

## WHY ADDITIONAL PLACES ARE NEEDED FOR AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE INTAKE FROM AFGHANISTAN

The Australian Government has announced it will provide at least 3,000 humanitarian visas to people from Afghanistan within the 2021-22 Humanitarian Program ceiling of 13,750 places. The Refugee Council of Australia, the Afghan Australian Advocacy Network and others are calling for an additional intake of 20,000 places beyond the current ceiling in response to the heightened risks facing many people from Afghanistan in the wake of the Taliban seizing power.

In considering the case for an additional humanitarian intake, the Australian Government must take account of the following:

- **The compelling global need for resettlement:** The increasing displacement from Afghanistan does not reduce the compelling need for resettlement of refugees from other crises, including those in Syria, Iraq, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and other regions of Africa and Latin America. In June 2021, the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR released its assessment of resettlement needs for 2022, identifying 1,445,383 refugees in urgent need of resettlement out of the 20.7 million refugees under its mandate.
- **The scale of displacement from Afghanistan:** At the beginning of 2021, 2.6 million citizens of Afghanistan were refugees, 239,000 were seeking asylum and 2.9 million were internally displaced. The Taliban's takeover of the country, culminating in the capture of Kabul in August 2021, is resulting in ever-increasing displacement. By 8 September 2021, UNHCR had reported 22,120 newly arrived refugees in neighbouring countries and 592,531 people internally displaced since January 2021. Many more people in Afghanistan are yet to be displaced but fear for their lives because of their work as women's rights activists, human rights defenders, government officials or staff employed by embassies or western armed forces or because of their religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation.
- **The depth of Australia's connection to Afghanistan:** The 20-year involvement of Australian armed forces in Afghanistan from 2001 was the longest international military engagement in Australian history. More than 39,000 Australian Defence Force personnel were deployed and 41 Australians lost their lives. This \$10 billion military engagement has been supported by \$1.5 billion in Australian overseas development assistance to Afghanistan since 2001, aimed at promoting the empowerment of women and girls, human rights, economic development, education, health and effective governance. Citizens of Afghanistan who have shared this vision for their nation's future and participated in its implementation are now among those at great risk.
- **Recent cuts to Australia's refugee program:** After increasing Australia's annual refugee and humanitarian intake to 16,250 in 2017-18 and 18,750 in 2018-19, the Australian Government reduced the annual program by 5000 places in 2020-21 to 13,750. In recent years, the Government has redefined the program target as a "ceiling", with the 2019-20 and 2020-21 programs falling well short because of COVID-related travel restrictions.
- **Australia's generous responses to past crises:** In September 2015, the Abbott Liberal-National Coalition Government announced that it would allocate 12,000 additional places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees on top of the annual refugee intake, in response to escalating displacement in the Middle East and Mediterranean region. Over the five years to June 2020, Australia issued offshore humanitarian visas to 46,085 Syrian and Iraqi refugees. From 1976, the Fraser Coalition Government reformed Australia's refugee policy to respond to displacement from Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) after the 1975 fall of Saigon. Australia accepted 50,158 refugees from Indochina in the five years to June 1981 and more than 130,000 over the 15 years to 1991.

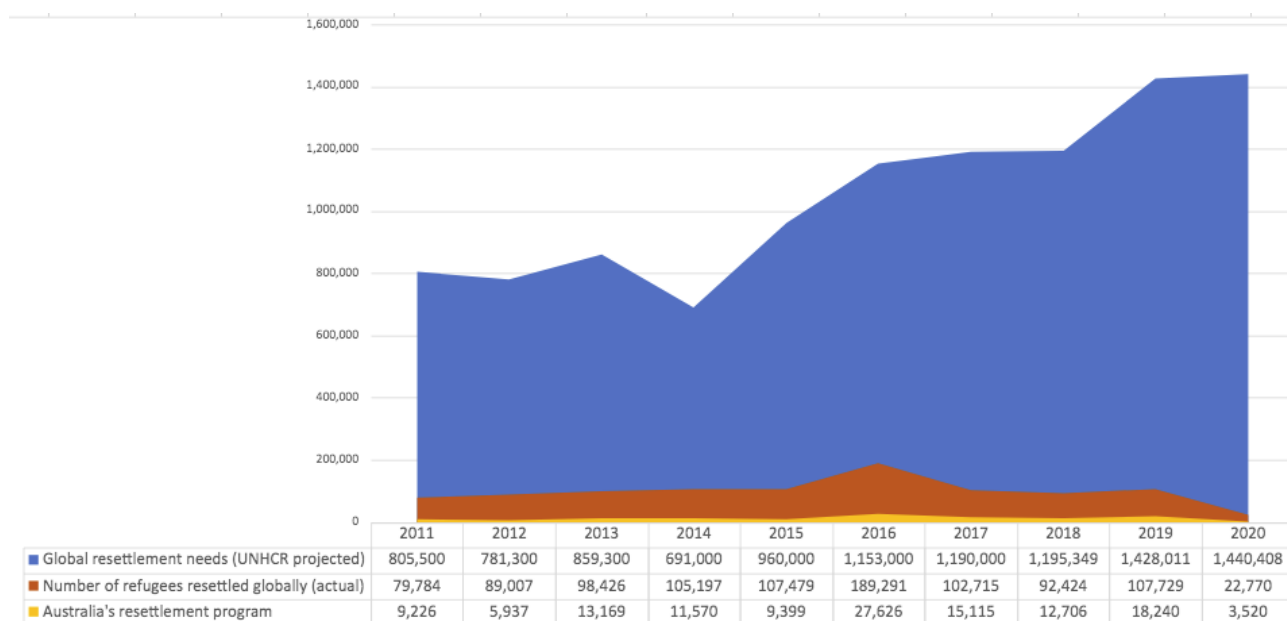
The remainder of this brief provides background information in support of these points.

