

## QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

### ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES - 25 FEBRUARY 2014

#### IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

#### (AE14/282) PROGRAMME 2.1 Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance –

Senator Carr (Written) asked:

Afghan Interpreters:

- a) When was this policy put forward?
- b) Has it been implemented?
- c) How many visas will be available?
- d) Will these places form part of the 13 750 humanitarian intakes or will they be separate?
- e) Does that figure include the families of the interpreters? If so, which family members? If not, why?
- f) Will they be entitled to apply for family reunion visas?
- g) Are they going to be subject to directive 62 and queuing?
- h) What will the process entail and how long will it take?
- i) How will the process compare to similar processes in NZ, UK and USA? (UK and USA have been exposed as making it impossibly hard to apply for these visas)
- j) Are these applications underway?
- k) Are these individuals invited to apply?
- l) If so, how is that occurring?
- m) If not, are they aware of the program?
- n) What support is the Department providing to the applicants?

*Answer:*

- a) The visa policy was announced on 13 December 2012 and came into legislative effect on 1 January 2013.
- b) Yes. Substantial progress has been made implementing Australia's visa policy for at-risk locally engaged Afghan employees (LEE). Since November 2013 a significant number of Afghan LEE and their families have been resettled under the policy. More than half of those likely to be eligible have been granted visas.
- c) Up to 800 visa places have been allocated for Afghan LEE and their families in 2013-14.
- d) Visa places will be counted within the 13 750 places allocated to the Humanitarian Programme.
- e) Visa places for Afghan LEE include their dependent family members (as defined in migration legislation and policy).

- f) Once in Australia, permanent humanitarian visa holders are eligible to propose family members under the Special Humanitarian Programme and may also be able to use other migration or temporary visa options.
- g) Direction 62 sets processing priorities for applications made under the Family Stream of the Migration Programme. Direction 62 does not apply to the Special Humanitarian Programme.
- h) Applications made under this policy are assessed in two stages. First, Afghan LEE must obtain formal certification by the Minister of their employing agency that they are at significant risk of individual harm as a result of their support to Australia's whole of Government mission in Afghanistan. If assessed as eligible, they can lodge an application for a Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) visa with the Department in Islamabad. Further information can be found on the Department's website (<http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/whats-new.htm>).

Visa applications by eligible Afghan LEE are given the highest visa processing priority. Subject to health, character and security assessments, most straight forward applications can be finalised within 3-4 months.

- i) The visa policy is broadly consistent with schemes offered by other International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners in Afghanistan. However, as indicated in the response to question (j) below, we have already seen the fast and positive resolution of the cases of the majority of applicants.
- j) Yes. Substantial progress has been made and a significant number of Afghan LEE and their families have already been resettled.
- k) Yes – see below (l).
- l) The programme was publicly announced on 13 December. Within Afghanistan, potential applicants were advised through a range of mechanisms, including information sessions held in January 2013 in Afghanistan with Afghan LEE.
- m) Not applicable - see above (l).
- n) Afghan LEE are eligible for the same settlement services provided by the Department of Social Services as any other humanitarian entrants. Following an assessment of their needs, this may include assistance finding accommodation, a package of basic household goods, translating and interpreting support and help to access government, community and health services.