

Safe Harbour InfoBites



Safe Harbour Australia is a movement bringing people together - through art - to ask our Government to treat all refugees and people seeking asylum with humanity and compassion.

A number of pop-up installations are being held in and around Adelaide from January – May 2019. The installation includes a large boat surrounded by an ever-growing number of small balsa boats and larger corflute boats, painted and decorated by community members from all walks of life.

Everyone is invited to come along, check out the installation and, if they want to, add to it by painting a small boat (all materials supplied).

At the pop-ups, people can also read some InfoBites – snippets of information (we did our best to find solid, reliable and credible sources) about people seeking asylum, refugees and offshore processing of people on Nauru and Manus Island.

The information in the InfoBites is reproduced below. Please feel free to use it and share it with anyone you think may be interested. The information was compiled in January 2019 – please be aware that the statistics quoted are constantly changing.

To stay in touch or find out more

Follow Safe Harbour Australia on Facebook (look for the logo)

Contact Mij Tanith on 0405 086 533, mijtanith@gmail.com



Safe Harbour InfoBites: The basics

A migrant is:

- a human being
- a person who chooses to move to another country, usually for work, education or family reasons.

An asylum seeker is:

- a human being
- a person who is seeking international protection but who hasn't been recognised as a refugee under the *1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees* – their claim for refugee status hasn't been decided yet.

A refugee is:

- a human being
- a person who has made a claim for international protection and has been recognised as a refugee under the *1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees*.

Under the Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who is outside the country of their nationality and has good reason to fear being persecuted in their own country because of their race, religion, nationality, or for being a member of a particular social group, or because they hold a particular political opinion.

Why do people try to come to Australia without permission (a visa)?

In many cases, they are being persecuted by their government. This makes it dangerous for them to apply for passports or approach our Government for a visa.

Some people are stateless, and do not have the right to apply for a visa.

They may need to flee quickly because of the dangers they face, so they may not have time to get their documents and apply for visas.

Australia has strict visa conditions which can make it very difficult for many refugees to come here by applying for a visa.

*Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au



What is Operation Sovereign Borders?*

- It is our Government's border-protection policy, introduced to 'protect Australia's borders, combat people smuggling in our region, and prevent people from risking their lives at sea'.

Under this policy:

- anyone attempting to reach Australia by boat (not including people on cruise ships or other boats who have valid visas) is turned back at sea or sent to an offshore processing centre
- vessels patrol Australia's territorial waters and intercept boats carrying people seeking asylum. We either return boats to just outside the territorial seas of their last country of departure or transfer people directly to the territory of another government.

* *Operation Sovereign Borders*, Department of Home Affairs, www.osb.homeaffairs.gov.au; and *Australia's refugee policy: An overview*, Factsheet, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated October 2018

What is Australia's offshore processing policy?*

- Since 2012, more than 3,000 people seeking asylum arriving in Australia by boat have been sent by our Government to regional processing centres on Nauru (women, children and families) or Manus Island (men unaccompanied by family) to have their claim for refugee status assessed.
- Our Government holds that that no-one arriving in this way will be settled in Australia, regardless of whether they are recognised as a refugee under the *Refugee Convention* and regardless of any family or other ties here.
- No new people seeking asylum have been transferred to Nauru or PNG since 2014. Instead, people seeking asylum trying to reach Australia by boat since then have been turned back at sea or otherwise returned to their countries of origin.

* *Frequently asked questions about refugees, Australia's refugee policy: An overview; and Who is legally responsible...?*, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated October 2018

What is involved in 'turning back the boats'?*

- Our Government's policy is to turn back boats where it is safe to do so. Very little information is publicly provided about the conduct of these operations.
- As at September 2018, 33 vessels have been intercepted under this policy, with 827 people returned to their country of departure or origin.
- Australia does not monitor what happens to people it returns under the policy.

* *Who is legally responsible for offshore processing on Manus and Nauru?*, Factsheet, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated October 2018.



Nauru:^{*}

- sits just below the equator and is a raised, fossilised coral atoll in the Pacific Ocean
- is the world's smallest island nation – just 21 sq km
- has a population of about 10,000 people, most of whom live along the coast, making them highly vulnerable to climate change, sea-level rise and natural disasters
- faces serious food and water insecurity and is dependent on foreign imports
- relies heavily on revenue associated with the offshore processing arrangements in place with our Government.

**Refugee status determination in Nauru, Research Brief, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated August 2018*

Nauru for people seeking asylum:^{*}

- Our Government made an agreement with the Nauruan Government in 2012 for that country to 'process' people seeking asylum who arrived in Australia by boat without a valid visa.
- Until 2015, people waiting for an outcome on their claims for refugee status were detained at the Nauru regional processing centre.
- In 2015, the regional processing centre on Nauru was given 'open centre' status, lifting restrictions on freedom of movement. Due to a lack of housing, however, people who have been recognised as refugees remain in the centre.

