

CSBQ Discussion paper

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LUTHERAN COMMUNITY CARE REFUGEE FACT SHEET

IN HELPING REFUGEES we have found that there is a great deal of mis-information in the community about asylum seekers – those fleeing persecution by seeking safe refuge in another country. Lutheran Community Care would like to provide some factual information about the refugee situation in Australia and where you can get more details.

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..." (*The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*)

How many people apply for asylum in Australia?

Number of asylum applicants in Australia and selected countries

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Australia	7,986	11,135	8,128	8,390	12,185	13,105
Canada	25,600	25,600	24,300	24,973	30,124	36,534
Denmark	5,100	5,900	5,100	5,699	6,467	10,077
Germany	127,000	149,200	151,700	143,429	138,319	117,648
Sweden	9,000	5,800	9,700	12,844	11,231	16,303
United Kingdom	55,000	27,900	32,500	46,020	71,160	76,040
United States	154,500	128,200	84,800	54,952	41,377	48,054

How Long are Asylum Seekers Detained?

Asylum seekers arriving in Australia without authorisation are detained while their applications for asylum are processed. Accordingly to the Dept of Immigration, as at 2 November 2001, there were 2,736 people in detention; about 40 per cent of them in Woomera. Department figures show most detainees are released after 6-12 months. In some cases, people are detained for more than two years.

Is Australia a generous nation when it comes to taking asylum seekers?

The Australian government often claims that we are second only to Canada in the

number of refugees we take. This is incorrect. Their claim is based on the fact that Australia is one of only eight countries whose immigration program actually specifies an annual quota of refugees. Our Humanitarian Program offers 12,000 refugee places per year, making Australia second highest on a per capita basis.

However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that many more than eight countries accept asylum seekers. More than 70 countries accept asylum seekers in some form or other. They simply do not set a fixed number of refugees they will accept. Of these Australia is ranked 32nd. On a per capita basis, we rank 38th, behind Kazakhstan, Guinea, Djibouti and Syria. Of 29 developed countries that accept asylum seekers, Australia is ranked 14th.

Does Australia Already Take Enough Refugees?

The Australia government recently announced that it would continue to allocate 12,000 places for refugees under its humanitarian program. The number has remained static for three years, despite the ever-increasing numbers of refugees worldwide. This is few refugees by world standards. In the 1980s, Australia accepted 20,000 refugees each year.

According to Amnesty International, one in every 115 people on earth are refugees, and a new refugee is created every 21 seconds. Refugees re-settle all over the world. However, the distribution of refugees across the world is very unequal. For example, Tanzania hosts one refugee for every 76 Tanzanians (1:76); Britain hosts one refugee for every 530 Britons (1:530); and Australia one refugee per 1583 Australians (1:1583).

Are Asylum Seekers 'Queue Jumpers'?

Australia's Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, has frequently claimed that people who come to Australia without the necessary documentation are jumping a queue. They are unfairly taking the place of other refugees who have to wait in line. The United Nations states that refugees should not be judged on the basis of how they got to a country, but on the legitimacy of their claims.

There are up to 60,000 people waiting for only 12,000 places a year under Australia's humanitarian program. A breakdown of processing times obtained by *The Australian* newspaper showed the average waiting time for applications to be processed from the Middle East was 170 weeks (3 years 14 weeks). It can be longer for those who have no family or other connection with Australia.

When your life is under daily threat is it reasonable to expect anyone to remain in a queue for up to four years!

Human Rights Submission

Lutheran Community Care has written a submission to the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission* in respect of the impact of detention on immigrant children. This was based on our strong background in working with children. In preparing this we consulted with the Lutheran World Service and others who work closely with refugees and people who have been released from detention centres. Our agency is challenged when we respond to need because there is no funding from the Commonwealth government for this work and the State government has only limited resources.

What is a Temporary Protection Visa?

Asylum seekers arriving in Australia without documentation, and whom Australia accepts as refugees, are granted three-year Temporary Protection Visas (TPV). After three years, TPV holders must re-apply for refugee status. Asylum seekers arriving under Australia's refugee program are granted permanent residence visas. This means that two classes of refugees have been created, with very different entitlements.

Restrictions on TPVs include: no family reunion; no access to federally-funded English classes; limited access to social security benefits, immigration settlement services and Medicare; full fees for tertiary education; no automatic right to return after leaving Australia.

Many TPV holders are deeply distressed at not being able to be reunited with their families.

Agencies such as Lutheran Community Care are providing many of the critically-needed services for TPV holders to support them and their families as they settle in Australia.

For more information on how you can help, contact:

Lutheran Community Care Phone 8269 9300

Australian Refugee Association Phone 8354 2951

Migrant Resource Centre Phone 8223 3604

Survivors of Torture and Trauma Rehabilitation Service Phone 8346 5433

SA Council of Churches Phone 8221 6633

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