



Australia's humanitarian program

Introduction

In the past sixty years Australia has resettled over 645 000 refugees and displaced persons, including thousands during and immediately after World War II. Today, as part of its planned humanitarian program, the government allocates places each year to refugees and others with humanitarian needs.¹ This year's humanitarian program, announced on 18 April 2005, allocated 13 000 places for 2005–06, including 6000 places for the resettlement of refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and 7000 places for the Special Humanitarian Program and protection visas in Australia.²

This research note outlines Australia's humanitarian response over the last sixty years and includes regional initiatives and international comparisons. It is intended as a companion research note to [Australia's migration program](#).³

Australia's humanitarian response

Australia's first Commonwealth immigration department was established in July 1945. Subsequently, Australia resettled thousands of post-war refugees and displaced people, and ratified the [UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees](#) on 22 January 1954. However, it was not until the late 1970s with the arrival of the Indochinese boat people seeking asylum that the government developed a specific refugee policy.⁴

In 1977, the then Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, the Hon. M. MacKellar, announced Australia's first refugee policy based on the following four principles:

- Australia fully recognises its humanitarian commitment and responsibility to admit refugees for resettlement
- The decision to accept refugees must always remain with the Government of Australia
- Special assistance will often need to be provided for the movement of refugees in designated situations or for their resettlement in Australia
- It may not be in the interest of some refugees to settle in Australia. Their interests may be better served by resettlement elsewhere. The Australian Government

makes an annual contribution to the UNHCR which is the main body associated with such resettlement.⁵

In 1981 the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) was introduced to assist people who did not fit neatly into the refugee category, but who were subject to human rights abuses and had family or community ties with Australia.⁶ The SHP, together with the refugee category, marked the beginnings of the annual program that we have today.

In June 1989, a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was adopted at the International Conference on Indochinese Refugees held in Geneva in response to the flow of asylum seekers from Vietnam and Laos. Australia was one of 51 nations who endorsed this agreement.⁷

By the 1990s, a comprehensive refugee system was in place within the immigration portfolio and in January 1993 a decision was made by the Keating government to separate the humanitarian program from the general migration program.⁸ In 1996 the Howard government introduced the practice of separately identifying onshore asylum seekers granted refugee status, from offshore applicants.⁹

Humanitarian Program, grants by category, 1998–2005¹⁰

Category	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05
Refugee	3 988	3 802	3 997	4 160	4 376	4 134	5 511
Special Humanitarian	4 348	3 051	3 116	4 258	7 280	8 297*	6 755
Special Assistance	1 190	649	879	40			
Onshore Protection	1 830	2 458	5 577	3 885	866	788	895
Safe Haven		5 900					
Temporary Humanitarian Concern			164	6	3	2	17
Total	11 356	15 860*	13 733	12 349	12 525	13 851	13 178

Source: DIMIA advice and [Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program](#), DIMIA *Fact Sheet* no. 60.

Since 1998, Australia's humanitarian program has allocated an average of about 13 000 places to refugees. Only a small proportion of these places generally go to onshore applicants. In 2003–04, for example, of the 13 851 humanitarian visas granted, only 788 were protection visas granted onshore.¹¹ Higher numbers were granted in 2000–01 due to a wave of boat arrivals, (of the 13 733 humanitarian visas granted, 5577 were onshore applicants), but the majority of the successful applicants were accepted from the offshore program.¹²

Source countries

Most of our post-war refugees came from Europe until the arrival of the Indochinese boat people. Since then, Australia has accepted more than 155 000 Vietnamese refugees and between 1976 and 1986 the Vietnam-born population of Australia rose from 2400 to 83 000.¹³

Between 1989 and 1991 there was an increase in people claiming refugee status due primarily to the Tiananmen Square incident in China in June 1989—most of the Chinese applicants in the country at the time were allowed to stay by the Hawke government.¹⁴ There were 16 248 Protection Visa (PV) applications during 1990–91, with about 77 per cent coming from Chinese nationals.¹⁵

Australia has also responded to other global resettlement needs since then, such as the Balkan crisis in 1991 and the large number of refugees resulting from wars and unrest in the Middle East and Central Asia—mostly Iraq and Afghanistan. More recently, the focus has been on resettling refugees from Africa. In 2003–04 over 70 per cent of refugee resettlement grants were allocated to Africa and 24 per cent to the Middle East and South-West Asia (down from 40 per cent in 2002–03).¹⁶

Offshore resettlement program, grants by region, 1998–2004¹⁷

Region	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Europe	4 736	3 424	3 462	2 709	1 158	354
Middle East & SW Asia	2 919	2 208	2 155	2 743	4 656*	2 867**
Africa	1 552	1 736	2 032	2 801	5 628	8 353
Asia	295	113	316	189	201	221
America	24	21	27	16		7
Offshore Processing Centres*					311	
Other Out of Region					15	
Total	9 526	7 502	7 992	8 458	11 656	11 802

Source: DIMIA [Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program Fact Sheet](#) no. 60.

