

**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: 03

Subject: For the 26000 Humanitarian Visa applications received in the past 7 Weeks, breakdown by month and category

Asked by: Tim Ayres

Question:

Senator AYRES: [inaudible] during the course of the hearing, if they are to hand; otherwise, I suppose, read them to us. I just also want to understand, as to this 26,000 figure: What does that mean? What's that comprised of? Over what period has that been received? Can somebody just tell me that? That's a very large number.

Mr Wilden: Yes. The 26,000 is the applications we have received almost totally from people of Afghan ethnicity who are seeking protection. They will cover a very, very broad spectrum of people—people in country, people out of country, people with some connection to Australia and people with no connection to Australia. What we have to do—and we're putting extra teams on to do this—is to go through and check, first of all, that they're valid applications; then, if they are valid applications, they go into our process.

Senator AYRES: Is that 26,000 over the last month, the last six weeks or the course of this year?

Mr Wilden: It's about seven weeks now.

Senator AYRES: Over the course of the last seven weeks?

Mr Wilden: Yes.

Senator AYRES: Are you able to tell us what categories those fall into in terms of the types of visas?

Mr Wilden: No. They arrived in such large volumes, we still have to go through and do that process—but certainly humanitarian, seeking protection for Australia is the broad category you'd put them under.

Senator AYRES: Broadly, since the fall of Kabul or from before that?

Mr Wilden: I'd have to check. Because they come in all the time, if you like, we receive applications all the time. From the fall of Kabul there was a spike that started to trend up, and we've been receiving them daily in very large volumes ever since then.

Senator AYRES: But also from before then?

Mr Wilden: Yes, we receive applications, and I think the number is about 50,000 a year.

Unidentified speaker: Yes.

Mr Wilden: We receive about 50,000 a year generally into our humanitarian program offshore.

Senator AYRES: From Afghanistan or generally?

Mr Wilden: That's just generally. Say two years ago, several thousand of those would have been for Afghanistan. But the 26,000 is particular to Afghanistan.

Senator AYRES: What I'd like is a month-by-month accounting over the last 18 months of visa applications that have been received and some information that identifies their category. I want to understand how many of the 26,000 fall into the seven-week period that you've described and how many are from since January this year

Answer:**Class XB (offshore) applications lodged by Afghan citizens**

Lodgement Program Year	Lodgement month	Total
2019–20	April	58
	May	63
	June	89
2020–21	July	82
	August	83
	September	60
	October	79
	November	76
	December	73
	January	52
	February	53
	March	79
	April	102
	May	88
	June	95
	July	131
	August	8,615
	September	14,791
2021–22	01 to 08 October	1,564

Notes:

1. This information is provided by the Department of Home Affairs. As data has been drawn from a dynamic system environment, the information is correct at the time of publication and figures may differ slightly from previous or future reporting.

The Department is assessing the above caseload to determine priorities and valid applications. These applications are under the class XB visa (lodged offshore). All applications will be assessed against all subclasses in the XB class and the decision of which subclass they may be granted rests with the delegated officer.

Between 17 August 2021 and 08 October 2021, 24,857 class XB (offshore) Humanitarian applications were lodged by Afghan citizens.

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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: 05

Subject: Why did Home Affairs Secretary choose not to participate in the first public hearing?

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

Please provide an explanation of why the Secretaries of Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs and Trade chose not to participate in the first public hearing of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into Australia's engagement in Afghanistan on 11 October 2021.

- a. Did the Secretaries of Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs Trade discuss or forewarn their non-appearance with their respective ministers or ministerial offices? If yes, when and with whom?
- b. Did any DFAT or Home Affairs officials discuss the Inquiry, its terms of reference or any possible Inquiry questions with any Member of Parliament on or prior to 11 October 2021? If yes, when or with whom?

Answer:

The Committee Secretary invited representatives of the Department of Home Affairs to give evidence to the committee. The invitation did not specify that the Secretary's attendance was required. In the Secretary's judgement, senior departmental officials were well equipped and prepared to give evidence and to speak to questions of fact in relations to Australia's engagement in Afghanistan.

