Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Border Protection

Questions on Notice

Inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relationships with the Middle East

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Trade Sub-Committee

| Questions on Notice |
| Inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relationships with the Middle East |

QoN No.	Subject
TI/001	List of deemed "at risk" countries in the Middle East
TI/002	Electronic lodgement of Forms
TI/003	ID number
TI/004	Numbers of visitors on student Visas
TI/005	Numbers of visitors on student Visas
TI/006	Off-base processing numbers
TI/007	Fee for Service
TI/008	Base application fee
TI/009	Application fee
TI/010	Application fee
TI/011	Number private jets fly in each jurisdictions
TI/012	Numbers for visitor and student visas 2014-15
TI/013	Cost and application process for student and tourist visas
TI/014	MENA Countries
TI/015	Student visa application process
TI/016	Processing of Australian Visas
TI/017	Australian Visa Process
TI/018	Electronic visa waiver program
TI/019	Middle East Student Visas
TI/020	Middle East Student Visas
TI/021	Refusal Rate
TI/022	Enhanced Passenger Processing
TI/023	Off-terminal border processing
TI/024	English Test
TI/025	Streamlining the Visa Processes
TI/026	Immigration representatives - Morocco
TI/027	Middle Eastern visitors

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 4 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/001*) – Parliamentary Inquiry - List of deemed "at risk" countries in the Middle East

Asked:

Senator GALLACHER: I have seen the list of countries where visas are deemed—I think it is entitled 'at risk' and 'not at risk'. There is a list of countries where you can get a visa within a week or whatever and then there is another list of countries that takes a month or more. Is all of the Middle East in the 'at risk' group?
Mr Williams: No. It is mixed across the region and the countries.
Senator GALLACHER: What have the ones who are not at risk done to get less onerous—
Mr Williams: It is usually based on information like visa refusal rates, visa overstay rates, evidence of noncompliance in the past for a significantly large number of the case load for us to apply the higher risk measures to that group.
Senator GALLACHER: I think in our papers here it says Kuwaitis can get a visa into New Zealand pretty well straight away, whereas they cannot in Australia. Why are we doing things differently?
Mr Williams: We all have our risk settings in different places.
Senator GALLACHER: The Kiwis have got it wrong?
Mr Williams: I am not saying that, no. Australia has a universal visa system, so there is no visa waiver program as far as Australia is concerned, whereas New Zealand operates a visa waiver program, as do some other countries. That is usually a pragmatic decision around where they wish to put resources.
Senator GALLACHER: Could we get a copy of the list of at-risk countries in the Middle East?
Mr Williams: Yes. We will take that on notice and provide it.

Answer:

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (the Department) does not produce a list of at-risk countries for visas. The Department does refer to assessment levels within the current Student Visa programme and to risk levels in our published Temporary Visa processing service standards.

In the Department's Student Visa programme there are currently three assessment levels. Assessment levels align student visa requirements to the immigration risk posed by applicants from particular nationalities, studying in a particular education sector. Assessment level 1 represents the lowest immigration risk and assessment level 3, the highest. The higher the assessment level, the greater the evidence an

applicant is required to demonstrate to support their claims for the grant of a student visa.

A current breakdown of assessment levels applicable for passport holders of all countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is included in the table below.

The Department's website references the terms 'low risk' and 'high risk' in the Visitor Visa programme to define the applicable service standard, in relation to visa application processing times. Each application is assessed on its individual merits and many visitor visa applications are processed within low risk service standards.

Table 1: Assessment levels for passport holders of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Passport held	Subclass 570 ELICOS	Subclass 571 Schools	Subclass 572 VET	Subclass 573 Higher Education	Subclass 574 Postgraduate Research	Subclass 575 Non Award	Subclass 576 Foreign Affairs or Defence
Algeria	3	3	3	3	2	*	All 576 travel documents are assessment level 2
Bahrain	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Egypt	3	3	3	3	1	3	
Iran	3	3	3	3	2	2	
Iraq	3	3	3	3	2	*	
Israel	2	3	2	2	1	1	
Jordan	3	2	2	3	1	3	
Kuwait	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Lebanon	3	2	3	3	1	3	
Libya	3	3	3	3	2	*	
Morocco	3	3	3	3	2	*	
Oman	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Palestinian Authority	3	3	3	3	2	*	
Qatar	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Saudi Arabia	1	1	2	1	1	1	
Syria	3	3	3	2	2	3	
Tunisia	3	3	3	3	2	*	
United Arab Emirates	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Yemen, Republic of	3	3	3	2	2	3	

