



11 February 2026

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

**RE: Inquiry into offshore processing and resettlement arrangements**

**Introduction**

The St Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee's inquiry into offshore processing and resettlement.

The Society is a national charitable organisation with a long history of supporting people seeking asylum and refugees across Australia, through direct assistance, service delivery, and policy advocacy.

The Society's position is grounded in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in particular, the dignity of every human person. The Society respects Australia's domestic and international human rights laws which protect the vulnerable. Australia's offshore processing regime and related third-country arrangements continue to cause serious harm to people seeking our protection, while also raising significant concerns about integrity, transparency, and value for money for Australian taxpayers.

This submission addresses the Committee's terms of reference relating to payments to contractors and third parties, the outcomes and effects of those payments, and the integrity and value-for-money of current arrangements, with particular reference to arrangements since 2022.

The Society notes that this inquiry is limited to offshore processing and resettlement arrangements since 2022. However, we believe that the current arrangements cannot be assessed in isolation from their longer and continuous operations in the same two countries, Papua New Guinea and Nauru, since 2012-13. Policy and funding decisions made by successive governments provide an important context to understanding today's offshore processing and resettlement arrangements.

**Outcomes and Effects**

The principal effect of current arrangements has been the traumatisation of thousands of people over more than a decade, with the Government's actions in the last four years reinforcing that treatment for the hundreds still suffering under the regime.

The principal outcome is that there are still:

- nearly 30 people, some with families, in Port Moresby, one of the most dangerous capital cities in the world, who've been in the country for nearly 13 years, most with no hope of re-settlement in a safe country
- approximately 100 residents on Nauru, one of the least accessible countries in our region, with none having the prospect of safe re-settlement elsewhere, and
- several hundred people living in our community, having been medically evacuated from Nauru and Papua New Guinea, with only a few eligible for re-settlement to New Zealand, before that arrangement ends on 30 June 2026.

Vincentians across Australia work with specialist refugee agencies to support those in our community, many who still suffer from severe medical problems. All suffer the despair of remaining 'in limbo' unable to find safe permanent home, where they can begin to re-build their lives.

Recent research shows<sup>1</sup> that:

- 88 per cent of the refugees in PNG, and 22% of people held in Nauru suffer severe mental health conditions
- 100 per cent of people in PNG reported difficulty accessing medical care, including being declined care, and being asked to pay for care when they have no financial support
- 60 per cent of people in Nauru reported concerns with the limited healthcare available in Nauru
- 100 per cent of people detained in Nauru and in PNG have reported experiences of trauma (including persecution, the journey to seek asylum by sea, family separation, medical trauma, experiences of violence in detention)

Some of the Society's Members have visited the people in Port Moresby, with one visit late last year. Our member on that visit found all greatly traumatised by their thirteen years of mistreatment, with eight so sick that they are unable to ever live there independently. The other twenty also have significant health issues from living for over a decade in a country with very limited specialist care. But for them the major concern is safety, particularly for their families.

For foreigners in Port Moresby, the only hope of living with some safety there is to have homes in gated communities, which are beyond the means of men on their current allowances and on any income that they might earn from any low-paid jobs they could get.

In summary, the outcomes of this regime, both prior to and following 2022, and across offshore and onshore settings, demonstrate a systemic failure that has caused ongoing harm without achieving its state policy objectives. On this basis, the regime should be brought to an end as a matter of urgency, a course of action that would also deliver substantial fiscal savings for Australian taxpayers.

## **Payments to contractors and third parties**

### **Scale of expenditure**

Offshore processing has involved sustained and significant public expenditure. Since 2012, Australia has spent more than \$13 billion on offshore detention and processing.

Despite the relatively small number of people currently affected, expenditure remains substantial. In the 2025–26 Budget, approximately \$581 million was allocated to offshore processing and related arrangements.

This level of spending raises questions about proportionality, efficiency, and the ongoing justification for offshore arrangements.

### **Contracting arrangements**

Offshore processing relies heavily on private contractors and subcontractors to deliver accommodation, security, health, welfare, and logistical services. These services are delivered in contexts with limited infrastructure and constrained opportunities for independent oversight.

