

# refugee council of australia report



July 2020

## SEVEN YEARS ON:

### AN OVERVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S OFFSHORE PROCESSING POLICIES



Refugee Council  
of Australia

## Acknowledgement

The Refugee Council of Australia would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our former Policy Director, Dr Joyce Chia, who, long after her departure from RCOA, has continued to support us and diligently compiled the statistics in this report.

We are also grateful to our many policy volunteers, who, in the absence of regular updated information provided by the Government, tirelessly went through any public record that could shed a light on the state of Australia's offshore processing policy and assisted us in data gathering.

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## Introduction

On 13 August 2012, Australia announced that it would resume sending people to Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG) under a policy of offshore processing. On 19 July 2013, a significant change was announced. While the previous offshore processing policy was that those who were found to be refugees would be resettled in Australia and, possibly, elsewhere, under the new policy, even those who had been 'processed' and found to be refugees, would not be resettled in Australia, but only 'elsewhere'.

There was, however, no place 'elsewhere' at the time of the announcement. The Australian Government restarted offshore processing without a plan, and still – seven years later – does not have one.

In the seven years since, the Australian Government has spent billions of dollars maintaining a harmful policy. The Government justified it by stating that it 'saves lives' and stops people from drowning at sea. What it fails to mention is that our offshore processing policy is not saving lives – instead, we are killing people more slowly and more remotely, starving them of hope, and denying them a future.

In the name of our offshore processing policy, we have sacrificed our good relationship with two countries with whom Australia has close historical ties. We have lost all of the credibility we had gained from decades of leadership in resettling refugees. As other countries start to step in and grant protection to those we have detained for years, we are cementing our place as a country that harms refugees, rather than protects them. By 'protecting our borders', we have lost our soul.

It has been **seven** years since 19 July 2013 announcement. The brutal truth is many of us have become accustomed to the fact that our asylum policies damage and inflict indefinite pain on people seeking protection. We do not ask our politicians enough questions. Why 84 months after this policy was announced, after we spent \$7.6 billion for just over 3,000 people, many are still languishing on Nauru and in PNG? Some were teenagers, arriving in Australia alone. They are now young men and women, their dreams for the future shattered, the most important years of their lives wasted while they were being shifted from one country to another, from one detention centre to another. Why are those who have come to Australia for medical treatment still locked away in detention or are left in the community with no support and no future?

In response to the few questions posed, our politicians play semantics. They contest the statement that people have spent seven years in offshore detention because the facilities were

declared 'open centres'. This overlooks the fact that being confined to a small island the size of Melbourne Tullamarine airport (in the case of Nauru) or being confined to a small island with little freedom of movement (in the case of Manus Island) or being in limbo in Port Moresby, where people are subject to arbitrary and inconsistent rules and restrictions, is not in any way the definition of freedom. When scores of people were suddenly detained in a detention centre in Port Moresby, our Government simply removed them from statistics. They did so under the pretence that these people were under the jurisdiction of PNG's authority, conveniently overlooking the fact that they were in that country because we forcibly sent them there.

We can, and must, end offshore processing now. There is a way out, for this is not a problem of policy, but a problem of political will.

## How we collected the data and the constraints

As of 10 July 2020, when this report was finalised, the latest statistics published by the Department of Home Affairs, both in relation to immigration detention and regional processing and resettlement were from 31 March 2020.

The Australian Government no longer provides regular statistics on offshore processing: for example, the detailed statistics relating to people still offshore, medical transfers and information about the location and status of people who are currently in Australia. The Government no longer provides details of the outcome of interviews for resettlement in the United States, as it claims it is a matter for US Government. The Australian Government now only provides a monthly update on the number of people who have been resettled in third countries, including the United States. However, as mentioned, the last monthly update on this dates back to the end of March. When the data is provided, it is not uncommon for it to be inconsistent with what was provided before or for large gaps to exist in data (we aimed to point these issues out wherever applicable throughout the report).

Most of the information in this report has been collected through the analysis of Senate Estimates. Usually, the information provided in this way is already outdated by the time it is provided. As well, it should be noted that there are limitations and gaps in the data, as the information depends on the way the question was asked and the frequency with which it is asked. We have also looked through the documents released under Freedom of Information laws, budget papers, Operation Sovereign Borders updates (mainly for returns and removal figures) and media reports.

We believe, however, that in a democratic country like Australia, getting a clear understanding of what is happening to the people we have sent to offshore facilities should not be this complicated. We should not need to go through hundreds of Senate questions on notice, hundreds of pages of the Senate Estimates Hansard, documents and media reports to be able to understand what is happening to very small group of people. Our Government can do much better. It is imperative that this information is provided in a simple format and language and in a central location on the Department of Home Affairs website, as it is through scrutinising this data that we can hold our elected officials accountable.

In the absence of this, we hope that this report provides a snapshot of where we are at, seven years after the 19 July 2013

announcement. Our aim is to provide the key figures related to offshore processing policies: how many people have been sent

offshore, where people are now, where they were from, how many returned or were forcibly removed, how many needed to be transferred to Australia for medical treatment, where in Australia they are now, and how much we have spent.

## Key Figures

The data underlying all of the figures in this report, along with the sources and notes on the data, are available to download from a spreadsheet [here](#). The spreadsheet also includes more detailed data and charts that were previously reported by the Refugee Council in the statistics page of our website but have not since been updated in Senate estimates or elsewhere.

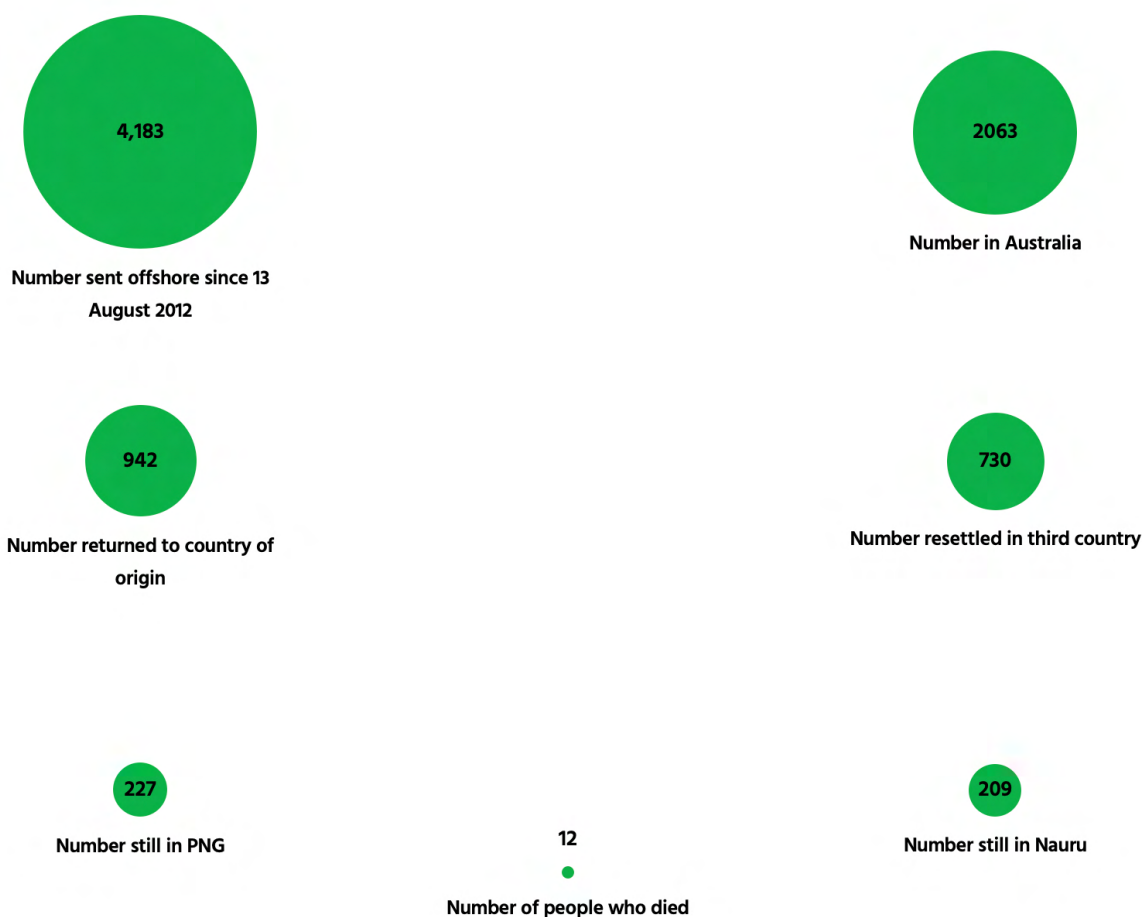


Figure 1- A snapshot of key figures as of 31 March 2020<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is a difference between the number of people currently in Australia (who were initially in offshore processing facilities) and the number of 'transitory persons' currently in Australia. The figure 2,063 includes those who were sent to Nauru and PNG before 19 July 2013, when the policy changed to prevent people from being resettled in Australia and those already on Nauru and PNG were transferred back to Australia. As we will mention in page 11 the number of 'transitory persons' currently in Australia is 1,220. This number only includes people who arrived after 19 July 2013 and then temporarily transferred back to Australia, primarily for medical treatment.

