

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO  
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SPOKEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 01**

**Subject: How many visa holders were left behind**

**Asked by:** Penny Wong

**Question:**

**Senator WONG:** Okay. I have a lot more questions, but I'm conscious that the chair will want to move to someone else. This morning we had evidence from Mr Kolomeitz about a few things. One of them was an assessment of the number of holders of or applicants for Australian visas who have been left behind. I think he gave the number as 5,000. I have written to the minister as at 21 September, and I had followed it up orally prior to that, asking for the same information that President Biden and Prime Minister Johnson have given—that is, the number of citizens and visa holders left behind in Afghanistan as at 31 August. I still have not got a reply to this, and I would like an answer: how many Australian citizens and visa holders remain in Afghanistan?

**Mr Newnham:** I can answer at least the first part of your question. You asked about Australian citizens, and our best estimate with a level of confidence around this figure is that, as at 1 October, there were 129 Australian citizens remaining in Afghanistan who had registered on our database as requiring assistance from government.

**Senator WONG:** That's actually not an answer to my question. That's just those who have registered. Do you have any information as to the number of citizens? You're telling me who's registered; that's one subset. How many citizens and how many visa holders are there?

**Mr Newnham:** Senator, I'm giving you the best data that we have. I don't have an answer beyond that database.

**Senator WONG:** Okay. Home Affairs or Defence, can anyone tell me about numbers of visa holders?

**Mr Wilden:** We'll have to take that on notice, because visa holders obviously cover a very broad spectrum. In terms of what you're looking for, are they only LEE or are they broader 201s, family, skill—

**Senator WONG:** This is a question I asked Mr Pezzullo in a briefing, and I was told that this would be able to be provided. I have now also done Senator Payne the courtesy of writing a letter. Why is it you cannot tell the Australian public how many people we left behind? You can't even give us an estimate?

**Mr Wilden:** If you've asked those questions previously, clearly, we're gathering that, but we'd also note that a lot of these people have left Afghanistan already. A lot of them were picked up by other countries. We have already found visa holders who've come to our attention in the US, in the UK, in many of the surrounding countries and in Europe, who we are now trying to facilitate to get here, so it's not as simple as who is left behind in-country versus who holds a valid visa to Australia. But we'll come back to you with that information.

**Mr Newnham:** I'm sorry, but I do want to add to my earlier answer. I've given you Australian citizens, and I absolutely acknowledge the comments by Mr Wilden. What I can also add, though, is that 157 permanent residents were registered on our database, as at 1 October, as seeking Australian assistance. That's a total—citizens plus permanent residents—of 286.

**Senator WONG:** That's only those who have registered.

**Mr Newnham:** That's correct.

**Senator WONG:** And you have no estimate of those who may not have.

**Mr Newnham:** We don't have an estimate.

**Senator WONG:** And we have no numbers that Home Affairs is willing to provide me—despite the secretary saying over a month ago that they could be provided—as to the number of Australian visa holders/applicants outstanding or remaining in Afghanistan.

**Mr Wilden:** If you're adding applicants, I can say that we've received 26,000 applications in the last four weeks.

**Senator WONG:** What about visa holders? Do you have any numbers at all? Mr Kolomeitz says he's got—

**Mr Wilden:** We have several thousand Afghan visa holders offshore, but they are across many countries, as I said, and under many different visas. We will come back to you with a breakdown of how many there are by what we do know of where and in which visa category they are.

**Senator WONG:** When are you going to do that? I've been asking for this for quite a while now.

**Mr Wilden:** We should be able to come back in the next week or two—

**Senator WONG:** I don't understand why the United Kingdom and the United States can both provide information, at least estimates, and our government seems to have taken an oath of secrecy about this.

**Mr Wilden:** I can't speak to the accuracy of those other countries' data, but we will come back within the next week to 10 days with what we do have. I'd just note that there may be caveats, because there will be things we don't know.

