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Immigration detention in Australia: a quick guide to the statistics

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This guide provides current statistics on immigration detainees in Australia (onshore) since 1989–90. It updates the appendices of a more detailed Parliamentary Library research paper, [Immigration detention in Australia](#) (2013). The research paper includes an overview of the historical and political context surrounding mandatory immigration detention (introduced by the Keating Government in 1992) and details of Australian Government immigration detention policy responses between 1976 and 2013. For an update on immigration detention policy since 2013 see the Parliamentary Library research paper, [A comparison of Coalition and Labor government asylum policies in Australia since 2001](#) (2017).

For statistics on the number of asylum seekers who have been accommodated (offshore) at regional processing centres in Nauru and PNG see the Parliamentary Library publications, [Australia's offshore processing of asylum seekers in Nauru and PNG: a quick guide to statistics and resources](#) (2016); and [The 'Pacific Solution' revisited: a statistical guide to the asylum seeker caseloads on Nauru and Manus Island](#) (2012) for details on the asylum cohorts processed offshore during the Howard Government.

Statistics in this guide include:

[Table 1: Immigration detainees by year since 1989](#)—the numbers of detainees held both in closed immigration detention facilities (including Christmas Island) and in community detention during the financial year. Detainees may be held for short periods in a single financial year or may be detained for longer periods over multiple financial years.

[Table 2: Unaccompanied minors in immigration detention](#)—an 'unaccompanied minor' (UAM) in this context is usually a person under the age of 18 years (without a parent or relative 21 years or older) who originally arrived unauthorised by boat seeking asylum. UAMs are mostly detained under community placements or in 'alternative places of detention' where appropriate services and support are available.

[Table 3: Community detention](#)—for those where a 'residence determination' has been made by the Minister enabling them to reside at a specified place in the community, not in an immigration detention centre. Families and UAMs are often detained under these arrangements.

[Table 4: Bridging visa \(BVE\) grants](#)—since November 2011, eligible unauthorised maritime arrivals (referred to in departmental statistics as IMAs) have been released from immigration detention on a Bridging visa E (BVE). These are temporary visas that allow the visa holder to reside in the community while they wait for their immigration status to be resolved.

Table 1: Immigration detainees by year since 1989 (includes community detainees)

Year	Women	Men	Children	Unknown	Total
1989–90	48	122	62	14	246
1990–91	57	126	66	11	260
1991–92	42	119	25	2	188
1992–93	49	197	17	3	266
1993–94	49	161	63	5	278
1994–95	286	500	376	14	1 176
1995–96	159	349	184	1	693
1996–97	120	727	73		920
1997–98	393	1 359	110	1	1 863
1998–99	649	2 852	216		3 717
1999–00	1 025	5 627	822	3	7 477
2000–01	1 390	6 053	1 344	4	8 791
2001–02	1 785	6 307	1 224	5	9 321
2002–03	1 536	5 157	427	4	7 124
2003–04	1 586	5 053	324	1	6 964
2004–05	1 600	5 989	381		7 970
2005–06	920	5 542	425		6 887
2006–07	794	3 988	276		5 058
2007–08	640	3 744	239		4 623
2008–09	642	3 534	206	15	4 397
2009–10	1 149	7 657	996		9 802
2010–11	1 752	9 595	1 787		13 134
2011–12	2 288	14 190	2 898		19 376
2012–13	N/A	N/A	6 264		38 147
2013–14	4 774	18 192	4 755		27 721
2014–15	3 317	9 236	2 666		15 219
2015–16	2 087	7 653	956		10 696

Sources:

- **1989–90 to 2007–08:** Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), Joint Standing Committee on Migration, [Inquiry into Immigration Detention in Australia, Submission 129d](#), 30 September 2008.
- **2008–09 to 2011–12:** DIAC advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 3 December 2012.
- **2012–13:** DIAC, [Annual report 2012–13](#), p. 181; and Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, Answers to Questions on Notice, Immigration and Border Protection Portfolio, Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013–14, 19 November 2013, Question [SE13/0326](#).
- **2013–14 to 2016–16:** Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 3 March 2017.

Notes:

- An additional 1637 people were detained in offshore processing centres in Nauru and Manus Island (PNG) between September 2001 and February 2008. Source: C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), [Last refugees leave Nauru](#), media release, 8 February 2008.
- The total number of people detained in offshore processing centres in Nauru and Manus Island since the policy was reintroduced by the Gillard Government in September 2012 is not available. However, the number of people accommodated in the centres reached a peak of 2450 in April 2014, including a peak of approximately 200 children. See E Karlsen, [Australia's offshore processing of asylum seekers in Nauru and PNG: a quick guide to statistics and resources](#), Research paper series, 2016–17, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2016.

