

# Refugee Myths and Facts

## Who is a refugee?

'Refugee' is used commonly to refer to people who are forced to leave their homes for many reasons, including conflict and violence. Sometimes it is used to also refer to a person displaced due to a natural disaster or environmental change.

## How many are there? Who are they? Where do they go?

At mid-2022, UNHCR estimates that the number of people forcibly displaced from their homes reached 103 million. Of these, around 53.2 million were displaced within their own country (internally displaced), while 32.5 million are refugees.

### Myth:

It is illegal to be an asylum seeker.

### Fact:

Everyone has the right to seek asylum if your life or freedom is threatened.

The top five countries of origin make up 69% of refugees worldwide:

*Syria, with 6.8 million*

*Venezuela, with 5.6 million*

*Ukraine, with 5.4 million*

*Afghanistan, with 2.8 million*

*South Sudan, with 2.4 million*

*Myanmar, with 1.2 million*

Distressingly, children made up an astonishing 41% of the world's refugees in 2021.

Most people flee to neighbouring countries. The majority of refugees are being hosted in Turkey, Colombia, Pakistan, Uganda, and Germany. Developing countries host the vast majority

of refugees with 83% of refugees hosted in developing countries. The countries with the largest proportionate number of refugees are Aruba, Lebanon, followed by Curaçao, Jordan and Colombia. One in every 78 people on earth has fled their home.

### Myth:

People seeking asylum are queue jumpers.

### Fact:

There is no orderly queue.

## How do they come to Australia?

The Minister of Immigration sets the number of people that Australia will take in and determines the priorities for deciding who will be accepted. In 2022-2023, Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program is set at 13,750 places plus an additional 4,125 for Afghan nationals.



*Share a Meal, Share a Story*

## Resettling refugees

For many decades, Australia has been a leader in bringing some of the most vulnerable refugees in the world from overseas and supporting them to settle in Australia. Australia's contribution is important, as relatively few countries resettle refugees. This commitment is even more valuable today when it is harder than ever for refugees to find protection in a safe country.

## Why do people seek asylum rather than be resettled?

While Australia's resettlement program is world-class, Australia's treatment of refugees who come to Australia seeking protection is now leading the world in the opposite direction – to the most punitive policies aimed to deter vulnerable people from seeking safety.

There is no 'queue' for people to join. Instead, the 'normal' way for refugees to find protection across the world is to cross a border and claim protection as a refugee. This is commonly called 'seeking asylum'.



2015 Refugee Week event Canberra

## Are people seeking asylum 'queue jumpers'?

This way of seeking protection is protected under the Refugee Convention (the main international treaty protecting refugees). While governments can choose to resettle refugees, if they sign the Refugee Convention, they are obliged to consider the claims of refugees who arrive in their territory.

**Myth:**

Most people seeking asylum arrive by boat.

**Fact:**

Most people seeking asylum arrive by air.

## Are people who seek asylum by boat illegal?

While Australia's asylum policies are focused on people arriving by boat, other people seek asylum after entering Australia by plane with a visa (for example, as a tourist or student). Often, people coming by boat are considered not to be 'genuine' refugees, even though historically, between 70 to 100% of them have been found to be refugees.

Fleeing danger is messy. If you are being persecuted, it is very risky even to try to get a passport from your government or a visa to another country. Countries in general do not allow someone to apply for a visa because they are a refugee and need protection. In some countries, you still need an 'exit visa' – permission to leave the country. If you are fleeing war or conflict, you don't generally have time to research, plan and apply for a visa.

**Myth:**

Boat arrivals are fakers and are not real refugees.

**Fact:**

Between 70-100% of boat arrivals have been found to be refugees.

## How does Australia treat people seeking asylum?

Australia is stopping people seeking asylum from coming (by boat or plane). If any do come by boat, they are sent to Nauru or Papua New Guinea to be 'processed' for years and are being left to languish there with little prospect of living safely and supporting themselves. Those who enter Australia without prior notice are, by law, required to be detained. There is no time limit to their detention and no independent review of whether they should

be detained. People are held despite committing no crime. Those now in administrative detention have been there on average for more than a year, with some detained now for nine years.

In recent years, most people seeking asylum have been released into the community. While this is very welcome, their difficulties do not stop there. Many of them are forced into destitution, because they are not given enough (or, most recently, anything) to live on. They were barred from working for years and have not received any real help to settle in Australia by the government. They are forced to live like this for years, as it takes the government years to process their claims. Even when they are found to be refugees, the punishment continues.

**Myth:**

Refugees are a threat to national security.

**Fact:**

Refugees are the survivors of violence and terror.

In February 2023, the federal government announced it would end the policy of temporary protection. Under this policy, refugees who come by boat were forced to live on temporary protection visas and were required to apply every three or five years to stay in Australia. They could not be reunited with family, or even visit them without the permission of the government. From 13 February 2023, people on a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) could apply for a Resolution of Status Visa. The government has estimated it will take 12 months for all eligible people to get a permanent visa.



*Waleed Aly at 2016 Refugee Week Celebrations*

**Sources:**

*UNHCR - Global Trends*

*UNHCR Refugee Data Finder: UNHCR - Refugee Statistics*

*UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2022: UNHCR - Mid-Year Trends 2022*

*Kaldor Centre: What is occurring in the seas north and west of Australia? We have no way of knowing | Kaldor Centre (unsw.edu.au)*

*Australian Government Department of Home Affairs*