**Refugee status determination in Nauru, Research Brief, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated August 2018*

Manus Island:^{*}

- is an island in Papua New Guinea (PNG), a Pacific nation with a population of around 7.3 million people, located north of Australia across the Torres Strait from Queensland's Cape York Peninsula
- is the largest island in Manus Province – the smallest and least populated of PNG's 22 provinces. The province is situated about 800 km from PNG's capital, Port Moresby
- is commonly referred to as the site of the former regional processing centre (the centre was actually situated on Lombrum naval base on an immediately adjoining island)
- has as its capital the town of Lorengau.

**Refugee status determination on Manus Island, Research Brief, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated August 2018*

Manus Island for people seeking asylum:^{*}

- Our Government made an agreement with the PNG Government in 2012 for that country to detain and 'process' people seeking asylum who arrived in Australia by boat without a valid visa.
- In 2016, PNG's Supreme Court ruled that the forced transfer and detention of people seeking asylum on Manus Island was unconstitutional.
- In late 2017, our Government withdrew all services from the processing centre and 'closed' the centre. 'Transit' accommodation was made available in Lorengau.

**Refugee status determination on Manus Island, Research Brief, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated August 2018*



How many people are we talking about, and where are they?*

Our Government reports on how many people are in the offshore processing centres but does not report regularly on people now living outside those centres. As at 21 October 2018:

- there were 652 people left on Nauru and 626 left in PNG.
- There were 495 recognised refugees left in PNG, and 541 recognised refugees on Nauru.
- There were 107 families on Nauru, including 52 families with minors.

During the final months of 2018, our Government has been bringing children from Nauru to Australia for medical treatment but says they will not be allowed to stay.

*Operation Sovereign Borders and offshore processing statistics, Refugee Council of Australia website at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/statistics; media reports of ministerial statements, November 2018

Is our Government responsible for what happens to people it has sent to Nauru and Manus Island?*

- Australia can't impose its own laws or exercise government functions without the permission of the Nauruan and PNG governments.
- Australia does have obligations towards people it has sent to those countries, under both Australian law and international human rights law.
- Both Australia AND each offshore processing country is responsible for various aspects of the care and treatment of these people and, in some cases, this responsibility may overlap.

*Who is legally responsible for offshore processing on Manus and Nauru?, Factsheet, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, last updated October 2018.

How much does it cost to detain a person seeking asylum?*

The exact financial cost of Australia's asylum seeker policy can be very difficult to establish. This is because expenditure ranges across a number of government programs and portfolios.

In 2014, the National Commission of Audit reported that it costs:

- \$400,000 a year to hold a person seeking asylum in offshore detention
- \$239,000 to hold a person in detention in Australia
- less than \$100,000 for a person to live in community detention
- around \$40,000 for a person to live in the community on a bridging visa while their claim is processed.

*The cost of Australia's refugee and asylum policy, Factsheet, UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, October 2018.



What about people who have been transferred here?*

- Around 460 people are in Australia from Nauru or PNG for medical treatment, other protection reasons, or accompanying a family member.
- Most are in community detention, living in specified residences, subject to curfews. They (were) provided a basic living allowance and other critical supports including health care and access to torture and trauma counselling.
- In 2017 and 2018, our Government removed these supports from many people so that, as at 21 May 2018, there were 149 people transferred from Nauru or Manus Island who were living in the community without any access to income or casework support, nor access to subsidised medication.

**Until when? The forgotten men on Manus Island, Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International Australia, November 2018*

What is the “US Deal”?*

- In September 2016, the US agreed to consider the resettlement of up to 1,250 refugees from Nauru and Manus.
- As of 22 October 2018, 276 refugees from Nauru had left for the US and 148 had had their applications turned down.

**Senate Estimates Committee, as referenced in *Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*

What is the “New Zealand offer”?*

- Since 2013, on a number of occasions, New Zealand has offered to resettle 150 people seeking asylum from Nauru and Manus Island.
- Our Government has consistently refused the offer, saying that it would be unacceptable to resettle anyone in New Zealand unless Parliament passed legislation imposing a blanket ban on anyone subject to offshore processing from entering Australia on any kind of visa.

**Until when? The forgotten men on Manus Island, Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International Australia, November 2018*



Safe Harbour InfoBites: Busting some myths

Myth: People who try to come to Australia by boat to seek asylum are doing something illegal.

