



# MARY MEETS MOHAMMAD

Tasmania's first asylum-seeker detention centre unexpectedly arrives in Mary's local community.



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ATOM



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# MARY MEETS MOHAMMAD

A documentary feature film by  
Heather Kirkpatrick

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*I needed to have this experience rather  
than to be turned around by somebody else.*

*To meet the men themselves, that's what  
convinced me. There are so many lies  
going on out in the community*      – MARY



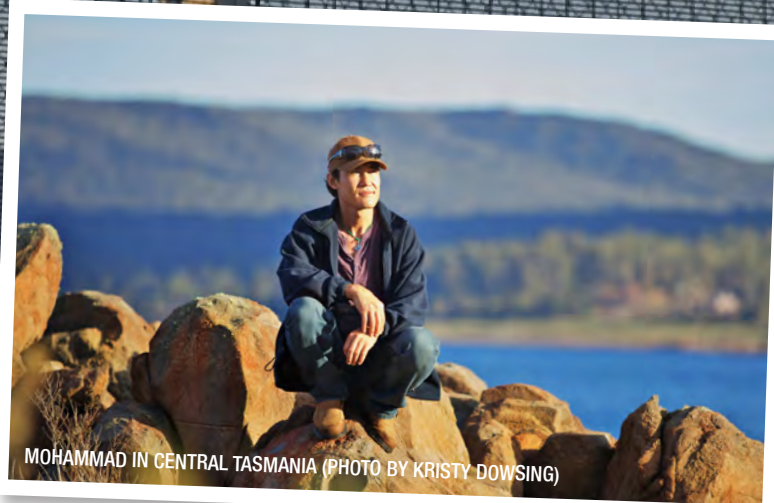
## OVERVIEW

Tasmania's first detention centre opens and local knitting club member Mary, a staunchly Christian pensioner, does not welcome the 400 male asylum seekers. Mohammad is a 26-year-old Muslim asylum seeker of the Hazara ethnic group of Afghanistan. He is detained inside the centre and an unlikely friendship develops between Mohammad and Mary after her knitting club donates woollen beanies to the asylum seekers. Mary finds many of her prior beliefs are challenged as her relationship with Mohammad deepens.

## SYNOPSIS

The film opens with the Australian government's surprise announcement in 2011 to build Tasmania's first asylum seeker detention centre at Pontville, thirty kilometres north of Hobart. Tasmania is Australia's least multicultural state and the local community erupts with hostility as the Department of Immigration hosts a public meeting.

When a suggestion is made at the nearby knitting club to make beanies for the asylum seekers, not everyone is in support. Knitter and elderly Christian woman Mary is strongly opposed to the Muslim asylum seekers; however she becomes curious to see the 'luxurious life' the



detainees are rumoured to have, and visits the centre a couple of months later as the beanies are delivered. Afterwards, Mary and four other knitters decide to become regular visitors to the asylum seekers.

The knitters' friendships deepen with the Hazara men from Afghanistan as they help knitting and craft activities to flourish within the detention centre. Asylum seeker Mohammad provides revealing insights of life inside the detention centre and the knitters are surprised by the first hunger strike at the centre.

When the detention centre closes after six months, some of the refugees decide to settle in Hobart. The knitters stay in contact with them and we see a close relationship develop between Mohammad and Mary. Despite their friendship, Mary remains uncomfortable with Mohammad's Islamic beliefs.

The close of the film sees knitter Joy invite Mohammad and Mary to her fishing shack in the Central Highlands of Tasmania. Will a connection of common humanity prevail for Mary and Mohammad over their religious and cultural differences?

## Secondary Curriculum Relevance

*Mary Meets Mohammad* (Heather Kirkpatrick, 2013) would be a valuable resource for students in middle and senior secondary school classes in Civics and Citizenship, History, Geography, Politics and Society, English, Philosophy, Values Education, Religion and Society, and Cross-cultural Studies. The National Curriculum guidelines for Civics and Citizenship outline General Capabilities to be fostered and includes the following advice in relation to Intercultural Understanding:

*Students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to value their own cultures, languages, religion and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped, and the variable and changing nature of culture. The capability involves students in learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate respect.*

### English:

**Year 8:** Explore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups. (ACELT1626)

**Year 9:** Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts.

Analyse how the construction and interpretation of texts, including media texts, can be influenced by cultural perspectives and other texts. (ACELY1739)

**Year 10:** Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts. (ACELT1639)

Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices. (ACELY1749)

(Note that texts and media texts include film).

### Geography:

**Year 8:** The factors that influence the decisions people make about where to live and their perceptions of the livability of places. (ACHGK043)

The reasons for and effects of international migration in Australia. (ACHGK058).

