

## MYTH 8 BOAT ARRIVALS PRESENT A SECURITY RISK

A terrorist threatening national security is more likely to have travelled by plane with a valid visa or false documentation than by leaky boat. It is improbable that a criminal or terrorist would have chosen such a dangerous and difficult method to enter Australia, given that asylum seekers who arrive by boat without authorization or valid travel documents have always undergone far more rigorous security and identity checks than other entrants to Australia. There is no evidence that any boat arrival to Australia has ever been found to be a terrorist.

## MYTH 9 ASYLUM SEEKERS WHO CAN AFFORD TO TRAVEL BY BOAT ARE ECONOMIC MIGRANTS

Wealth is no protection from persecution. Educated and wealthy people are often targeted as the greatest threat to an authoritarian regime.

Paying for an escape journey is no disqualifier for refugee status. Most asylum seekers who resort to boats pool and sell assets and/or borrow heavily to fund their escape.

## MYTH 10 BOAT ARRIVALS TO AUSTRALIA COULD HAVE STOPPED IN ANOTHER COUNTRY ALONG THE WAY

Asylum seekers who arrived from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia often travelled through intermediary countries before arriving in Australia. There is nothing unjust or deceptive about this. Either these countries are not signatories to the Refugee Convention or they do not have the capacity or the will to deal humanely with the large numbers of refugees they receive.

Asylum seekers in Indonesia are at constant risk of being picked up and detained indefinitely in squalid and overcrowded detention centres. The average wait time for a refugee claim to be finalized by UNHCR in Indonesia is ten years. They then face an indefinite waiting period for a resettlement country to offer them a resettlement place. Even with UNHCR registration, refugees in Indonesia are not permitted to seek employment. Yes, their children can attend school, but in practice, language, cultural barriers and costs prevent most from doing so. Clearly, Indonesia is not yet at a stage where it can offer refugees their human rights.

## MYTH 11 WE NO LONGER HAVE CHILDREN IN DETENTION

Children have been removed from detention centres on the Australian mainland, but 45 children remain in offshore detention on Nauru. These children will never be resettled in Australia, even if found to be refugees. There are over 200 children living in community detention on the Australian mainland, all the while living with the threat, along with their families, of being returned to Nauru or to their home country.

## MYTH 12 REFUGEES DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY

By definition, refugees are survivors. They have survived because they have the courage, ingenuity and creativity to have done so. These are exactly the qualities we value.

Refugees, who have fought for survival and overcome great traumas, have risked everything to make it to Australia. They express immense gratitude and dedication to their adoptive nation.

The challenge for Australia is to assist newly arrived refugees to process the experiences of their past and rebuild their lives. If we do this, we will reap the benefits of the qualities and experiences they bring to Australia.

Over 800,000 refugees and displaced people have settled in Australia since 1945. Many have gone on to do great things and have served us well in the fields of medicine, science, the arts, politics and more.

**Refugees have been good for Australia. Let's not forget it.**

### SOURCES

- Asylum Insight
- Australian Parliamentary Library
- Chilout (Children out of detention)
- Refugee Council of Australia
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

For more information re sources, go to the Buddies website  
<https://www.refugeebuddies.org/dispelling-the-myths>

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# Refugees: dispelling the myths



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[www.refugeebuddies.org](http://www.refugeebuddies.org)

### **MYTH 1 'STOPPING THE BOATS' SAVES LIVES**

The Australian government now returns all asylum seeker boats – mostly to Indonesia, but also to Sri Lanka, India and Vietnam. Operation Sovereign Borders is known to have turned back 30 boats and 765 people since September 2013. The government's veil of secrecy makes it difficult to ascertain whether these turnbacks save lives or put them at further risk. Nor do we know how many go on to board other boats and risk their lives on other oceans.

For people who are desperate to escape persecution and start a new life, people smugglers are invariably their only escape route. Denying people the opportunity to risk a boat journey also means denying them the opportunity to improve their lives.

Boat arrivals are now prevented from ever gaining resettlement in Australia. This is the real reason behind the 'stop the boats' mantra. It's not about saving the lives of asylum seekers. It's about keeping them out of Australia.