NB:*The assessment level is determined by matching the passport held with the visa subclass for the education sector of the principal course.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/002*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - Electronic lodgement of Forms**

 Asked:

Mr RANDALL: I am not totally satisfied with the answer to the question I asked. You have told us about the forms, and that now you are moving to electronic lodgement where you can. Have you compared your electronic system—because it is something new—with other countries in terms of the ability to negotiate a proper way through these electronic lodgements so you can make it easier? It goes to Sharman's question about whether, if you are doing it electronically, you are going to use the native language in a booklet or in some other form. For example, what if one of these people has one parent, either because the other parent is dead or they are illegitimate, and they do not tick the box. How do they get help on that?

Mr Williams: All sorts of human circumstances are considered in the process, and we take that into account. It does not necessarily mean that because you do not have one parent alive that you are therefore excluded from the visa process.

Mr RANDALL: But if they do not tick the box at the time of lodgement, then you would—

Mr Williams: They need to explain it then, in the form. They need to explain to us what their circumstances are, and we will take that into account. As far as the comparison with other countries is concerned, I think it is correct to say that we have not done a formal comparison, certainly in this particular area of the world, around what countries like the UK, Canada or the US do, although in broad terms we have a sense that we are all heading in a similar direction around online lodgement. Many of us use visa application centres, which I mentioned. In fact, in this region we share visa application centres with the UK.

Answer:

In respect of the Middle East, the Department has not undertaken a formal comparison of Australia's electronic lodgment systems with those of other countries.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/003*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - ID numbers**

Asked:

Dr STONE: So why do you give an ID number then? What is an ID number for an overseas agent if it is not associated with registration?

Mr Williams: If it is an ID number that is associated with their Australian registration—

Dr STONE: But they are not an Australian registered person.

Mr Williams: I would have to check that. It may be that in some particular locations we do that. In some cases we deal with agents who are not migration agents. For example, we might have a channel for people to apply through a travel agency arrangement. We do that in China. Or we might do it through a service delivery partner, like a visa application centre. Again, they perform some of the role that a migration agent can perform around preparing an application and getting it to a decision-ready state. It is difficult to be prescriptive about a single industry standard worldwide. In some countries people tend to use intermediaries. In Latin America that is quite common. Sophie, did you want to add anything?

Ms Montgomery: If we knew a bit more about the ID number that is being presented, that might be useful. It could well be a technical ID number so that people are able to access something like online lodgement. As Jim said, it could be an AVAC that has an ID number; it could be a local agent who has a particular access process.

Dr STONE: It is using your instructions: 'The department may give some overseas agents an ID number. This number does not mean that they are registered.' It is in your own instructions and information. So the student out there now thinks, 'This person does not have an ID number. Is that important or not important?' What typically happens, in my experience of constituents who come to me complaining, is that they were told, 'I have got an ID number, which means I am supported by the Australian government as a registered, okay, kosher agent,' yet they have been ripped off, given wrong information, or sometimes there is a corrupt situation where wrong information has been supplied and it is actually a false ID.

Mr Williams: I will need to check the use of that particular ID number. I notice it does qualify that by saying, 'This does not mean that the agent is recognised under the Australian scheme.'

Dr STONE: Why use it? Why give this false security, this ID number, which does not mean anything?

Mr Williams: Because it may be useful to us to know if there is an intermediary involved, regardless of whether they are registered, and also it may give them some limited functionality around lodging applications on people's behalf in the system. A lot of people do like to use intermediaries.

Answer:

The Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (OMARA) is an office of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (the Department). In Australia, only agents registered with the Office of the MARA can legally give immigration assistance. A registered migration agent may be identified as a validly registered agent using the allocated Migration Agent Registration Number (MARN) and located by searching the Department's website.

Migration agents operating outside of Australia fall under the jurisdiction of the country in which they are operating. They may provide immigration assistance only as the relevant sections of the Migration Act do not have extraterritorial effect.