## People subject to offshore processing

Since offshore processing began on 13 August 2012, 4,183 people have been sent to Nauru or PNG<sup>2</sup>. There is a slight discrepancy between this figure, provided by data on 14 July 2019, and the figure of 4,177 people provided in April 2019 to Senate Estimates<sup>3</sup>.

These figures do not include those born in offshore facilities. Between 19 July 2013 and 28 February 2019, 46 children were born to people transferred offshore who remained in Nauru and 125 children were born to those transferred from Nauru to Australia<sup>4</sup>. No official statistics has been released on the number of children born in PNG, fathered those subject to offshore processing. However, news outlets reported that according to those on the ground who worked with this group, this number is at least 39 children as of end of October 2018<sup>5</sup>.

Of these, 3,127 people have been sent to Nauru or PNG since 19 July 2013<sup>6</sup>, when the Australian Government changed its policy so that anyone who arrived in Australia by boat and transferred to offshore facilities would never be resettled in Australia.

## Current numbers on Nauru and PNG

As of 31 March 2020, there were 209 on Nauru and 227 people still in PNG<sup>7</sup>. These are the latest monthly statistics provided by the Department of Home Affairs. Since then, there have been media reports of another 63 people who have left PNG and Nauru to be resettled in the United States and in at least one case in Europe. This is made up of 35 people who were flown out of Port Moresby in May 2020<sup>8</sup>, and another 28 people from Nauru and PNG who were reported to be due to fly out in June 2020<sup>9</sup>.

According to Senate Estimates, in March 2020 there was only one woman left on Nauru, after seven out of eight women remained there were transferred to Australia in February 2020<sup>10</sup>.

The below figure shows the number of people in PNG and Nauru and their refugee status as of 31 March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Border Force, Operational Performance Monitoring- FOI request FA 19/07/00487, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/foi/files/2019/fa-190700487-document-released.PDF>>. Please note that this figures include the number of people taken to offshore facilities until 14 July 2019, however as far as RCOA understands no new person has been taken to this facility since then.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates Hearing of Home Affairs Portfolio (4 April 2019), <[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/a7e92ff2-6a3e-4f04-8597-c90cfed83dfe/toc\\_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee\\_2019\\_04\\_04\\_7045.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/estimate/a7e92ff2-6a3e-4f04-8597-c90cfed83dfe/0000%22](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/a7e92ff2-6a3e-4f04-8597-c90cfed83dfe/toc_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee_2019_04_04_7045.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/estimate/a7e92ff2-6a3e-4f04-8597-c90cfed83dfe/0000%22)>, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Senator Stirling Griff, Answer to Question on Notice BE19/107 (8 April 2019), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadestimatesquestions/EstimatesQuestion-Committeeld6-EstimatesRoundld6-PortfolioId20-QuestionNumber106>>.

<sup>5</sup> Lyanne Togiba and Michelle Cheng, 'Life in limbo: the Manus babies who face a stateless future' The Guardian (13 December 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/dec/13/life-in-limbo-the-manus-babies-who-face-a-stateless-future>>.

<sup>6</sup> Senator Kim Carr, Answer to Question on Notice AE17/170 (27 February 2017), <[https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/legcon\\_ctte/estimates/add\\_1617/DIBP/QoNs/AE17-170.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/legcon_ctte/estimates/add_1617/DIBP/QoNs/AE17-170.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Home Affairs, Key statistics as at 31 March 2020, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us-subsite/files/population-and-number-of-people-resettled.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> Stefan Armbruster, 'Dozens of refugees flown from Australia and PNG to US despite coronavirus travel ban' SBS News (21 May 2020), <[https://www.sbs.com.au/news/dozens-of-refugees-flown-from-australia-and-png-to-us-despite-coronavirus-travel-bans?fbclid=IwAR33J\\_FgNAcAZAzYyC3LdAk4FNfBY6eMfk5B-uRuNW5SZHreT2kcJLaM\\_Q](https://www.sbs.com.au/news/dozens-of-refugees-flown-from-australia-and-png-to-us-despite-coronavirus-travel-bans?fbclid=IwAR33J_FgNAcAZAzYyC3LdAk4FNfBY6eMfk5B-uRuNW5SZHreT2kcJLaM_Q)>.

<sup>9</sup> 'US takes more Manus, Nauru refugees', Radio New Zealand (11 June 2020), <<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/418773/us-takes-more-manus-nauru-refugees>>.

<sup>10</sup> Estimates Hearing of Home Affairs Portfolio (2 March 2020), <[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/toc\\_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee\\_2020\\_03\\_02\\_7589\\_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/0000%22](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/toc_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee_2020_03_02_7589_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/0000%22)>, 195.

## People in PNG and Nauru, 31 March 2020

■ Refugees ■ Still in RSD Process ■ Non-refugees

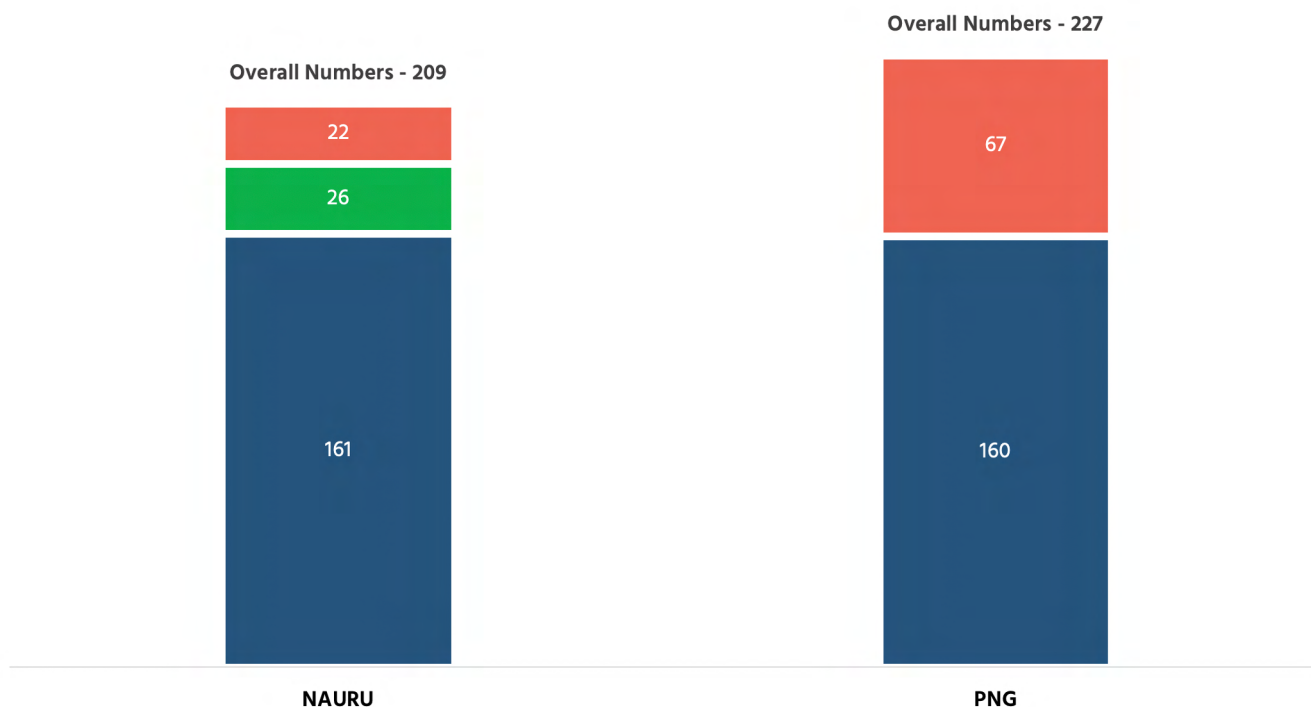


Figure 2- Number of people in PNG and Nauru and their refugee status

## Where people live on Nauru and PNG

For the first few years, people were housed in detention centres, called 'Regional Processing Centres' by the government. The early days of Operation Sovereign Borders saw a rapid increase in the number of people sent to both Manus Island and Nauru. In January 2014, the numbers of people on Manus Island peaked at 1,353. The number of people on Nauru peaked at 1,233 in August 2014.

