

Policy Brief



Refugee Council
of Australia

Analysing critical issues
in refugee and asylum policy

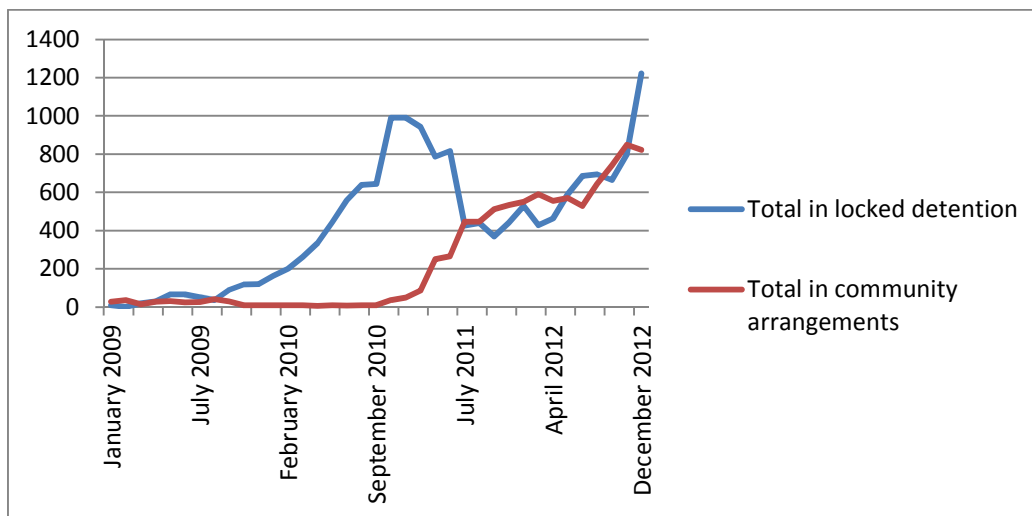
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HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION?

With a number of current community campaigns aimed at ending the detention of child asylum seekers, the Refugee Council of Australia is often asked about the numbers of children in Australian immigration detention facilities. The most recent statistics on immigration detention available on the website of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) show that the number of children held in closed immigration detention facilities in Australia has reached an all-time high. As at 31 December 2012, 1221 children were held in closed immigration detention facilities.¹ The previous peaks in the numbers of children in closed detention were 990 as at 4 February 2011 and 842 as at 1 September 2001.²

Of the children held in secure detention facilities as at 31 December 2012, 1144 were held in Alternative Places of Detention, including facilities at Christmas Island, Darwin, Leonora (WA) and Inverbrackie (SA). 39 children were held in Immigration Residential Housing facilities in Sydney, Perth and Port Augusta (SA) and 38 were in Immigration Transit Accommodation facilities in Melbourne and Brisbane.³ Children in these detention facilities generally have their freedom of movement restricted to attending school (if they are enrolled) and occasional escorted excursions.

Children in immigration detention and detention alternatives, 2009-12 (trend)



In October 2010, in announcing the Government's plan to move children out of immigration detention facilities, the Prime Minister acknowledged that "protracted detention can have negative impacts on [children's] development and mental health".⁴ Since then, the number of children living in the community in community detention or on Bridging Visas has increased from 10 to 822. However, the number of children in community alternative arrangements has not kept pace with the increase in children arriving by boat as asylum seekers.

¹ Source: Immigration Detention Statistics Summary, 31 December 2012, DIAC, <http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/facilities/statistics/>, accessed 15/3/13.

² The detention statistics for 4 September 2011 were released by DIAC on 18 February 2011. The 1 September 2001 statistics on children in detention were drawn from a Ministerial statement on 1 June 2010 - <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2010/ce10045.htm>

³ For a list of detention facilities, see <http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/facilities/locations/>

⁴ See <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2010/cb10071.htm>

BACKGROUND READING ABOUT THE DETENTION OF CHILDREN

The Rights of All Children in the Context of International Migration (Committee on Rights of the Child, 2012)

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion2012/2012CRC_DGD-Childrens_Rights_InternationalMigration.pdf

This report summarises the outcomes of the 2012 General Day of Discussion on children's rights issues relating to international migration. It includes discussion of immigration detention and a recommendation for all countries to "completely cease the detention of children on the basis of their immigration status".

Captured Childhood: Introducing a new model to ensure the rights and liberty of refugee, asylum seeker and irregular migrant children affected by immigration detention (International Detention Coalition, 2011)

http://idcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Captured_Childhood-report.pdf

This report details good practice examples of alternatives to detention for refugee, asylum seekers and irregular migrant children and presents a five-step Child-sensitive Community Assessment and Placement (CCAP) model to prevent the detention of children.

A Last Resort? National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004)

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/children_detention_report/index.html

This report details the findings of an inquiry into Australia's mandatory immigration detention system as it applied to children who arrived in Australia without a visa over the period 1999-2002.

Campaigns about children in detention

Global Campaign to End Child Immigration Detention - <http://endchilddetention.org>

ChilOut - <http://www.chilout.org>

Children in immigration detention and detention alternatives, 2009-12 (selected dates)⁵

Date	In closed detention				In community			Total	
	IRH	ITA	APOD	Total	CD	BV-E	Total	Total	% in closed detention
30 January 2009	0	0	10	10	28	0	28	38	26.3%
27 March 2009	2	0	18	20	14	0	14	34	58.8%
29 May 2009	4	1	62	67	32	0	32	99	67.7%
24 July 2009	4	0	48	52	26	0	26	78	66.7%
18 September 2009	8	0	25	33	10	0	10	43	76.7%
4 December 2009	4	20	95	119	9	0	9	128	93.0%
29 January 2010	5	32	127	164	9	0	9	173	94.8%
2 April 2010	14	70	179	263	9	0	9	272	96.7%
21 May 2010	78	62	303	443	9	0	9	452	98.0%
25 June 2010	75	56	427	558	8	0	8	566	98.6%
13 August 2010	65	54	521	640	10	0	10	650	98.5%
10 September 2010	45	62	538	645	10	0	10	655	98.5%
4 February 2011	36	145	809	990	37	0	37	1027	96.4%
11 March 2011	34	140	769	943	87	0	87	1030	91.6%
6 May 2011	24	115	648	787	251	0	251	1038	75.8%
31 July 2011	45	52	329	426	446	0	446	872	48.9%
30 September 2011	42	2	396	440	446	0	446	886	49.7%
30 November 2011	30	3	408	441	534	0	534	975	45.2%
31 January 2012	20	2	506	528	551	0	551	1079	48.9%
31 March 2012	7	1	420	428	591	0	591	1019	42.0%
30 April 2012	9	0	454	463	556	0	556	1019	45.4%
30 June 2012	6	2	583	591	489	81	570	1161	50.9%
31 August 2012	5	57	632	694	514	130	644	1338	51.9%
31 October 2012	10	25	762	797	758	90	848	1645	48.4%
31 December 2012	39	38	1144	1221	732	90	822	2043	59.8%

⁵ Figures drawn from detention statistics released by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. As statistics have not been issued at regular intervals, the above dates were chosen to represent the four-year trend.

Key: IRH: Immigration Residential Housing. ITA: Immigration Transit Accommodation. APOD: Alternative Place of Detention. Community arrangements: CD: Community Detention (or Residence Determination). BV-E: Bridging Visa E