The Department routinely issue offshore agents with an identification number (Offshore Agent ID Number) for administrative purposes only. It is used to identify and reference multiple applications as being lodged by the one offshore agent and streamlines our data entry requirements. Any reference to an identification number on Departmental forms is supported by advice to clients that the identification number does not mean that the agent is registered and that it does not represent endorsement of the agent by the Australian Government.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/004*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - Numbers of visitors on student Visas**

Asked:

CHAIR: Are you able to provide the latest numbers of visitors on student visas by region and by country in 2013-14 (2014-15)? Have they changed much in the last three years, dealing with the area we are looking at, the Middle East? Basically, I am asking for students and visitors from the region. Have you got numbers for those?
Mr Williams: I have numbers. I can provide a breakdown on notice, if you wish, but the general trend is that the number of student visas from the countries covered by the terms of this committee's interest is around 16,000 student visa applications lodged annually. It is fair to say that that probably means around 9,000 new students per year, because some of those people are renewing visas—they are already in the country and are simply renewing. There has been a slight decrease in offshore student numbers, but there has been a slight increase in offshore visitor lodgements. That has gone from around 52,600 to around 54,700 over the last couple of years.

Answer:

The following tables provide the numbers of Visitor visas (subclass 600) - Tourist Stream and student visas granted to citizens of Middle East and North Africa countries in 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Table 1: Number of Visitor visas (subclass 600) - Tourist Stream granted to MENA nationals by programme year and travel document country

Travel Document Country	2013-14	2014-15
Algeria	77	85
Bahrain	366	329
Egypt	2,128	2,141
Iran	5,750	7,509
Iraq	519	508
Israel	5,259	5,318
Jordan	1,052	1,146
Kuwait	2,101	2,177
Lebanon	4,487	4,810
Libya	60	53
Morocco	277	256
Oman	577	801
Palestinian Authority	102	106
Qatar	913	1,012
Saudi Arabia	5,954	6,954
Syrian Arab Republic	157	166
Tunisia	91	99
United Arab Emirates	3,792	3,682
Yemen, Republic of	66	63
TOTAL Subclass 600 tourist stream grants to MENA nationals	**33,728**	**37,215**

Table 2: Number of Student visas (subclasses 570-576) granted to MENA nationals by programme year and travel document country

Travel Document Country	2013-14	2014-15
Algeria	15	4
Bahrain	60	33
Egypt	246	201
Iran	1,521	1,612
Iraq	1042	870
Israel	148	171
Jordan	363	420
Kuwait	293	262
Lebanon	354	383
Libya	446	140
Morocco	27	37
Oman	504	536
Palestinian Authority	43	43
Qatar	29	14
Saudi Arabia	8,164	8,739
Syrian Arab Republic	28	22
Tunisia	20	11
United Arab Emirates	290	235
Yemen, Republic of	31	26
TOTAL Student visa (subclasses 570-576) grants to MENA nationals	**13,624**	**13,759**

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/005*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - Numbers of visitors on student Visas**

Asked:

Ms VAMVAKINOU: Do you know where they are coming from predominantly?
Senator O'NEILL: Do you have a breakdown?
Ms VAMVAKINOU: I am assuming the student one must be from Saudi Arabia and the visitors are probably from Lebanon.
Ms Montgomery: We can provide this separately so you can absorb it, but for offshore lodgements the larger numbers come from Egypt, 4,853 last financial year—
Ms VAMVAKINOU: These are tourists or students?
Ms Montgomery: These are visitors. You wanted visitors. Again, we can provide this on notice. Israel was 6,635; Saudi Arabia we have 6,500; Lebanon is up there, 7,600—

Answer:

Table: Number of Visitor visas (subclass 600) - Tourist Stream granted in 2014-15 by travel document country

Travel Document Country	2014-15
Algeria	85
Bahrain	329
Egypt	2,141
Iran	7,509
Iraq	508
Israel	5,318
Jordan	1,146
Kuwait	2,177
Lebanon	4,810
Libya	53
Morocco	256
Oman	801
Palestinian Authority	106
Qatar	1,012
Saudi Arabia	6,954
Syrian Arab Republic	166
Tunisia	99
United Arab Emirates	3,682
Yemen, Republic of	63
Total Subclass 600 Tourist Stream grants to MENA nationals	**37,215**

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/006*) – **Parliamentary Inquiry - Off-base processing numbers**

Asked:

CHAIR: Do you have any numbers as to how much off-base processing you do?
Mr Williams: I do not but I can take that on notice.
CHAIR: It is to see whether it is significant or whether it is just the odd jet, if you know what I mean.
Mr Williams: I will take that on notice.
CHAIR: Thank you.

Answer:

In the 2014-15 financial year the total number of aircraft processed via off-terminal clearance was 4,421 nationally.