Refugees living on Nauru are all now living in the Nauruan community, with no one living in the processing centre by the end of March 2019.

The processing centre at Lombrum Naval Base (located on Manus Island) was forcibly closed in October 2017, when there were still 690 men there. The men eventually were transferred to three

centres located much closer to Lorengau, the main town on Manus Island. Those centres were East Lorengau Transit Centre, West Lorengau Haus and Hillside Haus<sup>11</sup>.

On 9 July 2019, and following a fire in Hillside Haus, the residents of this centre that accommodated the so-called 'non-refugees', were given a notice informing them the accommodation would be temporarily closed for renovation and they could either move to another accommodation on the Island or fly to Port Moresby by 12 July 2019. In another notice provided around the same time, it was reiterated that this arrangement was temporary and the repair work would finalise by 7 August 2019. As this followed a period of escalated mental health-related events, including self-harm and suicide attempts, almost all of the men opted to relocate to Port Moresby to be in a different environment.

On 25 July 2019, three men from this group were arrested in Port Moresby and transferred to Bomana prison where for the first few days they were placed in a large cell with convicted criminals. PNG Immigration released a public statement claiming that they were arrested for "immigration non-compliance" and did not provide any further information.

<sup>11</sup> For further information about the forcible closure of Lombrum centre and relocation of the men, see: Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International, *Until When: The Forgotten Men on Manus Island* (20 November 2018), <[https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Until\\_When\\_AIA\\_RCOA\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Until_When_AIA_RCOA_FINAL.pdf)>.



On 11 August 2019, all of the former residents of Hillside Haus were given a Removal and Detention Order that was signed by PNG Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration in April 2016, three years prior. A few hours later and in the early morning of 12 August 2019, 50 men were arrested and transferred to a newly built Bomana Immigration Centre. The three men who were initially in Bomana prison later joined them in that immigration detention centre. All but four of them were from Iran, a country that does not accept forcible deportation of its citizens. They were eventually released after being pressured to sign to 'voluntarily' return to their home countries but most endured six months of detention in substandard conditions and primarily

incommunicado. In January 2020, the last 18 men held in that detention facility were released<sup>12</sup>.

On 19 August 2019, the PNG government offered to relocate the rest of refugees on Manus Island to Port Moresby<sup>13</sup>.

As of 2 March 2020, only four refugees and people seeking asylum remained on Manus Island<sup>14</sup>.

Figure 3 shows the changing number of people in the processing centres on Nauru and Manus over time (please note that the number zero in this figure does not mean all refugees and people

## People on Manus and Nauru Regional Processing Centres

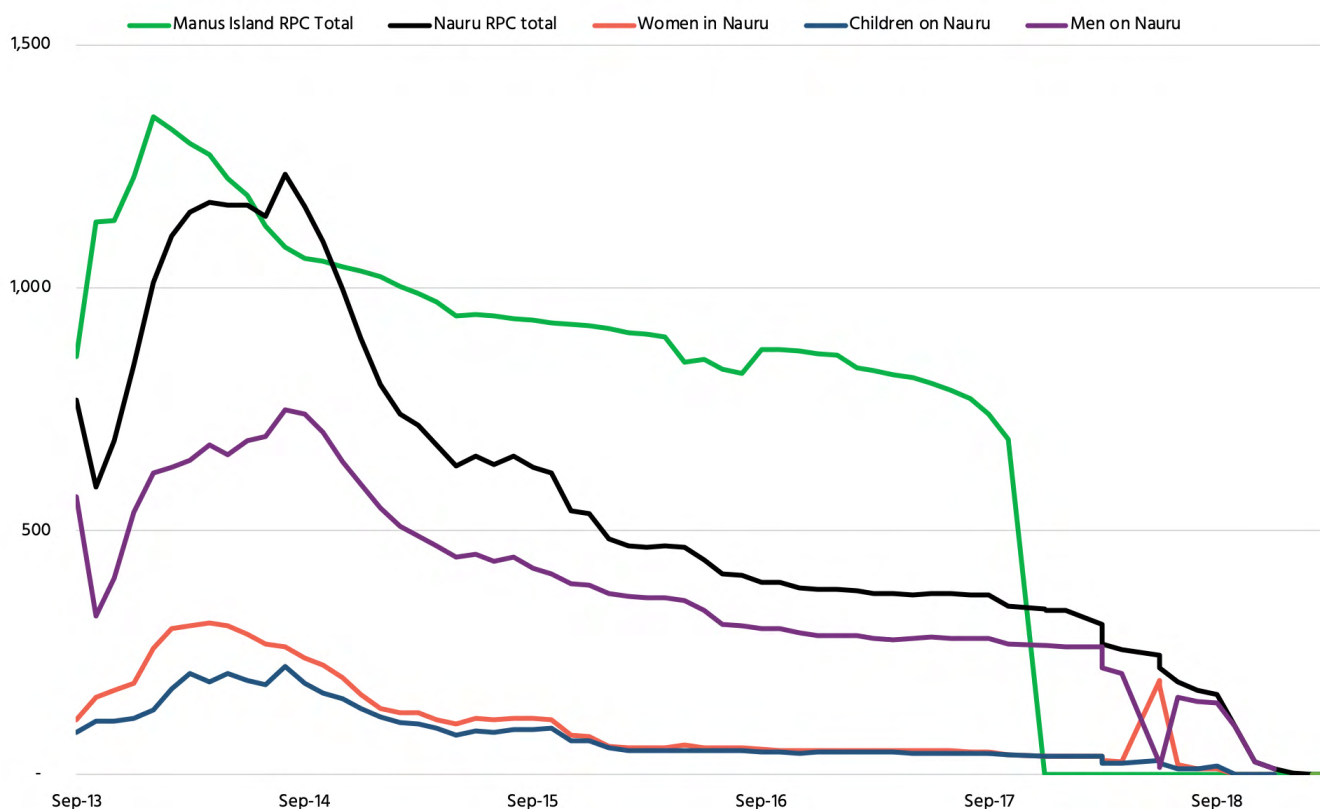


Figure 3- Number of people in Regional Processing Centres on Manus Island and Nauru

<sup>12</sup> Josh Taylor, 'Last asylum seekers held in Papua New Guinea detention centre released' *The Guardian* (24 January 2020), <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/24/last-asylum-seekers-held-in-papua-new-guinea-detention-centre-released>>.

<sup>13</sup> Helen Davidson, 'Remaining Manus Island refugees offered voluntary relocation to Port Moresby' *The Guardian* (20 August 2019), <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/20/remaining-manus-island-refugees-offered-voluntary-relocation-to-port-moresby>>.

<sup>14</sup> Estimates Hearing of Home Affairs Portfolio (2 March 2020), <[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/toc\\_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee\\_2020\\_03\\_02\\_7589\\_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf;search=%22committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/0000%22](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/toc_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee_2020_03_02_7589_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf;search=%22committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/0000%22)>, 182.



seeking asylum have left those locations. It only refers to the number of people in Regional Processing Centres which, as mentioned, are no longer in use and are replaced by other types of accommodation).

## Children on and off Nauru

The big story in 2018 was the belated push to transfer children out of Nauru, thanks in large part to the [#KidsOffNauru campaign](#). On 28 February 2019, the last four children on Nauru departed for the United States<sup>15</sup>.

Figure 4 shows the rapid decline in the numbers of children on Nauru, from 122 at the end of the 2017-2018 financial year to zero as of 28 February 2019 (please note the numbers were reported irregularly, so there is large gap between October 2018 and February 2019).

