seekers than other Western Countries.

FACT 15:

- There were 20 industrialised countries who received more asylum seekers than Australia based on a per capita basis in 2009¹⁵.
- Countries that received more asylum seekers than Australia in 2009 included: England (29,800), Germany (27,600), Norway (17,230) Belgium (17,190), Greece (15,930), Austria (15,830), Netherlands (14,910), Switzerland (14,490), Poland (10,590) and Turkey (7,830).

MYTH 16: Australia is experiencing an unprecedented increase in the number of people seeking asylum by boat.

FACT 16:

- 22 Industrialized countries had a bigger % increase in people seeking asylum than Australia during the same period.
- In comparison this is what other countries for example have experienced in 2009 in the same period:

Country	% increase of asylum seekers for 2009 compared to same time in 2007	% increase of asylum seekers for 2009 compared to same time in 2008
Australia	28%	27%
Finland	344%	160%
Norway	234%	51%
Poland	152%	15%
United Kingdom	39%	21%
Austria	32%	41%
Canada	65%	11%
Austria	32%	41%
Germany	46%	12%
Netherlands	134%	23%
Malta	203%	9%

¹² DIAC Annual Report (2008-09), <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/reports/annual/2008-09/pdf/>

¹³ UNCHR (2009) Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, <http://www.unhcr.org/4ba7341a9.html>

¹⁴ Parliamentary Library, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/bn/sp/BoatArrivals.htm>

¹⁵ UNCHR (2009) Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, <http://www.unhcr.org/4ba7341a9.html>



MYTH 17: Australia is being swamped by Refugees from Afghanistan.

FACT 17:

- Australia had only 0.03% of the world's Afghan refugees (940 people out of 2.8 million) in 2009
- Even though there are 2.8 million Afghan refugees globally across 69 asylum countries worldwide, 96% of them were located in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran alone.

MYTH 18: The Gillard Government has ended the Pacific Solution that the Howard Government created.

FACT 18:

- Whilst the Rudd Government closed Nauru and Manus Island, over 4,000 islands remain excised from Australia's migration zone, allowing the Australian Government to avoid its international obligations to asylum seekers who arrive on our shores. The Gillard Government is currently exploring the option of establishing a regional offshore processing solution.

MYTH 19: There is no difference between the ALP and the Liberal Party when it comes to their policies on refugees.

FACT 19:

- Whilst both the ALP and Liberal Party have harsh and unjust policies towards asylum seekers, the Liberal Party has the harsher and inhumane policy as it has as part of its refugee policy these stand alone policies:
 - (a) Turn back boats
 - (b) Re – introduce Temporary Protection Visas and the 45 day rule
 - (c) Process all families and children on Christmas Island that arrive by boat without exception

MYTH 20: We have a more generous refugee and humanitarian program under the Gillard Government than we did under the Howard Government.

FACT 20:

- We take less people as refugees under the Gillard Government than we did under Howard as a percentage of our overall immigration intake. Under the Howard Government refugees made up 7.6% (13,104 visas) of the total immigration program. Under the Gillard Government refugees are 6.6% (13,750 visas) of the total migration program. To put Labor's 6.6%, or 13,750 people, quota in context, it is half the proportionate rate the Howard Government set in 2000-01 - 14.6% (13,733).
- The first two years of the Rudd/Gillard Government has resulted in the refugee share being reduced to 7.3% (13,500) in 2008-09, before rising slightly to 7.5% (13,750) and now dipping again to 6.6% of the overall program.
- The Gillard Government's humanitarian quota is less than half the size in real terms of the benchmark Paul Keating set in his last year in office – 6.6% in 2010-11, compared with 15.3% in 1995-96.

MYTH 21: Asylum seekers are illegal immigrants

FACT 21:

There is no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker. Australia is a signatory to the Refugee Convention of 1951 which means that a person is able to seek asylum in Australia by boat or plane, with documents or undocumented. They are breaking no laws under the Refugee Convention of 1951.

MYTH 22: Asylum seekers don't need to come all the way to Australia, they could stop in another country along the way.

Fact 22:

- There is no queue or processing system for asylum seekers to come from Afghanistan or Iraq.
- There is no requirement under the Refugee Convention for a person to seek refuge in their first country of arrival.
- For asylum seekers who make it to Indonesia from the Middle East, the available countries who are signatories to the Refugee Convention and accept refugees is very limited. Indonesia is not a signatory. From Indonesia to Australia only Cambodia is a signatory.



MYTH 23: We are seeing more people coming by boat because of a softening of our border protection policy.

Fact: 23

Annual figures released 16th of June 2010 by the UN refugee agency show that some 43.3 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2009, the highest number of people uprooted by conflict and persecution since the mid-1990s.¹⁶

Myth 24: Asylum Seekers who come by boat from Indonesia just don't want to wait their turn in the queue

Fact 24:

The Australian Government refuses to accept any asylum seekers assessed as refugees by the UNHCR who have arrived after 2007 in Indonesia.

In the last 3 years the Australian Government has settled each year an average of just 52 refugees from Indonesia in Australia.

The current waiting period in the 'queue' for a refugee in Indonesia (who is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention) seeking settlement in Australia is on average 37 years.

MYTH 25: People seek asylum in Australia to get access to government support and live the good life here. Asylum seekers who can afford to come by boat are economic migrants.

Fact 25:

Asylum Seekers do not leave their country due to choice. People seek asylum because they fear for their safety and life in their home country. They leave by whatever means they can.

No asylum seekers have access to: Centrelink, Health Care Card, Public Housing, Settlement Services, English Programs, Job Services Australia, Traineeships or Tertiary Education. Many also have no right to even work or a Medicare Card.

www.asrc.org.au

¹⁶ UNHCR (2009) Global Trends, <http://www.unhcr.org/4c11f0be9.html>