The figures provided are inclusive of private craft, Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) charters, medevac aircraft, Australian/Foreign military, ferry flights and regular public transport.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/007*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - Fee for Service**

Asked:

Mr RANDALL: You can imagine the frustration when you have your own jet and you fly across here and you want to fast-track everything, and you get to sit at the airport for four hours while you wait for someone to turn up to process you.

Mr Williams: Usually, what happens in those cases is that those aircraft are directed to the general passenger terminal. They would come in through that. So they would not have to wait for the service; they could choose to—

Mr RANDALL: So you get behind two A380s and form a queue. We are trying to encourage people to come and invest in this country, tell them that they are wanted, and we put them in with the cattle.

Mr Williams: I would not describe it that way.

CHAIR: That is how you and I go, Don.

Senator O'NEILL: We might say 'welcome to egalitarianism' rather than calling them 'cattle', I think. Chair, can I ask some questions on that?Senator O'NEILL: Is there a fee for service that is applied in those situations?

Mr Williams: In the case of the airport facilitation, I understand there is. But it is not my area of expertise. If you would not mind, I will check that for you.

Senator O'NEILL: Would you be able to take it on notice and find out how much it is?

CHAIR: Fees, yes.

Answer:

Cost recovery can apply to off-terminal clearances; however payment of cost recovery does not guarantee border clearance services for an arrival or departure time of the aircraft operator's choice (refer to TI/011). There is currently no user-pays system to guarantee border clearance services within a defined time period for arrival or departure of private aircraft.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/008*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - Base application fee**

Asked:

Senator O'NEILL: My other question is around fees as well. On the form here, the payment details, you have 'base application charge'. Could you tell us what that is?
Mr Williams: The way the fee structure was changed a few years ago was to a base application charge and then, as other elements become relevant to a case, there might be a higher fee. Usually a base application charge refers to an individual applicant; and, if there are other people added to the case, like dependants, then they would have to pay an extra charge—
Senator O'NEILL: I can see that here. Could you just take me through your form, on page 69. What is the base application charge?
Mr Williams: I will just have to find those.
Ms Montgomery: Tell me if I am answering the wrong question here. The base application charge for a student visa is $535.
Senator O'NEILL: Sorry, I cannot hear you properly.
Ms Montgomery: Sorry. The base application charge for a student visa is $535, I believe.
Senator O'NEILL: And the non-internet application charge?
Ms Montgomery: Okay, I do not have that form

Answer:

The application charges for a student visa are outlined in the table below and apply to applications made inside or outside Australia. Visa Application Charges are subject to change. On 1 July 2015 there was a price increase. The prices listed in the table below are current at 16 February 2016.

Base application charge	$550
Non-Internet application charge	Nil
Additional applicant charge for applicant who is at least 18 years of age	$410
Additional applicant charge for applicant who is younger than 18 years of age	$135
Subsequent temporary application charge (if applicable, per person)	$700

The Subsequent Temporary Application Charge of $700 applies to certain visa holders who are making a second application in Australia for a specified temporary visa. It does not apply to students lodging an application outside Australia.

Applicants for the Foreign Affairs and Defence Sector Student visa (subclass 576) are exempt from the Base application charge, additional applicant charges and subsequent temporary application charges.

Postgraduate Research Sector (subclass 574) applicants are charged the Base application charge, but are exempt from the additional applicant charges and subsequent temporary application charges.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/009*) – Parliamentary Inquiry – Application fee

Asked:

Senator O'NEILL: And then there is the series of others—the additional applicant multiplied by 18 years, over or under 18—
Ms Montgomery: So that would be the number of dependants you have with you coming in on the same—
Senator O'NEILL: and the temporary application. How much, on average, do you get as a visa application amount?
Mr Williams: Again, I think we would have to take that on notice. Most of the student visa applicants—and I do not want to be too general here, because a lot of applicants do come in with dependants, so it would be subject to those further charges, but generally speaking—are individuals coming in for study, so the base application charge would be the most likely basic charge. The non-internet application charge is rarely charged, to be honest. I think it is about $80. The additional charges for dependants vary according to the visa category. For a student, it is usually around $405 for people over 18, and for children under 18 it is $135.

Answer:

According to departmental systems, the average amount paid in 2014-15 for a Student visa (including Student Guardian visa - subclass 580) was $620.59.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/010*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry – Application fee**

Asked:

CHAIR: What about tourists coming on a package to Australia?
Mr Williams: They generally just pay a single fee for the applicant themselves.
CHAIR: Which is?
Mr Williams: But every applicant would pay that fee.
Ms Montgomery: It is $130, I think.
Mr Williams: I think $135 is the fee.

