

# Labor for Refugees



[www.labor4refugees.com](http://www.labor4refugees.com)

---

A LABOR FOR REFUGEES (NSW/ACT) PUBLICATION

---

July 2024

## LABOR IN GOVERNMENT - REFUGEES AND PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

**Labor for Refugees** is made up of party members and trade unionists who, in 2001, committed themselves to updating and improving Labor Party Policy on refugees and people seeking asylum. We are largely rank and file activists in the party, many who have been with Labor for Refugees since 2001. While we do not speak for the Labor Party in a formal sense, our aims have broad support. We have successfully argued for improvements to Labor's National Platform at successive National and State Conferences, and we liaise with the responsible Ministers. Since coming to office, the Labor Government, in accordance with previously adopted policy, has offered permanency to those on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas.

### NAURU

Labor for Refugees continues to monitor refugee and asylum seeker arrivals and departures on Nauru. Following recent arrivals by boat, the Guardian newspaper (4.6.24) reports that there are about 100 refugees and people seeking asylum on Nauru. As with previous detainees on Nauru, despair about their future is growing as they hear nothing from the Department of Immigration. All forms of communication with the outside world are confiscated by the guards if they find them. A refugee states in the Guardian 13.6.24 "***We can't see our future, everyone is uncertain, everyone is afraid, they ask 'What will happen to us?'. Will they forget us, just leave us here? How many years, 10 years?'***". Labor for Refugees will meet with Minister O'Neil to pursue answers to these questions. The media did report in May 2024 that the federal government expects to mothball Australia's refugee-processing centre on Nauru within a year, saving taxpayers more than \$250 million in 12 months, according to a line item in the federal budget.

### PNG

It is estimated that there are 52 refugees still in PNG. It is not generally known what progress is being made in processing these refugees. The Federal Government says when asked, that the future of these refugees is the responsibility of the PNG Government following a finding by the PNG High Court that detention was illegal in that country. Responsibility for these refugees was transferred to PNG by the former LNP government. The Australian Government has continued to provide financial support for the refugees in PNG but there now appears to be a scandal in the corrupt use and direction of that money. Since October 2023, basic support services for the refugees – food, income allowance, medical assistance, transport, electricity – have been cut, leaving the refugees in desperate circumstances. Labor for Refugees has expressed concern to the Federal Government several times about the fate of these refugees in PNG, especially those who are either physically or mentally unwell and want them brought to Australia. Ongoing issues concerning the refugees and their families fall within the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Home Affairs, Clare O'Neil.

### PERMANENT RESIDENCY

The Government has offered permanency to those on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas. Approximately 19,000 on these temporary visas have so far been given permanent residency. There are a further 12,000 refugees who arrived by boat (called the "legacy caseload" by the Coalition), whose fate remains uncertain after many years. The 2023 National Platform states that those on bridging visas should have work and study rights while they wait for the outcome of their application for asylum. As refugees move into the Australian community, they face challenges such as access to housing, employment, physical and mental health services, English language support, and transport. Some State governments have health and welfare support systems in place, but the Federal Government needs to restore the subsistence income support abolished by the Coalition Government. After we ran an extensive campaign this year, supported by ALP members, our Labor for Refugees motion will be included on the agenda at the NSW Labor Conference 2024. It supports a full waiver of both the Application Fee and Tuition Fee for refugee students in NSW. This waiver also applies to all new arrivals from the Ukraine, Israel and Palestine. It is expected that this motion will pass at the NSW Conference.

## **THE HIGH COURT, INDEFINITE DETENTION AND THE DEPORTATION BILL**

Much has been reported in the media about this Bill. It was introduced before a High Court freedom bid by an Iranian detainee that the government said was being lawfully held since he could be deported if he co-operated with efforts to remove him. The bill threatens up to five year's jail for non-citizens refusing to go back to their countries and could ban entire nationalities from visiting Australia if their governments won't accept citizens being returned against their will. The bill was introduced in response to attacks by the Federal Opposition on Labor's immigration policies. It was reported in the media on the 22.6.24 that the Albanese Government was backing away from the once-urgent bill to jail foreigners who resist deportation when parliament resumed, as the Coalition challenged Labor to front up over the future of the controversial legislation. Immigration Minister Andrew Giles' Deportation Bill was left off the draft schedule for the Senate after it was removed from the parliamentary program a month ago, days after the government fended off a High Court challenge over the release of detainees. As at the 2 July 2024, 322 submissions were made to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Inquiry, including a submission from Labor for Refugees. Of submissions received by the deadline, only one from the Department of Home Affairs supported the Bill. Labor for Refugees looks forward to the permanent demise of this bill

**Despite progress, there is still much to be done.**

**Over the past two decades respect for international law and convention has been eroded in Australia. The Government needs to:**

- Significantly increase funding to support the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to improve orderly regional processing and resettlement in the region.
- Appoint a children's advocate independent of the Department of Home Affairs, legislate to impose mandatory reporting of child abuse in detention, and recognise the role of state child protection authorities.
- Complete the implementation of the National Platform, including appointing a Special Envoy for Refugees, and conducting an inquiry into immigration detention.

**Beyond this, Labor for Refugees NSW/ACT will continue to advocate for further policy reforms to:**

1. Ensure no children are kept in detention ever again. Rather, they will be placed into community-run reception centres together with their families.
2. Increase Australia's humanitarian intake progressively to 50,000 per year.
3. Ensure the closing of off-shore processing centres on Nauru and PNG and the transfer of all detainees to Australia for on-shore processing. This measure will provide savings of up to \$1 billion per year to be spent on other priorities.
4. Ensure the provision of legal aid for people seeking asylum.
5. Ensure that the provisions of the UN Refugee Convention and UN human rights instruments, to which Australia is signatory, are included in Australian asylum seeker and refugee domestic law and policy.
6. Achieve the cooperation required to reach sustainable regional processing arrangements and reject policies which turn away asylum-seeker boats.
7. Maintain levels of foreign aid sufficient to address the root causes, improve conditions and the rule of law in the places from which people are escaping.
8. Where short periods of detention are unavoidable, Labor for Refugees will work to ensure the mandatory reporting of abuse in detention and the establishment of an independent commission to inform the public on the facts on refugees and people seeking asylum.

## **BECOME A MEMBER**

By joining Labor for Refugees, you will be supporting a change in ALP policy compatible with the policy objectives as follows:

1. All people seeking asylum to be treated with compassion and justice, and in accordance with Australia's international obligations.
2. The right of all people seeking asylum in Australia to have their status as refugees assessed on Australian soil, under the Australian legal system.
3. People seeking asylum to be accommodated in government run and urban-based reception centres. When a formal application for refugee status has been made and security, health and identity checks are complete, asylum seekers are free to move out of reception centres and to stay in supportive communities. The time in detention not to exceed 30 days without judicial review and the right of appeal.

The link to our membership form is [www.labor4refugees.com/membership](http://www.labor4refugees.com/membership)  
Authorised by Shane Prince and Jenny Haines for Labor for Refugees NSW/ACT. For enquiries contact the Secretary, Nizza Siano at [contact@labor4refugees.com](mailto:contact@labor4refugees.com)