Elaborations:



- Identifying and explaining the main types and patterns of international migration, for example, permanent migration, temporary labour migration, student migration, forced migration (including refugees) and family reunion;
- Investigating where and why international migrants settle in Australia and how this may reinforce urban concentration;
- Exploring the changing cultural diversity of the Australian population.

**Year 10:** Reflect on and evaluate the findings of the inquiry to propose individual and collective action in response to a contemporary geographical challenge, taking account of environmental, economic and social considerations; and explain the predicted outcomes and consequences of their proposal.

Elaborations:

- Reflecting on the role of personal values and attitudes in influencing their responses to situations including goals;
- Explaining how the application of geographical concepts and methods has contributed to deep understanding of the causes of and solutions to issues related to environmental change, human wellbeing or development.

### History:

**Year 10:** The contribution of migration to Australia's changing identity as a nation and to its international relationships. (ACDSEH147)

**Additional Curriculum Links from Australian Curriculum:** <<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Curriculum/F-10>>

## Tertiary Curriculum Relevance

Politics, International Relations, Human Rights Law, Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Psychology and Mental Health Studies.





HAZARA COFFINS IN QUETTA, PAKISTAN (PHOTO BY JOYA SEENA)

## INTRODUCTION

The movement of millions of asylum seekers is widespread and global. It affects hundreds of countries and not just Australia. There has rarely been a debate in our Australian history that so divides people and there has rarely been a topic about which most of us know so little. In increasing numbers, people seeking asylum are travelling in fishing boats in an attempt to reach Australia. This ocean journey from countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka is perilous. As we see on television news reports, some boats do not make landfall and people are drowning.

What criteria might teachers use to select a resource that explores the dimensions of this complex subject in a way that will engage and inform students? *Mary Meets Mohammad* is very accessible and firmly grounded in the realities of life for two people in an Australian community. It deals sensitively with the realities of mandatory detention for asylum seekers and with the anxieties of those who live close to a detention centre. We see little of what happens in these centres unless there is violent unrest, as access to the centres by the media is not permitted and few citizens see inside them. This documentary goes well beyond the simplistic mantras of 'Stop the boats' and 'Let's control our borders'. It is a film about human rights, democracy and common decency. How should we treat people who come to Australia fleeing persecution, whether they arrive on boats or by plane, and who is responsible for actions taken in a democratic country – the leaders, or its people?

Should the treatment of asylum seekers be hidden from citizens and the media, or do we have a right to know how government policies are being implemented in our name? By what criteria can a society be judged to be good? By its wealth? By the way in which it treats its poorest and most disadvantaged? By the richness of its art and culture? Do we have responsibilities to those less fortunate than ourselves? These are a few of the questions this program should encourage students to consider. *Mary Meets Mohammad* presents a close study of how one small community learns that things are not always as they first appear and that people are not always as inflexible and stereotypical as they are often depicted in the media. Changing attitudes and behaviours are possible.



QUETTA, PAKISTAN (PHOTO BY GHULAM SAKHI HAZARA)



After viewing and discussing what we see in this film and undertaking some research using the materials in this guide, students should be able to explain:

- What being an asylum seeker and refugee means;
- Australia's obligation as a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention;
- The changes in Australia's asylum seeker policies over the years
- How Australia's asylum seeker policies compare to the rest of the world;
- Why some people are fearful of and hostile to boat-arriving asylum seekers;
- Why many people are not happy with the government's treatment of boat-arriving asylum seekers both onshore and offshore;

... and finally, be prepared to:

- Express and present an informed view about how Australia's management of asylum seekers has changed over the years since boat-arriving asylum seekers began arriving in the 1970s;
- Offer a coherent evidence-based proposal about how current policies in relation to the treatment of asylum seekers could be changed in the future.

## Australia's changing policy on asylum seekers since the 1970s

The first boat-arriving asylum seekers to Australia arrived in 1976, when Malcolm Fraser's Liberal government was in power. Fraser's government reduced the arrival of asylum-seeker boats to zero by the early 1980s through negotiation with the source and neighbouring countries of the refugees, as well as with allies and the United Nations, to facilitate an orderly migration process. The Vietnamese government minimised its own exposure to human rights criticism by facilitating the non-violent immigration to Australia of dissidents and ethnic Chinese Vietnamese. Under Fraser, more than 246,000 refugees were able to arrive in Australia by plane from 1975–1983 after their applications were processed in Asia, thus avoiding risky boat journeys. Australia did not have a policy of mandatory detention then. Details about this period can be found here:

[http://www.apf.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Publications\\_Archive/online/Refugees2/](http://www.apf.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/online/Refugees2/)

[http://www.apf.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/Detention/](http://www.apf.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/Detention/)

The Keating Labor government introduced mandatory detention legislation for asylum seekers arriving in Australia without visas in 1992. For a timeline of key decisions and policy changes in relation to indefinite mandatory detention between 1992 and 2012, see a two-part article by academic and journalist Wendy Bacon, published in *New Matilda* in 2012.

