

Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker program

QUESTION ON NOTICE 1

JSC on Migration Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker program
Public Hearing – via teleconference, 3 August 2020

Question submitted by the Hon Julian Leeser MP

Question

I wonder if you're able to tell me anything about the number of Australians taking advantage of a Working Holiday Maker visa reciprocal program. Much is made in your submission and in other submissions by agencies and interested stakeholders of the reciprocal nature of this program. What do we know about the Australians who are going overseas—how many, where to?

Answer

Under Australia's reciprocal WHM program, young Australians are provided with the opportunity to holiday for up to 12 months in most partner countries and territories, during which they can generally undertake short-term work. This enhances people-to-people ties between Australia and partner countries and provides participants with a unique experience that contributes to personal and professional growth.

The Australian Government does not collect data on outbound Australians, including the number of Australians travelling overseas under reciprocal WHM arrangements. However, anecdotal reports suggest Australians are most likely to travel to destinations such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Ireland under the reciprocal Working Holiday Maker programs. Although young Australians travel to many partner countries, they may consider other visa options if they do not intend to work. Many Australians are also able to take advantage of dual nationality status when visiting partner countries. In comparison, young people from partner countries seeking to travel and work in Australia may not have as wide a choice of visa options.

Visa caps negotiated with agreement countries for the subclass 462 visa can provide an indication of numbers potentially overseas in any given year. However, there are no caps under the 19 agreements with partner countries in the 417 subclass.

A list of reciprocal caps for the subclass 462 visa is at [Table 1](#). The table shows how caps have increased over time. Home Affairs considers a range of issues when deciding to increase caps, including compliance risks of partner countries, demand and interest, and requests from partner countries.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE 2

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Question submitted by the Hon Maria Vamvakinou MP

Question

You'd probably be aware that, from time to time, there has been a lot of narrative around the exploitation of working holiday-makers....Have you, in your interactions with diplomats from our bilateral countries, ever received any complaints about their citizens and their treatment in Australia in relation to the work-holiday visas? Does your experience give some validity to or provide evidence as to the truth around the more negative aspects or experiences of people who come here under the working holiday-maker visa? I know that if people, in any particular country, run into any trouble at any time they tend to go to their embassies or their consular officials. Are you aware of working holiday-maker visa holders perhaps doing that and then, subsequently, those officials perhaps coming to DFAT to ask questions on their behalf? That's what I'm trying to understand—whether there's been any of that sort of interaction or activity?

Answer

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has not received any diplomatic representations from foreign missions on worker exploitation concerns. If we had, these would have been referred to the Fair Work Ombudsman.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE 3

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Questions submitted by Senator the Hon Raff Ciccone

Question

In your submission, you say that the work-holiday arrangements should remain active and that MOUs with partner countries shouldn't be suspended.

1. Are there any other considerations to expand the current program with other countries that you're aware of?
2. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade doesn't engage with respect to those bilateral arrangements?
3. What input has the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provided to government with respect to expanding the program?
4. You're not aware of any inputs by the department or Austrade?
5. What incentives has the department or DFAT provided government with respect to working holiday-makers travelling to Australia when it's safe to do so?

Answer

1. The Department of Home Affairs is responsible for administering the WHM visa program, including leading the bilateral negotiations with potential new partner countries. Bilateral considerations for expanding the WHM program with other countries include strengthening people-to-people links, economic benefits, and the prospect of reciprocity for Australians. A list of countries with which Australia is currently negotiating new WHM arrangements is available at <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/working-holiday-report-dec-19.pdf>
2. DFAT works with the Department of Home Affairs and other relevant agencies on WHM bilateral arrangements.
3. Home Affairs conducts an annual review of the program, inviting input from a range of Government agencies, including DFAT, Austrade and Tourism Australia. This review considers opportunities to expand the program to new countries and increase caps and age limits for existing agreements. The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio contributes economic and strategic insights to these deliberations, drawing on bilateral, international and tourism sector knowledge.
4. As noted above, the portfolio agencies provide input on decisions to expand the program. The portfolio also contributes to policy discussions on program enhancements, such as providing incentives for visa holders to work and visit regional and remote areas.
5. The Government is considering possible pathways for the return of WHM to Australia when health and border conditions permit.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE 4

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Questions submitted by the Hon Steven Georganas MP

Question

Are you aware of the difficulties that I've been informed about in terms of the renewal of the APEC card for Australian businesses currently through the website or through the mechanisms that are in place to renew this card? Which agency or department would be responsible for the APEC card? So you're happy to take that on notice and let me know of any difficulties around the renewal for Australian businesses?

Answer

The Department of Home Affairs has responsibility for management of the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) in Australia. Any questions regarding the operation of the ABTC should be directed to the Department of Home Affairs.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE 5

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Question submitted by the Hon Julian Leeser MP

Question

What sort of feedback do you receive from working holiday makers as to how they found the program after they've been here in Australia? What are some of the benefits that they see and what are some of the things that people have said to your officials about changes they'd like to see in the way in which working holiday makers are supported here?