- a. No, Secretary Pezzullo did not.
- b. Yes, on Wednesday, 6 October 2021, Departmental officials attended a private briefing with members of the Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade References Committee regarding the inquiry into Australia's engagement in Afghanistan. We have been advised by the Committee Secretariat that the following Senators indicated their attendance: Kitching (Chair), Abetz (Deputy Chair), Fawcett, Antic, Ayres, Fierravanti-Wells, Lambie, Rice and Steele-John.

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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: 06

Subject: Were briefings sought about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan?

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

- a. Did the current or former Minister for Home Affairs seek briefings about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan? If yes, how many times and what were the dates for 2020 and 2021?
- b. Did the Prime Minister seek briefings about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan? If yes, how many times and what were the dates for 2020 and 2021? How often and by whom was the PM briefed?

Answer:

- A. The Minister for Home Affairs was provided briefings about the developing situation in Afghanistan. The current Minister was briefed multiple times between April 2021 and October 2021. The content of these briefs remains classified.
The former Minister for Home Affairs was provided briefings about the situation in Afghanistan as was required. The content of these briefs remains classified.
- B. This question is to be answered by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

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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: 07

Subject: Did the Department of Home Affairs provide a view on the absence of Australian Government Personnel

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

In providing comment on or input to the DFAT submission to close the Australian Embassy, did the Department of Home Affairs provide a view on how the absence of any Australian government personnel on the ground would impact the processing of all visas from Afghanistan?

Answer:

The Department of Home Affairs provided input to the DFAT submission on the implications of the closure of the Australian Embassy on the activities of the Home Affairs Portfolio. The content of this submission remains classified. The Department of Home Affairs did not have a presence in Afghanistan in 2021.

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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: 08

Subject: How many Home Affairs Staff in Afghanistan were visa processing prior to Embassy closure?

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many staff did the Department of Home Affairs have in Afghanistan undertaking visa processing and assessment work prior to the closure of the Australian embassy on 28 May 2021?

Answer:

The Department of Home Affairs did not have an immigration office at the Australian Embassy in Kabul. There were no staff undertaking visa processing and assessment work at the Australian Embassy prior to closure on 28 May 2021.

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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: 12

Subject: When did Immigration Minister decide to issue 449 visas

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

At what stage during the evacuation did the Minister for Immigration make the decision to start issuing Temporary Humanitarian Stay – subclass 449 – visas?

- a. What was the date?
- b. Why was this subclass selected?

Answer:

a. On 17 August 2021, the Government agreed to use the Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) subclass 449 visas to facilitate the urgent evacuation of priority Afghan nationals.

b. Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) Subclass 449 visas are intended for those who have been, or face a strong likelihood of being displaced from their residence, and are in grave fear of their safety because of their personal circumstances.

These visas facilitate the movement of large numbers of people under imminent threat of harm.

This type of visa was introduced and first used in 1999 to evacuate nearly 4,000 Kosovars from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and some 2,000 East Timorese from East Timor.

This visa was used due to the rapidly changing security circumstances in Afghanistan, the urgent and exceptional humanitarian nature of the evacuation operation and the limited window for people to depart Afghanistan through Kabul airport.

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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: 13

Subject: LEE Applications received by Home Affairs since December 2012

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many LEE visa applications had been received by the Department of Home Affairs when the PM announced the ADF withdrawal on 15 April 2021 and since the legislative instrument IMMI 12/127 was issued in December 2012?

a. How many Home Affairs staff were working on LEE visa applications on 15 April 2021?

Answer:

Between 1 January 2013 and 15 April 2021, 574 Afghan Locally Engaged Employees lodged a class XB (offshore) Humanitarian application (totaling 2,455 applicants).

a. At the time of Prime Minister Morrison's announcement of Australia's withdrawal from Afghanistan on 15 April 2021, Amman Post resources devoted to Afghan LEE processing were 0.3 A-based full time equivalent plus one locally engaged staff member for administrative processing.