HAZARA HOMES IN QUETTA, PAKISTAN (PHOTO BY GHULAM SAKHI HAZARA)







## INDEFINITE MANDATORY DETENTION

The time that an asylum seeker will spend in an Australian detention centre, or a centre offshore in another country that Australia has sent them to, is not specified. No other western country has an indefinite mandatory detention policy. Some asylum seekers have waited years to be released. During their time in detention, an individual's claim for refugee status is assessed.

Part 1: <<http://newmatilda.com/2012/07/24/our-nauru-amnesia/>>

Part 2: <<http://newmatilda.com/2012/07/25/three-waves-nauru-anguish#comment-42055>>

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced on 19 July 2013 that he had reached an agreement with Papua New Guinea, that the Manus Island detention centre would be expanded to host and process all future asylum seekers coming by boat. He stated they would not have the option for resettlement or to become citizens in Australia. It is expected there will be legal challenges to this action. Here are some media links:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/immigration/un-refugee-agency-condemns-kevin-rudds-png-asylum-seeker-plan/story-fn9hm1gu-1226686151213/>

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2013/rudd-plan-in-tatters-as-camps-labelled-gulags-20130724-2qjqo.html>

In recent years there have been many ongoing changes to Australia's asylum-seeker policies as both major political parties try to create conditions that deter boat-arriving asylum seekers from coming to Australia. Please research this area and see if there are further policy changes since this study guide was completed in July 2013.

## Tasmania's first detention centre

The Pontville Detention Centre is situated in the municipality of Brighton, thirty kilometres north of Tasmania's capital of Hobart. It was opened in September 2011 for six months only whilst other detention centres were being built interstate. Read a February 2012 interview transcript with then Minister for Immigration, Chris Bowen, about closing down the Pontville Centre despite considerable local support for the facility to remain open: <<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/cb/2012/cb182619.htm>>

The Pontville Detention Centre was reopened in February 2013 and now accommodates hundreds of teenage boys, known as 'unaccompanied minors' in immigration-speak. These are children who have arrived in Australia by boat without parents or family members.

## WATCHING THE FILM

### How does the story of *Mary Meets Mohammad* present the asylum seeker debate?

Government reports, political brawling, facts and figures, media images of leaky boats and detention centres, and statistics offer information and opinions about the asylum-seeker debate in Australia. However, the personal human stories of the asylum seekers themselves are rarely heard or seen. As you watch the film, make brief notes on how Mohammad's and Mary's experiences might be representative of that of many other asylum seekers and citizens. Consider how this approach of focusing on these crucial human stories at the heart of the subject affects your own response to the debate about the treatment of asylum seekers.



MOHAMMAD AND MARY KNIT (PHOTO BY KRISTY DOWSING)

- What do Mary, Joy and Rose discover they have in common with the men?
- A few months after the knitters begin visiting the detention centre, there is a hunger strike and Mary says, 'I wouldn't like to be locked up and I think I'd put up some kind of a protest. Freedom is something everyone is entitled to and should have.'
- What do these reflections show about how the experience of spending time with the men is affecting Mary?
- What are some of the attitudes to asylum seekers encountered by Mary on the pensioners' bus trip to the beach? What is the source of the incorrect information about the financial support asylum seekers get from the government? How does Mary react to these claims?
- What points in Mary's relationship with Mohammad could be described as 'light-bulb moments' where Mary's views are changing?

## Student Activity

### Responding to issues raised in the film

#### Not in my backyard

Brainstorm local responses to the announcement of the establishment of a detention centre at Brighton, north of Hobart. Using a whiteboard, list some of the concerns expressed by residents. How would you feel if a disused building such as a school or army camp near your house was converted into a detention centre for asylum seekers? Which of the concerns expressed in Tasmania might you share?

#### Fact or Fiction – Truth or Lies?

What do you think are some of the factors driving these concerns, e.g. first-hand experience, previous knowledge of living near a detention centre, statements made by politicians, media stories, local gossip, fear of an unknown group of people, or concerns about employment?

#### Mary's journey.

- Describe what we see and hear of Mary in the early parts of the documentary.
- What are some of the factors in her background – including her religious beliefs – that might partly account for her hostility to the presence of asylum seekers in the local community?
- Why is Mary curious to see inside the detention centre?
- What does she find when she first visits the centre as part of the knitting group? Does this reception surprise her?

