

Overview of Onshore and Offshore Detention of People Seeking Asylum in Australia

1992 – 2025

This information resource was compiled to support the Big Walk for Refugees in 2025 (<https://www.bigwalk4refugees.au/>), a virtual 'walk' which visited sites of immigration detention (current and past) in Australia, and also on Christmas Island, PNG, on Nauru, and in Indonesia. The 2025 Big Walk route included sites in Australia where detention centres have operated, some of which are still open. Since 1992 thousands of people have been detained (confined) in Immigration Detention Centres, and also APODs (Alternative Places of Detention) including hotels.

The information includes personal recollections, formal reports from national and international bodies, testimonials, rare photos of detention centres current and past, media reports and more. It is comprehensive, eclectic, organic collection of material providing information and insights on the impact of Australia's policies towards refugees and people seeking asylum and their supporters, and the extensive resistance to those policies.

This document is for activists, researchers, policy makers, media representatives, students and anyone who has an interest in the history and ongoing story of refugees and people seeking asylum's journey to permanent protection, regardless of the obstacles, delays and challenges that successive Australian governments have placed in their way.

If you have information you would like to add to this document, please email austrefugeenetwork@gmail.com with the Subject Line: addition to ARAN Resource document on Onshore and Offshore Detention.

There are sections in the document:

[Section 1: Mandatory detention in Australia](#)

[Section 2: Offshore detention on Nauru and in PNG](#)

[Section 3: Refugees trapped in Indonesia](#)

[See map of detention locations onshore and offshore](#)

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Section 1: Mandatory Detention of asylum seekers in Australia

Mandatory detention was introduced by the Keating Labor Government in 1992, and since then, many thousands of people seeking asylum, including children have been held in locked detention; many for very long periods. It has been common practice to separate families while in detention, and to transfer people to several detention sites before their eventual release.

The current Albanese Labor government has greatly reduced the number of refugees and people seeking asylum who are still in immigration detention.

Australia has been consistently criticised for sustained and serious human rights abuses in immigration detention, in Australia and offshore in PNG and on Nauru, and for denying the right for people to seek asylum here.

The Refugee Council of Australia wrote “...Australia’s detention policies are some of the harshest in the world. Detention is mandatory for those without a valid visa. It is also indefinite, and there is no independent review.....Australia’s detention policies have been found many times to be in breach of its obligations under international law.”

The Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW Sydney, the world's leading research centre dedicated to the study of international refugee law concluded “....Australia has obligations under article 31 of the Refugee Convention not to penalize asylum seekers for illegal entry. Mandatory detention may constitute a penalty for illegal entry, given that detention is not justified in the circumstances of each individual detained, and is directed at asylum seekers who arrive without a visa.”

1.1 Reports on immigration detention in Australia

Refugee Council of Australia Report: [Australia's detention policies](#)

[Kaldor Centre Factsheet on Detention](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission (brief overview): [Immigration detention and human rights](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission: [A last resort? - Summary Guide: The facts about immigration detention in Australia](#)

Human Rights concerns about Immigration Detention: [The harsh reality of onshore immigration detention in Australia](#)

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Global Detention Project: [Australia Immigration Detention Profile](#)

Department of Home Affairs: [Immigration detention statistics](#)

Sr Brigid Arthur has visited people in detention in Melbourne since 2001, and has also visited a number of detention centres in other states and on Christmas Island - [see her reflections here](#).

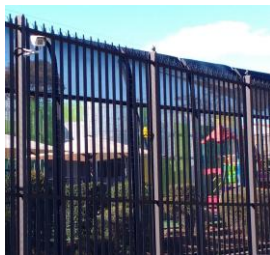
1.2 Immigration detention centres still operating in Australia

- Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA)
- Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation
- Villawood Immigration Detention Centre
- Perth Immigration Detention Centre
- Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Centre
- Adelaide Immigration Detention Centre

1.3 Villawood Immigration Detention Centre

Originally the Villawood Migrant Hostel or Villawood Migrant Centre was built in 1949 to accommodate post war refugees from Europe. A section was converted to an immigration detention centre in 1976 to provide security accommodation for persons awaiting deportation, now known as Villawood Immigration Detention Centre.

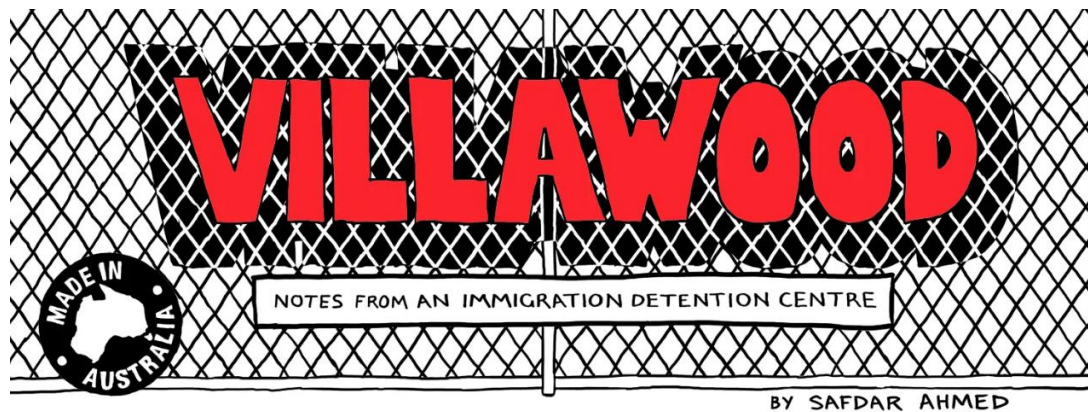
Benjamin Thomas White teaches history at the University of Glasgow, where he is also a part of the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum, and Migration Network (GRAMNet). He wrote the following report on Villawood for Refugee History, an interactive network for journalists, policy-makers, lawyers, NGOs, students, activists, academics, writers and artists and anyone interested in enriching and informing current debates about refugees [Villawood detention centre—past, present, and future — Refugee History](#).



