



FACT SHEET

Last updated 2 March 2016.

Australia's response to the Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian crisis

Overview

On 9 September 2015, the Australian Government announced that it would make an extra 12,000 Humanitarian Programme places available in response to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

These places are in addition to the existing Humanitarian Programme intake of 13,750.

On 4 February 2016, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, announced a further \$25 million in response to the Syria and Iraq humanitarian crises. This assistance will help in continuing to deliver protection services, shelter, food, health support and education to vulnerable populations in the region impacted by conflict.

The announcement brings Australia's total humanitarian response to the Syria and Iraq crises to \$258 million:

- \$213 million in response to the Syria crisis since 2011
- \$45 million in response to the Iraq crisis since 2014.

Eligibility and prioritisation

The 12,000 places under the Syrian/Iraqi initiative are available to refugees many of whom are referred by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and to persons proposed under the Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP).

Priority for 12,000 Humanitarian Programme places will be given to people displaced by the conflict in Syria and Iraq who are:

- assessed as being most vulnerable – persecuted minorities, women, children and families with the least prospect of ever returning safely to their homes
- located in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

People who fall into these categories will include both Syrians and Iraqis.

Applicants for resettlement are required to meet all criteria for a Refugee and Humanitarian visa, including health, character and security checks. These checks must be completed before people enter Australia.

All applications are assessed on an individual basis – in line with Australia’s existing refugee and humanitarian policies.

Most applications will take a number of months to process. It is not possible to be more precise than this because processing times vary according to the circumstances of individual applicants.

Security checks

The Australian Government takes our national security extremely seriously and has made clear from the outset that security and character checks of the additional 12,000 humanitarian entrants will not be compromised.

Rigorous security checks are conducted prior to arrival in Australia at a number of key visa processing points. This includes the collection and checking of biometric data such as facial images and fingerprints.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) works closely with relevant Australian agencies and international partners in conducting security checks including the checking of biometric data.

For all offshore humanitarian applicants, these checks are supplemented by an interview with Australian departmental officers where claims for resettlement and identity are assessed.

The additional places will not be offered to people in Australia or regional processing countries who travelled to Australia illegally by boat.

Visa grants

The first families granted visas as part of the additional 12,000 humanitarian places began arriving in Australia in November 2015.

There is now a regular flow of visa grants for Syrians and Iraqis under the 2015-16 Humanitarian Programme and through the additional 12,000 humanitarian places provided for those displaced by conflict in Syria and Iraq.

However, there is a time-lag between visa grants and the arrival of visa holders in Australia as it takes time to finalise travel arrangements.

The DIBP and the Department of Social Services (DSS) continue to work in close cooperation to ensure that post arrival settlement services are provided in a timely manner.

Visa processing arrangements

Refugee visa processing

Australia has consistently ranked in the top three resettlement countries for refugees referred by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, along with the United States of America and Canada.

The Australian Government is working closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to identify refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey who are the most vulnerable – persecuted minorities, women, children and families and in greatest need of resettlement.

Applicants for a refugee visa are required to meet all criteria for a [refugee visa](#) including health, character and security requirements. These criteria must be met before visas can be granted.

SHP visa processing

Australian citizens or permanent residents over the age of 18, eligible New Zealand citizens and organisations operating in Australia are able to propose persons for resettlement under the [SHP](#).

Priority for the limited places available under the SHP is generally given to applicants proposed by close family members.

People eligible for resettlement under the SHP may be registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, but it is not a requirement.

The limited number of places available and the high demand for these places means that not everyone can be accepted.

People who have already applied for a [Subclass 202 Global Special Humanitarian visa](#) will continue to be considered and do not need to do anything more.

There is no need for SHP applicants or proposers to contact the DIBP unless:

- we ask them to provide further information or attend an interview
- they need to tell us about a change in their circumstances.

Applicants and proposers who need to advise us of a change to their contact details can send an email to: victoria.ohpc@border.gov.au.

People previously refused a Global Special Humanitarian visa

People who previously lodged an application for a Global Special Humanitarian visa under the SHP that was refused will need to apply again if they wish to be reconsidered.