#### IS ARRIVING BY BOAT ILLEGAL?

Asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat are not illegal immigrants. The UN Refugee Convention (to which Australia is a signatory) recognises that refugees have a lawful right to enter a country for the purposes of seeking asylum, regardless of how they arrive or whether they hold valid travel or identity documents. The Convention stipulates that what would usually be considered as illegal actions (e.g. entering a country without a visa) should not be treated as illegal if a person is seeking asylum.

This means that it is incorrect to refer to asylum seekers who arrive without authorisation as 'illegal', as they in fact have a lawful right to enter Australia and seek asylum under both international and Australian domestic law.

SOURCE – REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA.





MOHAMMAD AND MARY AT JOY'S SHACK (PHOTO BY KRISTY DOWSING)

### Mohammad's journey.

- What is Mohammad's story? Why was he living in Pakistan? Why did he flee Pakistan, leaving his family?
- Why are men like Mohammad unlikely to have documents with them that attest to their identity and history?
- What does Mohammad reveal about the factors that cause severe depression and despair amongst asylum seekers in detention?
- What are some of the ways in which this sense of hopelessness is reflected in unrest at the detention centre?
- What do Emily and Clarissa, the friendship visitor coordinators, have to say about the problems for the detainees of being locked up indefinitely?
- When Mohammad is finally released on a bridging visa to live in the community, how much time has he spent in Australian detention centres?
- What are Mohammad's biggest hopes or dreams?

### ARE ASYLUM SEEKERS ARRIVING BY BOAT 'QUEUE-JUMPERS'?

Few countries between the Middle East and Australia are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and as such asylum seekers are forced to continue to travel to another country to find protection. There is no standard refugee process where people wait in a queue to have their applications considered.

— EDMUND RICE CENTRE.

## OTHER RESPONSES

*I'm very grateful that I had this experience. It taught me a bit about myself. My attitude changed so quickly and it was mainly because they just became individuals instead of a sea of people flooding our shores.*

— Joy, member of the knitting group

A variety of responses to the presence of asylum seekers in the Brighton community are revealed in this documentary.

- Describe how and why the Tasmanian Asylum Seeker Support group from Hobart wants to make a connection with the men being held in the detention centre?
- What is long-term Brighton Mayor Tony Foster's attitude to the detention centre being in his community?
- How does the local Christian church respond to the new arrivals?
- When a group of Kosovo Albanians were placed in a safe-haven community in Brighton in 1999 for three months, Mary's brother worked at the centre. What was his impression of the Muslim Kosovars?
- How is friendship shown to be the basis for developing an empathetic understanding of others?



# Student Activity

## MYTH or TRUTH?

The chart below (Table 1) asks you to look at a number of commonly held views about asylum seekers coming to Australia. Attempt to determine which of these views are MYTH or TRUTH. Always check the source to be as reputable as possible and check the dates of online information as facts and figures frequently change. Would you consider what a politician has to say about this topic to be a reliable source? Use information that appears in the documentary to illustrate any conclusions you reach, as long as you believe it to be reliable.

**Table 1**

Concerns about the detention centre in tasmania	Myth or truth	Perceptions, explanations and factual information
<b>ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE COMING ILLEGALLY</b>		<p>It is legal to seek asylum and it does not matter how you arrive. It is legal to seek asylum by any means, e.g. boat, plane, hiding under or in trucks or containers or even swimming. Many people die as they seek asylum around the world. See &lt;<a href="http://www.asrc.org.au/resources/for-students/">http://www.asrc.org.au/resources/for-students/</a>&gt; from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre or a research paper from the Parliamentary Library in Canberra.</p> <p><a href="http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/AsylumFacts/">http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/AsylumFacts/</a></p>
<b>REFUGEES GET MORE MONEY THAN THE PENSIONERS</b>		<p>Refugees receive the same entitlements as someone on social security and even less if you are an asylum seeker on a Bridging Visa – 89 per cent of a basic Centrelink allowance. See the details here:</p> <p><a href="http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/65onshore-processing-irregular-maritime-arrivals.htm">http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/65onshore-processing-irregular-maritime-arrivals.htm</a></p>
<b>ALL BOAT PEOPLE ARE TERRORISTS</b>		<p>Everyone undergoes a rigorous security clearance when they arrive in Australia. No links to terrorists have been uncovered yet. Most Hazaras are escaping from terrorism activity and many have lost family members to terrorists, e.g. Mohammad's story of losing two brothers killed by the Taliban.</p>
<b>MUSLIMS WANT TO TAKE OVER AUSTRALIA</b>		<p>Is there any evidence to support this proposition?</p> <p>Do all religions include an extreme range of views?</p> <p>Who were the Muslim Kosovo refugees, who lived in Brighton in 1999, being persecuted by?</p> <p>In which scenes are the religious differences between Mary and Mohammad represented in this documentary? Are there barriers to understanding and acceptance?</p>



## Debunking stereotypes

Much of the concern in respect to establishing the detention centre at Pontville was not related to the fact that its inhabitants would be refugees but rather because they would be Muslim. When Mary was asked how she felt about Muslim asylum seekers arriving at Pontville, she said, 'they are a pack of heathens. They like another form of God. To me there is only one God.' Did your views about Muslims change after seeing the film?