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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: 14

Subject: LEE applications received by Home Affairs at Embassy closure.

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many LEE visa applications had been received by the Department of Home Affairs when the Embassy closure was announced on 25 May 2021?

a. How many Home Affairs staff were working on LEE visa applications on 25 May 2021?

Answer:

Between 01 January 2013 and 25 May 2021, 589 Afghan Locally Engaged Employees (LEE) had lodged an offshore Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) visa application (totaling 2527 applicants).

a. On 25 May 2021, Amman Post resources dedicated to Afghan LEE visa applications were 1 A-based Full Time Equivalent, 2 Expat Locally Engaged decision-makers and 5 Locally Engaged for administrative processing.

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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: 15

Subject: LEE visa applications received by Home Affairs at 1 July 2021

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

81. How many LEE visa applications had been received by the Department by 1 July 2021?

a. How many Home Affairs staff were working on LEE visa applications on 1 July?

Answer:

Between 1 January 2013 and 1 July 2021, 638 Afghan Locally Engaged Employees (LEE) had lodged an offshore Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) visa application (totaling 2,734 applicants).

On 1 July 2021, 120 applications remained onhand (totaling 460 applicants).

a. On 1 July 2021, Amman Post resources dedicated to Afghan LEE visa applications were one A-based Full Time Equivalent, two Expatriate Locally Engaged decision-makers and five Locally Engaged staff for administrative processing.

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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: 16

Subject: LEE Visa applications received by Home Affairs by fall of Kabul on 14 August 2021

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

82. How many LEE visa applications had Home Affairs received by the time that Kabul had fallen to the Taliban on 14 August 2021?

a. How many Home Affairs staff were working on LEE visa applications on 14 August 2021?

Answer:

Between 01 January 2013 and 14 August 2021, 605 Afghan Locally Engaged Employees had lodged an offshore Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) visa application (totaling 2,598 applicants).

a. On 14 August 2021, Amman Post resources dedicated to Afghan LEE visa applications were 1 A-based Full Time Equivalent, 2 Expat Locally Engaged decision-makers and 5 Locally Engaged for administrative processing.

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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: 17

Subject: Average processing time of a LEE visa

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

What is the average Home Affairs processing time for LEE visas?

Answer:

**Average Processing Time (weeks) for Afghan LEE granted Class XB (offshore)
Humanitarian visas, 2013–14 to 2021–22 (to 15 October 2021)**

Program Year	Average Processing Time (weeks)
2013–14	15.1
2014–15	10.8
2015–16	31.2
2016–17	16.9
2017–18	16.8
2018–19	16.9
2019–20	21.8
2020–21	51.7
2021–22 to date	35.8
Total	25.1

Measurement of claims processing commences at lodgement of claim, however most claims are not complete and rely on the receipt of identity and other documents.

Notes:

1. This information is provided by the Department of Home Affairs and was extracted from departmental systems on 18 October 2021. As data has been drawn from a dynamic system environment, the information is correct at the time of publication and figures may differ slightly from previous or future reporting.

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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: 18

Subject: Average first response for LEE applications in Home Affairs

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

What was the average first response / acknowledgement of receipt of email for LEE applications in Home Affairs?

Answer:

The Afghan LEE mailbox at Amman Post was monitored closely in the lead up to and throughout the Afghan crisis.

An auto response was tailored and regularly updated to reflect changing circumstances during the evacuation period. The email response provided information and guidance on how certified LEE could apply for a visa. Responses to inquiries were then triaged, with urgent emails the highest priority.

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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: 19

Subject: Additional Resources

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

What resources – either in Afghanistan or Australia - were added to the Home Affairs LEE team as the Taliban started capturing more of Afghanistan?

Answer:

Home Affairs did not have staff in Afghanistan. Visa processing for the Afghan LEE visa policy is located in Amman.

Prior to 15 April 2021, Amman Post resources dedicated to processing Afghan LEE visa applications was 0.3 A-based full time equivalent (FTE) plus one FTE locally engaged staff member.

