

Myth: Agreements and co-operation between Australia and their countries of origin to prevent asylum seekers from leaving would stop the flow.

Facts

- It is against the law! The Refugee Convention (1951) obliges signatories not to prevent people from seeking asylum and not to return them to danger.
- It violates human rights. The right to seek asylum is protected by Article 14 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Australia did not co-operate with Saddam Hussein, or Stalin and his successors to prevent asylum seekers from leaving Iraq or the Soviet Union. There are no grounds for changing this practice. Yet Australia signed a memorandum of understanding with the Afghanistan Government to forcibly repatriate those not deemed to be refugees, despite people having been deported to danger in the past.

Myth: Sending boatpeople to other countries will solve Australia's asylum seeker problem.

Facts

- Indonesia and Malaysia have not signed the Refugee Convention and have no legal obligation to resettle refugees.
- Refugees in these countries cannot work or send their children to school
- Only a co-operative global solution under the auspices of the United Nations can solve the problem of displaced persons.

RAC is a democratic activist collective campaigning for justice for all refugees. Find out more about us at: www.rac-vic.org



FACTSHEET

REFUGEE ACTION COLLECTIVE (VIC)

Myth: Asylum seekers are illegal.

Facts

All Asylum Seekers have legal status under International and Australian law. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution". Asylum seekers are protected under the UN Refugee Convention (1951). They have the right to be assessed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), or by countries that have adopted and ratified the Convention. Australia is a Convention country.

Myth: We no longer have children in detention

Facts

- As of January 2011, 1065 children are in detention. This includes 442 unaccompanied minors.

Myth: Australia does more than our share.

Facts

On any way of counting, we are not doing our fair share:

1. The number of claims for asylum made in Australia is miniscule compared to other developed countries (2010 figures).
 - Australia 6,174 (pop 22 million)
 - Sweden 24,194 (pop 9 million)
 - Canada 33,251 (pop 34 million)
2. Australia's current (2010/2011) annual program is to take only 13,750 refugees.
 - This is less than 1/10th of 1% of the total number of refugees.
 - Our population is approx 1/3rd of 1% of the world's.
 - Our GDP is 1.6% of the world's.
 - Our land mass is 5% of the world's.

3. The burden for hosting refugees falls largely on developing countries.

| COUNTRY | Number of refugees hosted (09) |
|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Pakistan | 1,740,711 |
| Iran | 1,070,488 |
| Syria | 1,054,466 |
| Australia | 22,548 |

Myth: Boat people are queue jumpers.

Facts

There is no queue. In war zones there is no real access to UNHCR, embassies, or consular offices. In many cases, it is too dangerous to travel to these offices and refugees can face persecution for wanting to leave. This is the case for Tamils attempting to reach Colombo from the North of the island who face imprisonment and torture.

Myth: The boats are coming because Australia has gone “soft” on boat arrivals.

Facts

- Asylum seekers know nothing of the political debates in Australia.
- Numbers go up and down according to “push factors”: figures released by the UN in 2010 show that there were 43.3 million people forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2009, the highest number since the mid 1990’s.

Myth: Boat arrivals are not genuine refugees.

Facts

- Those who arrive by boat are overwhelmingly genuine refugees. In recent years the acceptance rate of boat arrivals has fluctuated between 85 and 98%.
- 45% of asylum seekers who arrive by air have been accepted as genuine refugees in recent years.
- Paying a people smuggler does not mean you are not a genuine refugee. The \$ 5,000 - \$10,000 paid often represents the entire wealth of an extended family who give this gift to one of its members so that he or she can escape persecution. In any case, the wealthy like anyone else can suffer persecution, violence, discrimination, and torture. History is full of such examples.

Myth: Asylum seekers are economic migrants.

Facts

To be accepted as a refugee, an asylum seeker has to prove persecution in accordance with the Refugee Convention. That is their source of legal status. “Economic migrant” is a category unknown to the law. It is a label used by politicians who want to discredit asylum seekers.

Myth: Refugees will make Australia’s population unsustainable

Facts

In 2009 4,338,427 permanent and temporary visas were granted. Refugees and humanitarian visas made up only 0.31% of this total.

Myth: Asylum seekers without papers can’t be genuine refugees.

Facts

War zones and places of persecution are not conducive to orderly bureaucratic processes. Many refugees flee at short notice. Governments that persecute their victims often refuse to issue papers and passports and sometimes punish those who want to leave. Information in travel documents can be used against refugees or the families they leave behind. In their desperate flight, refugees can easily lose everything, including their papers. No papers can be a mark of the genuine refugee.

Myth: Refugees are a burden, they are not good migrants.

Facts

This is patently untrue. Refugees are people who show initiative, drive and an attitude to give it a go. Often they are leaders of their communities. Like all migrants, they bring their skills, energies and talents to our society and contribute positively to our economy. Why encourage skilled economic migration, yet discourage refugees, many of whom have vital skills?

Myth: There is no alternative to mandatory detention.

Facts

- We already have one! Asylum seekers who arrive by airplane are not detained. Why detain boat arrivals?
- It costs a fortune to discriminate against boat arrivals: The \$973.6 million The Gillard government committed to running Christmas Island for the next 5 years would fund **150 years** of community based care. Here’s a chance to both reduce the deficit and do the right thing.