Towards the end of the film, Joy says that initially in Pontville there was a sense of 'prejudice through fear'. There are times when we all fear the things we don't know or fully understand. Dispelling the myths that abound in relation to Islam as a faith is crucial to debunking many of the stereotypes that exist in our society.

## Consider how Mohammad lived and interacted with others

Did the Muslim men inside Pontville Detention Centre celebrate Christmas?

Did Mohammad respect other religions?

Was Mary challenged by Mohammad's Islamic beliefs?

Were you uncomfortable with Mohammad's beliefs?

Did Mary change her views on Islam over time or not?

What do you think were the reasons?

In this film we see a number of average Australians modifying and changing their initial attitudes to the asylum seekers at Pontville. As active citizens, how would you best be able to find where the truth lies with the asylum-seeker debate? How can you play an active role in the debate other than how you vote at an election?

## Asylum seekers and refugees – some definitions

The terms asylum-seeker and refugee are often confused. An asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.

A refugee is legally defined as a person who is outside their country of nationality and unable to return, due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group. By receiving refugee status, individuals are guaranteed protection of their basic human rights and cannot be forced to return to a country where they fear persecution.

## A record number of refugees for the last two decades

The Global Trends Report released in June 2013 by UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, says that more people are refugees or internally displaced than at any time since 1994, with the Syrian crisis having emerged as the major new factor. At the end of 2012, more than 45.2 million people were in situations of displacement including 15.4 million refugees, 937,000 asylum seekers, and 28.8 million people forced to flee within the borders of their own countries. This translates to around 23,000 new refugees or internally displaced people every day. Children under eighteen make up 46 per cent of all refugees. War remains the dominant cause of global displacement.

Afghanistan remained the world's top producer of refugees, a position it has held for thirty-two years. On average, one out of every four refugees worldwide is Afghan, with 95 per cent located in Pakistan or Iran. Somalia, another protracted conflict, was the world's second-largest refugee-producing nation during 2012, however there the rate of refugee outflow slowed. Iraqis were the third largest refugee group (746,700 persons), followed by Syrians (471,400).

## Which countries hosts most of the world's refugees and asylum seekers?

A gap continues to widen between richer and poorer countries when it comes to who is hosting refugees. Developing countries host 81 per cent of the world's refugees compared to 70 per cent a decade ago. Pakistan continues to host more refugees than any other nation (1.6 million), followed by Iran (868,200) and Germany (589,700).



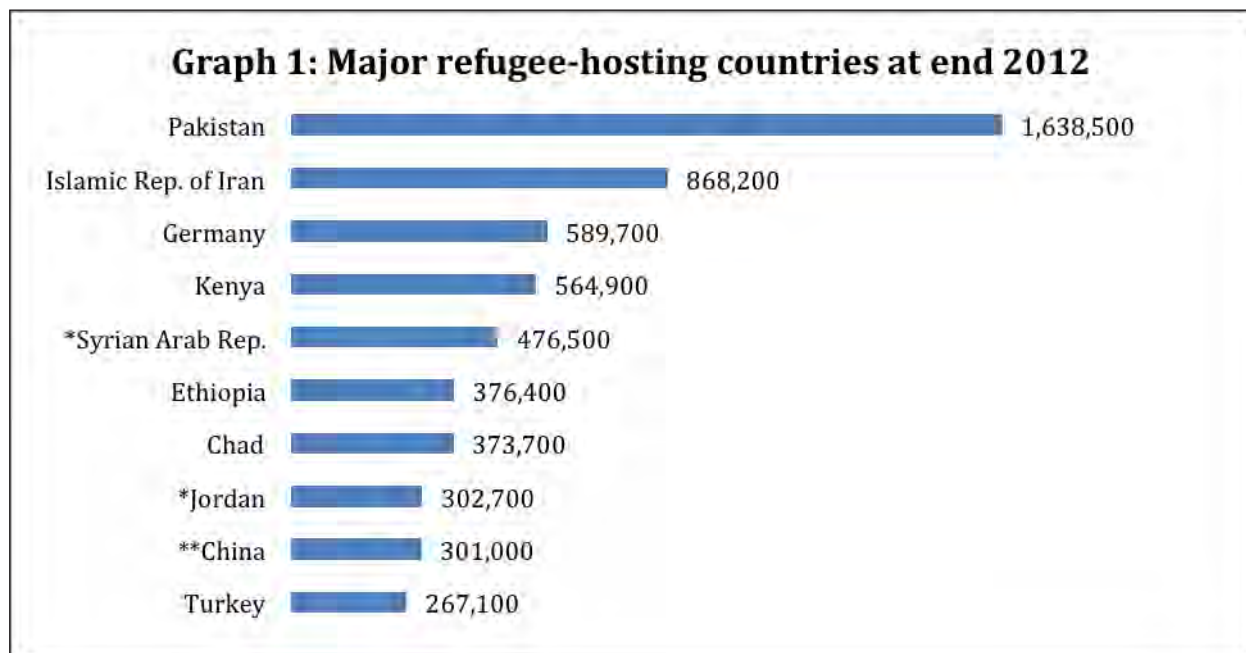
ASYLUM SEEKERS IN PONTVILLE DETENTION CENTRE





