

# UNHCR FACT SHEET ON SITUATION OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS ON MANUS ISLAND, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

15 December 2017

## Key Findings and Recommendations

### Operational Context



3,172 refugees and asylum-seekers have been forcibly transferred by Australia to 'offshore processing' facilities in Papua New Guinea and Nauru since the introduction of the current policy in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Of these, some 800 remain in Papua New Guinea.

Following the Australia-United States relocation arrangement, UNHCR has referred more than 1,200 refugees to the United States of America since December 2016. Another 500 people still require a review of their refugee status determination process by authorities in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, under the Australian arrangement.

Long-term solutions remain needed for all people transferred by Australia to Papua New Guinea and

Nauru. Neither Papua New Guinea nor Nauru are appropriate places for local integration for the majority of refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly given their acute needs as a result of prolonged detention and harsh conditions.



### PROTECTION

#### Key Findings

- Physical security remains a serious concern at Ward 1 of Lorengau, Manus Island, where both West Lorengau Haus and Hillside Haus are located. On the night of Saturday 9 to Sunday 10 December 2017, three separate incidents occurred in which aggrieved local residents approached these facilities and threatened refugees and asylum-seekers. This follows previous similar incidents on 17 November 2017 and 7 December 2017.

<sup>1</sup> Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Parliament of Australia, *Additional Estimates Hearing, AE17/170*, 27 February 2017.

- The findings below are derived from consistent reports by refugees and asylum-seekers, local community members, locally contracted security staff and local police authorities. Investigations by police on Manus Island are ongoing.
- At approximately 7:00 p.m. on Saturday 9 December 2017, a reportedly intoxicated local man entered Hillside Haus unimpeded by security guards, threatening refugees and asylum-seekers in the mess.
- In a separate incident at 3:00 a.m. on Sunday 10 December, three reportedly intoxicated local men armed with machetes and an axe attempted to force their way through the gates of West Lorengau Haus. UNHCR staff observed the axe head (9 cm by 14 cm) that had been retrieved by security staff. Refugees have consistently reported the men were throwing rocks, yelling and swearing in Tok Pisin language. These reports are also corroborated by available video footage.
- Following the incident at West Lorengau Haus, the same group of men walked the short distance to Hillside Haus, where two entered unimpeded by security and were yelling that refugees and asylum-seekers should leave. One man was armed with a wooden baton and the other with a small knife.
- A marked inequality between the standard of living available at East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre versus lesser living space, communal space, water and sanitation facilities and security at West Lorengau Haus is causing increased tensions.
- Caseworker support is not currently available on-site for refugees and asylum-seekers at any facility on Manus Island, given an ongoing dispute with local landowners regarding Australia's contracting of JDA Wokman. With JDA Wokman prevented from entering East Lorengau Regional Transit Centre as well as both Ward 1 sites, refugees and asylum-seekers can only access services if they are able to travel to a hotel in town, rendering the service inaccessible to the most vulnerable refugees, with medical needs in particular.
- Critically important torture and trauma counselling was entirely abolished on 8 October 2017. All interpretation services were discontinued at the end of October 2017. Such support is critical for those with acute needs, but also to ensure basic communication for many who do not speak fluent English.
- Asylum-seekers currently at Hillside Haus may not have been recognized as refugees for a variety of reasons, including due to mental health conditions, changes in their circumstances since 2013, or non-engagement with the Papua New Guinea refugee status determination process. It would be misleading in this context to refer to these individuals as "failed asylum-seekers" or "non-refugees". A review of negative decisions is needed to ensure that those with international protection needs are appropriately recognized as refugees and not returned to danger and persecution.
- The last population figures provided by the Papua New Guinea Immigration and Citizenship Service (ICSA) indicated a total population of 801 refugees and asylum-seekers in Papua New Guinea. Figures (currently unverified by UNHCR) estimate 616 persons accommodated in the three separate facilities on Manus Island: 350 refugees currently at East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre, 150 refugees at West Lorengau Haus, and 103 asylum-seekers at Hillside Haus. Comprehensive registration is needed to confirm these estimates.

