WHO ARE ASYLUM SEEKERS?

Asylum seekers are people who are seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.

Their refugee status application is processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or a government that is a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention.

An asylum seeker must be outside of their country of origin in order to lodge an application for protection.

The United Nations estimates there are 42.5 million people displaced by persecution and conflict around the world.

These people become refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people. They flee their homes in search of asylum and refuge, away from persecution.

EVERY YEAR, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ARE FORCED TO FLEE THEIR HOMES. SOME FLEE BECAUSE OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION, OTHERS BECAUSE OF THEIR RACE, GENDER, OR ETHNICITY. SOME FLEE BECAUSE OF THEIR POLITICAL STANCES, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS OR SOCIAL STATUS.
**WHO IS A REFUGEE?**

A refugee is someone who is recognized as needing protection under the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention.

The United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone: “owing to 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 or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

All refugees have been asylum seekers.

People who arrive in countries that are signatory to the 1951 Convention, regardless of their method of arrival, are entitled to seek refugee protection. Refugee status determination does not discriminate between how a person arrived in a country and lodged their application.

**How many refugees are there in the world?**

There are an estimated 42.5 million people displaced by persecution and conflict in the world. This breaks down to 15.2 million refugees, 26.4 million internally displaced persons and 895,000 asylum seekers.

**REFUGEES FACE A LONG AND DIFFICULT JOURNEY FINDING SECURITY AND PROTECTION. IN 2011 ONLY 0.7% OF THE WORLD’S REFUGEES WERE RESETTLED. MOST REFUGEES WHO AREN’T RESETTLED LIVE IN SOME OF THE WORLD’S POOREST COUNTRIES SUCH AS PAKISTAN, IRAN AND SYRIA.**
WHERE DO MOST REFUGEES COME FROM?

Countries that experience internal conflict and civil unrest produce the largest numbers of refugees.

Afghanistan is the leading country of origin for refugees, followed by Iraq and Syria. All three countries are experiencing protracted violence. 80 percent of refugees flee to developing nations.

Australia: refugees and asylum seekers

Globally, Australia is ranked 47th for hosting refugees according to the UNHCR. Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program resettles 20,000 refugees each year. This increase came as part of the Houston Expert Panel recommendations in 2012, upping the number from 13,750.

Australia is in the top three countries for resettlement of refugees. The USA, Canada and Australia provide 90 percent of global resettlement places.

In 2012, asylum seeker applications in Australia accounted for just over 3 percent of the global share. Refugees and asylum seekers coming to Australia account for just a small fraction of Australia’s annual permanent immigration.

In 2012 and 2013, Australia has seen a significant increase in the number of boat arrivals. In 2012 there were 17,202 arrivals. This seems like a large amount, although globally it is relatively small. According to a UNHCR report, 23,000 people around the world are forced to flee their homes each day, in search of asylum.

What are Australia’s legal obligations?

Australia is a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Australia has enacted the Convention agreements into domestic law, which means that a person who arrives in Australia seeking asylum is entitled to have their claim for refugee status assessed fairly within our jurisdiction.

Under the Convention, Australia must not return people to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened. A refugee status determination processes assesses the validity of a person's asylum claim.

What is Offshore Processing?

Offshore processing means that asylum seekers’ applications for protection are processed outside of Australia’s territory and legal system.

In 2012 the Houston Expert Panel recommended the reopening of Nauru and Manus Island as Regional Processing Centres (RPCs).

This policy and an accompanying suite of recommendations by the Houston Panel were developed with the purpose of deterring people risking their lives by taking dangerous journey’s by boat to Australia.

Offshore processing and arbitrary detention has received widespread criticism from the UNHCR, Amnesty International and the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Despite the criticism, both sides of politics support this policy, as do a majority of Australians.

* Globally, Australia is ranked 47th for hosting refugees according to the UNHCR.
WHY IS THE SALVATION ARMY SUPPORTING ASYLUM SEEKERS ON NAURU AND MANUS ISLAND?

The Salvation Army is committed to providing care for asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus Island regardless of politics or popularity. As an organisation we have provided care and support for the world’s vulnerable and suffering since 1865.

It is in our DNA to care for the vulnerable. Asylum seekers in the RPCs are facing uncertainty; they are isolated and incredibly vulnerable.

As a Christian organisation, we are motivated by the love of Christ and passionate about helping vulnerable people.

In Matthew 25:35-40 (ESV) Jesus tells his disciples: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

In The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) Jesus tells the story of a man who is beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. A religious leader passes by and ignores him. The man is then found by a complete stranger - who also happens to be from a different religious group - who stops and helps tend to his injuries. The mandate of this parable is clear; that we are to care for the suffering, the vulnerable and hurting, regardless of who they might be. We are to be a neighbour to all.

The Salvation Army embodies these Christian values of fairness and compassion by extending a hand to vulnerable asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus Island.

Does The Salvation Army support offshore processing?

The Salvation Army does not support mandatory detention or the offshore processing of asylum seekers. Our calling is not just to engage in debate and discussion, but to stand with, and alongside people who are vulnerable and in need.

While we may disagree with this policy, we always have, and will, be in places where there is suffering or need. This is something we have done for almost 150 years.
WHAT ARE AUSTRALIA’S VIEWS?