Answer:

The visa application charge for a Visitor visa (subclass 600) Tourist stream, lodged by an applicant who is outside of Australia at the time of lodgement, is currently $135.

At the time of the inquiry on 4 March 2015, the visa application charge was $130. This change took effect on 1 July 2015.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/011*) – **Parliamentary Inquiry – Number private jets fly in each jurisdictions**

Asked:

Senator O'NEILL: I have one more question, on notice. How many of these private jets fly in to each of the jurisdictions? And what is the fee that is applied for the special treatment for that flight on arrival?
Mr Williams: I will confirm that there is indeed a fee. I believe there is, but I will confirm that and we will give you that on notice.

Answer:

The available data for off terminal clearance does not differentiate between aircraft type and ownership. Subsequently, the figures provided are inclusive of private craft, Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) charters, medevac aircraft, Australian/Foreign military, ferry flights and regular public transport. A detailed analysis of regional private jet services was not possible within the required timeframe.

In addition, not all private jets require special treatment in the form of off-terminal clearances, and some off-terminal clearances may also be commercial aircraft.

The number of off-terminal clearances processed in 2014-15 financial year, by Region is as follows:

Region	Number of Off-Terminal Vessel Clearances
NSW/ACT	987
Victoria & Tasmania	1,150
Queensland	1,720
WA	260
Central (Adelaide & Darwin)	304
National Total	**4,421**

Customs Regulation 2015, Regulation 12 details the rates of fees and travel expenses, per officer attending aircraft clearance out of normal operating hours and/or locations as follows:

- An overtime fee of $43.35 per hour or part hour;
- a location fee of $40.10 per hour or part hour; and
- Travel expenses incurred, including the fare for transport and any accommodation allowances paid to an officer by the agency for the officer to perform the requested function.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/012*) – Parliamentary Inquiry – Numbers for visitor and student visas 2014-15

Asked:

* Can you please provide an overview of the Department of Immigration visa program in 2014-15 for visitors, students and business people from the Middle East and North African region?
* Is the Department of Immigration also able to provide a breakdown of the latest numbers of visitor and student visas from the region and by country in 2014-15, and has it changed much in the past three years?

Answer:

The following tables provide the number of Student and Visitor visas (subclass 600) - Tourist and Business Visitor Streams - granted to citizens of Middle East and North Africa countries in the past three programme years.

Table 1: Number of Student visas (subclasses 570-576) granted to MENA nationals by programme year and travel document country

Travel Document Country	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Algeria	16	15	4
Bahrain	49	60	33
Egypt	250	246	201
Iran	1,756	1,521	1,612
Iraq	629	1042	870
Israel	184	148	171
Jordan	431	363	420
Kuwait	373	293	262
Lebanon	394	354	383
Libya	702	446	140
Morocco	38	27	37
Oman	429	504	536
Palestinian Authority	32	43	43
Qatar	28	29	14
Saudi Arabia	8,084	8,164	8,739
Syrian Arab Republic	23	28	22
Tunisia	14	20	11
United Arab Emirates	302	290	235
Yemen, Republic of	28	31	26
TOTAL Student visa grants to MENA nationals	**13,762**	**13,624**	**13,759**

Table 2: Number of Visitor visas (subclass 600) - **Business Stream** granted to MENA nationals by programme year and travel document country

Travel Document Country	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Algeria	63	116	56
Bahrain	63	67	71
Egypt	629	618	515
Iran	751	483	542
Iraq	411	177	123
Israel	1,531	953	1,023
Jordan	259	294	276
Kuwait	33	71	52
Lebanon	308	248	337
Libya	30	54	4
Morocco	106	107	99
Oman	210	172	125
Palestinian Authority	38	44	30
Qatar	82	71	71
Saudi Arabia	319	470	775
Syrian Arab Republic	44	70	49
Tunisia	84	122	80
United Arab Emirates	196	435	326
Yemen, Republic of	10	19	19
TOTAL Subclass 600 – Business Stream grants to MENA nationals	**5,167**	**4,591**	**4,573**

Table 3: Number of Visitor visas (subclass 600) - **Tourist Stream** granted to MENA nationals by programme year and travel document country