The new detention centre at Villawood has been designed so that you can't easily see into it: if detainees managed to climb onto the roof and stage a protest, as they did in 2010, 2011, and 2012, only someone in a helicopter would know about it. But at the Blaxland compound you can see through the galvanized steel slats of the outer security fence and the wire mesh of the inner fence. And that means you can see the brightly coloured equipment of the children's play area inside.

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[Villawood. Notes from an immigration detention... | by Safdar Ahmed | The Shipping News | Medium](#) (A pictorial account from the inside 2015)

Villawood has seen protests by detainees, and many cases of self harm:

[Report shows disturbing state inside Villawood - ABC News](#) (May 2011)

[Rioters torch Australia asylum seeker detention centre - BBC News](#) (2011)

[Villawood rooftop protest ends after 11 days - ABC News](#) (2011)

[Riot at Villawood Detention Centre](#) ABC news coverage & commentary (2011)

[Villawood riot resolved without police intervention, says immigration minister | Sydney | The Guardian](#) (2015)



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Sydney Immigration Residential Housing

Part of Villawood IDC and is used to accommodate a smaller number of people, usually families including children and unaccompanied teenagers partially those who have arrived by boat or plane.

1.4 Perth Immigration Detention Centre

The Perth Immigration Centre at Redcliffe WA Opened in 1981.

The Human Rights Commissioner's Report No.10 (29 June 2000) is titled Report of an Inquiry into Complaints of Acts or Practices Inconsistent With or Contrary to Human Rights in an Immigration Detention Centre. It deals with a complaint by a Nigerian national detained at the Perth Immigration Detention Centre. The complaint included allegations that the detainee was handcuffed, shackled, placed in a windowless room for six days, denied medical treatment and held in detention for more than twelve months in 1996 and 1997. The treatment of the detainee was found, in some respects, to be in violation of ICCPR article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which requires detainees to be treated humanely. The complainant has been removed from Australia and his present whereabouts and well-being are unknown.

[HREOC Report No. 10 - Human rights violations in the Perth Immigration Detention Centre](#)

1.5 Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation (BITA)

The Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation facility opened in 2007

Watch a [first hand video account of visiting BITA](#) by Peter Jones, a regular visitor to BITA.

The Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanism visited BITA in December 2024 and provided the following report. This recently established body has a monitoring role in all places of detention. Recommendations from this visit included:

- *That action be taken to ensure all detained persons at the Brisbane APOD have access to at least one hour of outdoor recreation each day and that a communal recreation space be made available at the APOD so that detained persons are encouraged to leave their rooms to interact with other detained persons on a regular basis.*
- *that action be taken to ensure that detained persons at the APOD have free access to complaint and request forms and can lodge these without having to interact with an officer to do so.*

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- *The routine use of force in the form of mechanical restraints be ceased for transport and escort movements, to bring practices in line with the Department's Use of Force policy and procedural instructions.*
- *The infrastructure of the visits and outdoor area for detained persons from the APOD be re-arranged to provide greater privacy from the facility for visitors and persons transported from the APOD for outdoor access.*

[Post-Visit-Summary-Brisbane-Immigration-Detention-Centre-17-December-2024.pdf](#)

1.6 Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA)

Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) Broadmeadows opened 2008. The “High Security” compound opened in 2018.

Many people seeking asylum were held for years at MITA, and advocates and supporters visited regularly. At first the regime in the detention centre was somewhat humane, with a relaxed approach to visitors and people being allowed to go on outings by authorised visitors. Over the years, under the Coalition Governments, the centre was increasingly securitized and opportunities for visiting became very limited.

[Reported brutality at MITA January 2019](#)

Margaret O'Donnell reflects on what it was like visiting people detained in MITA (2009 - 2022) : A lot changed over the 13 years from 2009 to 2022 when we were visiting refugees and people seeking asylum who were detained in MITA. At first the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly, but over the years there was much more surveillance of visitors and detainees and many more restrictions. [Read more here.](#)

Amongst detainees at MITA were the Tamil family who came to be known as the Biloela family. They were detained in MITA from March 2018 to August 2019. Their youngest child had both her first and second birthdays in MITA. The family would then spend a further 22 months in detention on Christmas Island throughout protracted legal proceedings regarding their right to stay in Australia. [See their story here](#)

Sr Brigid Arthur has visited people in detention in Melbourne since 2001, and has also visited detention centres in other states - [see her reflections here](#) .

1.7 Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Centre

The Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Centre in Northam WA opened in June 2012 and was built to house 600.

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[Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Inspection Report | Australian Human Rights Commission](#) April 2024

The Commission's report raised **serious concerns** over the safety conditions and the level of care for detainees and staff at the **Yongah Hill** Immigration Detention Centre. These include:

- A reported rise in behaviours frequently associated with the prison system, including the trafficking of drugs and other contraband, bullying and standover tactics, and violence.
- Issues with the infrastructure, including the finding that the two low-security compounds were “no longer fit for purpose”.
 - Lack of access to healthcare, including emergency, out-of-hours, and mental health services.
 - Inadequate access to counselling, rehabilitation and trauma services, and education to minimise substance use.
 - People in detention had very limited access to meaningful programs or activities, fuelling boredom, frustration, and reducing opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration.



