

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Program: Australian Human Rights Commission

Question No. BE16/001

Senator Macdonald asked the following question at the hearing on 5 May 2016:

CHAIR: This may have to be taken on notice. Professor, of the work the commission does, do you have a top-of-the-head percentage on how much is related to refugees or immigration matters? Is that something that you would have statistics on? If not, could you give us a gut-feeling sort of thing?

Prof. Triggs: I can give you a precise answer: there is one person in the commission who is responsible for that work, and it is work that I have typically led. So it essentially me and one person. I would say that at least a third of the commission is devoted to managing the inquiries and complaints that we receive in the Investigation and Conciliation Service, and we have a legal team and others to support that. So that is the bulk of the work of the commission, along with the work of the individual commissioners and staff to support their work. But in terms of asylum seekers it is one.

CHAIR: But, of the interaction you have with the public and the complaints that you get through the front door, is that again sort of one in six—one commissioner out of the six? So does that mean about a sixth of the complaints, or does it not work that way?

Prof. Triggs: Do you mean how many complaints apply to asylum seeker issues?

CHAIR: Yes—or to refugee or immigration issues generally.

Prof. Triggs: I can give you a figure. I may have to take that on notice, but basically two-thirds of our complaints concern antidiscrimination matters, largely in employment and delivery of goods and services. I would say that probably something like five, eight per cent of our complaints relate to immigration detention, and those numbers of complaints are declining because fewer people are now held in immigration detention.

CHAIR: That is fine. Thank you for that.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

In the 2015-16 reporting year, the Australian Human Rights Commission received 160 complaints about immigration and refugee issues.

Complaints about immigration and refugee issues constituted 88% of complaints about a breach of human rights under the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act, 1986* (Cth) and 8% of the total 2,013 complaints received by the Commission in 2015-16.