Travel Document Country	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Algeria	76	77	85
Bahrain	266	366	329
Egypt	2,404	2,128	2,141
Iran	6,861	5,750	7,509
Iraq	405	519	508
Israel	4,814	5,259	5,318
Jordan	904	1,052	1,146
Kuwait	1,912	2,101	2,177
Lebanon	4,723	4,487	4,810
Libya	41	60	53
Morocco	161	277	256
Oman	653	577	801
Palestinian Authority	77	102	106
Qatar	565	913	1,012
Saudi Arabia	5,522	5,954	6,954
Syrian Arab Republic	145	157	166
Tunisia	65	91	99
United Arab Emirates	2,465	3,792	3,682
Yemen, Republic of	34	66	63
TOTAL Subclass 600 – Tourist Stream grants to MENA nationals	**32,093**	**33,728**	**37,215**

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/013*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry – Cost and application process for student and tourist visas** Click here to enter text.

Asked:

* Can you describe the application process and how long it would usually take for an applicant to be issued a student and tourist visitor visa under the program? The Embassy of Qatar told us of a Qatari student missing his first weeks of study due to delays in receiving his visa – are delays common?
* What are the costs and charges associated with applying for a tourism and student visas under the program and are the costs uniform across the MENA countries?

Answer:

Student visas
Student visa applicants may lodge online or by using Form 157A. Applicants may be required to complete medical assessments, which can be completed prior to or after lodging an application. Applications are assessed against requirements relating to English language ability, financial capacity, academic achievement, genuine intention to study temporarily in Australia, character and security. The Department may request information if it is not included in the application. Requests for information can cause delays, particularly at peak lodgment periods. The Department encourages students to lodge complete applications as early as possible to allow time for processing.

The costs of applying for a student visa are as follows and applies equally to applicants from all countries:

Base application charge	$550
Additional applicant charge for applicant who is at least 18 years of age	$410
Additional applicant charge for applicant who is younger than 18 years of age	$135

The median processing time for Student visa (all subclasses) applications decided in 2014-15 for Middle East and North African countries was 19 calendar days.

Visitor visas
Visitor visa applicants lodge their application online, or in accordance with procedures relevant to their country of residence. Some applicants may be required to complete medical assessments, which can be completed prior to or after lodging an application. Additional information may be requested, if it is not included in the

application and is required in order to assess the applicant's eligibility for the visa. Some applicants may also be required to submit biometrics.

The cost of applying for a Visitor visa (subclass 600) is $135 and applies equally to applicants from all countries.

The median processing time for Visitor visa (subclass 600) Tourist Stream applications decided in 2014-15 for Middle East and North African countries was six calendar days.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/014*) – Parliamentary Inquiry – MENA Countries

Asked:

In what MENA countries are officers from the Department of Immigration based and what role do they have there – do they process the visa applications?

Answer:

DIBP currently has Australia based officers in Australian diplomatic missions in the following MENA countries:
- Egypt
- United Arab Emirates
- Lebanon
- Jordan
- Iran

Officers in these posts have a variety of roles, although each of these posts process visa applications as part of that role.

Depending on the individual post structure, visa decisions are made by either Australian based staff or appropriately delegated locally-engaged staff.

DIBP also has satellite offices in Tel Aviv and Riyadh. These offices are staffed by locally engaged staff reporting to Australian officers in their parent post.
- Tel Aviv provides visa services to Israel and the Palestinian Territories and reports to Berlin, due to local sensitivities.
- Riyadh provides visa and citizenship lodgment services for clients in Saudi Arabia.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/015*) – Parliamentary Inquiry – Student visa application process

Asked:

Diplomats from the Middle East have described the Australian student visa application as the most complicated in the world – how does the Department respond and does it have any plans to change its process?

Answer:

On 16 June 2015, the Australian Government announced the introduction of a simplified student visa framework (SSVF), including the creation of one student visa subclass, from mid-2016. The SSVF will make the student visa application process simpler to navigate for students and online lodgement will be available to students from all countries, including Middle East and North African countries. In addition, and as part of this process, the student visa application form has been reviewed and simplified.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/016*) – **Parliamentary Inquiry – Processing of Australian Visas**

Asked:

Are you aware of any problems with the processing of requests for Australian visas for tourists, students and business people from the Middle East?

Answer:

The Department is not aware of any problems with the processing of requests for Australian visas for tourists, students and business people from the Middle East.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/017*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry – Australian Visa Process**

Asked:

How does the Australian visa process in the Middle East compare to the United States, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Europe and does it impact negatively on the Australian business, tourism or education sectors?

