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Asylum seekers and refugees: a quick guide to key Parliamentary Library publications

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Key publications

Asylum seeker and refugee policy has attracted a great deal of attention in Australia for many years. In particular, concerns over the unauthorised arrival of asylum seekers by boat have occupied successive governments and parliaments since the 1970s. With increasing levels of global forced displacement, public and political debate on these issues appears likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

The Parliamentary Library has produced several comprehensive papers on asylum seeker and refugee issues and government policy responses, many of which are regularly updated. This quick guide provides an overview of the content and links to several of the recent publications on issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees, both internationally and in Australia.

Asylum seekers and refugees

- J Phillips, [Asylum seekers and refugees: what are the facts?](#), updated 2 March 2015. This paper answers commonly asked questions about asylum and refugees, such as: 'What is the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee?', 'Are asylum seekers illegals?', 'Do most asylum seekers arrive by boat?' and 'Are boat arrivals genuine refugees?'
- E Karlsen, [Refugee resettlement to Australia: what are the facts?](#), updated 3 February 2015. This paper explains how Australia's resettlement program operates, focusing in particular on areas that are not well understood. For example, it examines whether refugees arriving spontaneously at the border (whether by boat or plane) take the places of refugees overseas, whether there is a resettlement 'queue' and Australia's contribution to resettlement of refugees from transit countries in the immediate region, such as Malaysia and Indonesia.
- J Phillips, [Australia's Humanitarian Program: a quick guide to the statistics since 1947](#), 7 January 2015. This quick guide includes humanitarian entrant estimates between 1947–48 and 1976–77 (provided to the Parliamentary Library by the Department of Immigration in 2001) and Humanitarian Program visa grants since 1977–78.
- L Buckmaster, [Australian Government assistance to refugees: fact v fiction](#), updated 11 November 2014. In recent years a series of emails have been widely circulated throughout Australia claiming to describe the social security entitlements of refugees compared with those of other Australian residents. A common claim in these emails is that refugees in Australia receive higher social security benefits than age pensioners. Some suggest that refugees receive free gifts such as houses. Claims of this kind are erroneous and appear to have caused some confusion in the community. They are often brought to the attention of senators and members by their constituents. This paper describes the current situation with regard to refugee entitlements to social security and other assistance in order to clarify this issue.

Law and policy

- The Parliamentary Library has produced a series of papers on significant developments in refugee law and policy. The series began in November 2007 when the Australian Labor Party (ALP) won the federal election. The latest in the series covers the last term of the Labor Government from January 2012 to August 2013. The following list includes all the papers in the series to date:
 - E Karlsen and J Phillips, [Developments in Australian refugee law and policy \(2012 to August 2013\)](#), 25 September 2014. This paper provides a snapshot of significant developments in refugee law and policy under the Gillard and Rudd (Labor) Governments between January 2012 and August 2013 when the 43rd Parliament was prorogued and the House of Representatives dissolved for a general election.
 - E Karlsen, [Developments in Australian refugee law and policy 2010–2011](#), 12 April 2012. This paper provides a snapshot of significant developments in refugee law and policy from September 2010 to the end of December 2011 during Labor’s second term in office under the Gillard Government.
 - E Karlsen, [Developments in Australian refugee law and policy 2007–10: Labor’s first term in office](#), 18 October 2010. On 24 November 2007, Labor won the federal election, defeating the Howard (Coalition) Government which had been in power for nearly twelve years. This paper provides a snapshot of significant developments in Australian refugee law and policy under Labor’s first term in office.
- J Phillips, [A comparison of Coalition and Labor government asylum policies in Australia since 2001](#), 28 February 2014. This paper provides a comparison of key Labor and Coalition asylum and refugee policies since 2001 when the Howard Government first introduced the practice of offshore processing to deal with previous waves of boat arrivals. It includes an overview of the recommendations made by the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers in 2012 and analysis by experts in the field regarding policy alternatives.

