



Alternative Policy Suggestions (Summary)
Asylum seeker and Refugee Policy 2015
Working Draft
15.5.15

The Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce is an initiative supported by the National Council of Churches in Australia, and the Steering Committee is comprised of 22 leaders who represent nine Christian churches and three ecumenical bodies. The Taskforce has a further 540 Christian entities who are network members.

The Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce believes that Australia's approach to those seeking asylum is a demonstration of our values as a nation. As such it is a national responsibility, not just confined to the Minister of Immigration and the staff of that Ministry, but the responsibility of all government parliamentarians and senators.

To this end, we respectfully call on all Federal political parties to consider the following policy alternatives.

1. The establishment of an independent statutory authority with responsibility for the guardianship of unaccompanied child asylum seekers
2. The establishment of open processing centres in rural and regional towns and states
3. Continuation of the Community Proposal Visa
4. Trial mobile refugee status determination processing units
5. Provide support to Malaysia and Indonesia
6. Support a safe haven for Syrian refugees
7. Establish new orderly departure programs

A brief explanation of these new policy and programmatic ideas follow

Domestic /Australia

1. The **establishment of an independent statutory authority with responsibility for the guardianship of unaccompanied child asylum seekers**¹. This is necessary in order to remove the conflict of interest that currently exists, and to separate the powers of the Minister so that the guardianship role is performed by an independent agency which has the best interests of the child as its primary concern². *Attachment One has more detail*
2. As an alternative to offshore processing, which is neither conscionable nor economically sustainable, and which has seen high numbers of sexual assaults occur towards children and women³, **establish open rural and regional processing centres in towns and states** (such as Tasmania) which welcome the economic and human capital contribution that asylum seekers and refugees can make. A significant amount of work has already been undertaken towards fleshing out the mechanics of this. See <http://www.thetasmaniaopportunity.com.au/>

¹ The details of one alternative model are outlined in the *UNSW Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission Inquiry into Children in Detention*, 2014.

² Issues related to the unusual model of model of Guardianship that exists in Australia is outlined in Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, *Protecting the Only Children: Recommendations to the Recommendations to the Australian Government and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with respect to unaccompanied children who seek asylum and refuge in Australia*; **JULY 2014**.

³ See examples and numbers from *Senate Estimates, February, 2015*, and the 33 cases cited in the Australian Human Rights Commission Inquiry into Children in Immigration detention, *The Forgotten Children*, February 2015.

3. **Continue the Community Proposal Visa**⁴ beyond the current pilot, which provides 500 humanitarian visas/year to asylum seekers who apply before arrival to Australia, for a substantial fee.

- a. This initiative should be continued in future budgets – it actually raises revenue for the Government; and
- b. The places should be additional to the humanitarian intake (currently 13 750), not part of the existing intake quota .

Regional/ Asia

4. Utilising the Australian Civilian Corps established by the ALP, **trial mobile processing units** to support sovereign governments in countries of first asylum such as Malaysia and Indonesia, to assist with quicker processing and to reduce the drivers for irregular maritime travel. *More detail provided in Attachment Four.*

5. **Provide support to Malaysia and Indonesia** to manage and/or integrate their refugee populations more durably (such funding must not however be cut from the aid budget, which is already at its lowest levels in recent history, as a proportion of GNI).

Global/International

6. Provide political and financial support for a **safe haven for Syrian refugees**: this prolonged crisis representing one of the greatest humanitarian crisis' of our time. The Taskforce supports the recommendations made by the Hon. Philip Ruddock and MP Chris Hayes following their field visit to Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon.

<http://www.acrt.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Ruddock-Hayes-Report-and-Recommendations-re-Middle-East.pdf>

See Attachment 6 for more detail and analysis

7. In close partnership with the UNHCR, **establish orderly departure programs**⁵ for those nationalities who represent the highest irregular maritime arrival loads to Australia, such as Afghanis, Iranians and Vietnamese, noting that Vietnamese have represented the 2nd and 3rd highest number of people in Australia's immigration detention system (it varies month by month) after arriving by boat, over the past 2 years⁶.

The full alternative policy document can be requested from mcoleman@actforpeace.org.au

⁴ <https://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/community-proposal-pilot.htm>

⁵ See *Beyond Operation Sovereign Borders: a long term asylum policy for Australia*; Kaldor Centre for International Law et al, May 2014.

⁶ Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Immigration Detention Statistics*, published monthly.