## UNHCR'S ASSESSMENT OF GLOBAL RESETTLEMENT NEEDS

Each year UNHCR produces its assessment of global refugee resettlement needs to share with governments involved in refugee resettlement programs. While most of the 20.7 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate do not have access to a durable solution to their displacement, UNHCR's annual assessment allows UNHCR to identify refugees in the most urgent need of resettlement.

Identified global resettlement needs have been growing since 2014, as has the gap between needed and actual resettlement places. Australia's offshore resettlement program makes a modest contribution to filling much greater needs.

Figure 1. Global resettlement needs and actual places, 2011-2020<sup>1</sup>



In 2021, UNHCR estimated that 7 percent of the 1,445,383 refugees in need of resettlement globally are from Afghanistan. This estimate preceded the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

Figure 2. Top 10 population groups in need of resettlement by country of origin and asylum, 2021<sup>2</sup>

Country of origin	Persons	Country of asylum	Persons
Syria	592,266	Turkey	423,600
Democratic Republic of Congo	124,690	Uganda	125,403
South Sudan	122,963	Lebanon	107,685
Afghanistan	101,309	Ethiopia	106,65
Sudan	86,659	Iran	87,000
Eritrea	79,484	Jordan	74,516
Somalia	72,985	Tanzania	63,000
Burundi	63,411	Sudan	53,000
Central African Republic	51,766	Chad	48,000
Iraq	46,790	Kenya	46,607
All Others	103,060	All Others	309,922
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,445,383</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,445,383</b>

## DISPLACEMENT FROM AFGHANISTAN

As at 31 December 2020, UNHCR recorded 2,594,775 refugees and 238,799 asylum seekers originating from Afghanistan and 2,886,317 people internally displaced within the country. In Asia and the Middle East, Afghan refugees were in Pakistan (1,419,084), Iran (951,142), India (7,470), Indonesia (5,865), Tajikistan (3,783), Malaysia (1,352), Turkey (1,192), Syria (1,110) and Azerbaijan (627).<sup>3</sup> As at 8

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR annual [Global Trends Report](#), Table 3. Actual resettlement in 2020 not released. Numbers based on UNHCR [media report](#). Figures are by calendar year.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR [Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021](#), p.102.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Global Trends 2020 annex tables, Tables 1 and 3.

September 2021, UNHCR recorded 11,500 newly arrived Afghan refugees in Iran, 5,300 in Pakistan and 5,300 in Tajikistan, as well as 592,531 people within Afghanistan who been internally displaced since 1 January 2021.<sup>4</sup>

## AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Australia has invested considerable resources in Afghanistan since 2001, including through the provision of overseas development assistance (ODA) and military engagement. More than \$1.5 billion in ODA has been provided to Afghanistan since 2001.<sup>5</sup> The Australian Defence Force's Operation Slipper (2001-2014) and Operation Highroad (2015-2021) involved the deployment of more than 39,000 ADF personnel, and the loss of 41 Australian lives.<sup>6</sup> In 2019, Australian Defence spending in Afghanistan through these two operations was estimated to be close to \$10 billion.<sup>7</sup> In announcing Australia's withdrawal of personnel in April 2021, the Prime Minister confirmed Australia's commitment 'to helping Afghanistan preserve the gains of the last 20 years, particularly for women and girls'.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 6. Costs and personnel strength of ADF operations in Afghanistan, 2001-2021<sup>9</sup>