### Minors

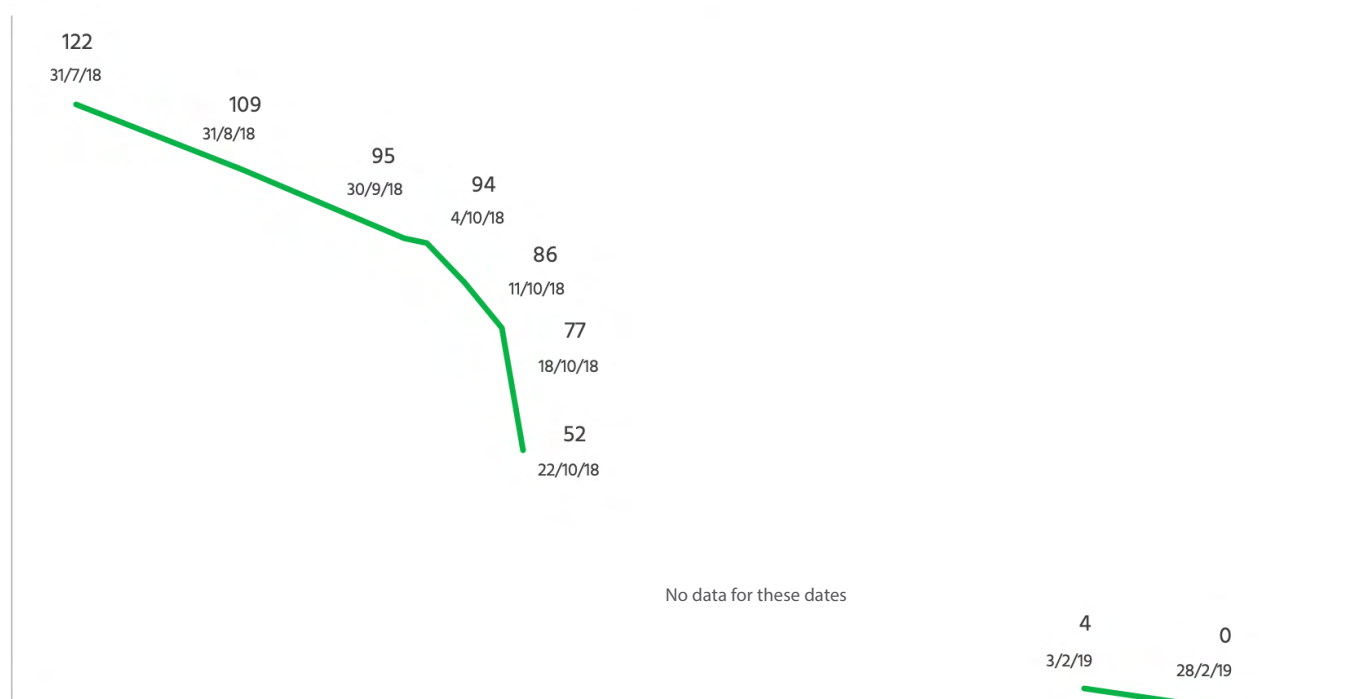


Figure 4- Minors on Nauru from July 2018 to February 2019

<sup>15</sup> 'Final refugee children leave Nauru for US' SBS News (28 February 2019), <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/final-refugee-children-leave-nauru-for-us>>.

## Nationalities of people sent to Nauru or PNG

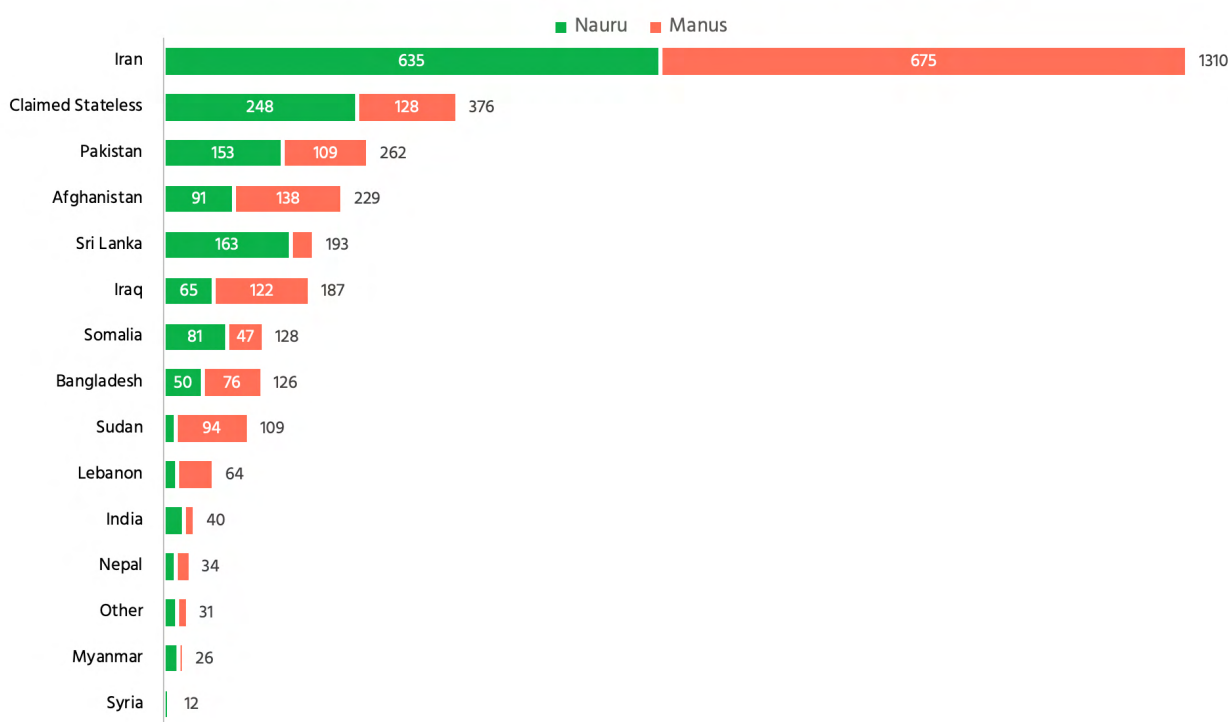


Figure 5- Nationalities as of 27 February 2017

## Where do people come from

By far the largest number of people sent to Nauru or PNG were from Iran. The second-largest group of people are stateless. There are also significant numbers of people from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. Figure 5 shows the nationality of all people sent for offshore processing, between 19 July 2013 and 27 February 2017. (There have been no reported new transfers since then) <sup>16</sup>.

## Resettlement in the United States and other countries

As of 31 March 2020, 702 people had been resettled to the United States <sup>17</sup>. This number includes 350 people from Nauru, 322 people from PNG and 30 people who were transferred to Australia and then left for the United States <sup>18</sup>. As mentioned earlier in this report, since the release of this statistics, more people left Australia, PNG and Nauru, primarily for resettlement in the United States.

As of 1 March 2020, over 260 others had been approved for resettlement in the United States but were waiting for final

<sup>16</sup> Senator Kim Carr, Answer to Question on Notice AE17/170 (27 February 2017), <[https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/legcon\\_ctte/estimates/add\\_1617/DIBP/QoNs/AE17-170.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/legcon_ctte/estimates/add_1617/DIBP/QoNs/AE17-170.pdf)>.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Home Affairs, Key statistics as at 31 March 2020, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us-subsite/files/population-and-number-of-people-resettled.pdf>>.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Home Affairs, Regional processing and resettlement, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/border-protection/regional-processing-and-resettlement>>. Please note that this page states that 702 people left for the United States as of end of April 2020. However, as the key statistics is still last updated on 31 March 2020, we have kept that date as reference point. It is highly likely that no one left any of the locations for third country resettlement in April 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