**Senator WONG:** Sure. Do you think 5,000 is about right?

**Mr Wilden:** I wouldn't like to guess.

**CHAIR:** While you're looking at the Australians registered, could you also look at the permanent residents as well?

**Mr Newnham:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** I would like a global figure for how many were issued visas but didn't get out. And I think that's for all three departments, because there's no master list.

### **Answer:**

The Department is unable to identify the location of visa holders who are outside of Australia.

We are able to identify the number of Afghan Citizen subclass 449 visa holders located in Australia, and those who have departed Australia or not entered.

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**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SPOKEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2022**

**QoN Number: 02**

**Subject: LEE applications on hand, being processed or finalised following the Biden announcement - Request for Stats table**

**Asked by:** Tim Ayres

**Question:**

Senator WONG: What about Home Affairs? As a consequence of the embassy closure, were you asked to do anything in relation to the processing of the LEEs? And yes I do understand that other departments certify and then you look at it. Did anything happen as a consequence of the closure of the embassy?

Mr Wilden: Yes. With the announcement of the closure of the embassy, we had an IDC about what the next steps would be. We highlighted at that point the need for referrals to reach us so that we could start processing their permanent protection visas, because they do take some time to go through the various steps of health, character checks et cetera. So pretty much immediately after the embassy—within weeks of the announcement—we were in the planning stage of making sure that locally engaged employees that were being sponsored by the other departments were referred to us for processing for their protection visas.

Senator WONG: At that point, how many did you have?

Mr Wilden: I'd have to go back and check. I'll come back after lunch with some numbers of where we were at that point, because it is ongoing and has been since 2013. There would have been a number in play already, and we were looking to finalise those that we already had referred. Then the question with the agencies was how quickly we could get any remaining ones who had not yet been referred so we could start the visa processing phase

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Thank you. This goes to the data requested on the locally engaged staff and the decisions made on their visas. First, I would like to give the number: there were 108 visa applications on hand from locally engaged staff as at 1 April 2021, and that totalled 583 applications. It's important to note here that there are two numbers: one is the locally engaged staff, and one is basically their family members.

Senator Wong asked for a breakdown of those numbers. In April, we granted 17 locally engaged staff visas, for 72 people in total, and we received five new applications, for 23 people in total. In May, we granted 21 LEE visas, and that

totalled 75 people, and we received 13 new LEE applications, for 62 people in total. In June, we granted 16 LEE visas, for 73 people in total, and we received 14 LEE new applications, with an additional 62 people. In July, 42 LEE grants for 202 persons; 11 new applications, for 50 people. And, in August, the final visas were granted by our Oman post: 76 LEE granted, for 338 persons, and 68 LEE new applications, for 293 people who lodged.

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Senator AYRES: I promise not to take very much time. It was really just to clarify: I think, after the lunch break, somebody went through some month-by-month figures. I assume you were reading from a table. Can that be circulated to the committee. I think there were some numbers for August, and it wasn't clear to me how many of the August ones had been processed and how many had been left over. If you could circulate that, that would

be of assistance. Also, the figure of 26,000—

CHAIR: Just one second, Senator Ayres. Mr Wilden, I think that was you and you were giving month-by-month, and I think you started with April—

Mr Wilden: It was. The numbers are in a broader brief, but we're happy to provide them.

CHAIR: If you could—

Mr Wilden: We just need to put that into an easier-to-read table.

CHAIR: We'd love a table. Thank you.

Unidentified speaker: A table would be great.

### **Answer:**

Afghan LEE continued to be a Government priority under the 2020-21 Humanitarian Program. The Department prioritised visa applications but processing arrangements, including health check appointments managed through partner agencies

Between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021, 275 persons were granted In-country Special Humanitarian (subclass 201) visas and a further 540 persons were granted visas between 1 July 2021 and 20 August 2021.

On 1 April 2021, there were 108 certified Afghan LEE with a visa application on-hand (total of 583 persons).