In Australia, views on asylum seekers are very polarized. Both sides of politics agree that a solution to boat arrivals is needed; however they disagree on how to do this.

67 percent of Australians support offshore processing for people arriving by boat, while only 25 percent of people believe that asylum seekers should be eligible for permanent resettlement.

Australians see this as a top five problem facing Australia today. As of 2012, the issue was ranked 3rd in importance, only outranked by concerns about the economy and quality of government.

Although up to 75 percent of Australians say that they are supportive of refugees who are assessed and processed overseas, they are less than welcoming about those who arrive to Australia by boat. Many Australians believe that people arriving by boat are not ‘genuine’ refugees; instead they are coming ‘for a better life’ and should only be granted temporary protection before being returned to where they came from.

In June 2013, 11 percent of voters said the way asylum seekers are treated is an important election issue.

WHAT DOES THE SALVATION ARMY DO IN THE REGIONAL PROCESSING CENTRES?

The Salvation Army provides humanitarian support and assistance to asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus Island. We work with other service providers such as medical services and security companies, to ensure that transferees in the RPCs are adequately supported while they undergo their refugee status determination process.

Caseworkers and support staff employed by The Salvation Army provide programs aimed at the wellbeing and development of transferees. Participation in Body, Mind and Spirit activities encourages personal and community engagement.

Recreational activities include; gym, running and walking groups, sporting matches and excursions.

We also provide education programs with English, Maths and IT/communications lessons. Other recreational activities include; chess club, conversation groups, art and music groups.

Spirituality is important to many of the transferees. Our religious liaison officers ensure asylum seekers have access to sacred text readings, pastoral visits, religious studies and religious services.

Cultural advisors are employed to assist us with understanding the specific needs of asylum seekers, translating and helping create a more cohesive environment for everyone. These advisors come from a variety of backgrounds and provide valuable support to both The Salvation Army staff and the asylum seekers themselves.
The Salvation Army advocates for the development of proactive, compassionate and appropriate human rights focused policies in relation to all asylum seekers.

How is the work in Nauru and Manus Island funded?

This work is 100% funded by the Australian Government. No funds donated to The Salvation Army for providing services to disadvantaged Australians are being used to undertake this work.

Does The Salvation Army advocate for the needs of asylum seekers?

We have advocated for an improvement in facilities at both RPCs to the relevant domestic and Australian authorities. We work with human rights organisations to promote the needs of asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus Island, and also the broader needs of asylum seekers in Australia.

We speak to policy makers, politicians, NGOs and the media. Though, due to privacy concerns, not all our work happens in the public eye.

The Salvation Army advocates for the development of proactive, compassionate and appropriate human rights focused policies in relation to all asylum seekers.

How can I get involved?

There are many opportunities to work at both Nauru and Manus Island RPCs. Please visit our website –

hms.salvos.org.au/get-involved

– to view our available positions.

You can also become involved by sending asylum seekers in the processing centres letters of support. These letters are an encouragement to asylum seekers that there are people in Australia who care for them. Another practical way you might want to get involved is by donating to services in Australia that support asylum seekers in community detention.

Contact us at -

salvoshms@aue.salvationarmy.org

- for more information.
REFERENCES

Australia’s views on asylum seekers

Asylum trends in Australia

History of The Salvation Army

Reports and Recommendations on Offshore Processing

Expert Panel

Facts and Figures (globally and Australia)

UNHCR and the UN Refugee Convention
http://www.unhcr.org/3b73b0d63.html
http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646cc8.html

Photography & Images
Cover - Erbil’s Children: Syrian Refugees in Urban Iraq - Three young Syrian girls play in a rundown area of Erbil. The six-year-old in the middle lives with her family in a partially-constructed home. They fled from Syria after a tank entered their neighbourhood and began firing at houses. The girl says she was scared but now feels safe in Iraq.
UNHCR/ B. Sokol

Page 4 - UNHCR News Story: Myanmar relocates thousands of displaced people ahead of Cyclone Mahasen - Displaced people in Khaung Doke Kho have been moved out of tents to nearby government shelters outside Sittwe, Rakhine state.
UNHCR/M.Murphy

Page 9 - Erbil’s Children: Syrian Refugees in Urban Iraq - These two Syrian sisters look unhappy as they sit in the living room of the house where their family is staying in Erbil. Their parents paid US$100 per person to be smuggled safety out of Syria after their neighbourhood came under prolonged, heavy attack. For weeks, Helen wasn’t able to sleep due to the shelling. “More than anything, what I want for my girls is that they are able to attend school in safety,” their mother said.
UNHCR/ B. Sokol

Page 12 & 13 - Dadaab Refugee camp - In 2011 refugees fled Somalia in such numbers that the existing camps in dadaab kenya couldn’t hold them. They settled on the outskirts of Dagahaley and Ifo in self built structures. These are at the edge of Dagahaley and the refugees here are being moved to Ifo extension a tented camp that opened in august 2011 that is closer to services, schools and health centers. October 2011. Brendan Bannon/IOM/UNHCR

Design & Layout
Luke Ma
Creative Director
www.lukema.com.au