



NEWSLETTER May 2023



6683 – A NUMBER TO CELEBRATE!





Dear Grandmothers and Friends

Congratulations on the outstanding effort in collecting almost 7000 signatures to our petition in support of those refugees at dire risk of being abandoned to hopelessness yet again.

6683 signatures were gathered at markets, street vigils, shopping centres, refugee support events, coffee shops, and at kitchen tables.

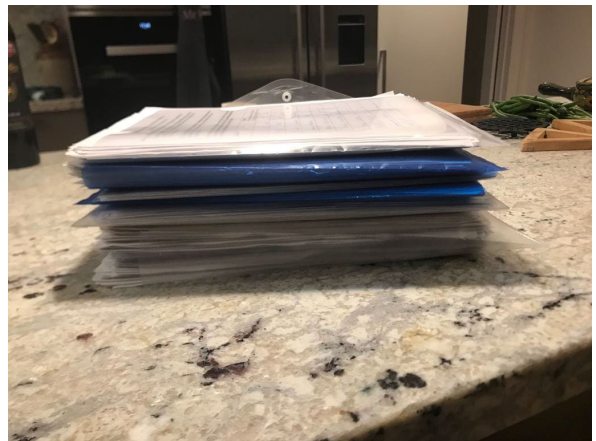


Co-chair Margaret Browne and Cooper electorate (Vic) grandmothers collect signatures at Northcote Plaza

This deliberate approach to engage directly with people rather than manage an online petition created fresh opportunities to keep up our efforts to inform and educate our local communities that, despite some welcome changes, refugees still need our support and advocacy.

The hundreds of original petition pages have been bundled together for secure delivery to Canberra. We have asked for it to be tabled in the House of Representatives during Refugee Week, preferably on **World Refugee Day - Tuesday 20th June**.

The petition's main focus is on the thousands of refugees onshore but excluded from recent decisions to grant permanent residency to others on temporary and safe haven visas.



The 2023-24 budget was handed down this month. In this edition we give you the key elements related to **how the budget has treated refugees**.

We also get insights from senior staff at Department of Home Affairs when giving – and not giving – evidence on the numbers of people still in Nauru and PNG during **Senate Estimates hearings**.

We look ahead to 19 July with a call to action to join the campaign calling on the Albanese Government to recognise that **10 years is too bloody long** to deny safe settlement in Australia to the thousands, including children, who were randomly sent to the offshore prisons of Nauru and PNG. **Shame! Shame!**



Front page photo: G4R Co-chair Margaret Browne and Executive Member Janet Joss pack the Grandmothers for Refugees petition for safe delivery to Parliament House, Canberra.

2023-24 FEDERAL BUDGET: WHAT IT MEANS FOR REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION

Analysis by Refugee Council of Australia 10 May 2023 [Refugee Council's Federal Budget Analysis 2023-24](#)

Key points:

- *The Budget papers make no comment on the size of the 2023-24 Refugee and Humanitarian Program, with indications from the Government that an announcement could follow in June*
- *Offshore processing is estimated to cost \$1.65 billion over the forward estimates, despite approximately 30 people remaining on Nauru*
- *Spending on border management and enforcement continues to outpace that of humanitarian settlement spending by more than double*
- *The five-year limit on access to settlement support has been removed, opening up options for assistance for people who need it*

SETTLEMENT SERVICES

The Government will remove the five-year maximum duration of eligibility for services under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Program, the National Community Hubs Program and Youth Transition Support services to ensure continued support for refugees and migrants who have been in Australia for longer than five years and have unresolved settlement related needs.

\$9.1 million in 2023–24 has been allocated to extend existing Youth Transition Support services for 12 months to 30 June 2024 to continue settlement services for young refugees and migrants to improve their employment outcomes.