### ***Month-by-month visa lodgement and grants of Humanitarian (subclass 201) visas to Afghan LEEs***

Month	Visa applications lodged	Visas granted
April 2021	5 LEE / 23 persons	17 LEE / 72 persons
May 2021	13 LEE / 62 persons	21 LEE / 75 persons
June 2021	14 LEE / 62 persons	16 LEE / 73 persons
July 2021	11 LEE / 50 persons	42 LEE / 202 persons
August 2021 (to 20 August)	68 LEE and family of LEE / 293 persons	76 LEE / 338 persons
Total	111 LEE / 490 persons	172 LEE / 760 persons

On 6 August 2021, the Department finalised all Afghan LEE that were certified before 10 July 2021 and had visa applications on-hand. The last pre-evacuation In-country Special Humanitarian (subclass 201) visa grants were on 20 August 2021. Any applicants on-hand after 20 August 2021 were considered against alternate visa options (such as Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) subclass 449 visa) to ensure they had the capacity to travel to Australia.

As at 15 August 2021, when the Taliban forces took control of Kabul, there were 37 certified LEE applications before the Department. Of these, 35 were granted (14 were granted In-Country Special Humanitarian (subclass 201) visas, 21 were considered instead for the grant of subclass 449 visas) and two were not granted (because the applicants were already in another country or did not otherwise meet the visa criteria).

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Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 04**

**Subject: Of those now landed in Australia, how many are temporary visa holders**

**Asked by:** Kimberley Kitching

**Question:**

**CHAIR:** I have one question; I'm happy for it to be responded to on notice. Of the 3,500 people, mentioned in media reports, who have landed back in Australia, how many are Australian permanent residents or citizens and how many are temporary visa holders or other visa holders? I imagine, if that 3,500 have come here, we are able to give a full breakdown of that 3,500.

**Answer:**

The table below provides the visa type of Afghan nationals who arrived in Australia between 20 August 2021 to 1 October 2021.

In addition, 495 Australian citizens also arrived.

Type	Description (Visa Subclass)	Number
Permanent	Partner 100	113
	Child 101	<5
	Orphan 117	<5
	Resident 155	73
	Refugee 200	5
	Refugee 201*	254
	Refugee 202	<5
Temporary	Business 188	7
	Marriage 300	6
	Partner 309	26
	Temporary Work 400	45
	Special 444	7
	Humanitarian Stay 449	2,844
	Student 500	<5
	Visitor 600	<5
	Protection 866	<5
	Crew 942	110
	Special 945	<5
	Diplomatic 995	<5
	<b>Total Visas</b>	<b>3,507</b>

Notes to table:

- With regards to Immigration data, the Department's current policy is to mask numbers which are less than five as <5, noting we are reviewing the confidentiality method for the future.

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**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 09**

**Subject: As at 4 May 2021 how many Afghan national applications were on hand?**

**Asked by:** Penny Wong

**Question:**

How many visa applications did the Department of Home Affairs have on-hand from Afghan nationals still in Afghanistan as at 4 May?

- a. Did DFAT and Home Affairs and Defence discuss staffing requirements for the processing of those visas once the embassy had closed?
- b. Were any contingency measures for visa processing put in place?
- c. Was an in-country mission contemplated by any department to enable the processing of visa applications?

**Answer:**

The Department is not able to identify the location of individuals who have applied for visas at a point in time post their application.

- a. Following the Government's announcement on the 15 April 2021 of the departure of its contribution to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, further detailed planning was undertaken by the Department of Home Affairs to ensure Australia was well placed to facilitate the visa grant and departure of LEE and their family members ahead of withdrawal. Meetings were held between relevant agencies, including the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC), Defence, DFAT and the Department of Health to identify timeframes and processes that were required ahead of departure for this group.
- b. Refer above and QON 24.
- c. There was no visa processing function at the Australian Embassy in Kabul prior to its closure.

