



## People Smuggling Mythbuster

### **MYTH: People smuggling is a business model that needs to be smashed**

People smuggling has come about as an avenue utilised by people in need of protection from persecution. There is a legitimate need to address the behaviour of people smugglers who exploit vulnerable people. A real solution would focus upon providing adequate alternative pathways for asylum seekers to escape their conditions of persecution and destitution. Until such options exist people will always get on boats because they have nothing to lose when a likely death awaits them if they remain in their country of origin, and transit countries offer nothing but a state of utter hopelessness.

### **MYTH: Asylum seekers get on boats from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Malaysia because of people smugglers**

The vast majority of boat arrivals to Australia risk the journey because they have no genuine alternatives. Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Malaysia have not signed the *Refugee Convention* and asylum seekers in those countries face long periods without protection. Additionally, according to the Parliamentary Library,<sup>1</sup> Australia resettled only 560 refugees from Indonesia during the period of 2001 to February 2010 and only 490 refugees from Malaysia in 2010-11.

In 2012, there were 10.5 million refugees under the UNHCR's mandate, with 6.4 million of these people in protracted situations.<sup>2</sup> The average duration of these protracted situations has risen over the last few years and is approaching 20 years.<sup>3</sup> In 2012, only 74,800 refugees were submitted for resettlement.<sup>2</sup> Based on these figures, a refugee able to find a 'queue' and wait in it could conceivably wait decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Parliament House  
[http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/RefugeeResettlement#\\_Toc310921312](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/RefugeeResettlement#_Toc310921312)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Global Trends 2012 'Displacement, The New 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenge'. June 19, 2013.  
<http://www.unhcr.org/51bacb0f9.html>

<sup>3</sup> James Milner & Gil Loescher, 'Protracted Refugee Situations,' *Refugee Studies Centre*, 29 September 2011, <http://www.prsproject.org/protracted-refugee-situations/>.

## **MYTH: ‘Stop the boats’ is the solution**

Both the Government and Coalition opposition are promising to stem the flow of boats to Australia’s shores in the next electoral term.<sup>4</sup> Both approaches - either ‘turning the boats back’, or promising to send all arrivals to PNG and forever refusing them protection in Australia, misunderstands the factors that result in people getting on boats in search of protection from genuine persecution. What is required is a full spectrum focus including a regional framework that provides adequate protection to individuals facing persecution.

A collaborative regional processing approach, including close involvement of the UNHCR and major transit countries, that also processes people within an ordered and reasonable time frame, is the only sustainable approach that will genuinely reduce the demand for people to be smuggled to Australia. Asylum seekers who know that they won’t be languishing in transit countries for years without re-settlement will be far less likely to risk the lives of themselves and their families in dangerous and expensive boat crossings. Measures such as excising the mainland or exporting our international obligations to resource-poor countries such as PNG and Nauru will not solve the problem of people smuggling either.

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-06-06/abbott-vows-to-stop-asylum-boats-in-first-term/4736294>