

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING : 08 February 2016

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(AE16/013) - Application status - Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme - Programme 2.4: Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance

Senator Carr, Kim (L&CA 35) asked:

Senator KIM CARR: How many applications have been rejected?

Mr Vardos: Off the top of my head I could not tell you how many have been rejected,

Senator KIM CARR: So it is predominantly on security grounds that these applications are not being processed?

Mr Vardos: No, I cannot confirm that. It could be a whole range of reasons. It could be health reasons. It could be character reasons.

Senator KIM CARR: On what categorisation have you not proceeded with their applications?

Mr Vardos: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: I would like to know whether it is health reasons, security reasons or character reasons—in other words, they are criminals, I presume.

Mr Pezzullo: To foreshadow an element of the response we will give on notice, with the change of our departmental arrangements, and particularly with the establishment of an enhanced intelligence function, including more officers cleared to see more highly sensitive material, and able to share that, including with international partners, we have put in place in terms of our nation's history probably the most rigorous security screening process since we established the department in 1945. That includes biometric checking and identity checking, including through classified data sources that I am not in a position to go into any detail about, with foreign governments. As a result of that heightened and more intensive scrutiny, the processes that have to be established to undertake that, particularly with foreign governments, were put in place late last year by Mr Vardos and his colleagues. That might have caused a lag of some period of time. But as those clearances come through we will be able to grant more visas. The bottom line is that we make no apology for undertaking even closer scrutiny of folks coming from one of the most violent conflicts on the face of the earth. So we will give you a breakdown. We will give it to you in aggregate terms so as not to identify individuals, and we will do it on notice.

Answer:

As at 23 February 2016, a total of 1,352 Syrian and Iraqi refugee and humanitarian programme applications have been refused since the beginning of the 2015–16 programme year. This includes applications under the Syrian and Iraqi components of the 2015–16 Humanitarian Programme and the 12,000 additional humanitarian places. An application may consist of more than one person (for example a family unit).

Systems reports show the reason code for refusal in the vast majority of cases as MR (Many Reasons). Reasons for refusal can include failure to meet health, character, security and/or identity requirements, and/or failure to meet the 'compelling reasons' criteria of the Migration Regulations. The 'compelling reasons' address such things as:

- the degree of persecution to which the applicant is subject in the applicant's home country
- the extent of the applicant's connection with Australia
- whether or not there is any suitable country available, other than Australia, that can provide for the applicant's settlement and protection from persecution
- the capacity of the Australian community to provide for the permanent settlement of persons such as the applicant in Australia.

Disaggregation beyond the reason code would require analysis on a case by case basis.