

Current facts

Detained in Australia

At 30 September 2020

There were 1534 people in immigration detention facilities, including 1350 in immigration detention on the mainland and 184 in immigration detention on Christmas Island. Two of these are children.

Of these, 229 had been in detention for more than three years, including 99 more than five years. The average time to date is 581 days.

A further 543 people were living in the community after being approved for a residence determination* (including 189 children), and 12,579 people seeking asylum who came by boat were living in the community after grant of a Bridging E Visa. (It is a sad fact that such people are still officially described by the Home Affairs Department as "Illegal Maritime Arrivals".)

*Usually referred to as community detention

Hardly anyone is in community detention for less than a year, 463 have been for more than a year and a half, including 200 for more than three years.

Above information taken from the Department of Home Affairs
<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/immigration-detention-statistics-30-september-2020.pdf>

Government policy and practice

By Australian law, people who arrive by sea or air without a valid visa, or who overstay their visa, must be detained. There is no time limit on the length of detention.

Papua New Guinea and Nauru Since the start of offshore processing, many organisations including UNHCR and Amnesty International have reported on the harsh living conditions, substandard services, and the physical and mental health impacts of indefinite detention. Similar effects occur even when the people seeking asylum are not actually in a detention centre but are refused asylum and have no certainty about their future.

In community detention people can move freely, but must live at an address specified by the Minister for Immigration and need permission to spend a night elsewhere. They are subject to curfews and other supervision arrangements.

Bridging Visa Es allow people to live in the community while their protection claims are being decided. Most people on these visas have access to Medicare. In the past, most also received a basic living allowance but access to this SRSS is now more restricted.



Temporary Protection Visas allow a refugee to stay in Australia for a maximum of three years, after which their protection claims are reassessed.

In contrast to the previous TPV policy, people with a TPV are never eligible for permanent residency. They cannot sponsor their family members to join them in Australia and they cannot travel overseas and return without permission from the government, which will be granted only in compelling circumstances.

They can work in Australia and have access to Medicare, income support and English language tuition. They can also receive torture and trauma counselling and employment assistance. However, they are not eligible for the full range of settlement support services. They can receive only a more limited form of income support known as Special Benefit, and not other benefits such as the Jobseeker, Youth Allowance or Austudy.

Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) is the name given now to the government-funded support program for people waiting for their protection claims to be decided and who are unable to meet their basic healthcare and living needs. It provides them with a basic living allowance - 89% of Newstart – now Jobseeker, casework support, access to torture and trauma counselling and subsidised medication.

In recent years and especially since August 2017, the government has been making it harder for people to access this program. A further step in the October 2020 budget was the halving of the amount for support.

Medical evacuations

Many people have been brought from offshore in order to receive medical support. Many of these are still in detention, including in hotels with no outside access.



During 2020 five hundred people, who had been brought to Australia for medical support, were released into the community. While that may seem to be a good thing, it also means they need to

find work in the middle of a recession, despite many having ongoing serious health issues, a lack of professional networks and/or a low level of English, having been denied access to English language programs. RCOA Media release 12.10.20

More generally, during 2020 when so many people lost jobs, people seeking asylum were eligible for neither Jobseeker nor Jobkeeper, so have been reliant on service providers, who have seen a 300% increase in the demand for their services.