From mid-April to 20 August 2021, Amman resources processing LEE visa applications were increased to one A-based FTE plus two locally engaged delegates and five locally engaged staff members – an increase of 6.7 FTE.

In addition, Canberra program management resources dedicated to Afghan LEE visa applications increased from 0.3 FTE prior to 15 April 2021, to 1.5 FTE from 15 April to 20 August 2021.

In total, resources for processing LEE visa applications increased from 1.6 FTE to 9.5 FTE for the above period.

Note, this does not include subclass 449 visa processing resources.

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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: 20

Subject: LEE applicants not yet certified

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

What happens for LEE applicants not yet certified by defence/DFAT, and without a 449?

- a. Are LEE applicants now required to apply by post if they live in Afghanistan and do not have an Australian proposer?
- b. Why are Afghanistan-based applicants without a proposed required to use mail and not have an electronic application option available to them?

Answer:

- a. Questions related to certification of LEEs is a matter for the Department of Defence (Defence) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Once a person is certified as a LEE, they are provided with information about how to make a visa application. These processes have not changed.

- b. Approved visa application lodgement methods are defined in migration legislation. These methods reflect that Australia's offshore Humanitarian Program is designed primarily to assist people who have left their home country because of persecution or severe human rights abuses, and who have no options for return or for resettlement in another country.

Further, while most Humanitarian visa applicants have suffered some form of discrimination or persecution, the limited number of visas available and the high demand for these places means that priority is given to those applicants proposed by a close family member in Australia and people outside their home country, assessed as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and formally referred to Australia for resettlement.

The Government is working to ensure that visa options continue to be available to Afghan nationals, both within Afghanistan and those who have been displaced from their home country, through Australia's long-standing Humanitarian and Migration Programs. Consideration of any amendments which may need to be made to lodgement mechanisms will be taken into account as part of that process. DFAT, Defence and the Department, continue to assist those Afghani visa holders who have moved across the border post the evacuation effort.

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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: 21

Subject: Applications on-hand where applicant is a citizen of Afghanistan

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

To Home Affairs - You have outlined in your submission the number of visa grants that have occurred to 31 September. Prior to the fall of Kabul, how many visa applications did the Department of Home Affairs have on-hand, where the applicant is a citizen of Afghanistan?

a. Can you outline the wait time for each of those subclasses as well? And how many applications for Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) visas were on hand where the applicant is a citizen of Afghanistan? In-country and out of country please. As per page 15 & 16 of the Home Affairs submission to this Inquiry please.

Answer:

Non-Humanitarian - Afghans applications onhand as at 13 August 2021 where the client location is outside Australia by onhand age

	0-3m	>3-6m	>6-9m	>9-12m	>12-15m	>15-18m	>18m	Total
Child	<5	9	7	11	8	5	96	139
Crew and Transit	0	<5	<5	0	0	0	0	2
Family	2,007	427	381	401	430	416	12,793	16,855
Other Temporary	<5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Resident Return/ADV	<5	0	<5	0	0	0	0	3
Skilled	16	0	0	0	5	24	49	94
Student	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	0	<5	12
Temporary Resident (Other Employment)	<5	8	6	10	7	5	51	89
Temporary Resident (Skilled Employment)	<5	0	0	5	0	<5	0	8
Visitor	110	100	20	32	<5	<5	25	295
Working Holiday Maker	0	0	0	0	0	0	<5	2
Total	2,144	548	417	461	455	456	13,019	17,500

Source: Department of Home Affairs, 2021 (DD-17635.01)

Note 1: Includes primary and secondary applicants.

Offshore Humanitarian – Afghans applications onhand as at 13 August 2021 where the client location is outside Australia by onhand age

Subclass	0-3m	>3-6m	>6-9m	>9-12m	>12-15m	>15-18m	>18m	Total
200	106	46	24	9	7	42	101	335
201	29	<5	<5	<5	11	<5	10	63
202	159	86	91	72	85	102	371	966
203	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
204	10	<5	<5	0	0	<5	14	31

Onshore Humanitarian* – Afghans applications onhand as at 13 August 2021 by onhand age

	0-3m	>3-6m	>6-9m	>9-12m	>12-15m	>15-18m	>18m	Total
Permanent Protection	17	8	6	15	25	11	52	134
Temporary**	0	242	79	31	43	74	1,307	1,776

*Applicants are onshore at time of lodgement.