Temporary protection

In October 1999, the Howard Government introduced Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for asylum seekers who arrive unauthorised and are subsequently assessed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to be refugees.¹⁸ Before then, all refugees, including unauthorised arrivals found to be refugees were given immediate access to permanent protection visas (PPVs).¹⁹

Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Temporary Humanitarian Visas (THVs) granted as at 25 February 2005²⁰

Grant year	Temporary Protection Subclass 785	Return Pending (Temporary) Subclass 695	Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) Subclass 449	Temporary Humanitarian Concern Subclass 786
1998–99	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*
1999–00	872	N/A*	1905	N/A*
2000–01	4479	N/A*	1	166
2001–02	3210	N/A*	8	5
2002–03	295	N/A*	12	6
2003–04	206	N/A*	37	35
2004–05	165	110	1	5
Total	9227	110	1964–	217#

Source: Data taken from an answer given by DIMIA to a Question on Notice from Senate Additional Estimates, Immigration Portfolio, 15 February 2005.

The TPV is initially granted for a period of three years, with the option of applying for further protection before the end of that period. In September 2001, changes were made to the legislation that determined that TPV recipients applying for further protection were 'not able to access a PPV if, since leaving their home country, they had resided for at least seven days in a country where they could have sought and obtained effective protection'.²¹

In July 2004, the government announced new measures allowing TPV and other Temporary Humanitarian Visa (THV) holders—such as Temporary Humanitarian Stay Visa or Temporary Humanitarian Concern Visa recipients in Australia when the regulations commenced—to apply for mainstream migration visas to remain in Australia permanently, without requiring them to leave the country to lodge their applications. The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone stated that 'This decision in relation to the opportunity for those on TPVs to apply to stay in Australia permanently, recognises the fact that many TPV holders are making a significant contribution to the Australian community, particularly in regional areas.'²²

This initiative took effect on 27 August 2004, along with a new [Return Pending Visa](#) (Subclass 695) allowing people found not to be in need of further protection to remain in the country for 18 months (with continued access to the same benefits and visa conditions as the TPV and THV), in order to make arrangements to depart.²³

Resettlement–international comparisons

Only about 20 countries participate in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) resettlement program and accept quotas of refugees on an annual basis. In 2004, of the main countries which resettled refugees through UNHCR the USA accounted for 63 per cent, Australia 19 per cent, Canada 13 per cent, Sweden 2 per cent, Norway 1 per cent, Finland 1 per cent, and Denmark 1 per cent. Taking into account both UNHCR resettlement figures and other humanitarian intakes, in 2004 the USA admitted the largest number of resettled refugees (52 900), followed by Australia (16 000) and Canada (10 500).²⁴

Main countries of UNHCR refugee resettlement in 2004

USA	52 868
Australia	15 967
Canada	10 521
Sweden	1801
Norway	842
New Zealand	825
Finland	735
Denmark	508
Netherlands	323
UK	150
Ireland	63
Chile	26
Mexico	11

Source: UNHCR, [Refugees by numbers](#), 2005 edition.

Regional initiatives

In January 2004 the government announced that it would try to increase the numbers of migrants and humanitarian entrants in rural and regional areas.²⁵ This announcement was initiated partly from recommendations made by the government's [Review of settlement services for migrants and humanitarian entrants](#) in 2002–03, and partly from interest from the state governments in new entrants settling in regional areas with labour shortages.

DIMIA is able to influence some humanitarian entrants, without any strong ties to family or friends who are already in the country, to settle in regional areas once their settlement needs have been assessed. DIMIA's [Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy](#) and [Community Settlement Services Scheme](#), for example, have had some success in encouraging 'unlinked' refugees to settle in regional areas.²⁶ However, most humanitarian entrants continue to settle in urban areas where they will be close to family or community support.

Regional settlement location of people assisted under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, 2003–04

State/ Territory	Settlement Location	Refugees	SHP entrants	Total
NSW	Sydney Metro	564	2393	2957
	Coffs Harbour	8	29	37
	Newcastle	17	88	105
	Wollongong	34	53	87
	Goulburn	14	0	14
	Wagga Wagga	14	0	14
VIC	Melbourne Metro	518	2614	3132
	Geelong	30	25	55
	Warrnambool	4	0	4
	Shepparton	0	2	2
QLD	Brisbane Metro	352	342	694
	Logan/Beenleigh/ Woodridge	79	11	90
	Toowoomba	30	200	230
	Townsville	19	7	26
	Cairns	24	0	24
	Gold Coast	3	14	17
SA	Adelaide Metro	492	495	987
WA	Perth Metro	526	685	1211
	Mandurah	10	0	10
TAS	Hobart Metro	114	130	244
	Launceston	114	20	134
	North West Coast	68	0	68
NT	Darwin Metro	87	37	124
	Alice Springs	0	2	2
ACT	Canberra Metro	20	67	87
Total Metro		2673	6763	9436
Total Regional		468	451	919
Sub Total		3141	7214	10355
PPV / TPV / THV Holders				46
Grand Total		3141	7214	10401

Source: DIMIA, 2005–06 Humanitarian Program Discussion Paper, 2005.

