

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 28-29 MAY 2008

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(92) Output 1.2: Refugee and Humanitarian Entry and Stay

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

(1) Please provide details of the number of persons who have been allowed entry under the refugee, humanitarian and asylum categories for each of the following years:

2005-2006

2006-2007

(2) Please provide details of the number of persons who are proposed to be allowed entry under the refugee, humanitarian and asylum categories for 2008-2009.

(3) In relation to each of the periods 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2008-09, also provide a breakdown of those persons from area of origin and where possible, religious background. Is there a proposal to change the mix of persons to be allowed entry into Australia.

(4) At a speech on 12 December 2007 at the Parramatta Office of the Immigration Department, Minister Evans allegedly set out a series of differences between the immigration direction of the Rudd Government and how it differed from the Howard Government. Please provide a copy of that speech. If the same is not available, please outline what are the specific differences of approach by the Rudd Government from that of the Howard Government?

(5) In relation to the Middle East specifically, is it proposed to reduce the number of refugees of Christian background allowed entry in favour of groups of other religious background?

Answer:

1. In 2005-06 a total of 14 144 visas were granted under the Humanitarian Program. This total included 6022 Refugee visas and 6736 Special Humanitarian Program visas to persons under the offshore component, and 1386 visas granted under the onshore component including 1272 Protection visas.

In 2006-07 a total of 13 017 visas were granted under the Humanitarian Program. This total included 6003 Refugee visas and 5183 Special Humanitarian Program visas to persons under the offshore component, and 1831 visas granted under the onshore component including 1701 Protection visas.

2. For 2008-09, the Humanitarian Program is planned for a total of 13 500 places, with 6500 Refugee places and 7000 places allocated for Special Humanitarian Program visas offshore, and Protection visas and other visas granted onshore.

3. In 2005-06, the regional balance outcomes for Refugee and Humanitarian grants made offshore were 55.65 percent to persons born in Africa; 33.98 percent to persons born in the Middle East and South West Asia; 9.88 percent to persons born in the rest of Asia; and 0.49 percent to persons born in Europe and the Americas.

In 2006-07, the regional balance outcomes for Refugee and Humanitarian grants made offshore were 50.91 percent to persons born in Africa; 27.95 percent to persons born in the Middle East and South West Asia; 20.70 percent to persons born in the rest of Asia; and 0.44 percent to persons born in Europe.

The offshore regional allocations for 2008-09 have been set at 33 percent for persons born in Africa, 33 percent for persons born in the Middle East and South West Asia and 33 percent for persons born in the rest of Asia. The remaining one percent is a contingency reserve.

The religion of offshore Refugee and Humanitarian visa applicants is not a criterion for the grant of a Refugee and Humanitarian visa. The Department's Settlement Database provides statistics on the religion of people who subsequently arrive in Australia on a humanitarian visa, as this information is needed for settlement purposes.

4. The Government is focused on strengthening and promoting Australia's contribution to refugee protection. This includes having robust and effective arrangements for considering the claims of people who seek Australia's protection.

Since coming into office the Government has:

- Brought an end to the Pacific strategy by closing the centres on Nauru and Manus Island.
- Abolished the Temporary Protection Visa. This will allow around 1000 refugees to access permanent residence in Australia and reunite with separated immediate family members who are currently overseas. In the future, asylum seekers who are found to be refugees will receive a permanent visa.
- On 29 July 2008 the Minister announced a range of reforms to Australia's immigration detention system, including seven key immigration detention values. Detention in immigration detention centres will operate as a measure of last resort only and for the shortest practicable time. Conditions of immigration detention will be enhanced to further ensure the inherent dignity of the human person, including an increase in the use of alternative measures of immigration detention within the community. Wherever appropriate, a person who poses no risk to the community and who will comply with conditions placed on them will be able to remain in the community while their visa status is resolved.

- The Minister also announced that an enhanced non-statutory processing regime for people who arrive in an excised offshore place and claim protection will be put in place to make processing fairer and more transparent. The enhanced process will include the availability of independent advice and assistance to asylum seekers funded by the Government, access to independent review of unfavourable decisions and external scrutiny by the Immigration Ombudsman.

The Government is also deeply committed to building on Australia's Humanitarian Program. The 2008-09 Humanitarian Program will be 13,500 places which is an increase of 500 places on the 2007-08 program. This includes 6500 places for refugees, with a one-off increase of 500 places to assist people affected by the conflict in Iraq. This represents the largest refugee component of the Program since 1985-86. The remaining 7000 places will be allocated to the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) category including Protection Visa applications. From 2009-10 onwards, the 7000 places allocated to the SHP will be increased by 750 places to 7750 places.

The offshore component of the 2008-09 Program will draw equally from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Each of these regions will be allocated 33 percent with the remaining one percent to be used for contingencies. The proportion of offshore places allocated to Africans will increase from 30 percent of the 2007-08 program to 33 percent of the 2008-09 program, or about 300 extra places. This reflects the Government's commitment to supporting refugees, regardless of their country or region of origin.

5. Australia's Humanitarian Program is global and non-discriminatory. There are no special arrangements for people from Christian backgrounds, or for any specific religious group, across any of the geographical regions. Every application for a visa under the Program is assessed individually against the criteria in the Migration legislation. There is no proposal to alter these arrangements.