Busting the myth: People who seek asylum by boat are not breaking the law. They can come without first getting permission (a visa). Indeed, in most countries, this is the normal way of claiming refugee status.

Article 31 of the *Refugee Convention* clearly states that refugees should not be penalized for entering without valid travel documents. This is because people seeking asylum will often find it very difficult or even impossible to get a visa.

*Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Myth: Refugees don't contribute to Australian society.

Busting the myth: People who have come here as refugees:

- are more likely to set up businesses and play an important role in developing trade and other links with their countries of origin
- value the education of their children very highly – more young refugees study than other migrants and people born in Australia
- contribute to civic and community life through volunteering and engaging in neighbourhood activities and events.

By definition, refugees are survivors. They have survived because of their courage, ingenuity and creativity. These are qualities which we value in Australia.

*Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Myth: People seeking asylum who arrive by boat are a security threat.

Busting the myth: People seeking asylum go through strict processes before they are allowed to stay in Australia. They are detained when they first come. They must pass identity, health and security checks before they can be released into the community.

If they are found to be refugees, they must pass more security, health and character checks before they get to stay.

If a person has committed war crimes, crimes against peace, crimes against humanity or other serious non-political crimes, they cannot be refugees under the definition in the *Refugee Convention*.

*Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au



Myth: People seeking asylum are ‘jumping the queue’ and taking the place of people who have registered with the UN’s refugee agency (UNHCR) or those who are waiting in refugee camps.

Busting the myth: There is no queue.

A queue implies that resettlement is an orderly process and that, by waiting for a period of time, a person will reach the front of the queue. The UN resettlement system prioritises people according to considered needs, rather than waiting time.

Resettlement is offered only by a few countries. There are very few places for resettlement. Less than 1% of the world’s refugees are resettled every year.

**Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au*

Myth: Tough border protection policies will save lives and stop people smugglers.

Busting the myth: Nobody wants to see people seeking asylum risking their lives to reach Australia. Nobody seeking asylum wants to risk their lives either, but they do it because it is better than going back to persecution.

If we turn people back or punish them by sending them overseas to be detained, this does not save people but condemns them to more suffering. It is like stopping someone from being electrocuted by strangling them instead.

**Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au*

Myth: Just stop the boats. That’s what we must do to protect our borders, save people from drowning, and stop people smuggling.

Busting the myth: The truth is that there are no easy answers.

We can and should help countries to become more stable and peaceful, and to stop oppressing people. We can and should help countries treat refugees better while they are living there, so that they don’t feel like they have to leave. We can and should change our border policies so that it is easier for people to reach Australia safely.

In the end, seeking asylum is something people do when they have run out of choices. We should not condemn them for it, nor pretend we are saving them by punishing them more.

**Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au*



Myth: We should be helping disadvantaged Australians first.

Busting the myth: Many organisations and people help both disadvantaged Australians and people seeking asylum, because they respond to need, not to nationality.

There are many problems in our society, but it would be wrong to think we can only address one problem at a time. Even if we could, having more resources wouldn't solve problems such as poverty and homelessness. Addressing these requires more than just resources, but changes to the way our society works.

**Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au*

Myth: Genuine refugees don't pay people smugglers thousands of dollars.

Busting the myth: A person does not have to be poor to be a refugee. A refugee is someone who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. It makes no difference whether a refugee is rich or poor.

For many people, paying someone to get out of a country is the price that must be paid for safety. Tough border policies make it difficult for refugees to leave countries safely. Many families get into debt so that they can send a loved one to safety.

**Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au*

Myth: People who seek protection in Australia could have stopped in other safe countries.

Busting the myth: People often need to travel through a number of countries to find safety. Many countries do not protect refugees. For example, in the Asia Pacific region, refugees generally do not have a legal right to stay, work or access basic services. They often face violence, exploitation and abuse. They may be detained or returned to their country of origin.

The conditions in these countries mean that they have not found what is called in international law 'effective protection'.

People who come to Australia by boat have generally not found this effective protection.

**Refugee Council of Australia at www.refugeecouncil.org.au*



Safe Harbour InfoBites: Experiences of people seeking asylum

Two sisters came on the same boat. On Christmas Island they were separated.

One sister, her husband and child went to Nauru. The other sister, her husband and child stayed in Australia and were settled with another sister who had come previously. The family are recognised refugees.

The child sent to Nauru became ill and was diagnosed with a treatable orthopaedic condition. It could not be treated on Nauru. She was denied treatment in Australia. Her mother became pregnant and was recommended for transfer due to pregnancy complications. This was refused. The family were taken to PNG where the mother became increasingly ill. The baby nearly died. Mother and baby were transferred to Australia, but the father and other child were left in PNG. After intense lobbying, the father and other child were transferred to Australia.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com

A young man arrived on Christmas Island, with his sister, cousin and brother-in-law. All are recognised refugees.