Year	Budget (actual, \$ million)	Personnel (authorised strength)
2021-22 (estimate)	40.6	0
2020-21 (revised estimate)	85.3	80
2019-20	76.7	200
2018-19	86.7	300
2017-18	82.4	300
2016-17	223.0	270-300
2015-16	228.5	270
2014-15	293.0	400
2013-14	735.3	1,030
2012-13	1,006.5	1,550
2011-12	1,006.7	1,550

Year	Budget (actual, \$ million)	Personnel (authorised strength)
2010-11	1,088.9	1,550
2009-10	1,125.3	1,550
2008-09	701.9	1,200
2007-08	394.9	1,080
2006-07	223.3	840
2005-06	91.0	550
2004-05	-	1
2003-04	-	2
2002-03	176.0	2
2001-02	320.0	1,100

## HOW AUSTRALIA'S OFFSHORE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM HAS FLUCTUATED

While Australia has been resettling refugees in significant numbers since 1947, the refugee crisis in Indochina prompted the Australian Government to launch its plan for an annual refugee and humanitarian program in 1977 and to reform settlement support services. Since 1977, Australia has resettled 540,000 refugees.<sup>10</sup>

Australia's offshore humanitarian program has fluctuated in size, including in response to specific crises. Over three years (1979-1982), Australia resettled 64,341 refugees, the majority who were displaced from the conflicts in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos where Australian forces had been involved. While the Abbott Government cut the annual refugee program from 20,000 to 13,750 places after being elected in 2013, two years later the Government made a one-off allocation of 12,000 additional places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees as displacement from those conflicts increased. This resulted in the number of offshore refugee and humanitarian visas peaking at 20,257 in 2016-17.

Figure 3. Offshore refugee and humanitarian visas granted by Australia, 1977-2020<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR [Flash External Update: Afghanistan Situation #5](#), 8 September 2021

<sup>5</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2021). [Afghanistan Development Cooperation Factsheet: May 2021](#).

<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister of Australia. (2021). [Australian troops drawdown in Afghanistan](#). Media Release. 15 April 2021.

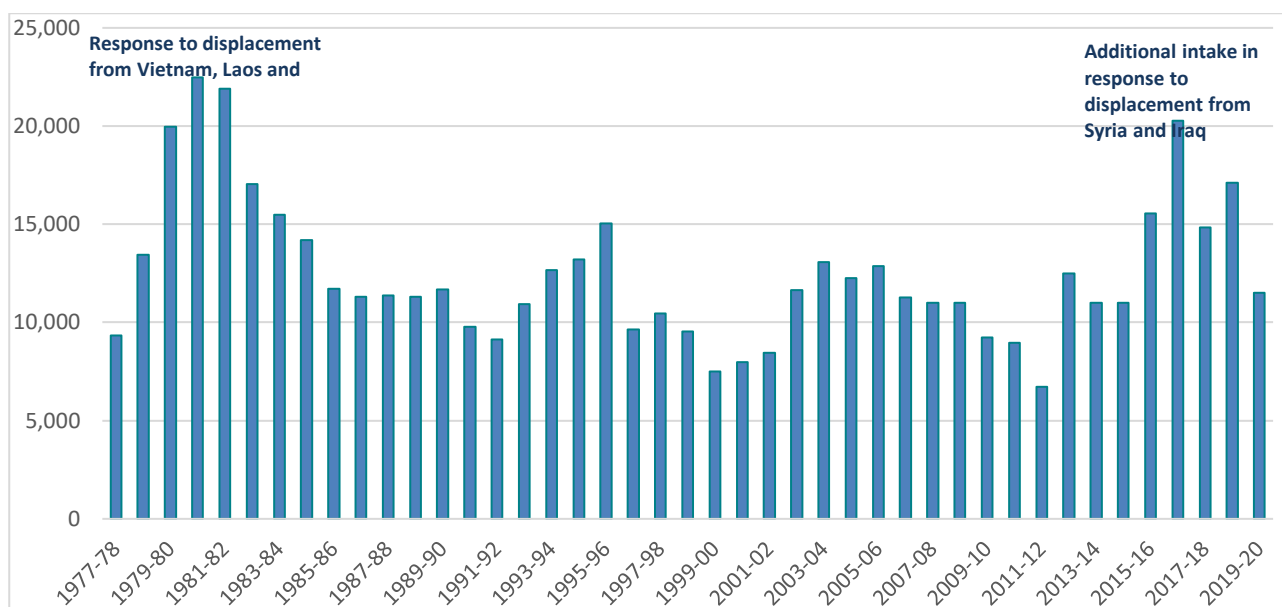
<sup>7</sup> Williams, C. (2019). [Do we still need Australian troops in Afghanistan?](#) *Sydney Morning Herald* (29/01/2019); Milne, S. (2020). [Bang for our buck? Afghanistan and ANZUS](#). *Defence Connect* (20/03/2020).