[Video by Ehsan Nazamyar](#), Case Worker, Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD) in Perth
- a regular visitor.

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1.8 Adelaide Immigration Detention Centre

The Adelaide Immigration Detention Centre (AIDC) is now known as Adelaide Immigration Transit Accommodation Centre. It is a small, purpose-built facility in Kilburn, South Australia, used for immigration detention that opened in 2011.

It is one of a few detention facilities in Australia that allows for self-catering.

[Report by monitoring body concerned by long term detention](#) June 2024

Sister Meredith Evans, a sister of Mercy, and member of Justice for Refugees SA and also Circles of Friends still visits refugees who have been re-detained in the Kilburn facility.

In Adelaide school students protested when two fellow students were seized in April 2014 and taken into closed detention - read about it here, and listen to their powerful song written by students and a music teacher at Woodville High School: ["Bring Them Home" -](#)



[Neo Pitso & Kyle Rigney](#) . Two young Vietnamese students seeking asylum had been living in Community Detention and attending the school.

The two students were relaxing after school, when two Border Force officers and two members of the Australian Federal police gave them a black plastic bag, told them to put their belongings in the bag and then took them to a nearby detention centre. In the early hours of the next morning, each young man was sent

on separate planes to Darwin and then on to Wickham Point detention centre, outside of Darwin.

Fellow students at Woodville High School were confused and enraged. Their leaders spoke about the injustice at a Youth Parliament and on television programs such as Behind the News and The Project. With Adelaide University students, they organized and spoke to a rally of 2,000 on the steps of parliament house in Adelaide. They also collaborated with an ex-student and a teacher to write this powerful song which details the fear their fellow students would be feeling in our so-called "lucky country" and calls for them to be returned to their school community. The video was filmed by students at the school.

In all 15 young Vietnamese asylum seekers who attended Adelaide schools fled into the community when they heard that the two from Woodville HS had been taken back into closed detention. One was the top student in the then Middle School of Norwood/Morialta

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HS. All those who fled were boys. With the two Woodville HS students, that made 17 altogether. No girls fled. One of the Vietnamese girls who knew them well from being in closed detention earlier has now graduated as a radiographer, with two degrees from the University of Adelaide and Uni SA. She recently received notice of her citizenship. We assume all 17 of those who fled must now be in the Australian community.

1.9 Christmas Island Immigration Reception and Processing Centre

The Christmas Island Detention Centre is now known as North West Point Immigration Detention Centre. It has a history of being opened, closed and reopened. The detention centre was last occupied in August 2023 but is maintained to be ready for use when needed.

Temporary facilities for asylum seekers were established on Christmas Island at Phosphate Hill in late 2001. In 2002, the Australian Government announced the replacement of the existing temporary facility and the construction of a purpose designed and built IRPC on Christmas Island with a capacity of 1,200 people. Over many years thousands of people seeking asylum were detained on Christmas Island, including families with babies.

Protests have been a common occurrence at Christmas Island, demonstrations of resistance against the cruelty of indefinite detention. In 2011, more than 250 detainees hurled rocks at staff and set fire to the accommodation block, causing a substantial amount of damage. They were subdued by tear gas and bean bag rounds, one of the first times bean bag bullets have been used in Australia. The protest was against the conditions and length of time people are held there.

In early 2014, about 375 detainees went on a hunger strike, seven stitching their lips together as a cry for freedom and a sign of solidarity for Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati, who had been murdered by a security guard in the Manus Island detention centre-PNG.

Further unrest occurred in 2014 after mothers, concerned about the living conditions for their babies, had a meeting with immigration officials. The mothers were reportedly told "You will never be settled in Australia. You will be going to Nauru or Manus Island and that's the end of the story." Following this message, it was reported that the mothers started screaming and threatened to set fire to the camp and were arrested. Following this arrest seven individuals made threats of self-harm and four committed self-harm. Ten mothers were placed on "guided supportive and monitoring engagement" under the PSP, requiring 24-hour surveillance by a Serco officer.

Read Rathy Barthlote's account of being held in Christmas Island with her 3 year old child [Rathy Barthlote, a mother's story Christmas Island 2013](#)

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On 31 August 2019 the [Murugappan Tamil family from Biloela](#) were taken to Christmas Island - they were the only people held there from August 2019 until June 2021 (nearly 2 years) before being flown to Perth when their youngest daughter fell critically ill. The incoming Labor Government granted bridging visas in May 2022 and the family was able to return to Biloela the following year, where they now live as permanent residents. Their story illustrates the deliberately cruel treatment of people seeking asylum, and that the Minister can exercise discretion at any time to grant permanency.

[Dignity in a Teacup: True stories of courage and sacrifice from Christmas Island](#) This book chronicles the five years Christine Cummins spent working as a torture and trauma counsellor with asylum seekers detained on Christmas Island. It provides a firsthand account of Australian immigration detention, during a period of dramatic change and controversy. With exclusive access to the stories shared by hundreds of asylum seekers, Christine describes the reasons people were forced to flee their homelands. These true stories are compelling and reveal the lives of ordinary people seeking a safe new life. It's an inspiring, intimate memoir about resilience and the tenacity of love.