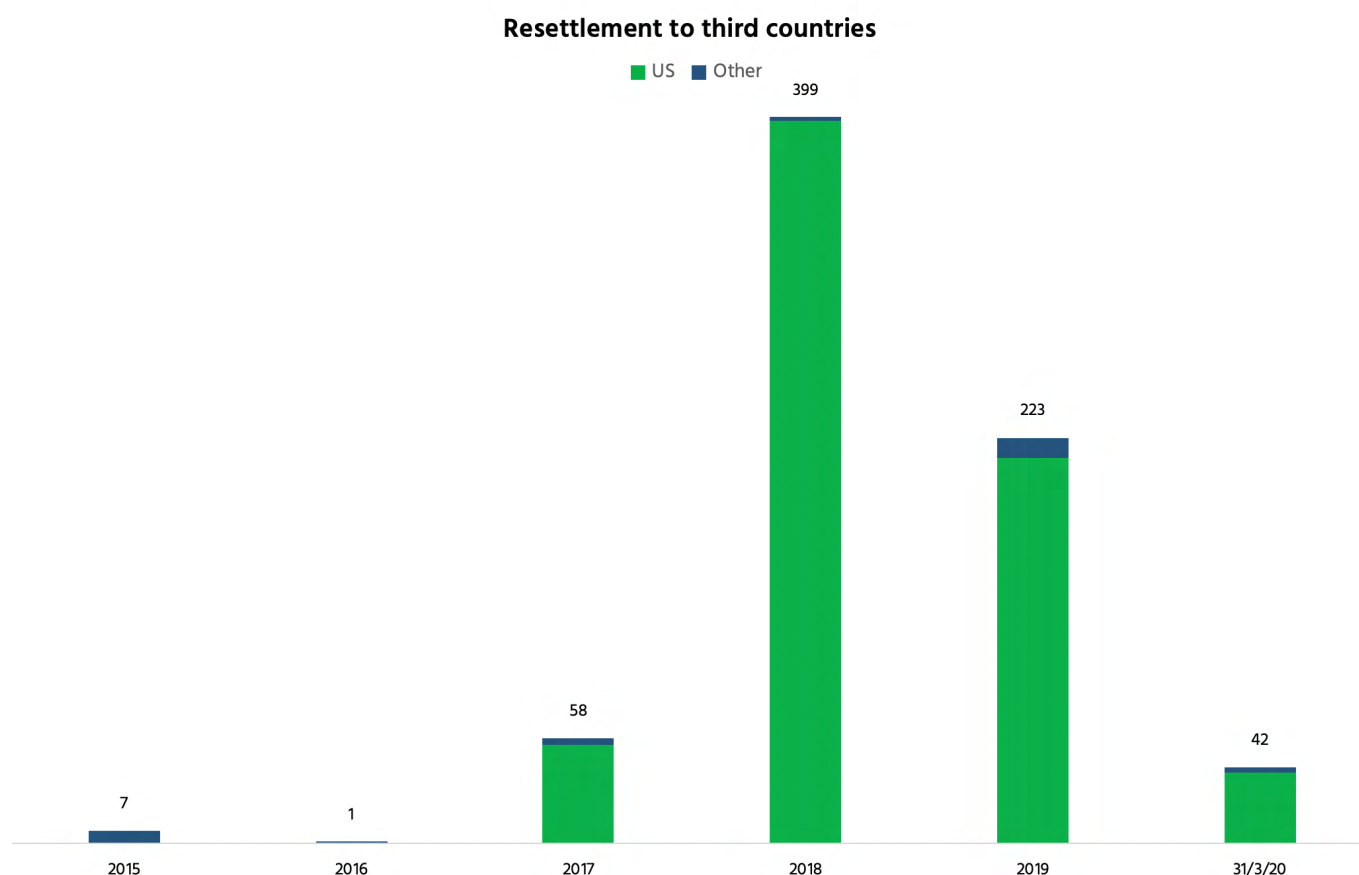


Figure 6- resettlement to third countries

checks (about 35 of these in Nauru, 50 in Papua New Guinea and 175 in Australia)<sup>19</sup>. In March 2020, the Department of Home Affairs reported that the United States intended to finish the process of interviewing people for approval by mid-2020<sup>20</sup>.

Figure 6 shows the total number of people resettled in third countries over the years, as well as the number of people resettled to the United States. It shows that the United States is by far the largest resettlement destination, followed by Canada where so far 11 people have been resettled to.

As at 28 February 2019, it was reported that 265 people had been rejected for resettlement by the United States<sup>21</sup>. We understand that this number has since increased but no further official data is available.

## Medical transfers

About 1,220 people are in Australia as a 'transitory person' (964 from Nauru, and 256 from PNG)<sup>22</sup> – that is, they were transferred to Australia for medical treatment, family reunion or other reasons, but could be returned to Nauru or PNG. Figure 7 shows the location of these people are in Australia and their visa status. A significant shift that has occurred in the past year is that all of those brought under the Medevac legislation remain in detention, including in so-called 'Alternative Places of Detention' (APODs) such as hotels in Melbourne and Brisbane, rather than in community detention.

In February 2019 the Australian Parliament passed a law known as the Medevac legislation, which required the Minister to consider

<sup>19</sup> Senator Nick McKim, Answer to Question on Notice No. 101 (2 March 2020), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadestimatesquestions/EstimatesQuestion-Committeeld6-EstimatesRoundld8-Portfoliold20-QuestionNumber101>>.

<sup>20</sup> Estimates Hearing of Home Affairs Portfolio (2 March 2020), <[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/toc\\_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee\\_2020\\_03\\_02\\_7589\\_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/0000%22](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/toc_pdf/Legal%20and%20Constitutional%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee_2020_03_02_7589_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/estimate/9cba4477-60ef-40db-a537-241108688a6c/0000%22)>, 172.

<sup>21</sup> 'Final refugee children leave Nauru for US' SBS News (28 February 2019), <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/final-refugee-children-leave-nauru-for-us>>.

<sup>22</sup> Senator Nick McKim, Answer to Question on Notice AE 20-104 (2 March 2020), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadattachment?attachmentId=be121d97-6f91-4442-81dc-a14266438458>>.