In order to further increase humanitarian settlement in regional areas, in the 2004–05 Budget, the government committed funding of \$12.4 million. Initiatives included

grants for humanitarian community services in regional areas, new regional needs-based planning frameworks and improved settlement information.²⁷

As humanitarian entrants generally require more settlement support than people arriving under the migration program, the success of these regional initiatives will depend very much on the level of service delivery and appropriate community support in rural and regional areas. Employment, housing, language assistance, counselling, health services and cultural support are all crucial in successfully integrating and supporting new entrants.

1. Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, (DIMIA), [Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program](#), *Fact Sheet* no. 60.
2. Senator the Hon. A. Vanstone, [Australia's humanitarian commitment holds firm](#), Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Press Release*, 18 April 2005.
3. J. Phillips [Australia's Migration Program](#), *Research Note* no. 48, Parliamentary Library, 2005.
4. Most of the 79 000 Vietnamese who arrived in Australia between 1975 and 1985 came from South-East Asian refugee camps. The first refugee boat from Vietnam arrived in Darwin in April 1975. Between May 1977 and 1981 there were an estimated 2097 unauthorised arrivals by boat. Source: James Jupp, *The Australian People: an encyclopaedia of the nation, its people and their origins*, 1988, p. 384. See also B. York [Australia and Refugees 1901–2002: an annotated chronology based on official sources](#), *Chronology*, Parliamentary Library, 2003.
5. The Hon. M. MacKellar, Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 24 May 1977.
6. DIMIA [Refugee and humanitarian issues: Australia's response](#), 2005, p. 16.
7. *ibid.* p. 4.
8. Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs *Refugee and humanitarian issues: the focus for Australia*, 1994 and DIMIA [Refugee and humanitarian issues: Australia's response](#), 2005, p. 16.
9. See DIMIA [Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program](#), *Fact Sheet* no. 60.
10. *This figure includes 5900 Safe Haven visas, comprising 4000 grants to Kosovars offshore and 1900 grants to the East Timorese onshore.
11. DIMIA [Immigration Snapshot 2003–04](#).
12. *ibid.*
13. J. Jupp, 'Australia's refugee and humanitarian policies', *Keynotes*, vol. 1, pp. 32–39, February 2002 and DIMIA *2005–06 Humanitarian Program: discussion paper*.
14. K. Betts, [Immigration policy under the Howard government](#), *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, May 2003.
15. DIMIA [Seeking asylum within Australia](#), *Fact Sheet* no. 61.
16. DIMIA [Refugee and humanitarian issues: Australia's response](#), 2005, pp. 18 and 34.
17. * Includes 311 grants to mainly Afghan and Iraqis in the Offshore Processing Centres in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. ** Includes 90 grants to mainly Afghan and Iraqis

in the Offshore Processing Centres in Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

18. For more background see J. Phillips, [Temporary Protection Visas](#), *Research Note* no. 51, Parliamentary Library, 2004.
19. DIMIA [Temporary Protection Visas](#), *Fact sheet* no. 64.
20. * Subclass 785 was introduced on 20 October 1999. Subclass 695 was introduced on 27 August 2004. Subclass 449 visa was introduced on 1 June 1999. Subclass 786 visa was introduced on 25 July 2000.

~ The grant of a subclass 449 visa is a prerequisite to the grant of a subclass 786 visa. Grants of a subclass 449 visa as a procedural step for the grant of a subclass 786 visa have not been included. Of the 1964 subclass 449 grants, 32 were subsequent grants to former subclass 449 visa holders and 11 were short-term grants to medical evacuees from Nauru and Manus Island.

Of the 217 subclass 786 grants, 34 were subsequent grants to former subclass 786 holders.
21. DIMIA [Temporary Protection Visas](#), *Fact sheet* no. 64.
22. Senator the Hon. A. Vanstone, [New measures for TPV holders](#), *Press Release*, 13 July 2004.
23. See DIMIA Measures for Temporary Protection and Temporary Humanitarian Visa Holders website. This is not to be confused with the Removal Pending Bridging Visa (Subclass 070), introduced in May 2005, enabling the release from detention of long-term detainees, determined not to be refugees by Australia, but who cannot be easily removed in practice.
24. UNHCR, [2004 Global Refugee Trends](#), p. 4.
25. Senator the Hon. A. Vanstone, [New initiatives to draw more migrants to regional areas](#), *Press release*, 12 January 2004 and DIMIA [Humanitarian settlement in regional Australia](#), *Fact sheet* no. 97.
26. DIMIA [Humanitarian settlement in regional Australia](#) *Fact sheet* no. 97.
27. *ibid.*

**Janet Phillips
Social Policy Section
Information and Research Service**

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