

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 018 – Public Hearing 15 November 2021

Topic: People on flights Kabul to Doha

Senator Janet Rice

Question

Senator RICE: I want to start with the good news of an extra 1,000 people that we've been able to evacuate out of Afghanistan since we were last discussing this. I note, Mr Newnham, that you've said that they are a mix of citizens, permanent residents and visa holders. Can you give us a breakdown of how many of those 1,000 people are in each of those categories?

Mr Newnham: I can't give you a breakdown of those extra 1,000 and the categories that have departed. What I can say is that, within that category, 103 have been part of those flights that have come out from Kabul. We might be able to check whether or not we could break down, in the course of the hearing today, how many are citizens, PRs—permanent residents—and visa holders in that category. There are a large number who have made their way, as I said earlier, over the border and been facilitated by our high commission in Islamabad. That is in the vicinity of 900 or just under—it might be 877 or something like that. I don't know that we have that breakdown of that figure.

Senator RICE: Sorry, what was the 103?

Mr Newnham: The 103 were on flights out of Kabul to Doha, sponsored—chartered, effectively—by the Qatari government. Then there are the 877—I could have that figure wrong; it's in the vicinity of 900—over the border to Islamabad. I can certainly give a try to breaking down the 103; I just don't know that it will be possible to break down the 877.

Answer

The Government evacuated more than 4100 people on 32 flights between 18 to 26 August during the emergency evacuation effort. Since then, the Government has supported a further 1,706 people to travel safely to Australia (as at 22 November), comprising:

- 45 Australian citizens
- 192 Australian permanent residents
- 1,469 other Australian visa holders.

DFAT continues to provide support to Australian citizens, permanent residents and immediate family members in Afghanistan.

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 021 – Hearing 15 November 2021

Topic: Cost of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan

Question from Committee

Question

This inquiry's terms of reference direct the committee to examine the costs of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan. The monetary cost to Australia in military and aid expenditure is estimated by some sources to have been at least \$9.3 billion. There are other estimates which are far greater than this.

1. What work has the Australian [Government] done to calculate the costs of the various components of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan?
2. What are the best available estimates of the costs associated with Australia's engagement in Afghanistan?

Answer

\$8.4 billion was spent by the Department of Defence on Operations SLIPPER and HIGHROAD between 2001 and 2021. This does not include other costs incurred on other operations in the Middle East, including in Iraq and in supporting our presence in the region.

DFAT had a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2021. The total operating cost for DFAT's operations during that time was approximately \$566 million. Since 2001, Australian Governments have allocated a total of \$1.51 billion in official development assistance for Afghanistan.

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 022 – Public Hearing 15 November 2021

Topic: Use of the PCASS

Question from Committee

Question

Submitters including Mr Jason Scanes have raised significant concerns about how the PCASS system has been used in relation to LEE certification and visa applications, arguing that results from this system have been used for purposes for which they were never intended, and that PCASS results have effectively been 'weaponised' to deny humanitarian assistance to legitimate applicants.

1. What was the intended purpose for which the PCASS system was used in assessing potential Afghan employees?
2. Please outline exactly how the PCASS system has been utilised by Defence, DFAT and Home Affairs in assessing applications for LEE certifications, and in visa application processing for certified LEEs and others seeking humanitarian visas.
3. How do Defence, Home Affairs and DFAT weigh the results of PCASS assessments alongside other forms of information about the character of an LEE applicant (for example, personal references from ADF members who worked with the individual)?
4. What records do Defence, DFAT and Home Affairs hold about PCASS results for Afghan staff involved in Australia's operations?

Answer

DFAT has not used the PCASS to assess applications for LEE certification.