### People transferred from offshore processing to Australia, by location

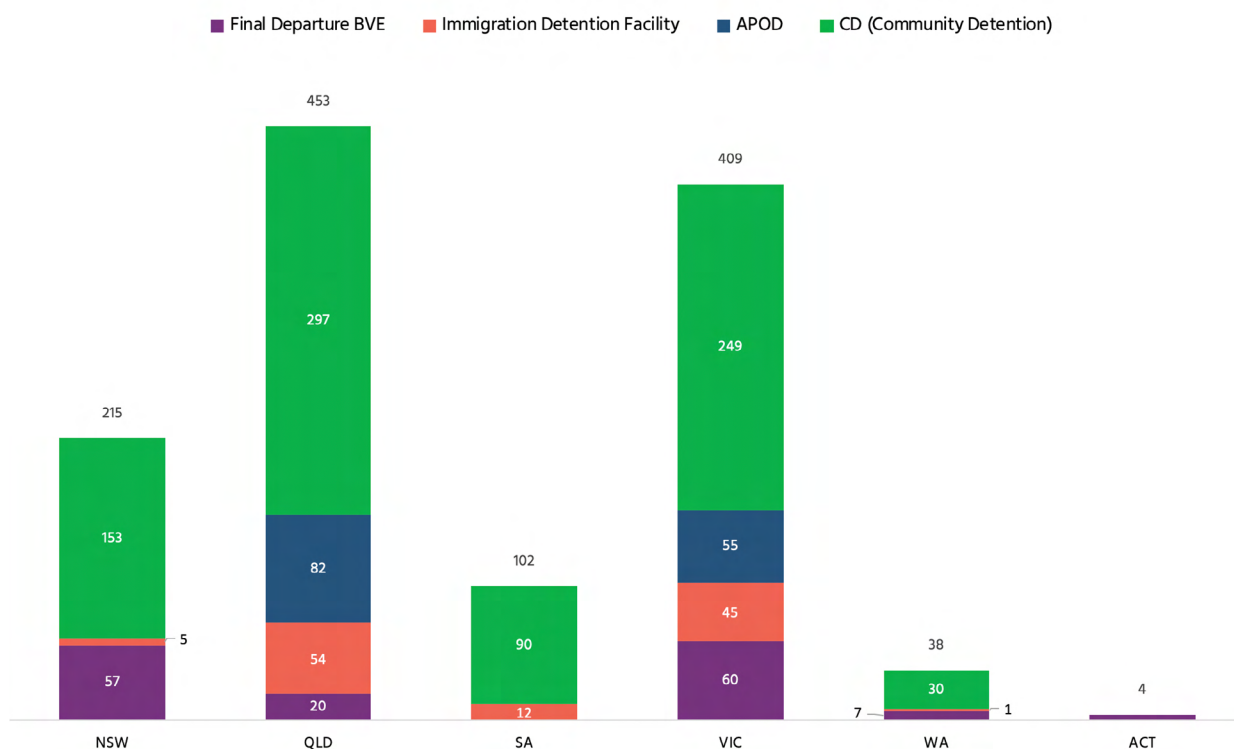


Figure 7- location of transitory people in Australia

### Medevac transfers and outcomes

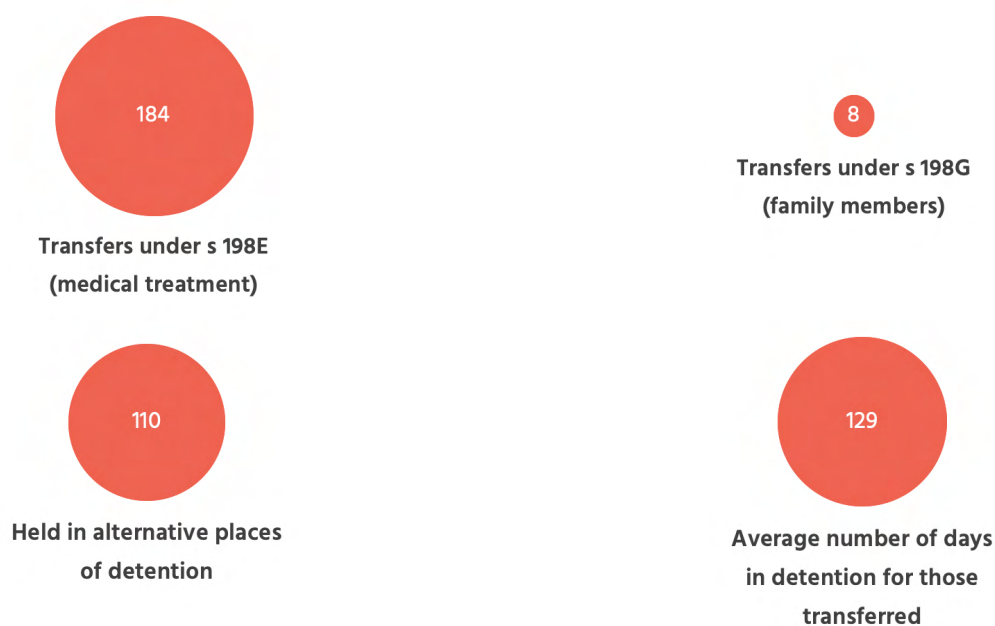


Figure 8- Overview of Medevac transfers

the views of independent doctors in determining whether a person should be transferred for medical treatment in Australia. The law was repealed in December 2019. During that time, 192 people were transferred to Australia under the legislation, including 8 people who had been separated from their family from a previous transfer <sup>23</sup>. Since the repeal of Medevac legislation and until 1 March 2020, another 45 people have been transferred to Australia for medical treatment (36 people from Nauru and 9 people from PNG) <sup>24</sup>.

Another 39 people had been approved for transfer by Australia under the Medevac legislation, but had not been approved by Nauru when the law was repealed. Of these, 20 were eventually transferred to Australia and another 10 transferred to Taiwan or PNG for medical treatment <sup>25</sup>.

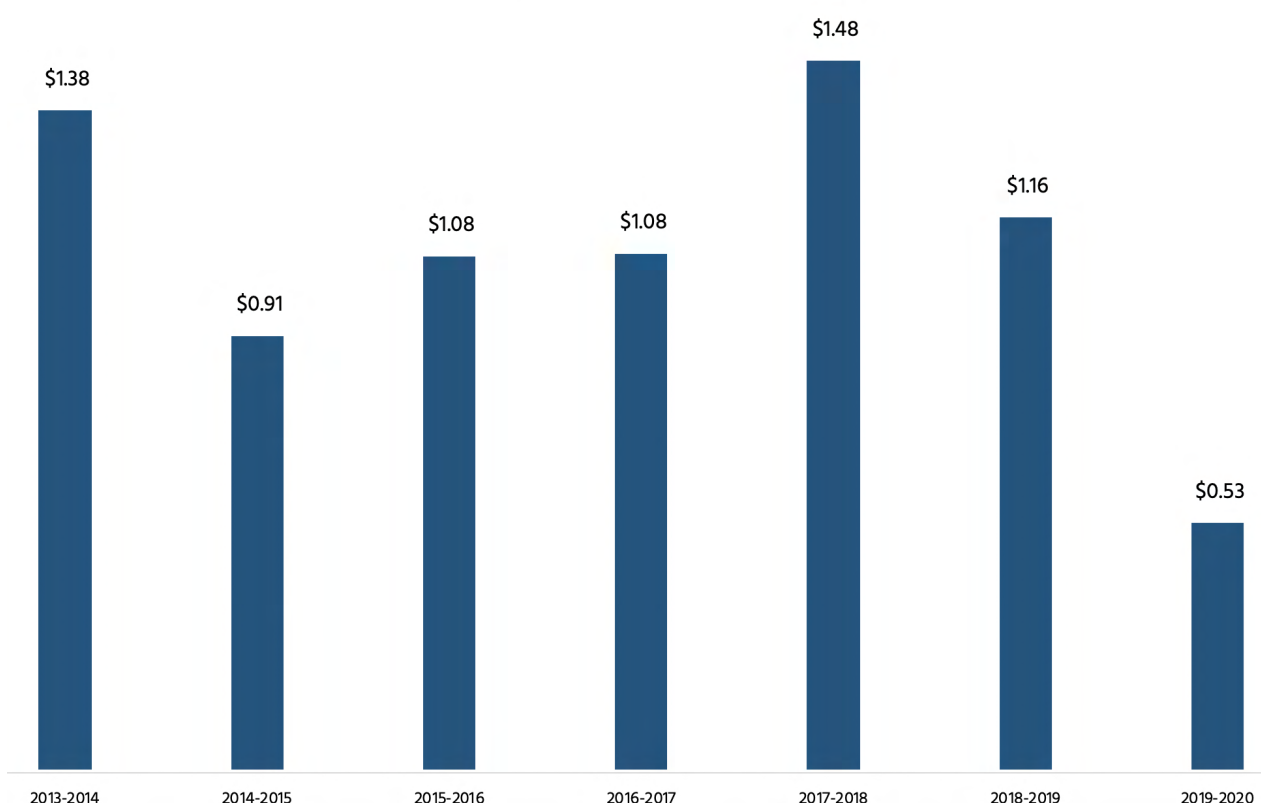
## How much we spent so far

### Total cost

The costs of offshore processing are difficult to fully understand. Different figures have been provided in different Senate Estimates and have not been regularly updated.

What is clear, however, is that offshore processing is extraordinarily expensive, regularly costing more than \$1 billion a year. Figure 9 shows the previous year's figures published by the Department of Home Affairs in its annual Portfolio Budget Estimates (the 'estimated actual', other than the most recent budget) since 2013-2014. These totals amount to **\$7.618 billion**.

**Costs of Offshore processing management (Budget) (\$ Billions)**



*Figure 9- cost of offshore processing*

<sup>23</sup> Senator Nick McKim, Answer to Question on Notice AE 20-216 (2 March 2020), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadattachment?attachmentId=980249eb-50dc-4432-a6e4-13d669008593>>.

<sup>24</sup> Senator Stirling Griff, Answer to Question on Notice AE 20-124 (2 March 2020), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadattachment?attachmentId=42bb2c06-61e1-4f78-970f-9eb5fdb8f368>>.

<sup>25</sup> Senator Stirling Griff, Answer to Question on Notice AE 20-128 (2 March 2020), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadattachment?attachmentId=a4daae40-2c80-40ed-a68b-e290a784e91f>>.

This is **\$2.44 million per person** if we simply divide this amount by 3,127, the total number of people who were taken to offshore facilities since 19 July 2013. This does not consider the fact that many of those people returned or removed to their home countries or were resettled in a third country well before the last financial year. If we consider that fact, the cost per person for a number of people will be significantly higher.

