



# Input to Annual Refugee Council of Australia Intake Consultations

---

The St Vincent de Paul Society remains deeply concerned with the wellbeing of all people who come to Australia seeking protection, and strongly committed to securing the human rights of all asylum seekers who come within our power.

We believe that the Australian Government has the primary responsibility for protecting those who arrive in our territory fleeing persecution. First and foremost this means compliance with all international law, including the Refugee Convention, and with principles of justice, compassion, and human dignity.<sup>1</sup>

Broadly, the Society believes this can best be effected by a regional response to the phenomenon of displaced persons. However, we only support efforts where the safety and human rights of asylum seekers will be protected in transit or in destination countries.<sup>2</sup> We are therefore opposed to attempts by Australia to settle refugees in countries with well-documented domestic difficulties in securing civilian safety, such as Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia.

For those asylum seekers who come to Australia, we support immediate community-based accommodation schemes, while their claims are being processed. We remain strongly opposed to indefinite mandatory detention. There is a significant body of evidence that this form of “deterrence” is deeply harmful: to the refugees locked in what some of our volunteers call concentration camps; to the staff who have to deal on a daily basis with the immense human suffering; and to our national identity as a generous and loving people, which is being eroded and fractured.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See, eg, St Vincent de Paul, ‘Humanitarian Policy – It Matters To Us!’, *The Record* (Spring 2014) at [vinnies.org.au/icms docs/196484 The Record Spring 2014 - Embracing diversity.pdf](http://vinnies.org.au/icms docs/196484 The Record Spring 2014 - Embracing diversity.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See, eg, St Vincent de Paul, Policy on Refugees, at [vinnies.org.au/icms docs/171529 Policy on Refugees.pdf](http://vinnies.org.au/icms docs/171529 Policy on Refugees.pdf), 3.2.

<sup>3</sup> St Vincent de Paul, Submission to Committee on Human Rights, December 2012, as [vinnies.org.au/icms docs/182709 Contribution to the public hearing on the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights examination of the Migration Regional Processing package of legislation.pdf](http://vinnies.org.au/icms docs/182709 Contribution to the public hearing on the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights examination of the Migration Regional Processing package of legislation.pdf).

Regarding numbers, the Society supports the return of our Refugee and Humanitarian Program to at least 20,000 places.<sup>4</sup> As a prosperous and stable nation, we have the economic and social capital to welcome far more people who desperately need our assistance. However, this should not occur by cost-shifting onto the community, as the Community Proposal Pilot attempts. Instead, the Community Proposal Pilot should only be supported if it opens up *more* places for refugees to come to Australia.<sup>5</sup>

Along with supporting community-based accommodation options, we believe that all adults should enjoy the ability to work in Australia, in accordance with the human right to work.<sup>6</sup> Then, once asylum seekers are found to be refugees, they must be given a permanent right to settle in Australia: we are completely opposed to the insecurity and uncertainty of short-term protection visas.<sup>7</sup> We also believe that the right to family is a basic human right, which is entitled to protection from the state.<sup>8</sup> As such, we have long supported family reunion for all new Australians.

---

The Society thanks the Refugee Council of Australia for conducting these community consultations. We share the commitment to refugees and asylum seekers, as particularly vulnerable members of our global society, and we appreciate the chance to participate in this conversation.

Australia does much good for refugees, but the Society has been very concerned about asylum seekers in Australia for some decades. We see people in detention centres with severe mental illness. We see people living in Australia in poverty, who are not allowed to get jobs. And we read stories about people who come to our doorstep desperate, who we send back to the place they were fleeing, and who are subsequently tortured or killed by their governments.

We will continue to advocate on principles of truth, compassion, dignity, and justice. We will continue to listen to the stories of refugees, and tell those stories. Through every means possible, we will continue to fight for a better future for refugees.

---

<sup>4</sup> See, eg, St Vincent de Paul, Input to RCOA's Annual Intake Consultations 2013, at [vinnies.org.au/icms/docs/171541 Input to Annual Intake Submission and Consultations.pdf](http://vinnies.org.au/icms/docs/171541%20Input%20to%20Annual%20Intake%20Submission%20and%20Consultations.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See St Vincent de Paul, Response to Discussion Paper on Pilot Community Sponsorship Scheme, at [vinnies.org.au/icms/docs/182580 Discussion paper on the Proposed Pilot of a PrivateCommunity Refugee Sponsorship Program.pdf](http://vinnies.org.au/icms/docs/182580%20Discussion%20paper%20on%20the%20Proposed%20Pilot%20of%20a%20Private%20Community%20Refugee%20Sponsorship%20Program.pdf). We have also consulted with government directly on this.

<sup>6</sup> See, eg, our support for the Right To Work campaign, at [righttowork.com.au/](http://righttowork.com.au/).

<sup>7</sup> See, eg, St Vincent de Paul, media release of 9 October 2014, at [vinnies.org.au/icms/docs/196985 Vinnies bears witness to mental distress of asylum seekers.pdf](http://vinnies.org.au/icms/docs/196985%20Vinnies%20bears%20witness%20to%20mental%20distress%20of%20asylum%20seekers.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> ICCPR, Art 23.