HAZARA GRAVES IN QUETTA, PAKISTAN (PHOTO BY GHULAM SAKHI HAZARA)

**GRAPH 1: MAJOR REFUGEE HOSTING COUNTRIES AT END 2012**



\* Government Estimate

\*\* The 300,000 Vietnamese refugees are well integrated and in practice receive protection from the Government of China



Asylum claims are not the same as the numbers of people given refugee status. Most people seeking refuge from conflict choose to remain in neighbouring countries in the hope of being able to return home (e.g. there are 24,800 Syrian asylum claims in industrialised countries compares to more than 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees currently in neighbouring countries).

By region, Europe received the most asylum applications in 2012, with 355,500 claims across thirty-eight countries. Germany saw the highest number of new applications (64,500 claims), followed by France (54,900 claims) and Sweden (43,900 claims). The single largest recipient of asylum requests was the United States with 83,400 claims. North-east Asia and Australia also saw increases but overall the asylum claims were significantly lower compared to other countries.

The Global Trends Report is UNHCR's leading annual report on the state of forced displacement. You can download Item 1 of the 2013 report here:

<http://unhcr.org/globaltrends/june2013/>

## Student activity

Download the above report and refer to Table 1 on pages 38 to 41. You will see countries around the world listed with the far right-hand side column showing the number of people whose application for asylum or refugee status is awaiting an assessment at the end of 2012 (labelled as 'Total population of concern' by UNHCR in the table).

How many claims are awaiting an outcome in Australia as at the end of 2012?

How many other countries in the world have a number of higher than this? Where does Australia rank in terms of the number of claims lodged per country in 2012?

The UNHCR releases a Global Trends Report in June each year with the latest statistics on worldwide movements of displaced people so you can keep up to date in the future.

The Taliban killed Mohammad's two older brothers and persecuted him for being a Shia Muslim belonging to the Hazara ethnic minority group. Most asylum seekers fleeing from Afghanistan are Hazaras. The Sunni Taliban in Afghanistan rose to power after the collapse of Soviet rule in the 1990s and they have killed thousands of Hazaras since this time.

The Hazaras are very easily recognised by the Taliban and other terrorist groups because of their distinctive Mongolian-like features. Many Hazaras have fled to Pakistan and Iran where they live illegally. The terrorist violence against the Hazaras in the Quetta region of western Pakistan has escalated in recent years. This daily threat to life has forced many Hazaras to travel to Asian countries such as Indonesia or Malaysia from where they hope to reach Australia on small fishing boats. Mohammad's story is typical of the journey many Hazaras have been forced to make.

- What are some of the common factors forcing people to seek refuge away from their homeland?
- What are some of the common challenges faced by asylum seekers?
- What percentage of boat-arriving asylum seekers are ultimately found to be genuine refugees?

## Words Matter

The language of political debates is often loaded, designed to elicit emotional responses. Depending on the position you hold, your attitude and the outcome you want, you might refer to asylum seekers as 'boat people', 'illegals', 'criminals' or 'queue-jumpers'. If you really want to generate fear you might use terms such as 'towel-heads', 'terrorists' or 'extremists'. Pauline Hanson commonly referred to asylum seekers as 'Asians' and 'Middle Eastern people'.

Places where new arrivals to Australia are detained may be referred to as 'prisons' or 'holding camps' where people can be 'incarcerated' or 'locked up' while waiting processing and assessment of their claim to be recognised as refugees.

- In what ways are some of these terms dehumanising?
- In what way does the language politicians use influence our perception and views?

Write three short paragraphs describing Australia's current practices in relation to our treatment of boat arrivals. Paragraph one should be a neutral description, paragraph two from a person who believes the boats should be stopped and paragraph three from someone who believes our treatment of asylum seekers is inhumane. Think carefully about the kind of language each person will use.



WEAVING OF AUSTRALIAN AND HAZARA FLAGS BY ASYLUM SEEKER





'FROZEN TIME' – GHULAM SAKHI HAZARA

### Asylum seeker policy developments in Australia

What is the origin of the United Nations Refugee Convention?