Answer:

Australia has a very competitive student visa process which already compares favourably with key competitors and supports the sustainable growth of the international education sector. Recent research conducted by the Institute of International Education indicates that prospective students perceived Australia to have a less complex student visa process than the United States, United Kingdom and Canada. Australia's student visa process will be made even more competitive through the introduction of the simplified student visa framework (SSVF) and the expansion of online lodgement, intended for implementation in mid-2016.

Australia's Visitor visa programme compares favourably with our key competitors and supports the competitiveness of Australia's tourism industry. The introduction of online lodgement for Visitor visas has increased the ease of access to the product.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/018*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry – Electronic visa waiver program**

Asked:

In recognition of the high rate of visa compliance by tourists from UAE, Qatar and Oman, the United Kingdom has recently announced it will launch a new electronic visa waiver program for Emirati, Omani and Qatari nationals. Are nationals from these Gulf States also very compliant with their Australian visa restrictions?
Would the Department of Immigration consider allowing the residents of any Middle Eastern countries such the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman to access the Electronic Travel Authority visa system or another more streamlined visa system?

Answer:
The Electronic Travel Authority (ETA) programme was introduced in 1996 and has not been expanded in over a decade. Given subsequent advances in technology and changes in the nature of global travel, expanding access to the ETA programme is not being considered.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (the Department) considers risk indicators such as visa overstay rates, cancellation and refused entry rates. The rate of non-compliance with visa conditions by citizens of the UAE, Qatar and Oman is negligible.

The Department already provides access to online lodgement for Visitor visa (Subclass 600) applications to citizens of the UAE, Qatar and Oman.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/019*) – **Parliamentary Inquiry – Middle East Student Visas**

Asked:

What are the main reasons why visitors or students from the Middle East have to undergo a more complicated paper-based visa application system than say visitors from the United States, Europe, and United Kingdom?

Answer:

Visitor visa programme
All citizens from MENA countries are eligible to lodge visitor visa applications online. Those that choose to lodge paper applications, in many cases, are assisted by a service delivery partner in their home country.

Student visa programme
Under current student visa programme arrangements, access to electronic lodgment is aligned with the immigration risk level rating of that country for a specific student visa subclass.

Student visa applicants from Assessment Level 1 countries can apply online - this includes several Middle East and North African (MENA) countries: Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Assessment Level 2 and 3 applicants from specific countries can also apply online via authorized agents.

It is anticipated that electronic lodgment will be available for all student visa applicants under the new Simplified Student Visa Framework, scheduled for implementation in mid-2016.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/020*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry – Middle East Student Visas**

Asked:

Are non-compliance or security reasons possible areas of concern for applicants from the Middle East, and if so do such concerns vary from country to country?

Answer:

The Australian Government uses the Assessment Level Framework as a risk management tool to manage the integrity of the student visa programme. Assessment Levels correspond to the immigration risk posed by applicants from a particular country studying in a particular education sector, based on an objective analysis of immigration compliance performance for students from a particular nationality or education sector.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection considers each Student visa applicant on their individual merits.

There are three Assessment Levels in the student visa programme - Assessment Level 1 represents the lowest immigration risk and Assessment Level 3 the highest.

The higher the Assessment Level, the greater the evidence an applicant is required to demonstrate to support their claims for the grant of a Student visa. Under streamlined visa processing, an education provider's prospective students are treated as though they are lower immigration risk.

All applicants must meet security and character requirements to be granted a student visa regardless of their nationality.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/021*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - Refusal Rate**

Asked:

What is the refusal rate for applicants under the current program and is there an appeal process if a visa is refused?

Answer:

The below table provides a breakdown of the refusal rates for the Student and Visitor visa programmes. The refusal rate is based on the number of visa applications refused divided by the sum of visa applications granted and refused.

Table: Refusal rate percentage by visa type for MENA countries of citizenship

Visa Category	**2012-13**	**2013-14**	**2014-15**	**2015-16 to 31/12/15**
Student	9.8%	7.8%	5.5%	9.1%
Visitor	23.8%	21.8%	19.4%	20.3%

The Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) has been established to conduct merits review of certain visa decisions made by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

Where applications are refused, applicants will receive a notification of the visa refusal which explains whether or not the decision is reviewable by the AAT.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/022*) **– Parliamentary Inquiry - enhanced passenger processing**

Asked:

The Tourism & Transport Forum believe any enhanced passenger processing options that go well beyond standard service should be made available at Australian airports and would appeal to high-wealth Middle Eastern visitors. Does the Department have any views on the feasibility of providing this service on a cost recovery basis?