** Includes TPV and SHEV, and includes valid subsequent applications granted.

Humanitarian Notes:

1. This information is provided by the Department of Home Affairs and was extracted from departmental systems on 16 August 2021. As data has been drawn from a dynamic system environment, the information is correct at the time of publication and figures may differ slightly from previous or future reporting.

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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: 22

Subject: Staff processing Afghani applications prior to fall of Kabul

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many Home Affairs staff were assigned to processing Afghan visa applications prior to the fall of Kabul?

Answer:

The Department operates a global visa delivery model, with visa processing offices at a range of locations in Australia and overseas. Resources are allocated flexibly to manage demand and on-hand levels for all visa types processed across our service delivery network. Staff may work across multiple visa programs based on operational requirements.

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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: 23

Subject: Staff processing Afghan visas during evacuation.

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many Home Affairs staff were assigned to processing Afghan visa during the evacuation operation?

Answer:

Between 19 August 2021 and 10 September 2021, the Department's efforts during the evacuation period included multiple onshore and offshore work sites. Work was distributed using our global network 24/7 and for Subclass 449 visa processing, 30 full time equivalent staff undertook processing with an additional (approx.) 1000 overtime hours. There were also 12 staff located in Canberra who worked around the clock in the migration stream. These staff were supported by a team of Executive level and Senior Executive Officers. There were also staff on the ground in Kabul and the UAE.

In Canberra, various areas of the Department undertook activity supporting the evacuation in various areas of intelligence, biometrics, corporate, health, legal, ICT, international, social cohesion, Australian Border Force and executive and senior executive support.

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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: 24

Subject: Staff currently processing Afghan visas

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many Home Affairs staff are currently assigned to processing Afghan visa applications?

Answer:

The Department has established the Middle East Onshore Complex Team (MEOCT) in Australia to focus on the processing of partner/family visa applications from the Middle East region, including Afghan applicants. There are currently 19 staff in the team, but this does not represent the entirety of staff processing Afghan visa applications, as the Department operates a global visa delivery model, with visa processing offices at a range of locations in Australia and overseas.

Resources are allocated flexibly to manage demand and on-hand levels for all visa types processed across our service delivery network. Staff may work across multiple visa programs based on operational requirements. Departmental systems do not allow us to identify staffing levels assigned to processing a particular type of visa application from a particular nationality at a particular point in time.

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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: 25

Subject: Average wait times

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

Prior to the fall of Kabul, what were the average wait times for visa applications across the subclasses outlined above?

a. In particular, Refugee and Humanitarian visas and Partner visas?

Answer:

As at July 2021, the average processing time from lodgement to visa grant for Class XB visas for Afghan applicants was 63.5 weeks.

Each month, the Department publishes visa processing times at the 75th and 90th percentile points on its website. These are available at www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/visa-statistics/live

These provide an indicative estimate of how long it takes to process a particular visa application globally. The processing time spans from the date a valid application is lodged, to the date it is finalised. Processing times are based on finalisations of primary visa applications for the month and exclude withdrawn visa applications, and secondary visa applicants. The percentiles indicate that 75 per cent of applications, and 90 per cent of applications, are processed within a certain number of days/months. Processing times for some visas are not available where the number of visa decisions is too few in the reporting period to provide a reliable indicator of time taken to finalise visa applications.

For Afghan citizens located outside Australia, the volume of visas processed in most non-humanitarian visa categories is below the minimum number of visa decisions required to provide a reliable indicator of time taken to finalise visa applications. Given this, processing times are not available for any non-humanitarian visa programs identified, with the exception of the Partner program.