Refer to the link <[http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=58](http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=58)> and click on the 1951 Q&A link.

### How long are people held in immigration detention?

There is no set time limit to how long a person may be held in immigration detention in Australia. The period of time a person spends in detention varies and may be years.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship regularly publishes statistics setting out the length of time people have been in immigration detention. The Human Rights Commission continues to have serious concerns about the impact of long-term detention, particularly with children.

### Immigration detention policy changes in recent years

In July 2008, the Minister for Immigration announced a policy known as 'New Directions in Detention', which included seven key immigration values. Of those values, the Human Rights Commission welcomed the following:

- Detention that is indefinite or otherwise arbitrary is not acceptable and the length and conditions of detention, including the appropriateness of both the accommodation and the services provided, will be subject to regular review.
- Detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time.
- Children – and, where possible, their families – will not be detained in an immigration detention centre.
- People in detention will be treated fairly and reasonably within the law.
- Conditions of detention will ensure the inherent dignity of the human person.

The Human Rights Commission recommended that these five values be both enshrined in law and implemented in practice as soon as possible. Unfortunately, to date they have not been enshrined in legislation and some of them are not being implemented in practice.

### More community detention placements for children

In October 2010, the Australian Government announced that it would begin to move a significant number of unaccompanied minors and families with children into community detention. Many children still remain in detention to date.

### Parliamentary enquiry recommends a maximum of ninety days in detention

In early 2011, a federal parliamentary enquiry was initiated to investigate Australia's Immigration Detention Network after some riots and fires had occurred at the Christmas Island and Villawood detention centres. The enquiry released their report in March 2012 after eight months of investigation and their report concludes:

*The Committee's most fundamental conclusion is that asylum seekers should reside in held detention for as short*

### PROCESSING

An asylum seeker must have their claim for refugee status investigated in order to remain in Australia. Security, health and character checks are required. They must prove they are a refugee, which is someone who has fled their home country and has a well-founded fear of persecution if they were to return. If an asylum seeker's claim for refugee status is rejected, they can appeal the case before facing deportation back to their country of origin.

a time as practicable. Evidence overwhelmingly indicates that prolonged detention exacts a heavy toll on people, most particularly on their mental health and wellbeing. A study found clinically significant symptoms of depression were present in 86% of detainees and one quarter of them reported suicidal thoughts. As well as incidents of self-harm, there have been numerous suicide attempts and nine deaths in detention centres in the 24 months to February 2012.

### The length of time in detention was found to be the key cause of mental breakdown.

Recommendation 23: 5.120:

*The Committee further recommends that asylum seekers who pass initial identity, health, character and security checks be immediately granted a bridging visa or moved to community detention while a determination of their refugee status is completed, that all reasonable steps be taken to limit detention to a maximum of 90 days.*

*Given the enormous human and financial cost of held detention, the Committee has reached the fundamental conclusion that less harmful, far more cost-effective alternatives are available and should be pursued. Last financial year to 2011 the Australian Government spent over \$772 million on running detention facilities. The projected cost of operating the community detention program in 2011–12 is \$150 million.*

For further information see the links here:

[http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary\\_business/committees/senate\\_committees?url=immigration\\_detention\\_ctte/immigration\\_detention/report/c05.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate_committees?url=immigration_detention_ctte/immigration_detention/report/c05.htm)

<http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2012/s3467992.htm>

### Offshore processing resumed in 2012

The Gillard Labor government announced that any asylum seeker who arrived by boat from 13 August 2012 onwards is potentially liable to transfer to a third country for processing of their claim for protection. Some asylum seekers were transferred to Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, but these centres soon reached capacity, forcing onshore processing to meet the demand of new arrivals for most of 2013.

On Friday 19 July 2013, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced an agreement with Papua New Guinea that the detention centre at Manus Island would be expanded to host and process all future asylum seekers coming by boat. He stated they would not have the option for resettlement or to become citizens in Australia. It is expected there will be legal challenges to this action.



- Explain why the Australian government has now decided that asylum seekers arriving by boat will be sent offshore to New Guinea's Manus Island to be processed.
- What would be the benefit for Papua New Guinea?
- Why doesn't the Australian Government want to detain and process asylum seekers in Australia?

Ex-Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser – who settled 246,000 refugees between 1975–1983 and stopped the boats by providing a regional processing centre at the source country of the boats and then plane tickets for those recognised as refugees – does not support Australia's offshore processing practice for asylum seekers and calls for a Royal Commission. He details his regional processing solution in an ABC interview:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-25/malcolm-fraser-calls-for-royal-commission-into/4842576>

### How does Australia's asylum seeker policy and practices compare to other countries around the world?

See the link here on an SBS online production – SBS Detention Centre. Stories from Australia's Detention System:

<http://www.sbs.com.au/detentioncentre/#chapter/future>



## Final Student Activities

### Thinking laterally and creatively

Using the material in this guide, information you have found through your research, your own understanding of the issue, class discussions and information from this or any other documentaries you may have seen, select one of the two tasks below:

1. Present an informed view about Australia's management of asylum seekers over the past forty years. Identify when and how we have 'got it right', in your view.