The Government will introduce an improved delivery model for the Adult Migrant English Program from 1 January 2025 within existing funding, to improve English language, employment, and settlement outcomes for migrants by providing flexible tuition options, introducing a national curriculum, supporting professional development for teachers, and enhancing client support and performance management.

ONSHORE DETENTION AND COMPLIANCE

Onshore detention and compliance is budgeted to cost over \$1.365 billion in 2023-24, an increase of \$74 million on spending in 2022-23. More than \$1.1 billion is budgeted for detention and compliance for each of the three years of the forward estimates.

OFFSHORE PROCESSING

Offshore processing is budgeted to cost \$1.5 billion over the forward estimates to 2026-27, despite only approximately 30 people remaining on Nauru and the Government's commitment to resettle all people to third countries. From July 2012 to June 2024, the Australian Government has spent \$12 billion on the policy of offshore processing. See Appendix B for further information. In total, approximately 4,183 people have been sent offshore during this time. The Budget papers also note that the Home Affairs Department is "at risk" of failing to meet its 2022-23 performance measure of resettling 95% of the 150 refugees due to go from offshore processing to New Zealand this year.

2023-24 Budget: Kaldor Centre analysis highlights other areas of spending...

[Budget 2023: What it means for refugees and people seeking asylum | Kaldor Centre \(unsw.edu.au\)](#)

By Lauren Martin

...In February, Immigration Minister Andrew Giles announced a pathway to permanent residency for refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Have Enterprise Visas (SHEVs). This move is estimated to increase payments for government services and benefits by [\\$732.5 million](#) (p 162) over five years from 2022–23, before its budget impact becomes negligible.

The budget earmarks \$4 million for only this year to fund the **Immigration Assessment Authority**, which reviews unsuccessful ‘fast-track’ protection visa applications. The IAA is left unfunded in the forward estimates, ‘pending the establishment of a new federal administrative review body’. The Albanese government has announced plans to dismantle the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, with [consultation](#) on the details of the new review body currently under way. This budget allocates [\\$89.5 million](#) (p 61) over five years from 2022–23 (and \$1.5 million per year ongoing) to support the establishment of the new review body. ...

A [joint statement](#) from Minister Giles and Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil noted **increased funding over 2022-23 and 2023-24 ‘to protect the integrity of Australia’s border’**, including maintaining the Australian Border Force’s offshore network of Airline Liaison Officers ‘to deter and disrupt irregular travel’.

Regional cooperation, which includes supporting the Bali Process and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as well as working with ‘partner governments to improve global migration outcomes and protect Australians from national security threats’ – [will receive](#) (p 28) \$118 million.

Ministers O’Neil and Giles also reported the budget would ‘continue **support for vulnerable young refugees and migrants**, with \$9.1 million over 12 months to ensure the continued delivery of Youth Transition Support services, which improve employment, education and social connections for refugees and vulnerable migrants aged 15 to 25.’ The funding allows the Government to scrap the five-year cap on eligibility for refugees and migrants who need job support through the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program, the National Community Hubs Program or Youth Transition Support services.

To support the mental health of refugees who experienced torture and trauma before moving to Australia, the budget commits [\\$136 million](#) (p 139) over four years from 2023–24 (and \$36.0 million ongoing) to the **Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma**.

Financial **support programs for migrant women and women on temporary visas as they escape violence** – the Escaping Violence Payment (EVP) and Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot (TVP) – will be [extended to January 2025](#) (p 88), at a cost of \$38.2 million, to be met from within the existing resourcing of the Department of Social Services.

Two weeks after the Budget was delivered, senior public servants appeared before Senate Estimates Committee. The Saturday Paper's editor responds to evidence given on costs and numbers.

Editorial Base Costs *The Saturday Paper on May 27, 2023*

The department says you cannot split the numbers. The cost of suffering on Nauru is not divisible by the refugees held there.