Film: [Island Of The Hungry Ghosts](#) is a hybrid documentary. Poh Lin Lee is a “trauma therapist” who lives with her family in this seemingly idyllic paradise. Every day, she talks with the asylum seekers, held indefinitely in a high-security detention centre hidden in the island’s core, attempting to support them in a situation that is as unbearable as its outcome is uncertain. Based on the experience of Christine Cummins who spent five years working as a torture and trauma counsellor with asylum seekers detained on Christmas Island

1.10 Alternative Places of Detention (APODs), including hotels

For decades the Australian Government has used hotels and other facilities and Alternative Places of Detention (APODs). The public is generally unaware of these facilities. See a detailed mapping of the use of APODs here: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/kaldor-centre/our-research/mapping-use-hotels-alternative-places-detention-apods>

Detention in hotels in Melbourne, Brisbane and elsewhere

For around 15 months through 2021 and early 2022 nearly 200 people were held in detention in suburban hotels - in Melbourne (Mantra and Park Hotels) and also Brisbane (Kangaroo Point Hotel). These people were brought to Australia from offshore detention (PNG and Nauru) under the Medevac legislation, but unlike others before them, were held in detention, and largely denied medical treatment. There were sustained protests in Melbourne and Brisbane calling for their release.

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Park Hotel Melbourne 2021

[Refugee activists removed by police after occupying Preston hotel housing medevac detainees](#)

[‘We are human, we are not animals’: Mantra refugees transferred to another hotel](#)

[They were trapped in immigration detention for nine years. Here's what life after the Park Hotel looks like - ABC News](#)

[Hotel Detention — Asylum Insight](#)



Protesters show support for the asylum seekers detained at the Kangaroo Point Central Hotel in Brisbane in August, 2020. (AAP: Darren England/File)

[Park Hotel empty as 26 refugees are released, Morrison Government refuses to release remaining 6 - Asylum Seeker Resource Centre](#) (April 2022)

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[Legality of all of Australia's APODs \(including MITA/BITA/AITA\) now at centre of Federal Court battle](#)

[Australian government's detention of a refugee in Melbourne hotels ruled legal by court](#)

1.11 Immigration detention centres no longer operating in Australia

Port Headland, WA:

Australia's first dedicated Immigration Detention Centre opened in Port Hedland, WA in 1991 in response to people fleeing Cambodia arriving by boat. Mandatory detention was legislated by the Keating Government in 1992.

Opened in 1991, Closed in 2003.

[Port Hedland detention centre | National Museum of Australia](#)



Curtin Immigration Reception and Processing Centre WA:

Curtin Detention Centre was located in a very remote area, 35km southeast of Derby WA. It was opened in the late 1990's and closed in 2002 but was reopened in April 2010 with a capacity of 1,500. It was closed permanently in September 2014.



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The Age article August 18, 2010 [Detention centre a 'living hell hole'](#)

Caroline Fleay -[Video clip Caroline speaks about visiting at Curtin](#)

[From RAC Vic archive](#) (although images are missing, notes in this document provide the picture of life at Curtin Detention Centre)

[Four Corners program](#) featuring the detention centres at Curtin and Darwin

[2011 Immigration detention at Curtin | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

[Australian Human Rights Commission: Observations from visit to Curtin Immigration Detention Centre and key concerns across the detention network 2011](#)

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From the AHRC Report: *“Many people at Curtin IDC have been detained for very long periods. The prolonged detention of particular groups is of increasing concern both there and across the detention network. This includes recognised refugees awaiting security assessments or other checks, recognised refugees with adverse security assessments, and stateless persons. The impacts of prolonged and indefinite detention are a major concern at Curtin IDC, and the Commission is troubled by the high rates of self-harm and the apparent suicide there earlier this year. Many people spoke about the psychological impacts of being deprived of their liberty for a long time with no certainty about when they would be released, and of delays with processing of their refugee claims, the lack of regular communication about progress with their cases, and perceptions of unfairness in decision-making.*

For the above reasons and more, the Commission continues to urge the Australian Government not to detain people in remote locations such as Curtin IDC, and to implement its New Directions in Detention policy under which asylum seekers should only be detained for initial checks rather than for the duration of processing of their refugee claims.”

Scherger Immigration Detention Centre QLD:

25km east of Weipa in Western Cape York, opened in 2010, closed in 2014 this facility provided accommodation for hundreds of male detainees.

[Scherger Immigration Detention Centre | Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability](#)

Minister Bowen’s Media Release 17 September 2010

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen MP, today announced that additional immigration detainee accommodation will be prepared for families and unaccompanied minors in Melbourne, and for single adult men in northern Queensland and in Western Australia. Scherger Air Force Base (near Weipa in Queensland) will also be adapted to accommodate up to 300 single adult men in the immediate term. Scherger will only be used until the individuals moved there can be relocated to more permanent locations. Support services – including case managers, mental health support teams, medical staff, interpreting services and education staff – will be available at all three locations.

The Cairns Post reported a high level of community anger about the secrecy around the establishment of the centre (18 Sept 2010):

..The Weipa Town Authority is also outraged by the decision and “lack of transparency”. Acting chairman Peter Miller said the authority heard RAAF Scherger would be used to house asylum seekers only five minutes before Mr Bowen made the announcement. “They have been very short with the truth and there has been absolutely no consultation.”

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Pontville Immigration Detention Centre Tas:

25kms north of Hobart, opened August 2011, closed September 2013.

Feb 2012 - There were differing views about whether the centre should be closed, see [Tas. refugee advocates debate Pontville centre closure | Green Left](#) August 2013 - closure announced in context of election campaign [Call to release all detained kids: refugee advocates](#)

Carol Bristow, recollection shared on social media:

Pontville: Stark, metal, concrete, guards, security checks.

Polite, shy, earnest, thoughtful young asylum seekers desperate to pursue a career or occupation, excited to have visited our snow capped mountain.

Appreciative of our visits; disappearing week by week with no chance of saying farewell as the Government moved them to the mainland.

Recollection Pontville Sally McGushin:

Pontville Immigration Detention Centre had actually become an Alternative Place of Detention by the time it closed. I notice that this is what Leonora is called on the map.