<sup>8</sup> Prime Minister of Australia. (2021). [Australian troops drawdown in Afghanistan](#). Media Release. 15 April 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Defence annual reports, cited in: Australian Parliamentary Library (2021). [Background to Afghanistan Withdrawal](#). Note: 2003-04 and 2004-05 figures were combined with Operation Catalyst (Iraq) and cannot be distinguished for those years. Figures in this table reflect funding allocated against Operations Slipper and Highroad and do not take into account peripheral but contributory expenditure (for example, [Operation Manitou—Middle East Region Maritime](#)—sustainment, personnel costs, training costs).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/how-many-refugees-have-come/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getfacts/statistics/aust/australias-refugee-humanitarian-program-visa-grants-stream-1977-78-2011-12/>



The annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program was increased from 13,750 to 16,250 places in 2016-17 and to 18,250 in 2017-18. However, in 2020 the program was cut by 5000 places to 13,750. The Government announced that this figure would be a “ceiling”, resulting in the loss of unallocated places.

## AUSTRALIA’S RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS CRISES

### Iraq and Syria (2015-2020)

Over five years (2015-2020), 46,085 offshore Humanitarian visas were issued to people fleeing conflicts in Syria and Iraq. This includes visas granted both within the regular Humanitarian Program intake, as well as 12,000 additional places announced by the Coalition Government in 2015 and finalised in 2017.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 4. Offshore visas granted by country of birth, 2015-2020<sup>13</sup>

Country of birth	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total
Iraq	4,639	7,478	4,630	7,095	5,785	29,627
Syria	4,187	6,261	3,227	1,836	947	16,458
Afghanistan	1,383	1,958	1,130	1,323	619	6,413
Myanmar	1,380	1,747	2,043	1,195	796	7,161
Iran	750	*	218	367	317	1,652
DR Congo	514	336	1,355	2,114	1,165	5,484
Pakistan	386	*	*	*	*	386
Bhutan	289	555	308	254		1,406
Thailand	473	*	*	*	*	473
Other	3,585	1,922	1,914	2,128	1,892	11,441
Total	17,586	20,257	14,825	16,312	11,521	80,501

\* Data lists number of visas granted for top 10 countries of origin. Resettlement numbers from this country likely to be counted in 'Other'.

<sup>12</sup> [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display\\_w3p;query=id:%22media/pressrel/5170536%22;src1=sm1](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display_w3p;query=id:%22media/pressrel/5170536%22;src1=sm1)

<sup>13</sup> Figures from Department of Home Affairs/Immigration annual reporting on Humanitarian Program outcomes. See: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/visa-statistics/live/humanitarian-program>

## China (1989-1991)

In response to the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989, Prime Minister Bob Hawke made a unilateral decision to allow 27,000 Chinese students to remain in Australia, his government going on to grant 42,000 permanent visas to Chinese students.<sup>14</sup>

## Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (1976-1981)

Over a five-year period from 1976-1981, Australia resettled 50,158 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. In June 1989 a Comprehensive Plan of Action was adopted at the International Conference on Indochinese Refugees held in Geneva. Between 1975 and 1991, Australia accepted more than 130,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 5. Offshore visas granted to Indochinese refugees, 1976-1981<sup>16</sup>

	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	Total
Vietnam	934	5,458	10,799	12,991	12,201	42,383
Cambodia	58	328	137	563	1,915	3,001
Laos and other	216	1,331	938	1,401	888	4,774
Total	1,208	7,117	11,874	14,955	15,004	50,158

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<sup>14</sup> [https://www.apf.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/1011/SeekingAsylum](https://www.apf.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/1011/SeekingAsylum)

<sup>15</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) (2009). Australia's refugee and humanitarian program, fact sheet no. 60

<sup>16</sup> Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, cited in Australian Government Publishing Service (1982). Indochinese Refugee Resettlement – Australia's Involvement. [Report from Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence](#), p. 15.