"I think as we've given evidence before, the costs for maintaining the facility are not attributable to the number of individuals," Stephanie Foster, an associate secretary in the Department of Home Affairs, told estimates this week. "There's a certain base level of cost which is required to maintain that capability. You can divide it, but that's not the basis on which the costs are calculated."

The numbers are these: Australia will spend \$485 million this year running its prison camp on Nauru. It will do this to maroon 22 refugees, about half as many people as there are seats on a school bus. Divided, it costs \$22 million per person, per year to continue this gruesome charade.

It is not hard to imagine how many people could be helped with this same money, how many thousands of refugees could be shown compassion. Instead Australia has chosen the ugly expensiveness of torture.

Perhaps it is fitting that the longer this goes on the more costly it becomes. These are the tariffs of barbarism. This is the money paid to ensure Australia's worst secrets are kept on foreign atolls. This is the high price of depravity.

In the same session of estimates, it emerged some of this money was paid to a man guilty of bribery. Even after he was charged, the government contracts continued. Perhaps it doesn't matter: one crime is like another. Perhaps it's fitting, even: an illegal system of detention, for which this country pays a foreign criminal to assist.

The department says that by next year it expects there will be no refugees left on Nauru. It will continue to spend \$350 million a year to maintain the facility. It calls this "contingency".

It doesn't yet know exactly where the refugees will go. It pretends not to know how many refugees remain in Papua New Guinea, falsely claiming Australia is no longer responsible for these people and sends them no money.

All of it now is trickery: numbers that cannot be divided, people on the streets of Port Moresby who they pretend do not exist. Offshore detention has become a monstrous shell game of jurisdictions and disappearances. It is people being wiped off balance sheets.

The government pretends this is not its problem. It forgets that many of these people were sent to these islands when it was last in power. "Our government has been on the record for a long time, including in opposition, that we would have preferred the legacy case load, for want of a better term, on Nauru to have been dealt with well before now," says Murray Watt, representing the Home Affairs minister. "It wasn't by the former government. We are now dealing with it."

A year after winning office, it is inexcusable that anyone should still be in offshore detention. It is inexcusable that the people on Nauru and in Papua New Guinea were not immediately brought to Australia. It is inexcusable that they were not given settlement for what they now are: **refugees fleeing Australia's system of torture.**

This article was first published in the print edition of The Saturday Paper on May 27, 2023 as "Base costs".

OUT OF SIGHT AND OUT OF MIND IN PNG

Senate Estimates was told on **23 May 2023** that **22 people remain on the Island of Nauru**, down from 41 held there on 31 March 2023. However, **the Australian Government still denies responsibility for those left in PNG** and releases no numbers.

Deakin Electorate Grandmother for Refugees, **Mary Williams**, turned to her friend **Fr Giorgio Licini**, a senior Catholic priest in PNG, for reliable updates on the humanitarian crisis he foreshadowed in 2019.

I received this letter from Fr Licini on Tuesday of this week (23 May 2023). It's his reply to my email asking if he'd give me (as a member of GfR) his update on the health and well-being of the refugees being held in PNG.

He's given permission to share it with you, and if wanted, for it to be published in our newsletter. – Mary W.



Thanks Mary for your enquiry.

The main point to make is that it is long overdue for Australia to remove from PNG those people who, 10 years ago, arrived on Christmas Island (AUSTRALIA), and not on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea).

My hope is that this off-shore business will never happen again. The Pacific is not just Australia's backyard.

My understanding of the present situation of those refugees remaining in PNG is roughly as follows:

1. About a dozen men are mentally and psychologically damaged beyond repair. (If left in PNG they will just die here in a short time. If forcibly transferred back to Australia - where they came from - they will have to be assisted for the rest of their lives).
2. There's a possibility that about 20-30 men can still be resettled in New Zealand, Canada, perhaps the US...
3. There are about 50 men with no third country resettlement options, who might possibly be able to survive in PNG in the future. But there is no legislation in place for these people who are without documents and official recognition.
4. A good number of those remaining are now in some sort of marital relationship. This may make things easier for them in case they are forced to remain in PNG but complicates the resettlement process for those entitled to it.