Pontville became a centre for juveniles in early 2013 I think but maybe it was 2012.

Presumably that was when it became an APD. The adults were either released into the community on Bridging Visas or transferred inter-state. Many of the early intake of youths were transferred from Leonora. Then I understood them to be coming directly from Christmas Island. There seemed to be a high turnover of youths as Immigration seemed to be trying to release them into the community as quickly as possible. We had to work hard to keep our visiting lists updated because all releases were confidential.

We could visit three youths at a time; in practice, on any visit, one of the youths would have been released to a family member or transferred, one would still be there, and we would have added a new one whose name and boat number would have been supplied to us on our previous visit. So we usually managed to see 2 youths on each of our lists.

When Pontville APD closed, a few of the remaining youths were transferred to Mainland Immigration Detention Centres but quite a number seemed to go into supervised group homes in the community - it was all confidential of course.

Film: [Mary Meets Mohammad](#) is a documentary feature film that follows the arrival of Tasmania's first detention centre (Pontville) through the eyes of local Christian women and knitting club member Mary and Muslim Afghan Hazara asylum seeker Mohammad, who is detained inside the centre - as they connect through the gift of a knitted beanie, It has won many prestigious awards, eg 2014 Special Award United Nations Media Peace Prize and was a finalist for the Walkley Documentary Award.

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Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre Vic:

Located in the Melbourne suburb of Maribyrnong, opened 1983 and closed 31 December 2018.

In January 2016 a report revealed that *Maribyrnong was the harshest immigration prison in Australia*, with guards handcuffing and using force against detainees at a far higher rate than in other immigration prisons. See news report here: [Australia's harshest detention centre revealed](#).

[Maribyrnong detention centre: Growing 'culture of excessive force'](#)

Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre (IRPC) SA:



Near the village of Woomera in South Australia, it opened in November 1999 and closed in April 2003.

It was originally intended to hold 400 people. At its peak in April 2000 it housed nearly 1,500 detainees, including about 500 children. Some remained in Woomera for the entire time it existed. In the beginning, visitors including media

representatives and monitoring agencies such as the United Nations and Amnesty International were not allowed in.

The centre faced significant challenges, including capacity issues, public criticism regarding human rights abuses, and riots, eventually leading to its closure in April 2003.

"We came here looking for freedom, safety, and justice. Instead, we found nothing but traps, built of steel bars, bad laws, and dishonest politics. Inside these cages, children have grown into adults. Young men's hair has turned white. Babies have been born, taken their first steps, spoken their first words. Most of us, separated from our families, have become like ghosts to our mothers, our wives, our children."— appeal from the asylum seekers of Australia, sent to refugee advocate Betty Dixon, January 2003 (from article by Jess Whyte: [We are Human Beings.pdf](#))

A former detainee reflects, 10 years after its closure an Sydney Morning Herald article in 2013: [Others need not suffer my living hell](#)

The Woomera Breakout on 30 March 2002 was a pivotal moment of resistance and cooperation between refugees and their supporters. Despite the isolation, despite the

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harsh conditions, despite the repressive actions by authorities the detention centre was unable to contain the demand for freedom.

- iview: I was actually there! documentary [Woomera Detention Centre Breakout](#) A documentary that includes numerous reflections from those at Woomera, including some involved in maintaining the system who realised they might have been on the wrong side of the fence.
- [Protest that helped refugees escape from detention—the Woomera breakout 20 years on – Solidarity Online](#)

Baxter Immigration Reception and Processing Centre (aka Baxter Detention Centre) SA:

Located 12kms south of Port Augusta SA it opened at a cost of \$44 million in September 2002 and closed 2007.



In 2003 hundreds went to Baxter to protest:

In 2003 I was part of the protest at the Baxter detention centre. I think there were about 300 people. The Baxter centre was built in such a way that no one could see out, so we flew kites with messages on them to let them know we were there. Peter Robson - Darwin

[Police ban kites, balloons at Baxter protest - ABC News](#)

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Protesters at the Baxter Detention Centre Date taken 2003

'We are all "boat people" only the first fleet didn't come in peace - free asylum seekers now' banner held up by two people outside the fence to the facility. SLSA catalogue, SLSA reference, B 71309/61.

ABC News: [Police efforts 'amaze' Baxter protesters - ABC News](#)

Sun 27 Mar 2005



Police and protesters have again clashed at the Baxter detention centre. (ABC TV)

Recollections of Baxter: [Di and Peter Russell share their experiences of visiting Baxter in 2003](#)

Andrew Clarke, who visited Baxter monthly for years:

The drive to and from Port Augusta with visits to the Detention Centre was very tiring. But once one had a relationship with people held there, the need to visit overcame all objections. People who had been there for more than five years had little hope. How could one let down people who had become friends?

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Margaret O'Donnell reflects on her visit to Baxter in 2004:

"On my first visit to Baxter in 2004 I visited a mother and her 13 year old son. Her husband was too mentally ill to join in the visit. The son had scars on his arms from self harming - it was very disturbing to see this. The family had previously been held in the Woomera detention centre. "

Peter Robson shares how messages were shared with people detained in Baxter in 2003:

In 2003 I was part of the protest at the Baxter detention centre. I think there were about 300 people. The Baxter centre was built in such a way that no one could see out, so we flew kites with messages on them to let them know we were there.