They were all sent to Nauru but after a time, the sister and brother-in law were transferred to Australia, leaving behind the two young men who had never been separated.

One of the men became very ill and was transferred, leaving the other alone.

The young man remaining on Nauru became so sick he could not eat or drink and remains in Nauru with an undiagnosed condition.

He has lost 29 kilos.

The Australian Border Force refuses to transfer him to Australia.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com

A Rohingya man was separated from his family.

The man's wife and five children, who travelled ahead of him in a different boat, are in Melbourne.

On arriving on Christmas Island, despite telling authorities that his family was in Australia, he was sent to Manus Island, where he has been for 5 years.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com



A young man, a recognised refugee, arrived at Christmas Island with his brother.

His brother was settled in Australia and he was sent to Manus Island.

During the 2014 attack on the Lombrum camp, he received a severe blow to the back of his head, resulting in detached retinas.

The treatment for this injury is not available in PNG.

The Australian Border Force continues to refuse him treatment in Australia.

As a result, he is now almost blind.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com

It is standard practice for the Australian Border Force to separate families requiring health care in Australia.

Women who require safe obstetric care arrive in Australia with no-one - their husbands are left behind.

The women and children remain in Australia and the fathers are in Nauru.

One father has been asked to relinquish his custody of the child as a trade-off for being given permission to apply to go to America.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com

A young man who is a recognised refugee arrived at Christmas Island and declared his need for asylum on the basis that he had worked in intelligence in his home country.

He had previously been saved from hanging in his own country by a representative of the UNHCR.

He was transported to Manus Island where he languished for three years until he became so ill the Australian Border Force had to transfer him.

He remains in detention in Australia.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com



A man of short stature, less than a metre tall, has been in detention in PNG for almost 5 years.

This man is a recognised refugee.

He experiences severe health issues, including dental disease and deteriorating eye health.

He cannot live a normal life without disability support not available in PNG.

His case has been highlighted in several UNHCR reports and there have been deputations to Members of Parliament.

His health declines almost daily.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com

A young man, a child when taken to Manus Island, is now cared for by the church community in PNG.

He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and is seriously mentally ill, but there is no appropriate treatment in PNG.

He is supported by an Australian woman to ensure that he has food, clothing and enough money for general living expenses without being a cost to the poor church community that cares for him.

He is a talented cook but has no opportunity to receive further education in PNG, as he is not a PNG national.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com

A young man received a serious head injury from a machete attack.

The Australian Border Force agreed to his transfer because he was at risk of dying.

He remains in Australia by court order.

He has permanent brain damage.

Because he arrived by boat and is in detention, he is not eligible to access the head injury services available to everyone else. He therefore relies on others to protect him from poor decision-making and accidents during his daily tasks.

*www.australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com



Safe Harbour InfoBites: In their words

Kazem (an Iranian refugee who has been held on Nauru for more than five years) said:

“The main thing that has caused us to suffer, too much, is about the future.

We were recognised as refugees in 2014 but we still don’t know about our future.

We applied to be settled in the US, and we recently got the negative results.

That decision affected us so, so much. I still don’t know how long it will take to get out of here.

This is really hard.”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*

Dr Beth O’Connor (an MSF psychiatrist who worked on Nauru) said :

“In a small community that has spent five years together, events have a wide impact.

In June, there was the suspected suicide of a young asylum seeker. He was a talented soccer player, well known and respected, so his death was felt deeply by many.

This event contributed to further despair, and the community struggled to find the resources to support each other.

There was a similar effect in family units: when one person was sick, we would see the whole family collapse.”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*

Farhad (a former patient of MSF) said:

“If I was in my home country, the government wants to kill me straight away.

I tried to come to Australia and the government kills me a little by little, step by step.

They tormented me a lot over five years on Nauru because I have no future in my life.”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*



Kazem (an Iranian refugee who has been held on Nauru for more than five years) said:

“After a while we found out that there is no difference between the tent and the community, because you’re just transferred from a small prison to the big prison that’s surrounded by ocean.”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*

Imran Mohammad (a Rohingya refugee once in PNG, now living in Chicago) said :

“It feels like it is Australia’s ultimate goal to put every vulnerable refugee and asylum seeker into an inescapable corner.

We have now lost seven lives from the hell of Manus and five from Nauru.

All were full of life.

I don’t know how many more lives they want in the name of this policy.”

**Until when? The forgotten men on Manus Island, Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International Australia, November 2018*

Dr Beth O’Connor (an MSF psychiatrist who worked on Nauru) said :

“Patients spoke about the injustice of their situation.