Table 2: Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in immigration detention

Year	Unaccompanied minors
1994–95	2
1995–96	1
1996–97	7
1997–98	10
1998–99	7
1999–00	53
2000–01	93
2001–02	198
2002–03	8
2003–04	1
2004–05	0
2005–06	1
2006–07	5
2007–08	2
2008–09	41
2009–10	476
2010–11	411
2011–12	1788
2012–13	1900
2013–14	134
2014–15	4
2015–16	<5

Sources:

- **1994–95 to 2007–08:** DIAC, Joint Standing Committee on Migration, *Inquiry into Immigration Detention in Australia*, [Submission 129J](#), 30 September 2008.
- **2008–09 to 2010–11:** Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, Answers to Questions on Notice, Immigration and Citizenship Portfolio, Budget Estimates 2012–13, 21–22 May 2012, Question [BE12/0363](#).
- **2011–12:** DIAC advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 3 December 2012.
- **2012–13:** Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, Answers to Questions on Notice, Immigration and Border Protection Portfolio, Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013–14, 19 November 2013, Question [SE13/0327](#).
- **2013–14 to 2014–15:** DIBP advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 16 May 2016. In 2013–14, 131 of the UAMs in immigration detention were unauthorised maritime arrivals (IMAs).
- **2015–16:** DIBP advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 3 March 2017. There were no unauthorised maritime arrival (IMA) unaccompanied minors in immigration detention and less than 5 non-IMA UAMs in 2015–16.

Table 3: Community detention

Year	People held in community detention
2005–06	76
2006–07	143
2007–08	108
2008–09	196
2009–10	161
2010–11	1551
2011–12	2590
2012–13	*
2013–14	4337
2014–15	3594
2015–16	1491

Sources:

- **2005–06 to 2007–08:** DIAC, Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Inquiry into Immigration Detention in Australia, [Submission 129J](#), 30 September 2008
- **2008–09 to 2010–11:** Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, Answers to Questions on Notice, Immigration and Citizenship Portfolio, Budget Estimates 2012–13, Answers to Questions on Notice, 21–22 May 2012, Question [BE12/401](#).
- **2011–12:** DIAC advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 3 December 2012.
- ***2012–13:** the Minister approved 3441 clients (1675 adults and 1766 children) for community detention in 2012–13, but the annual report does not provide statistics for the total, including those already in community detention. Between October 2010 (when community detention was expanded) and June 2013, the Minister approved 7595 clients (4123 adults and 3472 children) for community detention. DIAC, [Annual report 2012–13](#), 2013, p. 183.
- **2013–14 to 2015–16:** DIBP advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 3 March 2017.

Table 4: Bridging visa (BVE) grants to unauthorised maritime arrivals*

Year	Bridging Visa E (BVE) grants to IMAs since November 2011
25 November 2011 to 30 June 2012	2,741
25 November 2011 to 30 June 2014	29,564
25 November 2011 to 30 September 2014	30,003
25 November 2011 to 31 December 14	30,939
25 November 2011 to 31 March 2015	32,780
25 November 2011 to 30 June 2015	34,365
25 November 2011 to 30 September 2015	34,955
25 November 2011 to 31 March 2016	35,607
25 November 2011 to 30 June 2016	35,776
25 November 2011 to 30 September 2016	35,834

Source: DIBP, *Illegal maritime arrivals on Bridging E Visa*, various years (June 2012 to September 2015), [Onshore processing statistics](#), DIBP website.

*Note: the Commonwealth's *Migration Act 1958* describes asylum seekers arriving unauthorised by boat as 'unauthorised maritime arrivals'.

Notes:

- As at 30 September 2016, 28,842 IMAs on BVEs remained in the community, (24,496 with a current BVE and 2,346 awaiting grant of a further BVE). The remaining 8,992 IMAs who were granted BVEs had either been granted a substantive visa, departed Australia, returned to immigration detention or are deceased. DIBP, [Illegal maritime arrivals on Bridging E Visas](#), 30 September 2016.

- Since 25 November 2011 successive ministers have used their non-compellable, non-delegable intervention power under section 195A of the *Migration Act 1958* to grant bridging visas to some IMAs waiting for a resolution of their immigration status onshore. On 19 July 2013 the Government announced a decision to transfer all unauthorised maritime arrivals to offshore processing centres in PNG and Nauru. On 4 August 2013 an election was announced and during the election campaign the Coalition made a commitment to clear the ‘asylum legacy’ caseload comprised of asylum seekers in the community on BVEs and in immigration detention. For more detail see DIBP, [Bridging visas for illegal maritime arrivals](#), fact sheet, DIBP website; and E Karlsen, J Phillips and H Spinks, [Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment \(Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload\) Bill 2014](#), Bills digest, 40 2014–15, Parliamentary Library, Canberra 2014.

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