Answer:

As part of its 2015-16 Budget submission to Government, the Border-Related Fees, Taxes and Charges Review Taskforce recommended the establishment of a user-pays regime as a way of promoting more consistent levels of service to industry across Australia's international airports.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection is working with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to explore the feasibility of fee-for-service border clearance.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/023*) – **Parliamentary Inquiry - Off-terminal border processing**

Asked:

Many high wealth Middle Eastern visitors who wish to fly to Australia by private aircraft or business jet use business jet terminals. According to the TTF, the present off-terminal border processing is inconsistent, with Immigration officers usually available at the Sydney and Brisbane's jet bases, but not at those bases in Melbourne, Perth or Darwin. If so why is this?

Answer:

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) and border agency partners provide off-terminal clearances (OTCs) on a case-by-case basis. In assessing applications from industry, consideration is given to the size of the aircraft, numbers of travellers, the suitability of arrival/departure facilities and the required resources available to complete the clearance process.

Border agency officials attempt to support all OTC requests; however, the servicing of these requests results in the dilution of services at existing international airports and in other border control operations, through the deployment of officers to locations away from where they perform their normal duties.

At a number of Australia's major international airports, DIBP has implemented arrangements where applications for OTCs are only considered away from peak periods, and where the request is received (a minimum) 48 hours prior to the aircraft's arrival/departure.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/024*) – **Parliamentary Inquiry - English Test**

Asked:

Are Middle Eastern students, who have been studying in Australian universities for a BA or a Masters, required to sit for an English test to accommodate the requirements of their visa? If any may fail, and what happens in those instances?

Does a similar English test requirement apply to non-university students?

Answer:

All student visa applicants must satisfy requirements relating to English language proficiency in order to be granted a student visa. The evidence that must be produced to meet this requirement differs according to the sector of study, the Assessment Level of the applicant and whether the application is to be processed under Streamlined Visa Processing (SVP) arrangements. If the applicant cannot satisfy the English proficiency requirement, their visa cannot be granted.

In the following circumstances, the English proficiency requirement is considered to be met by presenting an enrolment from a CRICOS registered provider:
- Assessment Level 1 and Assessment Level 2 applications
- All SVP applications
- Applicants studying in the School Sector (subclass 571)
- Applicants studying in the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) Sector (subclass 570)
- Applicants studying in the Postgraduate Research Sector (subclass 574)

Applicants for a Vocational Education and Training (VET) Sector (subclass 572) or a Higher Education Sector (subclass 573) who are considered Assessment Level 3, must have achieved an acceptable score in an English test specified in migration legislation. In limited circumstances, the English proficiency requirement can be met through other means, such as providing evidence of successful completion in Australia of a qualification at the Certificate IV level or higher, including Bachelor and Master degrees, less than 2 years before the date of the student visa application.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/025*) – Parliamentary Inquiry - Streamlining the Visa Processes

Asked:

Is the Department of Immigration ever in direct discussion with Middle Eastern and North African countries about streamlining the visa process?

Answer:

DIBP officers based in MENA countries engage both directly and indirectly, through DFAT, with MENA countries regarding Australian visa processing. This may include any new visa streamlining measures or other processing changes that may be introduced.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/026*) – Parliamentary Inquiry - Increase in Immigration representatives into new countries

Asked:

Are there any plans to expand the numbers of Department of Immigration representatives in the region and into new countries such as Morocco?

Answer:

DIBP locates staff based on a wide variety of factors. These include the nature of engagement required on immigration, customs and border protection issues in a particular post or region, resources, visa caseload size and/or complexity and to maximize processing efficiencies. Currently, visa and citizenship services for clients in Morocco are managed in Cairo. There are no plans to place DIBP staff in Morocco or any other MENA countries other than those where DIBP staff are currently located.

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 04 March 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(*TI/027*) – **Parliamentary Inquiry - Middle Eastern visitors**

Asked:

How effective is the Department of Immigration at fostering cultural understanding of visitors from the Middle East among its border control officers?

Answer:

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Border Force (the Department), is committed to fostering cultural understanding of visitors from the Middle East and other countries.

The Department provides a one day *Intercultural Effectiveness* face to face training course that is available to all staff. It is a compulsory part of the training for border control officers and the Border Force Officer Recruit Training (BFORT) program.

In addition, the Department has a *Cultural Awareness: multicultural access and equity policy for Australian Government Agencies* eLearning program.