Most people have been recognised as refugees, yet while they have been told there are processes to resettlement, the criteria are unclear.

People try to learn the ‘rules’ of the system, but the rules keep changing.

They realise it is impossible to help themselves.”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*

Behrouz Boochani (a Kurdish-Iranian journalist on Manus Island) has documented the growing mental health crisis, reporting on:

- an Iraqi man who, in August 2018 tried to set himself on fire, after refusing to eat and isolating himself to his room
- a man who tried to hang himself in September 2018, but was cut down by refugees getting up to have breakfast
- a young man, sent to Manus Island when he was 19, attempted to kill himself in September 2018
- an Iraqi man who swallowed razor blades and nail clippers and continued to self-harm after being transferred to hospital.

**Until when? The forgotten men on Manus Island, Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International Australia, November 2018*



Suresh Sundram and Peter Ventevogel (medical experts for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said :

“The lengthy, arbitrary, and indefinite nature of immigration detention on Manus Island, together with hopelessness in the absence of durable settlement options, had corroded the resilience of the detainees, and made them vulnerable to mental illness.”

**Until when? The forgotten men on Manus Island, Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International Australia, November 2018*

Dr Robyn Osrow (an MSF psychiatrist who worked on Nauru) said:

“The impossibility of treating people in this situation became clearer to me each day I was on Nauru.

It was the situation that needed treatment and that needed to be changed, not the person.

In my medical opinion, even the world’s best medications and most expert psychotherapy can, at this point, only have very limited effect while asylum seekers and refugee remain on Nauru.

The only thing that will significantly improve their mental health condition is to leave the island and be brought to a safe and stable living situation.”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*

Dr Nick Martin (a senior doctor who worked on Nauru with International Health & Medical Services) said :

“Australia is diminished, this diminishes us all. There are people still in those places, still, after six years.

I know there are issues around migration around the world, I understand that, but the Australian solution is not a solution at all.”

In January 2019, Dr Martin was awarded the Blueprint International Whistleblowing Prize for his role in exposing grossly inadequate conditions and lack of medical care for refugees incarcerated by the Australian Government on Nauru

**Article in The Guardian newspaper, website at www.theguardian.com, 17 January 2019.*



Dr Patricia Schmid (an MSF psychiatrist who worked on Nauru) said:

“The issue of ‘indefiniteness’ – that there is no timeframe for the detention process – has a strong impact on my patients’ mental health.

They tell me that even prisoners have a sentence – they know when they will be released, they can plan their lives.

My patients don’t have that.

So they fear for the future, they are completely hopeless.”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*

Dr Vernon Reynolds (a child psychiatrist who worked on Nauru) said:

“I treated severely unwell children that I repeatedly recommended for transfer to a specialist hospital.

Instead, they were left for months to deteriorate further.

Such neglect cannot be justified and is morally and ethically wrong.”

**Australia’s man-made crisis on Nauru: Six years on, Refugee Council of Australia and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, September 2018*

Dr Christine Rufener (an MSF clinical psychologist who worked on Nauru) said:

“One of the most distressing outcomes of this policy of indefinite trapping of refugees on Nauru is that of family separation.

Our mental health team has worked with multiple fathers who have been separated from their wives and children for months or for years.

Fathers told us: ‘I wasn’t there to support my wife during her pregnancy or childbirth; I wasn’t there when my baby took his first breath.’”

**Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018*



Safe Harbour Australia

Stay in touch on Facebook, contact Mij Tanith on 0405 086 533, mijtanith@gmail.com

Dr Nick Martin (a senior doctor who worked on Nauru with International Health & Medical Services) said :

“I had to look at myself in the mirror – ‘You knew this was happening and you didn’t say anything’. And I couldn’t do that.”

In January 2019, Dr Martin was awarded the Blueprint International Whistleblowing Prize for his role in exposing grossly inadequate conditions and lack of medical care for refugees incarcerated by the Australian Government on Nauru

* Video interview on Blueprint for Free Speech Twitter account at twitter.com/BPFreeSpeech.



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Safe Harbour InfoBites: Deaths on Nauru and Manus Island

Twelve (12) people who were sent to Nauru or Manus Island by our Government have died since 2014.

The details below are from the Australian Border Deaths database at Monash University, www.arts.monash.edu/social-sciences/border-crossing-observatory/australian-border-deaths-database

The photos are from The Guardian, www.theguardian.com/australia-news/ng-interactive/2018/jun/20/deaths-in-offshore-detention-the-faces-of-the-people-who-have-died-in-australias-care



Reza Barati was 24 years old when he died in February 2014.

Reza died of head injuries following protests at the Manus Island detention centre. Violence resulted in the injury of 77 others, 12 seriously. Two security guards were later convicted of Reza's murder.

