

# **AUSTRALIA'S ASYLUM POLICIES**

**What's happening and how do we  
respond?**

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# Global displacement today



Photo: UNHCR

- 46 million people forcibly displaced
- 16.6 million refugees (4.9m Palestinians, 11.7m UNHCR)
- 988,000 people seeking asylum
- 28.8 million displaced inside own country

Figures compiled by RCOA from UNHCR figures. IDP figure as at December 2012.  
Asylum seeker figure June 2013. Refugees under UNHCR mandate as at June 2013  
with additional 600,000 added from growth in Syrian refugee numbers to March 2014.

# Syrian refugee crisis



Photo: UNHCR

- 2.54 million Syrian refugees in Middle East (as at 6 March 2014)
- Lebanon 953,420; Turkey 624,465; Jordan 582,080; Iraq 226,934; Egypt 135,031; North Africa 19,697

Source: "Inter-Agency Regional Response for Syrian Refugees", 6 March 2014, UNHCR

# Global protection challenges

- 1. International support for Syria's neighbours**  
2.5 million refugees in 5 countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt
- 2. Encouraging wealthiest nations not to turn away**  
Proportion of world's refugee in low and middle income countries increased from 70% to 81% in past decade
- 3. Providing prompt access to refugee status determination**  
UNHCR steps in to provide RSD in 66 countries
- 4. Action to tackle protracted refugee situations**  
6.4 million UNHCR refugees (60%) in protracted displacement with no durable solution in sight

# Global protection challenges

- 5. Increasing strategic impact of resettlement**  
0.84% of refugees resettled in 2012 but few protection improvements in key countries of asylum
- 6. Improving physical security of most vulnerable**  
Sexual and physical violence high in camps and cities
- 7. Preventing slide to insecurity in countries at risk**  
Which countries will follow Syria into crisis? Fears for future of Pakistan and renewed crisis in Afghanistan
- 8. Developing alternatives to detention**  
Global NGO efforts to highlight detention's harm, cost
- 9. Opportunities for self-reliance for refugees**  
Many refugees in enforced idleness or illegal work

# Australia's global contribution

According to UNHCR statistics, Australia during 2012:

- Received **29,610 asylum applications** – 1.47% of global total of 2,011,334 (rank 20<sup>th</sup>, per capita 29<sup>th</sup>)
- **Gave asylum to 8,367 refugees** – 0.61% of global total of 1,361,816 (rank 28<sup>th</sup>, per capita 32<sup>nd</sup>)
- **Resettled 5,937 refugees** – 6.7% of global total of 88,578 (rank 3<sup>rd</sup>, per capita 2<sup>nd</sup>)
- **Recognised or resettled 14,304 refugees** – 0.99% of total of 1,450,394 (rank 19<sup>th</sup>, per capita 22<sup>nd</sup>)

From 2003-12, Australia gave asylum to 30,567 refugees and resettled 108,308 (total 138,875) – 1.37% of global total (rank 19<sup>th</sup>, per capita 24<sup>th</sup>)

# Detention in Australia

*Immigration Dept statistics as at 28 February 2014:*

## **Locked detention facilities in Australia**

- 4,699 detained, 929 of them children
- Average time detained 253 days. 395 for >1yr (9%)

## **'Offshore Processing Centres'**

- 1,325 detained on Manus Island (men only)
- 1,107 on Nauru – 177 children, 300 women

## **Community detention**

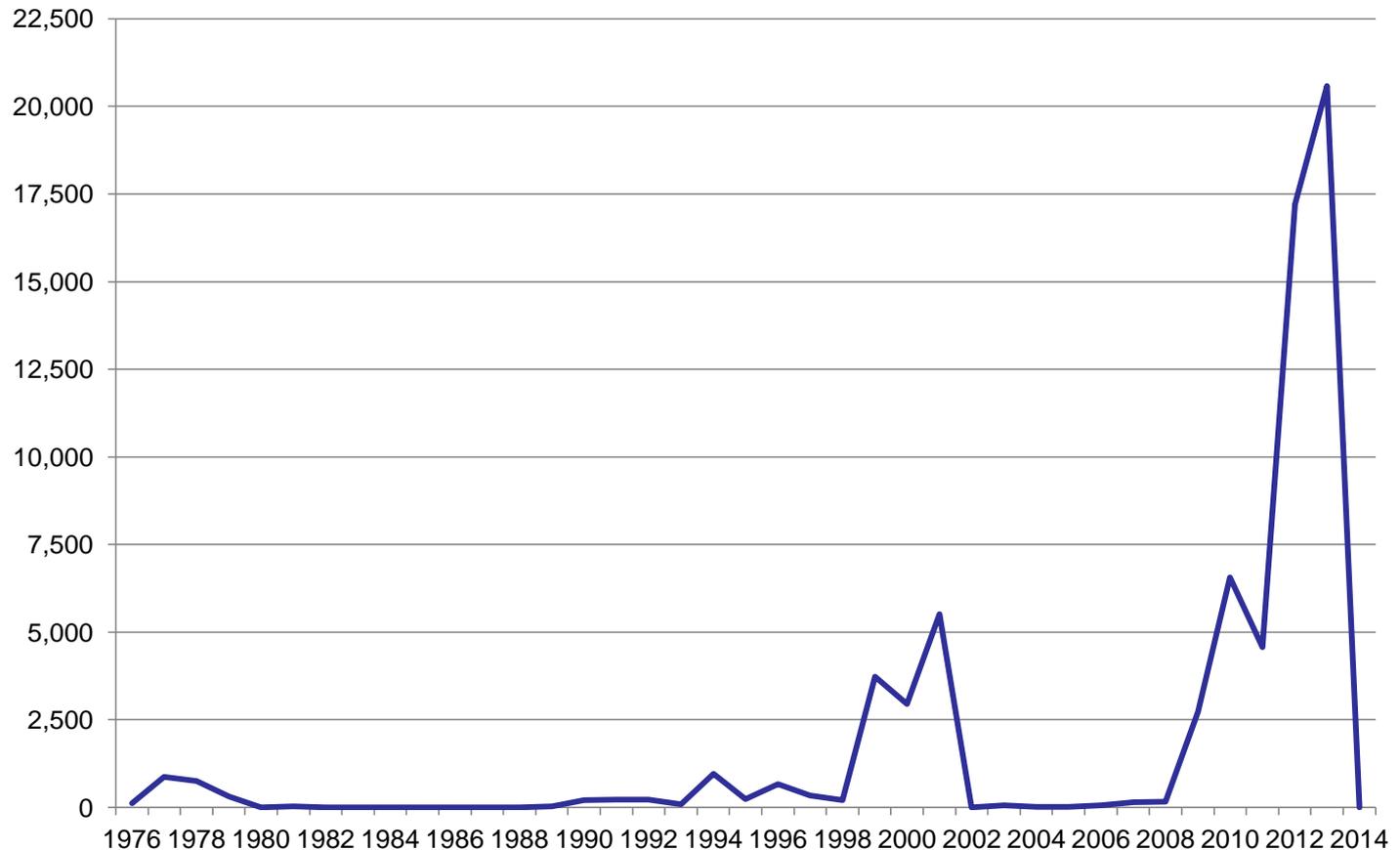
- 3,092 people, 1,579 of them children
- 75% detained for >1 year, 1% for <6 months