[The Baxter detention centre: Australia's purpose-built asylum seeker hell hole](#)

[Report and Reflections on Baxter Detention Centre Visits - Refugee Action Campaign](#) (2003)

[Baxter protests - Wikipedia](#): There were big protests during the Easter weekends of 2003 and 2005. Protesters came from all over Australia to protect against mandatory detention of asylum seekers. [Protesters at the Baxter Detention Centre \[B 71309/10\] • Photograph](#)

A debacle where an Australian permanent resident was detained at Baxter for more than 10 months drew attention to the abuses there: [Cornelia Rau, Australia's immigration wars and the true story behind TV drama Stateless - ABC News](#)

[New ABC and Netflix series Stateless is a show about refugees, so why is the cast so white?](#)

Leonora - Alternative Place of Detention WA:

This facility was located in the remote town of Leonora, approximately 830 kilometres northeast of Perth, it opened in 2010 and closed in 2014

It was a privately owned property leased by the Australian Government and operated as a low-security immigration detention facility. Primarily used for the detention of families with children. The facility was classified by DIAC as an 'alternative place of detention'. People detained in the facility were not permitted to leave unless they were under escort.

At the time of the Human Rights Commission's visit in November 2010 there were 202 people in immigration detention in Leonora – 69 men, 67 women, 35 boys and 31 girls. [Summary of Human Rights Commission observations from visit to immigration detention facility in Leonora](#)

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Darwin Airport Lodge NT:

Peter Robson - Recollection Darwin Airport lodge - Hundred of local people protected for 203 days calling for Freedom:

Over 2020 and 2021 DASSAN (Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network) held a vigil for 203 days outside the **Darwin Airport lodge**, demanding that the government allow the 23 people locked in there the right to stay in Australia. Hundreds had participated over that time and in the end some were granted asylum in Canada, some are still seeking visas and some died before seeing any freedom.



[In 2010 the Australian Human Rights Commission reported on Immigration Detention in Darwin](#)

At the time of the Commission's visit there were 783 people in immigration detention in Darwin – 468 men, 67 women and 248 accompanied children and unaccompanied minors. The majority were asylum seekers who had arrived by boat (referred to by DIAC as 'irregular maritime arrivals'). There were also a significant number of Indonesian crew members and a small number of alleged illegal foreign fishers. The largest group of people were from Afghanistan, followed by smaller groups from Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Burma. There were also around a hundred stateless people.

During the visit, people were held in immigration detention in five facilities in Darwin, as outlined below. The facilities were operated by Serco Australia, the detention service provider contracted by the Australian Government. Photos of the facilities are available on the Commission's website.

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It's important to note that in 2010 at the time of this report, 248 (nearly 1:3) of *those detained were children, including 81 accompanied children ranging in age from six weeks to 17 years, and 167 unaccompanied minors ranging in age from 11 to 17 years.....Child asylum seekers continue to be subjected to mandatory immigration detention. This breaches Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which require that a child should only be detained as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.*

Over the years, several facilities have been used in Darwin to detain refugees and people seeking asylum:

- Northern Immigration Detention Centre Opened August 2001 now closed
- Darwin Airport Lodge - Low Security 2010-2014
- Berrimah House - operating in 2010 - now closed
- Botanic Gardens Apartments - operating in 2010 - now closed
- Asti Motel - operating in 2010 - now closed
- Wickham Point Immigration Reception and Processing Centre - 2011- 2016
- Bladin Alternative Place of Detention, (APOD) at the Darwin Airport 2013 – 2015

Inverbrackie - Alternate Place of Detention, Woodside SA:

The 'Inverbrackie Alternative Place of Detention' was a low security, family orientated immigration detention centre in the Adelaide Hills, opened 18th December 2010 and closed mid 2014. Children attended local primary and high schools. The detention centre was managed by Serco and housed a maximum of 400 people.



Locals wanted to help the families there, but there was little opportunity: [Inside the secret world of Inverbrackie Detention Centre](#)

Read a **first hand account** from Dr Sue Packer, who regularly visited the families there: [Recollections on Inverbrackie - Dr Sue Packer.docx](#)

2014: The centre was closed because it was 'too sympathetic' to asylum seekers: [Inverbrackie closed in shift to "cruelty"](#)

10 years on: Remembering people who lived there: [Where Are They Now? Snapshots of Success](#)

Recollections: Dr Sue Packer, Paediatrician, Inverbrackie [Dr Sue Packer INVERBRACKIE 2025](#)

Adelaide - #Bringthemhome - Woodville School [Woodville Background to the song.docx](#)

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Port Augusta Immigration Residential Housing SA:

Designated an Alternative Place of Detention (APOD) it opened 2010 and closed 2014. Adult women, adult men, accompanied minors, families and undocumented migrants were detained here

Section 2: Offshore detention: Nauru & PNG

Australia has also received extensive national and international criticism for outsourcing its responsibility for people who have sought asylum in Australia to the much poorer countries of Nauru and PNG. The brutal detention conditions in these offshore camps have caused horrific harm. 14 people have died as a direct result of detention offshore, with numerous documented reports of assaults, suicide, self harm, abuse, sexual abuse, and trauma. 37 men are still trapped in PNG, some now with families, and the pain and trauma continues. 10 of these men are so unwell, they are no longer able to advocate for themselves. Up to 100 people are detained on Nauru without a plan for their resettlement. The cycle of harm that underpins Australia's offshore detention regime spins on.