Frequently asked questions

I am the proposer of a Special Humanitarian visa application for a family member who fled the conflict in Syria and Iraq. How can I seek an update on the progress of that application?

Applications already lodged by people who have fled the conflict in Syria and Iraq will continue to be considered – proposers do not need to do anything more.

Most applications will take a number of months to process. It is not possible to be more precise than this because processing times vary according to the circumstances of individual applicants.

At each stage of processing, both applicant and proposer will be informed in writing of the location of the application and where to direct queries. It is therefore important that proposers and applicants advise the DIBP if their contact details change.

If people need to advise us of a change to their contact details, they should send an email to the Victorian Offshore Humanitarian Processing Centre (victoria.ohpc@border.gov.au).

Can I sponsor (propose) my family member/s who have fled Syria/Iraq and sought refuge in Lebanon/Jordan/Turkey?

Australian citizens or permanent residents over the age of 18, eligible New Zealand citizens and organisations operating in Australia are able to propose persons for resettlement under the SHP. More information about how to propose a person for resettlement is on the DIBP [website](#).

Will people from minority groups be prioritised?

Priority will be given to people who are assessed as being most vulnerable and in need of resettlement.

Membership of a particular minority group or religion may be relevant to people's individual claims.

Will people who are not located in refugee camps be considered?

While some of the people selected for resettlement in Australia will be drawn from UN High Commissioner for Refugee camps, others will be drawn from the urban communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

What about people still in Syria and Iraq?

12,000 humanitarian visas are available for people displaced by the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

DIBP's capacity to consider people who are currently living in Syria and Iraq is very limited due to security concerns and the destruction of infrastructure.

Do people need to be citizens of Syria or Iraq to be eligible for one of the additional humanitarian places?

Priority will be given to people displaced by the conflict in Syria and Iraq who are:

- assessed as being most vulnerable – persecuted minorities, women, children and families with the least prospect of ever returning safely to their homes
- located in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

People who fall into these categories will include both Syrians and Iraqis.

The Australian Government will also provide humanitarian places for people in other situations as part of its annual intake of 13,750.

When will people from this intake start arriving in Australia?

The first family resettling in Australia under this commitment arrived in Perth on 16 November 2015.

There is now a regular flow of visa grants for Syrians and Iraqis under the 2015-16 Humanitarian Programme and the additional 12,000 humanitarian places.

The Australian Government is working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration and other partners to process and resettle 12,000 people displaced by the conflict in Syria and Iraq as soon as practicable.

Applicants for resettlement will be required to meet all criteria for a Refugee and Humanitarian visa, including health, character and security requirements. These criteria must be met before visas can be granted.

The DIBP and DSS continue to work in close cooperation to ensure that post arrival settlement services are provided in a timely manner.

Will people who come as part of this intake be able to stay in Australia permanently?

Yes. People in the 12,000-place intake will be granted a permanent visa.

Can Syrians and Iraqis who came to Australia by boat without a visa apply for one of the 12,000 humanitarian places?

No. The additional places will not be offered to people in Australia or regional processing countries who travelled to Australia illegally by boat.

My relative is not a citizen of Syria or Iraq but lived there for many years before being displaced by the current conflict. Are they eligible to apply?

Displaced people who are citizens of countries other than Syria and Iraq, to which it would be unsafe for them to return, may be eligible to apply for resettlement in Australia through Australia's existing offshore Humanitarian Programme.

However, people who are citizens of, or have a right of residence in, countries where it is safe for them to live, will not be granted one of these Humanitarian Programme places.

What services will the refugees who are resettled in Australia receive?

People resettled under this programme will be eligible to access the same benefits and support provided to other people arriving under Australia's offshore Humanitarian Programme. These include Medicare and social security benefits as well as settlement services to help them integrate into the Australian community.

The DSS is responsible for providing settlement support and assistance to people who come to Australia under the offshore Humanitarian Programme. The [DSS website](#) has information about what people in the Australian community can do to assist.