OR

2. Offer a coherent evidence-based proposal about how current policies in relation to the treatment of asylum seekers arriving in Australia could be changed to better serve the rights and needs of everyone involved. Consider both the humanitarian and economic reasons behind any changes you might propose.

Given the complexity and multi-stranded nature of this issue – 'asylum seekers and Australia' – the activities listed above would be best done in small groups rather than individually. Your findings could be presented as a talk, a letter to the Minister for Immigration or as a report.

### Other useful references

The Refugee Council of Australia – Myths about Refugees:  
<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/myth-long.php>

The Refugee Council of Australia – Durable solutions:  
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/int-ds.php>

Amnesty International – Refugees:  
<http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/>

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre  
<http://www.asrc.org.au>

A close look at what life is like within Australia's detention centres through an online project; SBS Detention Centre – Stories from Australia's Detention System:  
<http://www.sbs.com.au/detentioncentre/>

FAQs about the work of the Tasmanian Asylum Seekers Support Organisation:  
<http://www.tasasylum.org/volunteering-faqs.html>

<http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/29462/>

Edmund Rice Centre Q&A debunking myths about asylum seekers coming to Australia

Welcome to Australia:  
<http://www.welcometoaustralia.org.au>



JOY, MARY AND MOHAMMAD IN CENTRAL TASMANIA (PHOTO BY KRISTY DOWSING)



ABOVE: MOHAMMAD WITH KITE, RIGHT: MARY AND MOHAMMAD  
(PHOTOS BY KRISTY DOWSING)



The UN Refugee Agency Australia for UNHCR:  
<http://www.unrefugees.org.au>

Australian Human Rights Commission:  
<http://www.humanrights.gov.au>

Australian Human Rights Commission, *Human rights issues raised by the transfer of asylum seekers to third countries*, AHRC, Canberra, November 2012. <<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/human-rights-issues-raised-third-country-processing-regime>>

### Some links to Mary Meets Mohammad

*Mary Meets Mohammad* website:  
<http://www.marymeetsmohammad.com>

Facebook page *Mary Meets Mohammad*:  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mary-Meets-Mohammad/387916057968800>

*Mary Meets Mohammad* trailer on YouTube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBxXvXLOWSU>

Media and Reviews of *Mary Meets Mohammad*:  
<http://www.marymeetsmohammad.com/index.php/media-reviews>

### Other books, films and documentaries exploring asylum seekers

*The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif*, Najaf Mazari and Robert Hillman, Insight, 2008

(This book has been a popular text on the VCE English syllabus in the *Encountering Conflict* study. Read an extract from this novel at <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/the-rugmakers-story/story-e6frg8h6-1111115933254>>)

*A Well-founded Fear*, Delaney and Dean, 2008 – documentary about the Edmund Rice Centre's work in following up on asylum seekers who are deported from Australia.

*Go Back to Where You Came From*, 1 and 2 – a 2011 and 2012 SBS 'reality' series about Australians who undertake refugee journeys in reverse. The programs challenge perceptions about what it means to be a refugee.

*The Man Who Jumped*, Russell Vines, 2012 – documentary film about a Hazara asylum seeker who was at the centre of protests at Woomera detention centre in 2002.



Additional contributions and comments from Heather Kirkpatrick, Margie Piper, Helen Smith, & Anna Young.

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## THE FILMMAKER

Heather Kirkpatrick is an independent documentary filmmaker and freelance journalist from Tasmania. She also works as a professional outdoor instructor and emergency relief work logistician. Heather has worked on all seven continents and loves being immersed in different cultures in remote parts of the world.

*Mary Meets Mohammad*  
is a Waratah Films production.

It runs for 80 minutes

Director, producer, writer, camera & sound

HEATHER KIRKPATRICK

Editors

LARA VAN RAAY, HEATHER KIRKPATRICK  
& EDITING CONSULTANT RAY THOMAS

Second camera and sound in final scenes

RUSSELL HAWKINS

Composers

DAVID BRIDIE, HELEN MOUNTFORT  
AND SUSAN MCGOWAN

Music performed by

MY FRIEND THE CHOCOLATE CAKE  
AND SILKWEED

HEATHER KIRKPATRICK (PHOTO BY TOBY STORY)





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FISHING IN CENTRAL TASMANIA (PHOTO BY KRISTY DOWSING)