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**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 10**

**Subject: Post 8 June 2021, was any Department tasked by their Minister or PM to accelerate visa processing?**

**Asked by:** Penny Wong

**Question:**

On 8 June former Prime Minister Rudd joined growing calls for Australia to help evacuate the Afghan nationals, and wrote to Minister Andrews, pleading for urgent action. Was any Department tasked by their Minister or by the Prime Minister to accelerate visa processing times or to initiate evacuation planning following Mr Rudd's intervention on 8 June?

**Answer:**

Prior to the emerging humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, Afghan Locally Engaged Employees (LEE) were already a processing priority within the Humanitarian Program.

Following the Government's announcement on the 15 April 2021 of the departure of its contribution to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, further detailed planning was undertaken by the Department of Home Affairs to ensure Australia was well placed to facilitate the visa grant and departure of LEE and their family members ahead of withdrawal. Meetings were held between relevant agencies, including the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC), Defence, DFAT and the Department of Health to identify timeframes and processes that were required ahead of departure for this group.

On 17 August 2021, the use of the Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) (subclass 449) visa was implemented to facilitate the urgent evacuation of Afghan LEE and other priority Afghan nationals.



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Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 11**

**Subject: What consultation did Home Affairs have with those making a case for urgency on processing?**

***Asked by:*** Penny Wong

***Question:***

Many Veterans who were advocating for their Afghan colleagues had reached out to Defence and the Minister for Defence and Immigration in the lead up to the events of August. What consultation did Defence, Home Affairs, or DFAT have with those making a case for urgency on processing?

a. For example, Forsaken Fighters (FFsA) advocate Jason Scanes wrote to the Minister for Home affairs and the Minister for Immigration on April 20 and requested meetings in June, with follow up correspondence in July and August. Minister Hawke responded on 3 June, suggesting Mr Scanes respond to the discussion paper about Australia's Humanitarian Program 2021–22. Aside from Mr Hawke's suggestion relating to the discussion paper, what advice was given to the Minister about humanitarian visas and the Afghanistan situation between 20 April and 3 June?

b. Mr Scanes also wrote to Ministers Dutton, Andrews and Hawke on 10 June explicitly states "FFsA are ready to assist the Government in initial screening operations, application and document verification or any other assistance the Government may require. We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate and assist Government to ensure those entitled are assisted through the process and in accordance with any guidelines determined by Government".

c. Did any Department seek assistance from veterans groups or other civil society participants about assistance and developing guidelines?

d. What additional resources were put into assessing the requests and references from veterans in each Department?

***Answer:***

Questions regarding screening and document verification and the engagement of any third party assistance is a matter for the Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

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Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 30**

**Subject: 449 Visas granted**

**Asked by:** Penny Wong

**Question:**

As at 1 October 2021, a total of 5,317 subclass 449 visas have been granted. Is there a reason why not all of those invited to apply for a 449 visa did not apply?

- a. Given the visas are only valid for three months how many have you converted to permanent visas?
- b. Can you please provide a breakdown per category?

**Answer:**

At the peak of the evacuation from Kabul, to ensure that as many people as possible had the opportunity to access an evacuation flight, the Department was providing notification of the invitation to apply which enabled people to pass checkpoints and access the airport. Visa grants were subsequently processed within departmental systems as the notification holders presented to Officers.

- a. As at 1 October 2021, no subclass 449 visa holders have been granted permanent visas.

The Government is considering pathways to permanent residence for those evacuated from Afghanistan and located in Australia on temporary subclass 449 visas.

- b. As at 1 October 2021, no subclass 449 visa holder has been granted a permanent visas under any category.

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Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 36**

**Subject: Humanitarian visa holders still in Afghanistan**

***Asked by:*** Penny Wong

***Question:***

How many humanitarian visa holders remain in Afghanistan?

***Answer:***

The Department is unable to identify the location of visa holders who are outside of Australia.

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**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade  
Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan

**11 October 2021**

**QoN Number: 37**

**Subject: 449 Visa holders still in Afghanistan**

***Asked by:*** Penny Wong

***Question:***

How many 449 visa holders remain in Afghanistan?

***Answer:***

The Department is unable to identify the location of visa holders who are outside of Australia.