



## Asylum seekers and refugees in Australia

Australia has a proud history of helping asylum seekers, refugees and migrants proving to be a welcoming nation, welcoming thousands of European and Vietnamese refugees fleeing WWII and then the Vietnam War.

Currently there are around 50 million refugees with more than 85% currently living in developing nations. With conflict increasing around the world hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing their homes every week.

In the Asia Pacific very few countries have signed the Refugee Convention meaning they have no international obligation to provide protection to refugees.

**We believe Australia, as a signatory to the Refugee Convention, should be a leader for our region in providing support and protection to all asylum seekers and refugees. Internationally Australia takes very few asylum seekers and we believe there are alternative approaches to our current stance that we can take.**

Below is a snapshot comparison of Australian asylum seeker approach against the Italian.

### Australia

- GDP per capita: \$67,458.36 (2013) Population: 23.13 million (2013)
- Introduced mandatory detention in 1992 for asylum seekers who arrived by boat.
- Received a total of 69,000 asylum seekers at sea since 1976.
- Introduced legislation where no asylum seeker arriving by boat would ever be resettled in Australia.
- From 2006- 2011, 14,215 asylum seekers arrived via boat.
- Employed defence force to turn back asylum seeker boats to Indonesia.
- Around 90% of asylum seeker seekers who come to Australia by boat are found to be genuine refugees, as opposed to 43% of those who arrive with valid visas.

### Italy

- GDP per capita: \$25,925.88 (2013)
- Population: 59.83 million (2013)
- Between 2009 and 2010 Italy had a 'push back the boats' campaign with the Libyan government but had a change of heart and looked to protect people fleeing war torn nations.
- Rescued 144,000 asylum seekers at sea just in 2014.
- UN estimates 70% of asylum seekers in Italy arrive by sea.
- From 2006 -2011, 152,821 asylum seekers arrived in Italy via boat.
- Employed defence force to rescue asylum seeker boats.
- Held a national day of mourning for the estimated 500 asylum seekers who tragically died trying to reach Italy in a horrific boat sinking.

An issue recently dominating Australian and international media is the Rohingya asylum seeker crisis. The Rohingya people are a stateless people who, despite having lived in areas of Myanmar for centuries, have experienced high levels of persecution, violence and discrimination.

Since the 1980s Myanmar has refused to recognize the Rohingya people as one of the 135 'national races,' have denied the Rohingya people basic services, and have restricted their movements severely.

According to UNHCR in the past three years more than 120,000 Rohingya's have fled Myanmar on boats for places like Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.

In May 2015 approximately 8000 Rohingya migrants were left stranded on boats after people smugglers that had taken them from Myanmar, abandoned their boats in the middle of the Andaman Sea and neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia refused to look after them.

Australia has also refused to offer any support to Rohingya migrants with Prime Minister Tony Abbott responding, "Nope, nope, nope" when asked if there was a possibility of the stranded migrants to be settled and processed in Australia.

We call on the Australian government to do more to help the Rohingya people stranded and put pressure on our South East Asian neighbours to work together.

# We often hear negative stories about asylum seekers and can sometimes feel helpless. Here are some positive stories about organisations, individuals and businesses working together to support asylum seekers and refugees...

## African Australian Inclusion Program

The AAIP is a professional program for qualified African-Australians that offers 6 months paid experience with NAB, jointly run with Jesuit Social Services. The program came about after the African Australian community identified the need as they struggled to tap into the Australian employment market. Participants are offered real commercial experience including a workplace mentor, interview training and resume writing. Since the program began in 2009, 160 people have been placed, with 137 people completing it and 87% of people have found employment after the program. Analysis showed that for every \$1 invested in these African Australian refugee workers, stakeholders received \$4.64 back in social value. A worthy investment!

### It all starts with a spark

The Bright Sparks program matches refugee children with volunteers for a once a week after school 'homework club.' Since 2006 the program has grown to over 300 children being helped every week in primary schools around Western Sydney. Through the Spark Family Group program volunteers assist parents to improve their English; understand the Australian school system; address settlement issues; and learn skills to negotiate living in a new country. The Family Group Program is now implemented in eight schools and has the enthusiastic participation of 75 parents or carers and 22 volunteers.



### Work and Welcome

Keeping the Christian maxim of "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" at its heart, Work & Welcome is a schoolteacher salary sacrifice program where staff fund one term of employment at the school for a refugee or migrant.

The program was founded by Padua College teacher Mark Taylor in 1993 as a way to stand in solidarity with some of the most vulnerable in our society. The program has focused on helping refugees and migrants since 2000. Work & Welcome offers new Australians short-term paid work as well as providing the opportunity to gather local experience, to build new friendships, to develop new skills and to brush up on old ones.

### Thoughts from Pope Francis

On World Refugee Day 2014 Pope Francis offered prayers for the millions of people forced to flee their homes. He called on Catholics to reach out to them with assistance and a real welcome. Pope Francis said, "Remember, Jesus was a refugee; he and Mary and Joseph had to go to Egypt to save his life...Pray to Mary who knows the pain of being a refugee."

"Let us be close to them, sharing their fears and their uncertainty about the future and concretely alleviating their suffering."