Thanks again and keep in touch.
Cordially,
Fr. Giorgio

If at first you don't succeed....

Grandmothers for Refugees and friends at their fortnightly vigil outside the Hotham electorate (VIC) office of Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil MP on May 5th...



...on their next visit, 19 May, the Minister was very pleased to come out to meet those keen to get her attention with their determined messages on behalf of refugees.



Bloody 10 years too **A** long, Australia

19 July 2023 is the 10th anniversary of the Kevin Rudd announcement that anyone arriving by boat to seek asylum would never ever be able to settle in Australia.

Within months, Rudd was gone, and the Abbott government entrenched the “never, ever” decree as policy in support of his Stop the Boats campaign.

After that shameful date ten years ago, 3127 women, children and men were sent to Nauru or PNG. They are the “residual offshore caseload” - which is a nice way of saying “the hope forever denied ones”. Add to this number another 220 children born in Australia (171), Nauru (47) and PNG (2) who are also denied their right to apply for settlement here.

CALL TO ACTION>>> Refugees Off PNG and Nauru - Campaign Summary

Core Problem

- The Australian Government continues to leave refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru and PNG. This is unjust, denies them basic human rights and is actively harming them.

Campaign Objective

- All those on Nauru and PNG are given the option of being transferred to Australia while awaiting resettlement
- All those who wish to be transferred to Australia are brought here, placed in community detention or, if appropriate, in the community on bridging visas (but not locked detention) and provided with adequate support and the medical care that they require

Campaign Strategies

1. Direct advocacy with key decision makers by means of:
 - a. Meetings, letters, emails, postcards, phone calls
 - b. Open Letter from health professionals and organisations
 - c. Open Letter and/or a delegation from Faith Leaders
2. Direct advocacy with those who can influence the key decision makers
3. Identify and mobilise allies to broaden and strengthen the campaign
4. Raise community awareness of the issue

Refugee advocacy groups and grassroots members of the Australian Refugee Action Network (ARAN) are urged to utilise these strategies during Refugee Week 18-25 June and ramp up actions around 19 July 2023.

New Members of the G4R Executive

Following the retirement from the Executive of Jean Ker Walsh and interim member, Gael Walker (NSW) nominations for two vacancies on the Executive were advertised.

As no more than two nominations were received, **Judy Taylor and Ann Butler** were duly elected. Marita Keenan, interim member (WA) has advised she will retire at the end of the year.

Judy Taylor from La Trobe electorate (VIC) is a retired public servant (legal officer) with prosecutorial and policy development experience. In supporting Judy's nomination Virginia Schneiders said: *Her advocacy for refugees, over several years, has been constant and exceptional both at the community level and wider engagement with government and the media. Her background as a lawyer brings with it a ready ability to assess and dissect information and provide valued opinions on matters of policy and issues raised in the media.*

Ann Butler from Jagajaga electorate (VIC) has followed up her career as a teacher and Assistant Principal with volunteer roles. Helen Kennedy supported the nomination: *I have attended many rallies, pop-ups, meetings, and other voluntary activities with Ann over the last several years. She is passionate about overturning the current punitive, destructive policies towards many refugees in Australia, and throughout the world. With a curious and lively mind, she reads copiously, is a robust and clear thinker and is prepared to actively demonstrate her wish for change.*

AND FINALLY...



As this is my last edition as writer/producer of the G4R Newsletter, I want to thank you all for your readership and the many warm messages of encouragement and feedback sent over almost four years.

The monthly newsletter is a key point of regular connection with information, inspiration, and motivation for our members around the country.

I look forward to being a reader – and occasional contributor to future editions - and I hope you do too. *Jean*

Best wishes to all from your Executive group,
Margaret, Virginia, Janet, Marita, Judy and Ann