

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

002 – Public Hearing 10 November 2021

Topic: Partner visas

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Senator Julian Hill

Question

Mr HILL: I doubt you would know the answer to this, but I will explain the context. I am not sure whether you are able to seek advice from Home Affairs or whether we have to ask them. I am curious to understand how many partner visa or immediate family visa applications are currently in the system for citizens of Ethiopia. The reason I ask this is it's a point that I have been ferociously critical of the government on—I think I called it lethal negligence—as people have died as a result of government policy and the discrimination against processing visas of family members in Afghanistan. We finally got after the cover-up, but the government refused to answer questions. We got the questions through FOI and found there are about 8½ thousand partner visa applications—children of Australian citizens and husbands and wives of Australians that have been stuck for years in Afghanistan, waiting for their visa to be processed. The next most common area of concern for Home Affairs not processing visas is for people from Africa. Is it something that has been the subject of discussion and contingency planning? These are husbands, wives and children of Australians who are stuck there, waiting for a partner visas, because they can't get a visitor visa to come to Australia.

Ms Bell: I think we will have to take the question on how many partner visas are outstanding on notice.

Mr HILL: Sure. That would be terrific if you could seek that advice from Home Affairs. I suppose one of the learnings from Afghanistan—put aside from the political criticism, because it was deliberate government policy to leave those people there for years and not prioritise them. The question I suppose I am asking you more broadly as DFAT is: in your crisis contingency planning for these kinds of situations, is it something we've thought about previously or is it something that might be novel and that we might want to think about building into our checklists and procedures of things if we have the time to think about it? Many of these are Australian citizens by descent that may not have registered, in effect.

Ms Bell: In thinking about crisis preparedness, we do think about family units related to Australian citizens and permanent residents.

Mr HILL: If you could take that on notice that would be terrific, because that has obviously been an area of concern in other places..

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade annual report 2019-20, diaspora

Answer

As at 6 December 2021, the Department of Home Affairs advises that Partner visa applications remain in process for 221 Ethiopian citizens outside Australia who declared their residency as being in Ethiopia, and up to 78 others (including dependants) who did not declare their residency but many of whom may have been in Ethiopia at the time of application lodgement.