*Vic 42%, Qld 20%, NSW 17%, SA 9%, WA 9%, Tas 2%, ACT 1%*

## **On Bridging Visas**

- 23,979 people, 1,816 of them children

# Asylum seeker boat arrivals



**Boat arrivals over five-year period:  
Australia 51,637; Yemen 406,061; Mediterranean 197,217**

5-year figures: Australia 2009-13. Yemen and Mediterranean figures 2008-12 (Sources: Australian figures from Australian Parliamentary Library. International figures from UNHCR)

# Changes under Labor

Following Houston Report, Labor Government:

- Reintroduced offshore processing in Nauru, PNG
- Expanded Refugee and Humanitarian Program from 13,750 to 20,000 places
- Restricted humanitarian family reunion for boat arrivals but expanded family migration options
- Extended excision policy to all of Australia
- Re-established separate legal regime for boat arrivals whose asylum claims assessed in Australia
- Denied work rights to most asylum seekers
- Maintained 'enhanced screening' of Sri Lankans
- 'Regional Resettlement Arrangements' with PNG, Nauru

# Policies of Coalition government

- **Continued 'regional settlement arrangements'** with PNG and Nauru (now 4000 affected)
- **Turned back boats** carrying asylum seekers
- **Stopped** government-funded **legal advice** for asylum seekers who arrived by boat
- Reintroduced **temporary protection** for boat arrivals found to be refugees
- **Reduced the Refugee and Humanitarian Program** from 20,000 places p.a. to 13,750
- **Denied** access to **family reunion** for refugees who arrived by boat
- Refers to asylum seekers as **"illegal maritime arrivals"**
- Introduced **behavioural protocols**
- **Delayed** reissuing **Bridging Visas**
- Appears set to restrict **access to Refugee Review Tribunal**

# What now? 14 ideas for action

*The Coalition Government says it has a clear mandate to pursue its asylum policies. How do we respond?*

## Strengthening alliances

1. Improve sharing of information within sector about impacts of policies
2. Support strengthening of refugee community voices
3. Encourage those who oppose policies to speak up – campaign opportunities, building new alliances

## Potential pressure points in advocacy

4. Challenge implementation of cruel policies which serve no practical purpose
5. Constantly push for the release of vital information
6. Draw attention to negative international impacts of Australian asylum policies
7. Lobby Labor, Greens and crossbenches

# What now? 14 ideas for action

## Engaging Government

8. Promote settlement services as vital to social cohesion – and promote good practice (“bright ideas”)
9. Promote idea of positive Australian role in international action against displacement and to support refugees
10. Invite Government MPs to meet refugees and learn more about issues

## Community engagement

11. Find new ways to engage community volunteers in supporting asylum seekers and refugees
12. Promote local initiatives to welcome refugees (Welcome to Aust, Refugee Welcome Zones, awards)
13. Explore new community education options
14. Support vital services by fundraising

# Further reading

Resources produced by RCOA:

- Submission to Aust Govt on 2014-15 Refugee and Humanitarian Program (February 2014):  
[http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2014-15\\_Intake%20sub.pdf](http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2014-15_Intake%20sub.pdf)
- Detailed 2013 refugee statistics (February 2014):  
[http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2014-15\\_Stats.pdf](http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2014-15_Stats.pdf)
- Two-page statistical snapshot (February 2014):  
[http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/1402\\_RefugeeSnapshot.pdf](http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/1402_RefugeeSnapshot.pdf)
- Review of global protection challenges (September 2013):  
[http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/urpt/Protection\\_challenges\\_2013.pdf](http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/urpt/Protection_challenges_2013.pdf)
- Outline of possible steps towards improving refugee protection in Asia (November 2013):  
[http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/spch/131121\\_SMRC.pdf](http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/spch/131121_SMRC.pdf)
- Presentation on Australian policy of turning back boats (March 2014): [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/140308\\_Yaleuni.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/140308_Yaleuni.pdf)