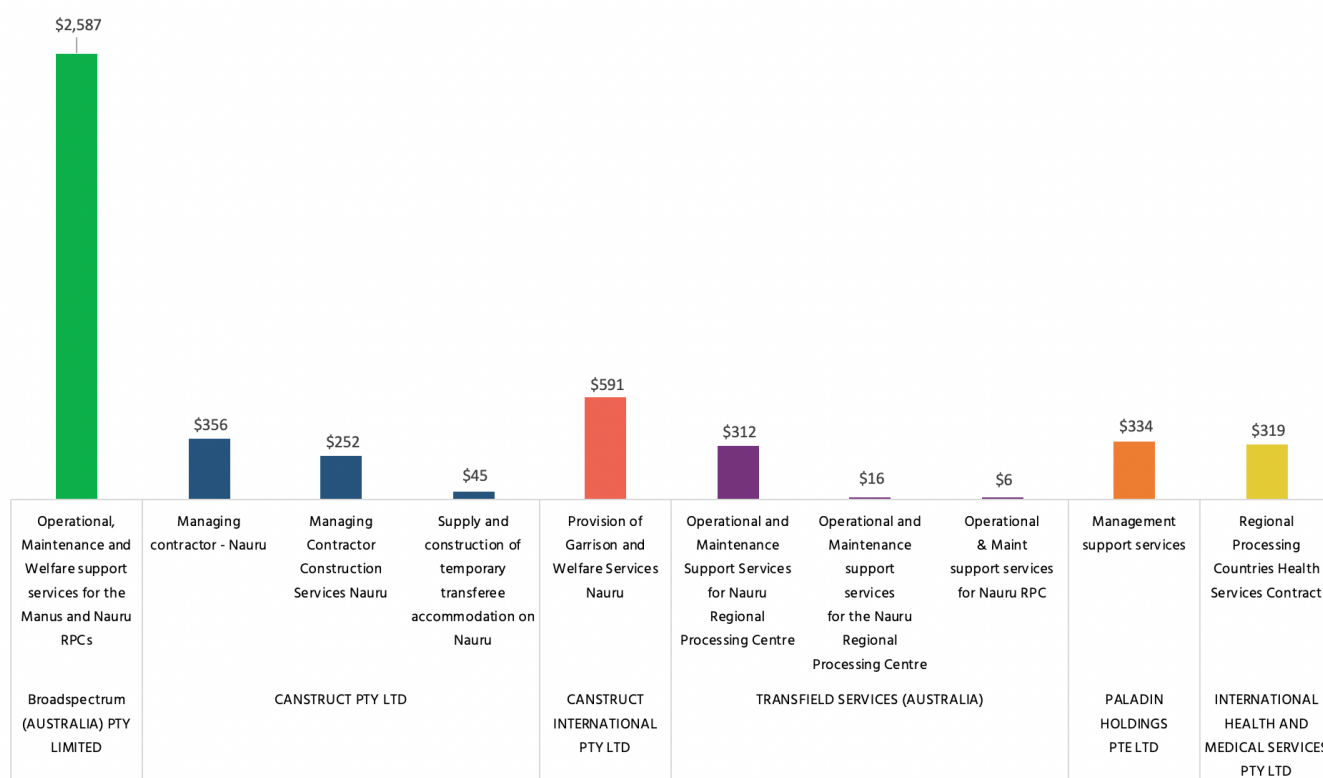
It should be emphasised that the astonishing figure of \$7.618 billion is likely to be an underestimate because it only counts those costs that are directly attributed to the offshore processing policy. This would not, for example, include any foreign aid that was used as part of any resettlement deal (for example, the \$40 million that Cambodia received in increased aid <sup>26</sup> as part of a deal to resettle refugees from Nauru, a deal that resulted in the resettlement of only seven refugees, many of them eventually returned to their home countries).

## Contractors

Over \$2.5 billion has gone to Broadspectrum alone, a contractor that previously supplied services on both Manus Island and Nauru. Despite the allegations of poor business practices, the Australian Government awarded a contract worth \$333 million to Paladin Holdings for a term less than 18 months, after it first provided \$89 million worth of services under letters of intent <sup>27</sup>.

The list of contracts for our offshore processing regime is extensive. More than \$5 million has been paid to one company providing air services to Nauru, and nearly \$20 million to another company leasing accommodation in PNG. Pacific International Hospital has a contract of over \$21 million to provide health services for those in PNG for less than a year. We have also spent over \$1.88 million on external legal costs related to medical transfers.

**Top five contracts in offshore processing by value (according to AusTender) (\$ Millions)**



*Figure 10- top 5 contracts in offshore processing by value*

<sup>26</sup> Nicole Hasham, 'Blow to Australia's \$55 million Cambodia deal as two more refugees reportedly leave-20160308-gnda8q.html'. <<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/blow-to-australias-55-million-cambodia-deal-as-two-more-refugees-reportedly-leave-20160308-gnda8q.html>>.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Karp and Christopher Knaus, 'Paladin: PNG PM calls for briefing, as Labor refers \$423m contract to auditor general' The Guardian (20 February 2019), <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/feb/20/labor-refers-paladin-to-auditor-general-over-controversial-423m-contract>>.

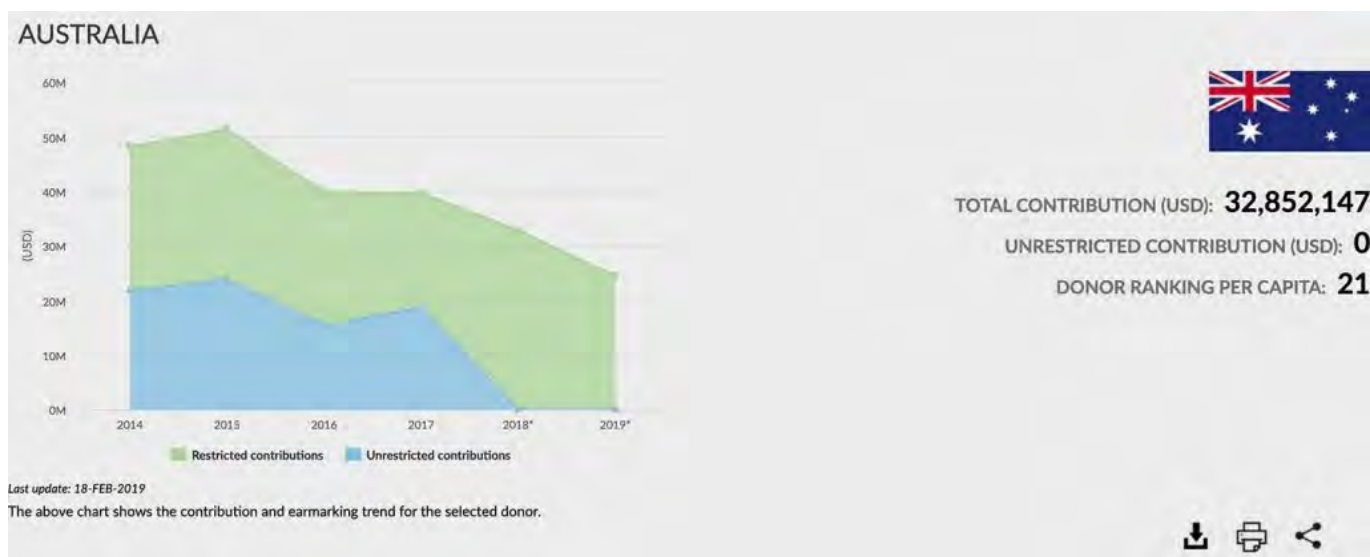


Figure 11- Australia's contribution to UNHCR as of February 2019

Yet the amount seen by refugees and people seeking asylum themselves is tiny. For example, in 2017 single adults in Nauru Regional Processing Centre received \$110 per fortnight in income support<sup>28</sup>.

Figure 10 shows the top five offshore processing contracts, according to their published value on AusTender (please note that Canstruct is listed as both Canstruct International and Canstruct Pty Ltd).

This spending is in contrast to Australia's declining contribution to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as illustrated in Figure 11.

There have been extraordinary costs associated with offshore processing as well, such as the \$87 million in visa fees paid to the Nauruan government (as at 30 September 2018). Australia pays Nauru a visa fee of \$2,000 a month for each refugee and \$1,000 a month for each person seeking asylum, and another \$1,050 annually for each service provider. The Australian Government has also paid nearly half a million dollars a month for 'staff bedsit accommodation' in a hotel (\$429,660 per month) with a total contract of \$19.26 million for the leasing of that hotel. The Government has spent \$38.5 million upgrading Nauru's hospital, and \$23.1 million building Bomana Immigration Centre in Port Moresby, to which we referred earlier in the report.

Most recently, the re-opening of Christmas Island detention facility in February 2019 has been budgeted as costing \$185.2

million over two years, and by 31 August 2019, according to Senate Estimates, had already cost \$26.8 million although only four people (including two children) are being detained there. There are over 100 staff on Christmas Island<sup>29</sup>.

## Refugee Status Determination

Even with the unfair refugee status determination process on Manus Island<sup>30</sup>, the percentage of final determinations (after review) recognising these people as refugees was 74%, at 31 October 2017. The Department of Home Affairs stopped reporting on the Refugee Status Determination outcomes in both PNG and Nauru from October 2017 until January 2020 when it restarted providing some information about people remaining in PNG and Nauru and their status.

According to the statistics last provided on 31 March 2020<sup>31</sup>, most of those remaining on Nauru and PNG have been recognised as refugees. Figures 12 and 13 provide the percentage of people who have been recognised as refugees, those still in the process and those who have received a negative outcome in both Nauru and PNG.

<sup>28</sup> For a full list of sources and more details about the cost, please see our detailed spreadsheet [here](#).

<sup>29</sup> Rebekah Holt and Aaron Fernandes, 'The Biloela Tamil family say Christmas Island detention staff are ignoring coronavirus protection measures' SBS News (8 April 2020), <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-biloela-tamil-family-say-christmas-island-detention-staff-are-ignoring-coronavirus-protection-measures>>.