Answer

Focus groups conducted by Tourism Australia with participants from France, Italy, Germany and the UK provided feedback on the working holiday experience. Participants enjoyed the laidback Australian lifestyle, the chance to make Australian friends, and the opportunity to experience unique and diverse destinations. Many also reported the program provided an opportunity to take a “gap year” after finishing school and before starting university, allowing them to gain life skills, independence and improve their English language ability. Australia was also seen as a remote and secure escape.

While participants reported pay rates were higher than other destinations, this was matched by a high cost of living. The cost of tours, flights, transport and food were reportedly high in comparison to other destinations. The focus groups also showed working holiday makers sought employment opportunities beyond the agricultural sector, including in childcare and food delivery services.

Participants suggested the program could be improved by more integrated online information to support the backpacker experience including information on: destinations and travel tips, employment opportunities, renting/buying a car, renting an apartment, and accessing telecommunications. They also recommended the program could be promoted more through social media channels.

In response to this feedback, Tourism Australia created a dedicated hub space on Australia.com as part of the *Australia Inc* campaign, which was launched by Minister Birmingham in March 2019. The hub space (<https://www.australia.com/en/youth-travel.html>) provides links to information to help working holiday makers plan their trip, find employment, secure housing and accommodation and learn about Australia.

The campaign also aimed to encourage young people in target markets to take a gap year, by demonstrating how a working holiday in Australia can provide the experiences and skills needed to succeed in the workforce and further their future careers.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE 6

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Question submitted by the Hon Julian Leeser MP

Question

What is the position in relation to Australians working and holidaying in China? Is there a certain number of people that are able to go there for that purpose, or was there something else that Australia received in the free trade agreement as a result of giving a cap of 5,000 places to China as part of the working holiday maker arrangements?

Answer

The MoU between Australia and China on a Work and Holiday Visa Arrangement (the WHV MoU) was part of the overall package of outcomes agreed both in and alongside the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA).

The WHV MoU allows up to 5,000 young (18-30 years) Chinese people with tertiary education and English skills to experience a working holiday in Australia. The WHV MoU is not reciprocal, as China does not grant work and holiday visas to any country.

Australia secured a range of beneficial commitments under ChAFTA including:

- the elimination of tariffs on almost all of Australia's goods exports to China on full implementation including for key Australian agricultural exports, resource and energy products, and pharmaceuticals such as vitamins and health products;
- significantly improved market access for Australian services providers, including for financial, professional, health and education services; and
- improved arrangements for Australian business visitors to China for intra-corporate transferees (executives, managers and specialists), contractual service suppliers, installers and maintenance staff.

ChAFTA outcomes continue to give Australian businesses a competitive advantage in the Chinese market. In the four years since ChAFTA's entry into force, Australia's goods and services exports to China almost doubled, from \$86.7 billion in 2015 to \$168.6 billion in 2019.

The Department of Home Affairs manages Australia's Work and Holiday visa programs, including with China.

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Table 1: Working Holiday Maker visa program – annual caps for subclass 462 visa

	Partner jurisdiction	Cap – Foreign nationals in Australia	Cap – Australians in partner countries	Variations
1.	Argentina	3,400	3,400	Original cap 500; increased to: 700 in July 2015; 1,500 in July 2017; 2,450 in July 2019.
2.	Austria	200	200	
3.	Chile	3,400	3,400	Original cap 100; increased to: 1,500 in October 2008; 2,000 in July 2017; 3,400 in February 2019.
4.	China	5,000	0	
5.	Czech Republic	500	500	
6.	Ecuador	100	100	
7.	Greece	500	500	
8.	Hungary	200	200	
9.	Indonesia	4,100	1,000	Original cap 100; increased to: 1,000 in January 2013; 4,100 in August 2020.
10.	Israel	2,500	500	Original cap 500; increased to: 2,500 in December 2018.
11.	Luxembourg	100	100	
12.	Malaysia	1,100	100	Original cap 100; increased to: 1,100 in July 2019.
13.	Peru	1,500	1,500	Original cap 100; increased to: 1,500 in January 2019.
14.	Poland	1,500	1,500	Original cap 200; increased to: 500 in October 2017; 1,500 placed in October 2019.
15.	Portugal	500	500	
16.	San Marino	100	100	
17.	Singapore	2,500	500	Original cap 100; increased to: 2,500 in December 2018.
18.	Slovak Republic	200	200	
19.	Slovenia	200	200	
20.	Spain	3,400	3,400	Original cap 500; increased to: 600 in July 2016; 1,500 in July 2017; 3,400 in December 2018.
21.	Thailand	2,000	2,000	Original cap 500; increased to 2,000 in November 2019.
22.	Turkey	100	100	
23.	United States	uncapped	uncapped	
24.	Uruguay	200	200	
25.	Vietnam	1,500	200	Original cap 200; increased to 1,500 in September 2019.