The riot prompted a Senate inquiry which concluded that our Government failed in its duty to protect asylum seekers, including Reza, from harm.



Photo not available

Sayed Ibrahim Hussein died in June 2014.

Sayed drowned after being caught in a rip while swimming in the Galab Channel on Nauru. A Nauruan man also drowned following an attempt to save him.



Hamid Kehazaei was 24 years old when he died in September 2014.

Hamid was on Manus Island and developed septicaemia from a cut on his foot.

He was finally airlifted to a Brisbane hospital where he became gravely ill and was placed on life support. He was declared brain dead and the decision was made to turn off his life support.



Omid Masoumali was 23 years old when he died in April 2016.

Omid set himself on fire during a UN monitoring visit on Nauru. The administering of painkillers was delayed. He suffered a cardiac arrest in hospital.

His wife believes the delay in his transfer to a Brisbane hospital (22 hours) may have contributed to his death.



Rakib Khan was 26 years old when he died in May 2016.

Rakib checked himself into hospital on Nauru following a suspected suicide attempt, reportedly from a pharmaceutical drug overdose. He suffered heart failure and died.



Kamil Hussain was 34 years old when he died in August 2016.

Kamil drowned while swimming at a waterfall on Manus Island during a day trip from the detention centre.



Faysal Ishak Ahmed was 27 years old when he died in December 2016.

Faysal died in a Brisbane hospital after being transferred from Manus Island after receiving head injuries following a fall and a seizure within the detention centre.

He had been unwell for some months in the lead-up to his death.



Hamed Shamshiripour was 31 years old when he died in August 2017.

Hamed was found dead in the forest near a refugee transit centre on Manus Island. PNG police said that the cause of his death was suicide; his family want an inquest to determine the cause of death.

Hamed was known to have suffered from acute and worsening mental health.



Rajeev Rajendran was 32 years old when he died in October 2017.

In a suspected suicide, Rajeev's body was found on the grounds of the Lorengau hospital on Manus Island.



Jahingir was 29 years old when he died in November 2017.

Jahingir died after the motorbike he was travelling on collided with another vehicle. Reports from sources reveal the man was run down on his motorbike on Nauru by a carload of Nauruans.

It was understood that there were no witnesses to the incident.



Salim was 52 years old when he died in May 2018.

Salim jumped from a moving vehicle on Manus Island. He suffered serious head injuries and died at the scene.

Salim had been on Manus Island for five years and had a long history of mental illness.



Safe Harbour Australia

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Fariborz Karami was 26 years old when he died in June 2018.

Fariborz killed himself in RPC3 camp within the Australian-run regional processing centre on Nauru after suffering from years of deteriorating mental health.

He had been held on Nauru for five years.



Safe Harbour InfoBites: Who cares and why?

Why is UNHCR (the UN's Refugee Agency) concerned about offshore processing?*

- Since 2016, UNHCR has consistently and repeatedly warned our Government that circumstances and conditions for refugees and people seeking asylum under our offshore processing policy have had severely negative impacts on health, particularly on mental health.
- In September 2018, more people had to be medically evacuated from Nauru to Australia than in the preceding two years combined, reflecting both the longstanding poor healthcare situation under offshore processing and a recent worsening of conditions.
- In October 2018, UNHCR renewed its call for refugees and people seeking asylum to be moved immediately to Australia, where they can receive adequate support and care.

*UN Briefing Notes: UNHCR urges Australia to evacuate off-shore facilities, 12 October 2018, at www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/10/5bc059d24/unhcr-urges-australia-evacuate-off-shore-facilities-health-situation-deteriorates

Why is the Refugee Council of Australia concerned about offshore processing?*

- It seeks to punish rather than protect those in need.
- It seeks to transfer Australia's responsibility to protect these people to poorer, less well-equipped countries.
- It has led to prolonged and indefinite detention and enormous human suffering.
- The conditions of detention are inhumane, with grossly inadequate health care and inhumane treatment.
- The system exposes highly vulnerable people to further harm, with consistent reports of sexual, physical and psychological abuse.
- It undermines democratic principles of transparency, accountability and the separation of powers.
- It is extraordinarily expensive.

*Australia's offshore processing regime, Refugee Council of Australia website, <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/seekingsafety/asylum/offshore-processing/briefing/>

Why is Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) concerned about offshore processing?*

- As a consequence of our Government's offshore processing policy, many men, women and children have now spent more than five years on Nauru, with catastrophic effects on their mental health.
- In an 11-month period to October 2018, close to one-third of MSF's refugee and people-seeking-asylum patients attempted suicide, while 12 patients were diagnosed with the rare psychiatric condition of 'resignation syndrome'.
- The mental health suffering on Nauru is among the worst MSF has ever seen, including in projects providing care for victims of torture.