See just one of the numerous United Nations reports of the many condemning offshore processing: [Australia responsible for arbitrary detention of asylum seekers in offshore facilities, UN Human Rights Committee finds | OHCHR](#) (9 January 2025)

ASRC media release January 2025: [UN Human Rights Committee condemns Australia offshore detention policy](#)

[3CR interview with Heidi from ASRC re Nauru and PNG](#) (May 2025)

[Suffering to Save Lives: Torture, Cruelty, and Moral Disengagement in Australia's Offshore Detention Centres | Journal of Refugee Studies | Oxford Academic](#)

[Finish this crisis: stories exposing the horrors of offshore detention](#) (2023)

Book and Film: [Chasing Asylum: A Filmmakers Story](#) by Eva Orner (2016). The book is dedicated to all the asylum seekers and refugees on Manus and Nauru. It is also a documentary film directed and produced by Eva Warner. It examines Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees

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2.1 Nauru Regional Processing Centre



Located in the south Pacific Island of Nauru and run by the Government of Nauru and funded by the Australian Government. Opened in 2001 by the Howard Government as a hurried response to the Tampa incident, there were very rudimentary facilities - the only accommodation was in tents. Detention on Nauru (and also Manus Island) was dubbed 'the Pacific Solution'. Detention on Nauru was suspended in 2008 by the Rudd Labor Government. However, the Gillard Labor Government reopened the detention centre in August 2012 in response to a media firestorm and pressure from the Opposition as a result in an increase number of boats seeking to land in Australia with people seeking asylum.

From the 18th September 2013 Operation Sovereign Borders policy took over from the Pacific Solution. At its peak in August 2014 there were 1,233 detainees on Nauru. By November 2018 there were still 23 children on the island. The centre was emptied on 31st March 2019 but many still live on the island. Some were sent to Australia for medical treatment after the introduction of the Medevac Bill on 13 February 2019. The last family left Nauru 13th June 2020.

In February 2022 there were 115 held by the Australian government on Nauru costing the government \$4m per year per asylum seeker. The centre was briefly empty for a few months in 2023 before being reopened in September 2023.

As of May 2025 approximately 100 people are being held on Nauru - with no certainty for their future. These people have travelled to Australia by boat to seek asylum here. An unknown number of people are apprehended at sea and their boats are turned back under the continuing Operation Sovereign Borders.

[Concerns grow for refugees on Nauru - ABC listen](#) (Feb 2025)

[Commentary regarding lack of health care on Nauru](#) (2023)

[Calls for Royal Commission amid Nauru health failures](#) (June 2025)

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Information from ASRC Policy Brief - Offshore processing June 2025

[See the full Policy Brief here](#)

There remains a lack of transparency and accountability from the Australian government, about the treatment, conditions and plan for people seeking asylum on Nauru. ASRC specialist caseworkers are providing support to the vast majority of people detained on Nauru

People are suffering a host of physical and mental health conditions and a lack of adequate healthcare. Issues include conditions such as hypertension, heart complaints, chronic pain conditions, dental issues, physical injuries, anxiety, depression, distress, and self-harm attempts.

People detained on Nauru reported the following concerns:

- People are arbitrarily and indefinitely detained and given no information around timeframes for their detention
- People have concerns about the fairness and transparency of the refugee determination process.
- Some are already recognised as refugees, however there are currently no resettlement options available to them.
- People in the community are receiving \$230 per fortnight to cover their basic needs including food, drinking water and internet, a rate that has not increased for years, despite the rising cost of living on Nauru.
- People cannot afford to eat 3 meals a day, to buy fruit, vegetables and meat, plus there are ongoing issues with the lack of availability of rice and flour on Nauru.
- People are offered return-resettlement packages to their countries of origin, sometimes even before having had the opportunity to apply for refugee status. Returns have occurred and there has been no transparency around assessments of risk of harm of return.
- No access to Telehealth: The Health Practitioners (Telemedicine Prohibition) Regulations 2019 (Nauru) prohibits foreign health practitioners from providing telemedicine to people in Nauru.

For years, hundreds of men, women and children have suffered in detention on Nauru:

[The Nauru files](#) were published by [The Guardian](#) in August 2016; more than 2,000 leaked incident reports from Australia's detention camp for asylum seekers on the remote Pacific island of Nauru – totalling more than 8,000 pages. The [Nauru files](#) set out as never before

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the assaults, sexual abuse, self-harm attempts, child abuse and living conditions endured by asylum seekers held by the Australian government, painting a picture of routine dysfunction and cruelty.

The [Kids Off Nauru campaign](#) (2018) was led by World Vision with support from a wide range of agencies - it was eventually successful in getting all children and their families off Nauru. However, after all this time, most of those children and their families still do not have permanent visas or a secure future in Australia.

2.2 Manus Island Regional Processing Centre, PNG.

Opened 2001 as an “offshore processing centre” as part of the Pacific Solution. It fell into disuse and was formally closed in 2008.



It was reopened in 2012 by the Labor Government. On 19th July 2013 Kevin Rudd announced that those sent to PNG or Nauru would never settle in Australia.

Conditions at the Manus Island Detention Centre were harsh, and detainees were brutally attacked by local G4S personnel in February 2014.

[What Really Happened On Manus Island](#) (RAC NSW)

[Reza Barati death: Two men jailed over 2014 murder of asylum seeker at Manus Island detention centre - ABC News](#)

[A Senate inquiry in December 2014](#) found the cause of the unrest and subsequent attack on the detainees, in which 70 asylum seekers were injured, was the failure to process asylum seeker claims, stating the violence was "eminently foreseeable". It also found the

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Australian Government — which labelled the incident as a "disturbance" — failed in its duty to protect asylum seekers, including Mr Barati.

On 26th April 2016 the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court ruled that the detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island was illegal, declaring it contrary to the country's constitution. It did not directly address the legality of detention practices elsewhere in PNG. The Detention Centre on Manus Island was formally closed on 31st October 2017.

The remaining former detainees were moved to Lorengau and then to Port Moresby.