## Recommendations

- Registration of all refugees and asylum-seekers currently in Papua New Guinea is needed to ensure a reliable population record as well as to allow individual protection needs such as medical or other vulnerabilities to be documented and appropriately addressed.
- Serious issues around peaceful co-existence between refugees, asylum-seekers and the Manusian community at Ward 1 should be addressed as a matter of urgency, with an emphasis on de-escalation and dialogue. It should be noted that local population, including landowners, do not feel they were adequately consulted prior to the decision to construct West Lorengau Haus and Hillside Haus in their neighborhood.
- Security protocols should be tightened to prevent access to refugee and asylum-seeker accommodation by unauthorized persons.
- Key on-site services, including caseworkers, medical and especially specialist mental health, torture and trauma counselling and interpreters, should be reinstated immediately.



## WATER AND SANITATION

### Key Findings

- As of 13 December 2017, UNHCR staff observed 11 squat toilets available at West Lorengau Haus for 150 refugees. One additional toilet is permanently locked and out-of-order. This ratio of 1:14 is well below the accepted standard of 1:8 for accommodation intended for over three months.<sup>2</sup> Squat toilets also pose accessibility issues for older refugees or those with particular medical conditions.
- UNHCR staff also observed that of these 11 toilets, five were not functioning (able to flush). Three of nine available urinals had no running water, and one was blocked and overflowing.
- As of 13 December 2017, UNHCR staff observed 11 showers available at West Lorengau Haus for 150 refugees. One additional shower was not functioning. This ratio of 1:14 is well below the accepted standard of 1:8 for accommodation intended for over three months.<sup>3</sup>
- 10 showers and 10 toilets are available for 103 asylum-seekers currently living at Hillside Haus. This ratio of 1:10 is below the accepted standard of 1:8 for accommodation intended for over three months.<sup>4</sup>
- Bottled water for drinking is being provided to refugees and asylum-seekers at all sites. A minimum quality of water for bathrooms and kitchen facilities is nevertheless necessary to ensure basic sanitation and prevent health risks.
- Water provided to the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre is sourced from the mains of Lorengau Town (Water PNG) and then treated.

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<sup>2</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and German Red Cross, *Emergency Sheltering – Guidelines on Emergency Sheltering of Refugees in Germany*, 2016, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and German Red Cross, *Emergency Sheltering – Guidelines on Emergency Sheltering of Refugees in Germany*, 2016, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, at p. 51 and p. 58.

- Water for both West Lorengau Haus and Hillside Haus is sourced from the local stream within Lorengau Town, and is tanked to the Ward 1 area, untreated.

## Recommendations

- Current bathroom facilities should be expanded to ensure a minimum of 19 toilets and 19 showers needed for 150 refugees currently residing at West Lorengau Haus.
- Current bathrooms facilities should be expanded to ensure a minimum of 13 toilets and 13 showers needed for 103 asylum-seekers currently residing at Hillside Haus.
- As water currently being tanked to Ward 1 is untreated, testing should take place at both the source and distribution points to ensure quality and prevent water-borne health risks.



## HEALTH

### Key Findings

- As of 31 October 2017, all services provided within the former 'Regional Processing Centre' including health, pharmaceutical, counselling, case management and activities programmes were terminated. These have been replaced by a business-hours primary care clinic and a reconstituted but limited mental health service. Medical care relies on an agency model of services, rather than outreach, which is critical for people with specific vulnerabilities, including mental health.
- The International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) clinic is significantly physically smaller, less well-equipped and with fewer staff than the previous clinic at the 'Regional Processing Centre' and its range of services limited to primary care issues. Pathology services at Lorengau General Hospital are constrained, while those at the IHMS clinic are largely limited to point of care testing. Radiology services are currently only provided at the Lorengau Hospital, and are likely to be over-subscribed by the influx of 700 extra people.
- IHMS does not have an ambulance, and their patient transport vehicle is not available after hours. An ambulance is not available to transport patients to the Lorengau General Hospital on a regular and consistent basis.
- After-hours primary care, emergency service provision and surge service provision in the event of any major health crisis are to be provided by the 120-bed Lorengau General Hospital. Capacity at this facility is very limited, with no anaesthetist, surgeon or psychiatrist.
- Affordability and local availability are major barriers to prescribed pharmaceuticals for refugees and asylum-seekers, who are expected to fill medical prescriptions themselves. The absence of on-site interpreters (as above) also presents a serious obstacle to proper medical treatment for those who do not speak fluent English.