*Indefinite despair: the tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, MSF mental health project, Nauru, December 2018



Why is the Australian Medical Association (AMA) concerned about offshore processing?*

In December 2018, the AMA President said:

- It is vital that all asylum seekers and refugees in the care of the Australian Government have access to quality care.
- There is compelling evidence that asylum seekers on Nauru, especially the children, are suffering from serious physical and mental health conditions, and they should be brought to Australia for appropriate quality care.
- This is a health and human rights issue of the highest order. We must do the right thing.

**AMA supports Phelps Bill to protect the health of asylum seekers, Media Release, 6 December 2018, at www.ama.com.au/media/ama-supports-phelps-bill-protect-health-asylum-seekers*

Why is Amnesty International concerned about offshore processing?*

In November 2018, the National Director of Amnesty International Australia said:

- The worsening health and safety crisis on Manus Island demonstrates that Australia's offshore processing system has failed. Three people have already committed suicide, driven to despair by years in an open-air prison, and in the last two months at least five others have attempted to end their lives, including one many who swallowed razor blades and nail clippers.
- Following public pressure, the Australian government has brought some child refugees from offshore detention in Nauru to Australia for medical treatment, but the situation for the men on Manus Island is just as acute.

**Manus Island: Australian and PNG leaders must act urgently to save lives, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org.au/manus-island-australian-and-png-leaders-must-act-urgently-to-save-lives>; and *Until When? The forgotten men on Manus Island*, Amnesty International and RCA 2018*

We care: The Australian arts community*

More than 700 members of the Australian arts community signed an open letter to our Government and the Opposition. In part, the letter said:

- We believe, along with the majority of Australians, that the people held in the offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus need to be brought to safety. They have suffered enough.
- Together we send this message to Parliament, to you who represent us: Please put aside parties and politics. Please, listen to your conscience. After five years of indefinite detention, we must bring these human beings to safety and ensure they receive the medical treatment they need.
- We know that no matter who we are or what we do, we can and must use our voice to speak out.
- Australia is better than this.

**#BlueForManusAndNauru at www.blueformanusandnauru.org.au*



We care: Academics for Refugees*

More than 3,000 academics and researchers from across Australia are members of this network. In October 2018, the group wrote that:

- Our key demand is that the Australian government urgently ends the horrors and harms of offshore detention.
- Our message as researchers, academics and members of the education sectors is that Australia must end its harmful policies of offshore processing, boat turn-backs and the mandatory detention of people seeking asylum. These policies have failed and cannot be maintained.
- They have created a serious humanitarian crisis on Manus Island, Nauru and in Australia, and caused prolonged suffering for individuals seeking asylum.
- The situation is also harming asylum seekers in Australia who have been denied access to work and welfare, and are subject to a policy of 'deportation by destitution'.

* www.academicsforrefugees.wordpress.com

We care: Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR)*

RAR is a grassroots movement for compassionate treatment of Australia's asylum seekers, with groups in every State and Territory. It calls for Australia to regain its moral credibility, saying (in part) that we can start doing this by:

- recognising people arriving in Australia by using people smugglers are human beings who need help
- ending offshore detention. Resettling in Australia those found to be refugees.

Groups within the movement organise and publicise vigils and other activities to raise awareness about refugees and people seeking asylum.

In South Australia, there is an active group called *Compassion and Justice for Refugees – Upper Spencer Gulf*.

*www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au



Safe Harbour InfoBites: Is there a better way?

A better way – the Migration Amendment (Urgent Medical Treatment) Bill 2018*

The bill proposes changes to our migration laws to:

- require the temporary transfer to Australia of transitory persons on Manus Island or Nauru, and their families, if they are assessed by two or more treating doctors as requiring medical treatment
- require the temporary transfer of all children and their families from offshore detention to Australia for the purpose of medical or psychiatric assessment.

It was hoped this bill would be debated and passed in Parliament before the 2018 Christmas break. This didn't happen. New hope among supporters is that it will pass in February 2019 when Parliament resumes.

*Parliamentary Business, Parliament of Australia at www.aph.gov.au

A better way – the “New Zealand offer”*

- Since 2013, on a number of occasions, New Zealand has offered to resettle 150 people seeking asylum from Nauru and Manus Island.
- Our Government has consistently refused the offer, saying that it would be unacceptable to resettle anyone in New Zealand unless Parliament passed legislation imposing a blanket ban on anyone subject to offshore processing from entering Australia on any kind of visa.