[Until when: The forgotten men of Manus Island](#) (RCOA & Amnesty report Nov 2018)

[Forgotten men on Manus are 'broken' one year since detention centre closed | SBS News](#)
Nov 2018

In October 2021 the Australian Government cut off support to the 124 remaining men on the island leaving PNG to take over responsibility for them.

[Papua New Guinea Arrangement — Asylum Insight](#) (March 2025)

2.3 Port Moresby

After the [Liberal National Coalition](#) was re-elected in the [2019 Australian federal election](#), reports of despair and attempted self-harm and suicide were reported in PNG. By 4 June 2022 there had been at least 26 attempts at suicide or self-harm by men in the Lorengau camps and Port Moresby (in the hospital and accommodation for sick asylum seekers).

[‘We just sit here’: the broken men Australia’s offshore detention regime left behind in Papua New Guinea | Australian immigration and asylum | The Guardian](#) (June 2025)

Information from ASRC policy Brief - Offshore processing June 2025

[See the full Policy Brief here](#)

In PNG: Of 1,353 people exiled by the Australian government to Manus Island detention centre in 2013, almost twelve years later there are 37 refugees and people seeking asylum remaining, many with partners and children, now in Port Moresby.

Subjected to long term detention, family separation, human rights abuses, medical neglect, deprivation and ongoing uncertainty, the majority of people are extremely unwell and traumatised. Amid allegations of corruption within the PNG Humanitarian Services program funded by the Australian government, service provision ceased in November 2023. For

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several months following, refugees suffered an enduring health and humanitarian crisis. Donations from generous Australians, helped keep them alive.

The new PNG Support program: Due to advocacy from the sector alongside refugees, in 2024 the Australian government struck a deal to provide time limited funding to the PNG government to reinstate support to the remaining refugees, ..(but there are concerns the allocation may be).. inadequate to cover basic needs including accommodation with security, utilities, food, transport, health care, medications.

With Port Moresby being the third most dangerous city in the world, refugees and their families have experienced violent attacks, thefts and home invasions. Many fear for their lives and the safety of their children and are too frightened to leave their accommodation.

Medical evidence is being ignored: The Minister for Home Affairs and the Department of Home Affairs have received numerous medical reports and risk notifications about the group over some years, highlighting the serious and severe physical and mental health conditions and risks to life for the group, however they have ignored and not acted on the evidence.

Section 3: Refugees trapped in Indonesia

In what then Immigration Minister, Scott Morrison, flippantly referred to as ‘taking the sugar off the table’, Australia imposed a ban on resettling refugees who registered with the UNHCR in Indonesia after 1 July 2014. This ban remains in place under the Albanese Labor government. As a result, 14,000 refugees remain trapped in Indonesia, they have no work or study rights, and thousands live in poverty.

While this is not an Australian managed Offshore Detention Centre, these refugees are trapped in Indonesia as a direct result of Australia’s refugee policies.

3.1 Videos, reports and media articles about the situation in Indonesia

Short video clip from an 11 year old Afghan refugee in Indonesia - from RAC Sydney online forum in **May 2025** : [Setayish, an 11-year old-Afghan refugee in Indonesia, on the situation for those stranded there - YouTube](#)

May 2025 [Afghan Refugees In Indonesia Protest UN, Australian Embassy Over Resettlement Delays | Afghanistan International](#)

July 2025 [The story of one Afghan woman’s long delayed journey to Australia from Indonesia](#) (A rare success story but only because Bibi arrived in Indonesia before the 2014 ban and a good summary of the plight of those left behind)

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June 2024 [Thousands of refugees in Indonesia have spent years awaiting resettlement — their future remains unclear - ABC Asia](#)

Why are refugees trapped in Indonesia? Hear about it here: [A firsthand account from Jakarta and Cisarua](#) (2022)

Rohingya children report abuse in refugee camp in Aceh. [Rohingya children stuck in Indonesian camps call for freedom to move - Indonesia | ReliefWeb](#)

[Five Years in Indonesian Immigration Limbo: An Interview With Hazara Refugee Karima Hakimi](#) (2022)



[Will Pekanbaru become Indonesia's Cox's Bazar? - New Mandala](#) (Feb 2025)



3.2 Education initiatives for refugee children in Indonesia

The Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre was established in 2014. Since then our community has grown in confidence and other communities and community leaders have emerged and have created their own initiatives. Find out more here: <https://www.cisarualearning.com/>

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3.3 Testimonials from people who have visited Indonesia and met with refugees

Report by Ian Rintoul (RAC Sydney) about Indonesia in 2022 : [Eyewitness report: Australia's other offshore hell—lift the ban on refugees in Indonesia – Solidarity Online](#)

Recollection from Charles, Canberra after recent visit to Indonesia

I recently visited Indonesia for the first time. It is remarkable how much the country has achieved in the 75 years since it was formed, but there are still millions of people living in poverty in appalling conditions, including at least 13,000 refugees who have fled their homelands and are now trapped in Indonesia with nowhere to go. This was just a statistic to me until I saw a group of people camped outside the United Nations headquarters in Jakarta. I was told these are refugees from Afghanistan hoping the UN will find them a home. Seeing this makeshift camp made me realise that these people are not statistics – they are our brothers and sisters who through no fault of their own have been forced to flee from persecution, torture and perhaps death. Of course, the UN cannot offer them a home unless affluent countries such as Australia offer to take them. But Australia and other Western countries refuse to consider them and Indonesia cannot afford to support them so they will probably be stuck in miserable hovels in Jakarta for the rest of their lives with no jobs, no income, no dignity and no hope. There is no easy solution to this tragedy but removing Australia's 2014 ban on resettling refugees from Indonesia and basing our refugee policies on compassion rather than cruelty, would be a critical first step in offering them the chance of a better life.