<sup>30</sup> For more on RSD process in PNG, see: Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International, 'Until When: The Forgotten Men on Manus Island' (20 November 2018), <[https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Until\\_When\\_AIA\\_RCOA\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Until_When_AIA_RCOA_FINAL.pdf)>, 45-47.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Home Affairs, Key statistics as at 31 March 2020, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us-subsite/files/population-and-number-of-people-resettled.pdf>>.



People in Nauru (as at 31 March 2020)

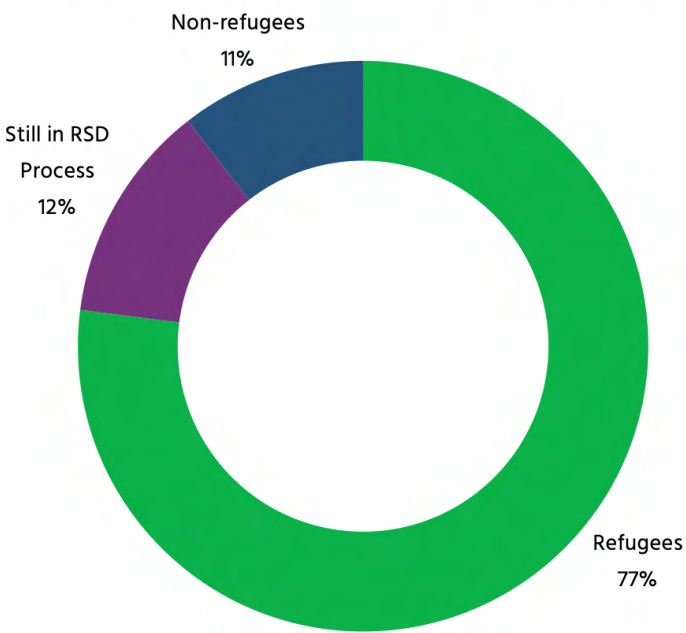


Figure 12- Refugee Status Determination- Nauru

People in PNG (as at 31 March 2020)

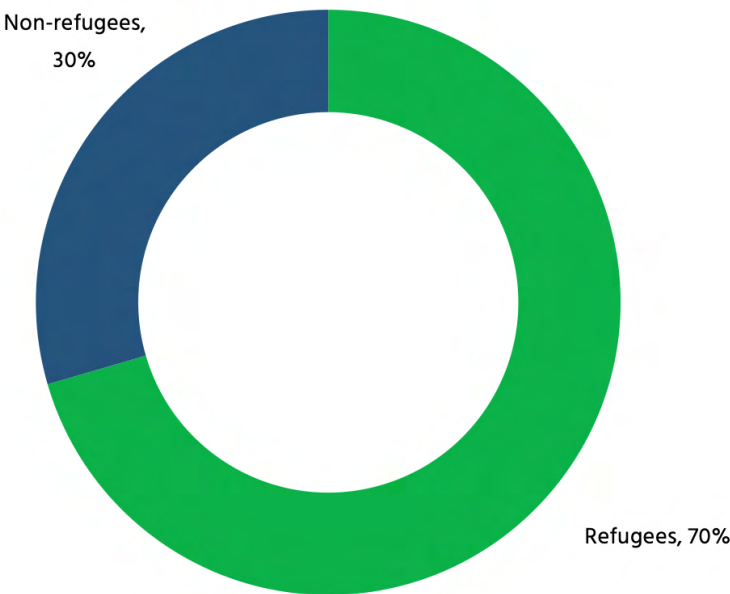


Figure 13- Refugee Status Determination- PNG

## Returns from Australia and offshore processing centres

The Department of Home Affairs monthly updates as part of Operation Sovereign Borders <sup>33</sup> show that there has been a consistent, small number of people who 'voluntarily' leave the offshore processing centres. This has been shown in Figure 14. It also illustrates returns (both voluntarily and or forced) from detention facilities in Australia.

Since the beginning of offshore processing in August 2012, 942 people have been returned to their country of origin (both 'voluntarily' and involuntarily) <sup>32</sup>.



Figure 14- returns (voluntary and forced from Australia and offshore facilities)

<sup>32</sup> Senator Stirling Griff, Answer to Question on Notice AE 20-127 (2 March 2020), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadattachment?attachmentId=56f5d0d5-3758-487d-a22e-5f66bbbf323e>>.

<sup>33</sup> Data available here: <https://newsroom.abf.gov.au/channels/Operation-Sovereign-Borders>

In June 2018 the government provided a full breakdown of all returns ('voluntary') and removals ('involuntary') from Nauru in the

period of September 2012 to May 2018 <sup>34</sup>. It also provided the same for Manus Island. Those figures are shown in Figure 15 <sup>35</sup>.

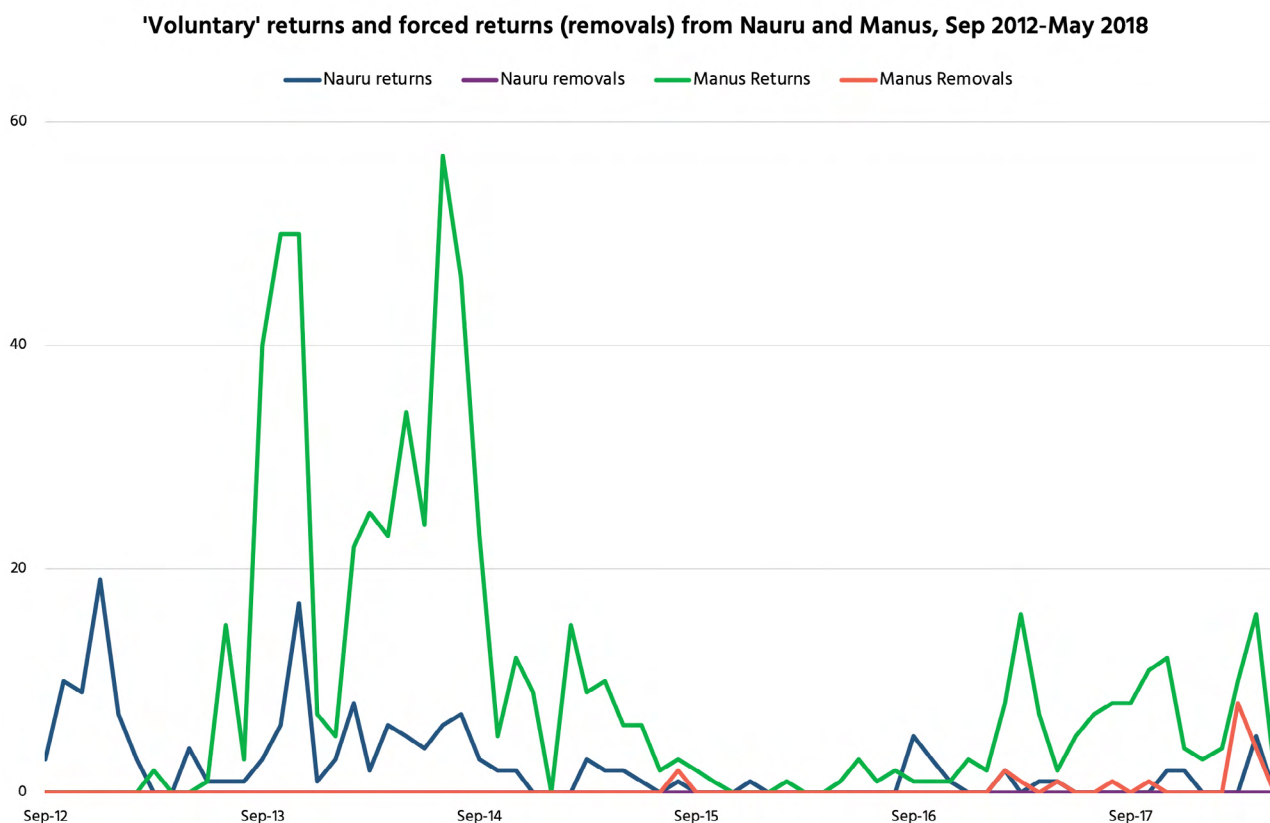


Figure 15- voluntary and forced returns from Nauru and Manus Island- September 2012 to May 2018

<sup>34</sup> Senator Kim Carr, Answer to Question on Notice BE 18/244 (12 June 2018), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadestimatesquestions/EstimatesQuestion-Committeed6-EstimatesRoundId3-PortfolioId20-QuestionNumber93>>

<sup>35</sup> Senator Kim Carr, Answer to Question on Notice BE 18/246 (12 June 2018), <<https://www.aph.gov.au/api/qon/downloadestimatesquestions/EstimatesQuestion-Committeed6-EstimatesRoundId3-PortfolioId20-QuestionNumber94>>



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