*Until when? *The forgotten men on Manus Island*, Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International Australia, November 2018

A better way – just bring them here*

- These people can simply be brought to Australia.
- This is entirely within Australia's power to achieve.
- The number of people involved is tiny.
- It would be an enormous cost saving to the government and help to restore our credibility in the region and internationally.
- It would drain a poison that has been slowly engulfing our politics, our identity and our democracy.

*Until when? *The forgotten men on Manus Island*, Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International Australia, November 2018



A better way – developing a multifaceted approach*

- In April 2018, Amnesty International Australia presented a human rights-based approach to reducing dangerous sea journeys by refugees and people seeking asylum.
- Their policy paper – *A Better Plan* - provides assurance to Australian policy-makers that it is possible to avoid costly and punitive deterrence measures and ensure greater adherence to the rights of refugees in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The organisation argues that an effective, efficient and humanitarian response to global migration requires a multifaceted response.
- It also argues that this response can be funded through a redirection of the \$430 million per annum budgeted to be spent on the management of asylum seekers offshore.

*A Better Plan: Human rights-based policies for the protection of refugees and people seeking asylum, Amnesty International Australia, April 2018.

A better way – developing a regional approach*

- People who arrive by boat in Australia generally move on from countries in Asia where they typically do not have a formal legal status and are unable to work legally, own or rent property, send their children to school or access basic services such as health care.
- Our Government could move gradually towards an agreed and common regional strategy, including making it easier to access procedures to determine refugee status and supporting the provision of vital services by non-government organisations.
- If refugees are able to get their most pressing needs met, they are much more likely to remain where they are while durable solutions are developed.

*Thinking beyond offshore processing: Key recommendations, Refugee Council of Australia, 2016.

A better way – using our influence early and well*

- Our Government could develop a response to refugee protection that starts well before people come to our shores.
- Our foreign aid could help countries build capacity, promote reconciliation and help better protect displaced people.
- Through diplomacy, we could help promote peace and improve the prospects of voluntary return, and encourage resettlement states to work together to promote lasting solutions.

*Thinking beyond offshore processing: Key recommendations, Refugee Council of Australia, 2016.



A better way – increasing protection in other ways*

- Our Government could gradually increase the number of places available to people under Australia's existing migration programs.
- We could also increase opportunities for Australian organisations and families to privately sponsor people in need.
- We could allocate more places for people in Australia to be reunited with their family through the general migration program.
- Our Government could examine other opportunities to offer places to people who could be eligible for other streams of our migration program, such as people with skills in high demand, or students.

**Thinking beyond offshore processing: Key recommendations, Refugee Council of Australia, 2016.*

A better way – defending our borders while respecting the rights of people seeking asylum*

In 2016, the Australian Human Rights Commission identified some options for an alternative response to flight by sea, recognising that there are no easy solutions. The options it identified were to:

- Expand opportunities for safe entry to Australia by increasing the size of Australia's resettlement program and improving access to alternative migration pathways.
- Enhance Australia's foreign policy strategies on migration in the Asia-Pacific region through coordinating development aid, diplomatic efforts and humanitarian response to address the needs of displaced people and work towards an effective regional cooperation framework on refugee protection.

**Pathways to protection: A human rights-based response to the flight of asylum seekers by sea, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016.*



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Finding out more

Reports

Until when? The forgotten men on Manus Island, a report by Amnesty International Australia and the Refugee Council of Australia, available from www.refugeecouncil.org.au, published November 2018

Australia's man-made crisis on Nauru: Six years on, a report by the Refugee Council of Australia and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, available from www.refugeecouncil.org.au, published September 2018

Indefinite despair: The tragic mental health consequences of offshore processing on Nauru, a report by Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders), available from www.msf.org.au, published December 2018

Other art-related projects supporting refugees and people seeking asylum

Writing through fences at www.writingthroughfences.org

All we can't see: illustrating the Nauru files at www.allwecantsee.com

Getting involved: joining or supporting a local group

Safe Harbour Australia, on Facebook or by contacting Mij Tanith on 0405 086 533, or email mijtanith@gmail.com

Adelaide Vigil for Manus and Nauru, on Facebook or through their website at www.adelaidevigil.com

Justice for Refugees SA, on Facebook or through their website at www.justiceforrefugeessa.org

Circle of Friends, through their website at www.cofa.org.au

Getting involved: asking politicians to represent your views in their work

To contact your local Member and Senators, the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader, see the list on the Parliament of Australia website at https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members

For tips on contacting politicians by phone, see the Adelaide Vigil for Manus and Nauru website at www.adelaidevigil.com

For tips on contacting politicians by letter, see the Refugee Council of Australia website at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/take-action/contacting-politicians

Offshore processing: Finding out more/getting involved