Previous reviews<sup>2</sup> and reporting have identified shortcomings in procurement and due-diligence processes, including the use of relatively small or opaque providers in complex, high-risk environments. Limited disclosure of contract terms, performance benchmarks, and evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> ASRC. July 2024. *CRUELTY BY DESIGN: The health crisis in offshore detention*. Accessed at: [https://asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ASRCreport\\_Healthcrisisinoffshoredetention\\_July2024.pdf](https://asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ASRCreport_Healthcrisisinoffshoredetention_July2024.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Richardson. 2024. *Review of Integrity Concerns and Governance Arrangements for the Management of Regional Processing Administration by the Department of Home Affairs*. Accessed at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/richardson-review/richardson-review-report.pdf>

outcomes makes it difficult to assess whether services are being delivered effectively or whether underperformance is identified and addressed.

### **Payments to host governments and other third parties**

In addition to payments to private contractors, offshore processing arrangements involve significant financial transfers to host governments and other third parties. These payments are often governed by confidential agreements, limiting public and parliamentary scrutiny.

The absence of clear, publicly available information about the purpose, conditions, and monitoring of these payments raises concerns about transparency and accountability, particularly given their scale and duration.

### **Cost-effectiveness**

Offshore processing represents a highly inefficient use of public funds. Independent analysis demonstrates that the cost of offshore detention far exceeds the cost of supporting people to live in the Australian community while their claims are processed.

At the same time, investment in community-based support has been substantially reduced. Funding for the Status Resolution Support Services program has been cut by more than 90 per cent over the past decade, leaving many people without basic support despite the comparatively low cost of community alternatives.

### **Cost-shifting impacts**

For those people now living in Australia, insufficient support and prolonged uncertainty contribute to cost-shifting to state governments, health systems, homelessness services, and charities. These downstream costs are not transparently captured in offshore processing budgets, further undermining claims of value for money.

### **Integrity, transparency and accountability**

A central concern with offshore processing arrangements is the lack of transparency surrounding contracts, payments, and performance. Confidentiality provisions limit parliamentary scrutiny and prevent meaningful public assessment of how funds are used and whether objectives are met.

Complex contracting chains, limited market competition, and constrained oversight increase the risk of poor performance and weaken accountability. Responsibility is often fragmented across governments and private actors, creating gaps in oversight and limiting access to effective complaints or redress mechanisms.

In the absence of independent monitoring and regular public reporting, it is difficult to demonstrate that offshore processing arrangements meet accepted standards of integrity or value for money.

The Society submits that the cruel outcomes, the scale of expenditure, lack of transparency, and repeated findings of governance failure warrant an inquiry with the independence and powers of a Royal Commission in order to restore public confidence and ensure accountability.

### **Recommendations**

The St Vincent de Paul Society recommends that the Committee find that Australia's offshore processing and resettlement arrangements fail to meet acceptable standards of transparency, accountability, and value for money, and that decisive action is required.

The Society proposes that the Committee:

1. **End offshore processing and prioritise durable solutions**  
Recommend that the Australian Government cease offshore processing and reception arrangements and resettle in our country, all people subject to these arrangements, including those already evacuated to Australia.
2. **Improve transparency and parliamentary oversight**  
Recommend that the Australian Government publish, subject only to clearly defined and limited

exceptions, the value, duration, and scope of all contracts and agreements relating to offshore processing and resettlement arrangements, including payments to host governments, primary contractors, and subcontractors.

3. **Strengthen procurement and integrity safeguards**

Recommend strengthened due-diligence, probity, and risk-assessment requirements for all contractors and subcontractors engaged in offshore processing arrangements, particularly where services are delivered in high-risk or low-oversight environments.

4. **Establish independent monitoring and reporting**

Recommend the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism with statutory powers to inspect facilities, review contractual compliance, and report publicly and regularly to Parliament on conditions, service delivery, and expenditure.

5. **Undertake a whole-of-system value-for-money assessment**

Recommend that the Australian Government conduct and publish a comprehensive assessment of offshore processing arrangements, including direct and indirect costs across Commonwealth, state, and community sectors, and comparison with community-based alternatives.

6. **Establish a Royal Commission into immigration detention and offshore processing**

Recommend that the Australian Government establish a Royal Commission into immigration detention, both offshore and onshore, with powers to compel evidence and examine:

- the human, legal, and systemic impacts of prolonged detention and offshore processing
- contracting and procurement practices
- expenditure and value for money, and
- governance, oversight, and accountability arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Mr P Toby oConnor  
Chief Executive Officer