Our 'stopping the boats' does nothing to reduce the number of people worldwide fleeing for their lives. It simply places an unfair burden on other countries of asylum and sees more people dying in horrific conditions when they have nowhere else to go.

### **MYTH 2 AUSTRALIA NEEDS HARSH POLICIES TO SECURE ITS BORDERS**

No country in the world has ever had greater control over its borders than Australia. While most countries share at least one border with another country and usually many more, Australia is an island continent with vast surrounding seas. This natural barrier has always made irregular migration extremely difficult.

In the United States, there are estimated to be around 11 million unauthorized immigrants living inside the country. In the European Union, the number is estimated to be between 2 and 4 million. In comparison, Australia has only around 50,000 people living unlawfully in the country at any one time, mostly tourists and temporary migrants who have overstayed their visas.

The total number of asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat from 1976 to 2013 was around 70,000 which equated to an average of less than 1,900 per year. They were manageable and relatively

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small numbers, especially considering that for many years now Australia has averaged an annual net intake of permanent migrants of around 150,000.

### **MYTH 3 OFFSHORE DETENTION IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE BORDER SECURITY**

Australia stands alone as a developed nation which imposes offshore detention on all boat arrivals and is roundly criticised internationally for this blatant breach of the UN Refugee Convention.

Around 1200 asylum seekers remain in detention on Nauru and Manus Island, the majority having been there now for four years. Despair over the hopelessness of their future has led to an ever increasing incidence of self harm and attempted suicide. Their only guaranteed hope of resettlement is on Nauru, PNG and Cambodia, all extremely poor and unwelcoming countries, each facing huge struggles to provide for their own people.

Offshore detention costs billions of dollars every year. It would be ten times cheaper to allow asylum seekers to live within the Australian community while their claims were processed.

Not only is it inhumane and hugely expensive, offshore detention will never achieve its aim of deterrence. The boats will still keep coming. Asylum seeker numbers follow regional and global trends. No matter how harsh Australia's policies become, nothing will stop people in fear for their lives from taking to boats.

Besides, it is a fundamental principle of human rights law that people cannot be punished for the reason of deterring others, which is exactly what Australia is doing.

### **MYTH 4 AUSTRALIA HAS ONE OF THE MOST GENEROUS REFUGEE INTAKES IN THE WORLD**

Australia is the world's 12th largest economy, yet we accept a miniscule proportion of the world's refugees.

With over 65 million refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people in the world in 2016, Australia has made just 13,750 visas available for refugees in 2016-17 and will increase this to only 18,750 by 2018-19.

Yes, Australia usually ranks third of around 20 to 30 countries who resettle refugees through the UN resettlement program, coming in behind the US and Canada, but UN resettlement assists less than 1% of the world's refugees. Worldwide, Australia ranked 25th in 2015. It ranked 32nd per capita and 47th relative to total GDP.

### **MYTH 5 BOAT PEOPLE ARE ILLEGAL**

People who arrive on our shores to seek protection, without authorization and with no documents, or with false documents, are not illegal. They are asylum seekers – a perfectly legitimate status under International Law. Many asylum seekers are forced to leave their countries in haste and are unable to access appropriate documentation. In many cases oppressive authorities actively prevent normal migration processes. Additionally, asylum seekers who have documents may be forced by people smugglers to destroy them to ensure there is no paper trail to increase the chance of arrest.

### **MYTH 6 BOAT PEOPLE ARE QUEUE JUMPERS**

There is no queue in any meaningful sense of the word. The United Nations resettlement system works more like a lottery than a queue. Only a small proportion of asylum seekers are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and only a small number of those are resettled as refugees in other countries.

With around 21 million officially-recognized refugees worldwide in 2016 and the UNHCR submitting around 160,000 refugees for consideration by resettlement countries, waiting in the UN queue would entail a wait time of more than 100 years.

### **MYTH 7 BOAT ARRIVALS ARE NOT GENUINE ASYLUM SEEKERS**

Government statistics prove that asylum seekers who risk their lives on a perilous boat journey are very likely to have genuine claims for protection.

While around 45% of plane arrivals have been found to be refugees, the proportion for boat arrivals has been consistently above 90%.