- Given the known level of psychological distress among refugees and asylum-seekers,<sup>5</sup> the abrupt termination of torture and trauma counselling and the lack of any proposed replacement is inappropriate and exposes them to severe psychiatric and psychological harm.
- The limited capacity of both the IHMS Clinic and the Lorengau General Hospital and the seriousness of medical conditions among the persons of concern requires a rapid transfer process off Manus Island.
- Overcrowding at the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre, West Lorengau Haus and Hillside Haus, as well as concerns regarding inadequate toilet facilities in both Ward 1 sites, pose risks for individuals of rapid spread of infectious gastrointestinal illnesses.

## Recommendations

- Trauma and torture counselling services, along with necessary interpretation services, should be immediately reinstated on-site.
- Prescribed medication should be provided for all who require it immediately (and free of charge).
- Procedures for medical evacuation should be streamlined to allow for immediate transfer of those who can neither be adequately treated at IHMS nor the Lorengau General Hospital.
- Specialist mental health services along with emergency and resuscitation support, including blood stocks, must be provided as a matter of urgency.
- A strategic operational plan or road map that identifies operational gaps including those above and provides timelines and processes to address them should be completed as a matter of priority.



## Key Findings

- Overcrowding is currently a concern at all three facilities for refugees and asylum-seekers on Manus Island.
- In East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre, up to four refugees are accommodated in shared bedrooms measuring 4.0 x 2.8 metres. In addition, each group accommodation unit has a cooking and dining space measuring approximately 4.0 x 7.0 metres which is shared between 8 or 12 refugees, depending on the bedroom configuration of the unit. This space of 6.3 m<sup>2</sup> for 8 person units or 5.1 m<sup>2</sup> for 12 person units is just at or below the accepted standard of 6 m<sup>2</sup> for accommodation intended for over three months.<sup>6</sup>
- At West Lorengau Haus, two refugees are intended to be accommodated in each room measuring 2.9 x 3.2 metres. A majority of rooms are already at full occupancy. This space of 4.6 m<sup>2</sup> per person is significantly below the accepted standard of 6 m<sup>2</sup> for accommodation intended for over

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Representation in Canberra, *Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee: Serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre 2016*, 12 November 2016, available at: [www.unhcr.org/en-au/publications/legal/58362da34/submission-to-the-senate-legal-and-constitutional-affairs-committee-serious.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/publications/legal/58362da34/submission-to-the-senate-legal-and-constitutional-affairs-committee-serious.html).

<sup>6</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - Emergency Sheltering – Guidelines on Emergency Sheltering of Refugees in Germany, 2016, p. 45.

three months.<sup>7</sup> No indoor communal space is available. Minimal outdoor space has very little shade and no available seating.

- At Hillside Haus, two asylum-seekers are intended to be accommodated in each room measuring 3.9 x 2.6 metres. A majority of rooms are already at full occupancy. This space of 5.1 m<sup>2</sup> per person is below the accepted standard of 6 m<sup>2</sup> for accommodation intended for over three months.<sup>8</sup> While UNHCR has previously observed a communal recreational area upstairs, this is currently locked and not accessible to asylum-seekers. Accordingly, no indoor communal space is available. Extremely minimal outdoor space has no adequate shade.

## Recommendations

- Living space for refugees and asylum-seekers at East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre, West Lorengau Haus and Hillside Haus requires expansion to meet a minimum standard of 6 m<sup>2</sup> per person.
- Communal space outside of small bedrooms is urgently needed at West Lorengau Haus and Hillside Haus.
- For 103 asylum-seekers at Hillside Haus, a minimum 4,635 m<sup>2</sup> should be available. For 150 refugees at West Lorengau Haus, a minimum 6,750 m<sup>2</sup> should be available. It should be noted that the total planned capacity of West Lorengau Haus (300 individuals) would require 13,500 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - Emergency Sheltering – Guidelines on Emergency Sheltering of Refugees in Germany, 2016, Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - Emergency Sheltering – Guidelines on Emergency Sheltering of Refugees in Germany, 2016, Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and German Red Cross, Emergency Sheltering – Guidelines on Emergency Sheltering of Refugees in Germany, 2016, p. 24.