During August and September 2021, Partner (1st Stage) 75th and 90th percentile processing times have significantly reduced when compared to the same period in 2020 – see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Partner (1st Stage) visa processing time for Afghans located outside Australia

Processing Times Percentiles	August and September 2020	August and September 2021	Variation
75th Percentile	36 Months	31 Months	▼ 5 months
90th Percentile	60 Months	33 Months	▼ 27 months

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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: 26

Subject: Current wait times

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

What are wait times now for those visa classes?

a. In particular, Refugee and Humanitarian visas and Partner visas?

Answer:

For the offshore Humanitarian program, the calculation of visa processing times requires a minimum of 30 primary visa applications to be granted or refused within the reporting period. Small numbers of Afghan Humanitarian visas have been granted since 15 August 2021, therefore statistics on processing times are not available.

For Afghan citizens located outside Australia, the volume of visas processed in most non-humanitarian visa categories is below the minimum number of visa decisions required to provide a reliable indicator of time taken to finalise visa applications. Given this, processing times are not available, with the exception of the Partner program.

In September 2021, 75 per cent of Partner (1st Stage) visa applications were processed in 32 months, and 90 per cent of applications were processed in 33 months.

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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: 27

Subject: Humanitarian places assigned to Afghan nationals following evacuation

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

Can Home Affairs confirm how many humanitarian places have been assigned to Afghans nationals following the evacuation?

Answer:

On 18 August 2021, the Australian Government announced that an initial 3,000 humanitarian places have been allocated to Afghan nationals within Australia's 13,750 annual program. This is a floor, not a ceiling. The Government anticipates this initial allocation will increase further over the course of 2021-22.

Refer also QoN 28.

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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: 28

Subject: 3,000 humanitarian places for Afghan nationals

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

Minister Hawke stated on 18 August: "The Australian Government today announced that an initial 3,000 humanitarian places will be allocated to Afghan nationals within Australia's 13,750 annual program." Who exactly is included in this commitment?

- a. LEEs? 449s? Can you provide some specific detail?
- b. Is there an upper limit to the number that will be provided?
- c. How many places will be provided this financial year? And next financial year?
- d. Is there an allocation per subclass?

Answer:

The announced 3,000 humanitarian places for Afghan nationals relates to the 2021-22 program of 13,750 places. The Government has said that this is a floor, not a ceiling, and it is anticipated that this initial allocation will increase further over the course of 2021-22.

Within the initial allocation of 3,000 humanitarian places, particular priority will be given to LEE, persecuted minorities, women, children and those with close links to Australia.

Further detail regarding the composition of and priorities within the allocated places is under consideration by Government and will be announced in due course.

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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: 29

Subject: 6,294 invited to apply for 449

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

In the Home Affairs submission to this Inquiry (on page 14) you state that 6,294 were invited to apply for a 449 visa. How were they invited to apply?

- a. How did you communicate that with these individuals?
- b. On what date did you offer the invitation for these visas?
- c. And what were they informed regarding evacuation and travel when you invited them to apply for these visas?

Answer:

- a. Contact details were provided to the Department of Home Affairs and the Department emailed individuals considered for Humanitarian Stay (Temporary) subclass 449 visa grant.
- b. Between 19 August 2021 and 1 October 2021, 6,294 persons were invited to apply for subclass 449 visas.
- c. Information provided included:
 - visa grant notification to facilitate urgent travel to Australia;
 - the names of the persons granted visas;
 - current DFAT information on the Australian evacuation flight offer should the visa holders decide to travel to Hamid Karzai International Airport;
 - visa expiry date and bar on applying for any other visa without the permission of the Minister for Home Affairs;
 - conditions attached to the subclass 449 visa; and
 - contact details for the Department.

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

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

11 October 2021

QoN Number: 31

Subject: Contact for visa applicants

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

A large number of applicants have not been contacted since lodgement and approval of their application. When will you be contacting visa holders to explain options for their visas?

Answer:

The Department is currently receiving large numbers of applications for Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) visas, which means it is taking longer than normal to respond. We know this is a distressing time for many people, including our Australian Afghan community, and request patience with the application process.

