

# REFUGEE AND MIGRANT SUNDAY 30 AUGUST 2009

## ABOUT REFUGEES

### How and why do refugees come to Australia?

REFUGEES are people who have fled from their home because of persecution or the well-justified fear of it. These people are usually (not always) in a country outside their own, where they have sought ASYLUM on grounds that would justify their being classed as a REFUGEE. A country which has signed the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the associated United Nations 1967 Protocol has agreed that it will not send asylum seekers back to a country where their lives will be at risk.

People who are in a country where there is an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) can apply for refugee status and the UNHCR will attempt to find another country where they can be accepted. The UNHCR tries to resettle people in their own country where possible, but if that is too dangerous then a third country is sought. This can take years, and some people live out their lives in refugee camps

Asylum seekers mostly come to Australia by plane, on tourist, student or working visas and ask for protection when they arrive here. A smaller number come by boat. If they have adequate reason to be classified as refugees they are granted permanent protection visas, which give them permanent residence. They are classed as “on-shore refugees” and are given the same assistance as “offshore refugees” who have come through the UNHCR. If they do not have adequate reason they are usually placed in detention centres until they can be returned to their home country, or to another which will accept them.

On 1 May 2009

- There were 455 people in immigration detention centres, of whom 184 were housed at the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre.
- There were 163 people in alternative detention arrangements and community detention.
- Of the 618 people in immigration detention:
  - 235 were detained as a result of compliance action – that is, overstaying their visa or breaching the conditions of their visa or having their visa cancelled
  - 62 were unauthorised air arrivals
  - 10 are illegal foreign fishers
  - 304 were unauthorised boat arrivals
  - 1 was an inadequately documented crew member
  - 6 were detained for other reasons (ship deserters, stowaways etc)
  - 319 had not applied for a protection visa
  - 129 were undergoing a refugee status assessment
  - 58 had been refused a protection visa
  - 112 had applied for protection visas, or a review of a decision in relation to their application for a protection visa.

- The majority of asylum seekers arrive in Australia with a valid visa and live in the community while they pursue their claims.
- There are no children in immigration detention centres.

For more information: [www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/about/index.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/about/index.htm)

At the end of 2007 6,303 people had asked for asylum in Australia. This compares with 50,700 in the United States of America, 45,600 in South Africa, 36,400 in Sweden. An estimated 740,000 were awaiting decisions about their status around the world; Ethiopia had granted refugee status to 19,896, USA to 17,979, Malaysia 14,156, France 12,928. (HREOC)

Australia has a HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM by which we accept a number of refugee people in various categories each year. The number proposed for 2009 – 2010 is 13,750 – 250 more than last year. People in the current quota will come mainly from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. (Over time these countries may be different, depending on the political conditions in the countries concerned).

The community services which people need to help them to settle here are mostly provided by non-government agencies, funded by the Federal and State governments, through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and state welfare departments. These services provide housing, education, health and employment assistance.

*Occasionally information is circulated which claims that refugees get far more financial assistance than needy Australians. This is not and never has been the case.*