

Population and Immigration: Fact Sheet 3

Asylum seekers: onshore

November 2020

The Humanitarian Program comprises offshore and onshore components. The offshore component selects refugees overseas, with available places dependent on the number of asylum seekers granted refugee status in Australia (onshore). An increase in protection visas onshore results in a corresponding decrease offshore. (See *Fact Sheet 4* for the offshore program.)

Asylum seekers arrive onshore by sea or by air. Those who in past years **arrived by sea were classified as 'Irregular Maritime Arrivals' (IMA)**. Those who **arrive by air are classified as 'non-Irregular Maritime Arrivals' (non-IMA)**. Most who arrive by air enter Australia as visitors or students.

The number of onshore asylum applications lodged by those arriving by air averaged 5,021 per annum from 2003-04 to 2012-13, and averaged 17,838 per annum from 2013-14 to 2019-20. In past years there was considerable variation in the number arriving by sea; an average of 1,312 from 2002-11, with no arrivals in some years. **In 2011-12, 7,983 asylum seekers arrived by boat, in 2012-13, 24,173.**

Earlier this year Australia closed its borders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has inevitably reduced onshore asylum applications. The magnitude of this impact will depend on the severity and duration of the pandemic, and the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus.

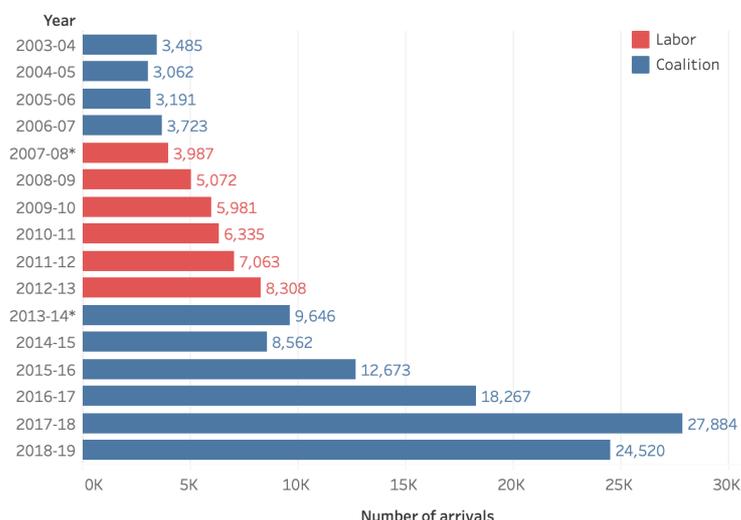
Most onshore asylum seekers came from the Asian region. Of asylum applications lodged by sea arrivals in 2012-13, 27% (4,949) were from Sri Lanka, 24% (4,382) from Iran, and 20% (3,572) from Afghanistan. Of asylum applications lodged by air arrivals in 2019-20, 26% (6,046) were from Malaysia, 14% (3,321) from China and 12% (2,866) from India, reflecting the large number of Malaysian, Chinese and Indian international students who had entered Australia on valid visas.

More men than women sought asylum within Australia. In 2012-13, of arrivals by sea, 85% were male, 15% female; of arrivals by air, 61% were male, 39% female, largely in the age group 18-30. Fewer statistics on air arrivals are available for recent years. In July 2020, of arrivals by air, about 65% were male, 35% female, largely in the age group 25-34.

In July 2013, Prime Minister Rudd announced that asylum seekers **arriving by boat would no longer have the opportunity for resettlement in Australia**, with their asylum claims processed in Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

The Liberal-National Coalition government, elected in September 2013, established **Operation Sovereign Borders, a military-led border security initiative to stop boat arrivals**. While details are incomplete, it is known that between 2013 and 2020, 38 boats carrying a total of 873 people were turned back and prevented from reaching Australian territory.

Number of people seeking asylum after arriving by plane 2003-04 to 2018-19



Source: Department of Home Affairs. Credit: RMIT ABC Fact Check. *Crossover year apportioned to party that governed for majority of year.