Applications are generally acknowledged in writing and processed as quickly as possible according to their date of receipt.

All visa applications will be processed in accordance with Government announcements and within program priorities, and assessed on an individual basis. Processing times can vary according to the particular circumstances of the applicant, their location (be it inside or outside their home country), and their ability to travel, provide documents or access to Australian government officials. All visa applicants in the Humanitarian Program must meet the visa criteria and satisfy public interest criteria for character, security and health.

The Department of Home Affairs is contacting those who hold an Australian visa that was granted to facilitate their evacuation, but remain in Afghanistan or have travelled to another country. Those granted subclass 449 visas have three months from date of grant to enter Australia. The Government will assist their travel where they are in a location able to travel to Australia. People in this situation are asked to contact their nearest Australian mission to make these arrangements. All subclass 449 visa holders will need to have their biometrics collected before travelling to Australia. Fulfilment of this requirement will be a consideration in any Travel Exemption Request (TER) to travel to 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: 32

Subject: Resources to speed up processing

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

Can you clarify what new resources (budget and people) will be provided to Home Affairs to speed up processing?

a. If you have moved people internally, where have those staff come from within the Department?

Answer:

Resources are allocated flexibly to manage demand and on-hand levels for all visa types processed across our service delivery network. Staff may work across multiple visa programs based on operational requirements.

The Department has established a team to focus on the processing of partner/family visa applications from the Middle East region, including Afghan applicants. There are 19 staff in the team, but this does not represent the entirety of staff processing Afghan visa applications, as the Department operates a global visa delivery model, with visa processing offices at a range of locations in Australia and overseas.

This team has been established from the Department's existing internal workforce, drawing from the Family Visa Branch and includes officers with specialisation in family visa processing.

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

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

11 October 2021

QoN Number: 33

Subject: Will permanent visas be processed by expiry in less than 3 months?

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

Given the short-term nature of these visas, will all permanent visas be approved by the time the visa expires in less than three months?

- a. Or will visa holders have to re-apply for another three-month visa on an ongoing basis until you approve a permanent visa?
- b. Can you give any assurances to visa holders that they will not face ongoing uncertainty and you have sufficient staff and resources to process these visas?

Answer:

Subclass 449 visa holders are barred from applying for another visa (other than a further Subclass 449 visa) unless the Minister lifts the bar preventing them from applying for a further visa (under s91K of the *Migration Act 1958*).

The Government is working out clear pathways to permanent residence for those evacuated from Afghanistan and located in Australia on temporary subclass 449 visas – either continuing on their existing visa pathways, or through the Humanitarian Program. Individuals will be contacted directly by the Department of Home Affairs (the Department) with information about how to apply for an appropriate visa.

The Department will continue to process any existing permanent visa applications lodged by those granted a subclass 449 visa, such as Family visa applications.

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

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

11 October 2021

QoN Number: 34

Subject: Confirm 449 Visa holders have access to welfare benefits

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

Can you confirm that all 449 visa holders have access to Medicare, Centrelink benefits and other welfare support?

Answer:

All Afghan evacuees granted a subclass 449 visa have access to Medicare, Centrelink benefits, and other welfare support, subject to satisfying the relevant non-visa related eligibility criteria.

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

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

11 October 2021

QoN Number: 35

Subject: Partner visa holders still in Afghanistan

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many partner visa holders remain in Afghanistan?

Answer:

As at 11 October 2021, there were 394 Afghan Partner visa (subclasses 300/309/100/820/801) holders outside Australia.

Afghan Partner visa holders outside Australia may be in or outside Afghanistan. The Department does not track the movements of visa holders outside Australia.

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

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

11 October 2021

QoN Number: 38

Subject: Australian visa applicants still in Afghanistan

Asked by: Penny Wong

Question:

How many Australian visa applicants remain in Afghanistan?

Answer:

The Department is unable to confirm or determine the location of visa applicants who are outside of Australia.

When applying for visas, applicants are required to provide this information and are required to keep the Department apprised of their contact details. However people may have elected to leave their original location and may not have updated the Department.