Irregular migration and people smuggling

- J Phillips, [Boat arrivals and boat ‘turnbacks’ in Australia since 1976: a quick guide to the statistics](#), 11 September 2015. This quick guide provides statistics on the number of asylum seeker boats that have arrived in Australia since 1976 when the first wave of boats carrying people seeking asylum from the aftermath of the Vietnam War began to arrive. The guide also includes the number of boats that have been ‘turned back’ since the practice of removing unauthorised maritime arrivals in Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels (SIEVs) from Australian waters was introduced by the Howard Government in 2001 and reintroduced by the Abbott Government in 2013.
- J Phillips and H Spinks, [Boat arrivals in Australia since 1976](#), updated 23 July 2013. This paper also includes statistics, but provides a more detailed history of boat arrivals in Australia since Indochinese refugees began to arrive by boat in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. It includes information on public opinion on boat arrivals and Government policy responses since the 1970s.
- H Spinks, C Barker and D Watt, [Australian Government spending on irregular maritime arrivals and counter-people smuggling activity](#), updated 4 September 2013. This paper outlines the various programs and agencies involved in the interception, detention and processing of asylum seekers who have arrived unauthorised by boat. The paper also examines the programs relating to counter-people smuggling activities and the prosecution and incarceration of alleged people smugglers. It does not attempt to place a definitive figure on these costs, but highlights the available information on expenditure relating to these activities.
- J Phillips and H Spinks, [Immigration detention in Australia](#), updated 20 March 2013. This paper provides a brief overview of the historical and political context surrounding mandatory immigration detention in Australia. It includes government policy responses and a statistical appendix with data drawn from available sources, including committee reports, ministerial press releases and figures supplied by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
- C Barker, [The people smuggler’s business model](#), 28 February 2013. While discussions continue on how best to disrupt the people smugglers’ business model, those participating in the debate have not publicly articulated the business model to which they refer. This has significant policy implications, given that the first step in developing a response is defining the problem to be addressed. This paper examines recent international research as well as relevant Australian case law and research on people smuggling to determine whether this business model can be identified. It does not seek to evaluate the appropriateness or efficacy of specific anti-people smuggling policies that have been, or are currently being pursued by Australian Governments.

- H Spinks, [Destination anywhere? Factors affecting asylum seekers' choice of destination country](#), 5 February 2013. This paper examines the literature on refugee and asylum seeker choice of destination and provides an overview of the key factors that figure in such peoples' decision-making.

Offshore processing

- R de Boer, [Health care for asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island](#), 28 June 2013. This paper provides background on the concerns expressed by refugee advocates and human rights groups over the mental health status of asylum seekers being accommodated in offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. This concern stems from the perceived lack of specialist mental health resources available and the indefinite nature of detention. Previous experience has shown that offshore processing of asylum seekers can have serious consequences for both physical and mental health. The paper also provides an overview of the contractual provisions governing the provision of health care on Nauru and Manus Island for asylum seekers.
- J Phillips, [The 'Pacific Solution' revisited: a statistical guide to the asylum seeker caseloads on Nauru and Manus Island](#), 4 September 2012. This paper provides a brief overview of the Howard Government's offshore processing regime commonly referred to as the 'Pacific Solution'. It outlines some of the concerns expressed by many on the practice of accommodating asylum seekers in offshore processing facilities in the Pacific. However, the primary focus of this paper is to provide a guide to the statistics on the asylum seeker caseloads on Nauru and Manus Island between 2001 and 2008. The data in this paper has been drawn from a range of sources, including committee reports, ministerial press releases and advice provided to the Parliamentary Library by the Immigration Department.

Budget reviews and briefing books

- Each year the Parliamentary Library produces a [Budget Review](#) to assist parliamentarians in considering the key issues posed by the federal Budget. The articles relevant to asylum seekers and refugees in the 2014–15 Budget Review included:
 - J Phillips and E Karlsen, [Migration and humanitarian programs](#), Budget Review 2014–15, May 2014.
 - H Spinks, [Responding to unauthorised arrivals](#), Budget Review 2014–15, May 2014.
 - C Barker, [Counter-people smuggling measures](#), Budget Review 2014–15, May 2014.
- At the start of each new Parliament, the Parliamentary Library also produces a [Briefing Book](#) providing analysis and background on some of the key issues of the day that may be of interest to the incoming Parliament. For example, the Briefing Book for the 44th Parliament included the following article of relevance to asylum seeker and refugee issues:
 - H Spinks and I McCluskey, [Asylum seekers and the Refugee Convention](#), Briefing book—44th Parliament, 2013.

Further reading

The Parliamentary Library regularly produces other publications of relevance to asylum and refugee law and policy such as:

- **FlagPost**—the Parliamentary Library's blog provides posts on current issues of interest to members of the Australian Parliament. [FlagPost](#) regularly includes [asylum and refugee posts](#).
- **Bills Digests**—[Bills Digests](#) provide an independent perspective on legislation and are written to assist members of Parliament in their consideration of Bills. [Migration related Bills Digests](#) are produced regularly, including many involving asylum seeker and refugee issues.
- **Research publications**—the Parliamentary Library provides research services to senators and members in the Australian Parliament, including the production of publicly available research papers and quick guides that are published on its [Research publications](#) web page.



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