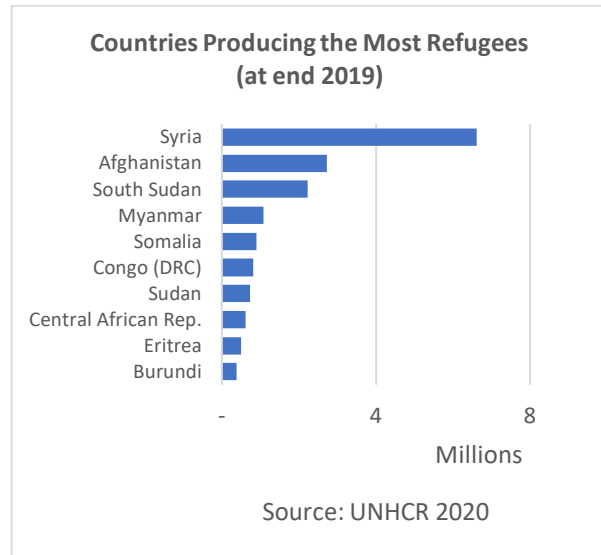
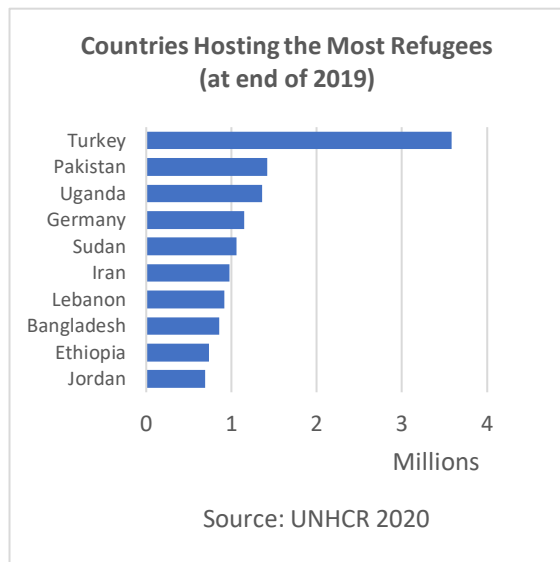


Australia is one of the most peaceful nations on earth.ⁱ Yet many of our fellow human beings live in countries where safety and security are deteriorating. Large numbers of them are forced to flee their country in order to find safety. At the end of 2019, 34 million people were refugees, asylum seekers or in a refugee-like situation, triple the number a decade earlier.ⁱⁱ



TEXT BOX

A **refugee** is a person living outside their country who is unable to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group, or political opinion.

An **asylum seeker** is a person who has applied or intends to apply for protection as a refugee but has not yet had their claim to refugee status assessed by authorities.

Refugees are not dispersed equally across the world, but given the vast majority seek safety in a neighbouring country, are concentrated around nations marked by high levels of violence. Consequently a handful of mainly developing countries house the bulk of the global refugee population.

The circumstances in which refugees live are commonly precarious. Most have faced severe trauma but have left behind familiar places, wealth, social institutions, relational networks and other resources on which people usually draw in times of crisis. In almost every host country places refugees experience restrictions on their freedom of movement and access to school, work, healthcare and social protections. Where the conflict in their home country is prolonged and in the absence of opportunities to become permanent residents of their host country or to resettle in a third country, refugees can live for decades in marginality and danger.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the difficulties refugees face. They have been disproportionately impacted by job loss, reduced working hours and reduced income.

Refugee women, already living within households and communities experiencing high levels of trauma and absent established societal mechanisms for preventing violence, were more likely to suffer increased levels of domestic violence. Children make up more than 50% of the global refugee population and more likely than other children to be impacted by the pandemic. As 94% of the world's students experienced school closures of up to 7 months in 2020, refugee children were among the most severely impacted given very low rates of access to online and other remote forms of learning. Likewise, refugee girls were left more exposed to violence, sexual abuse and child marriage as a result of the pandemic.

What should Australia do?

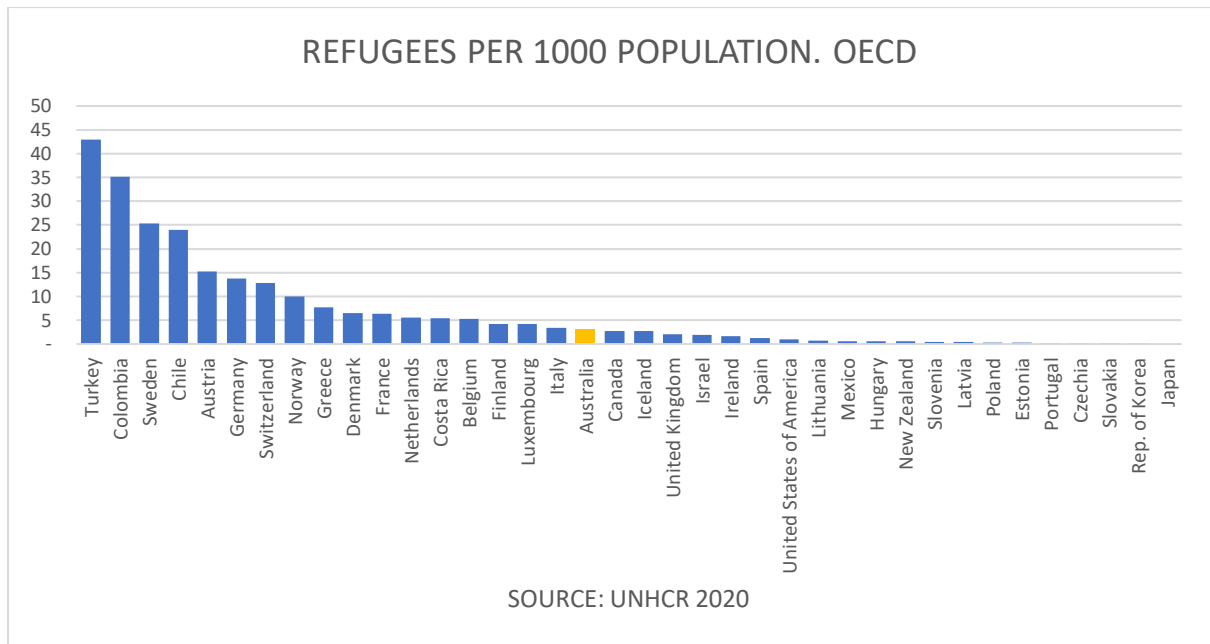
As an island state somewhat distant from the world's refugee hotspots, Australia has never experienced large, unplanned refugee flows of the scale of those countries sharing a border with countries that have produced large refugee flows. Our role in the international protection system has been to:

- Provide asylum to refugees who arrive at our borders seeking it;
- Resettle refugees from other host nations;
- Provide financial and technical support to host nations in the developing world;
- Promote peace and prosperity in our region and the world

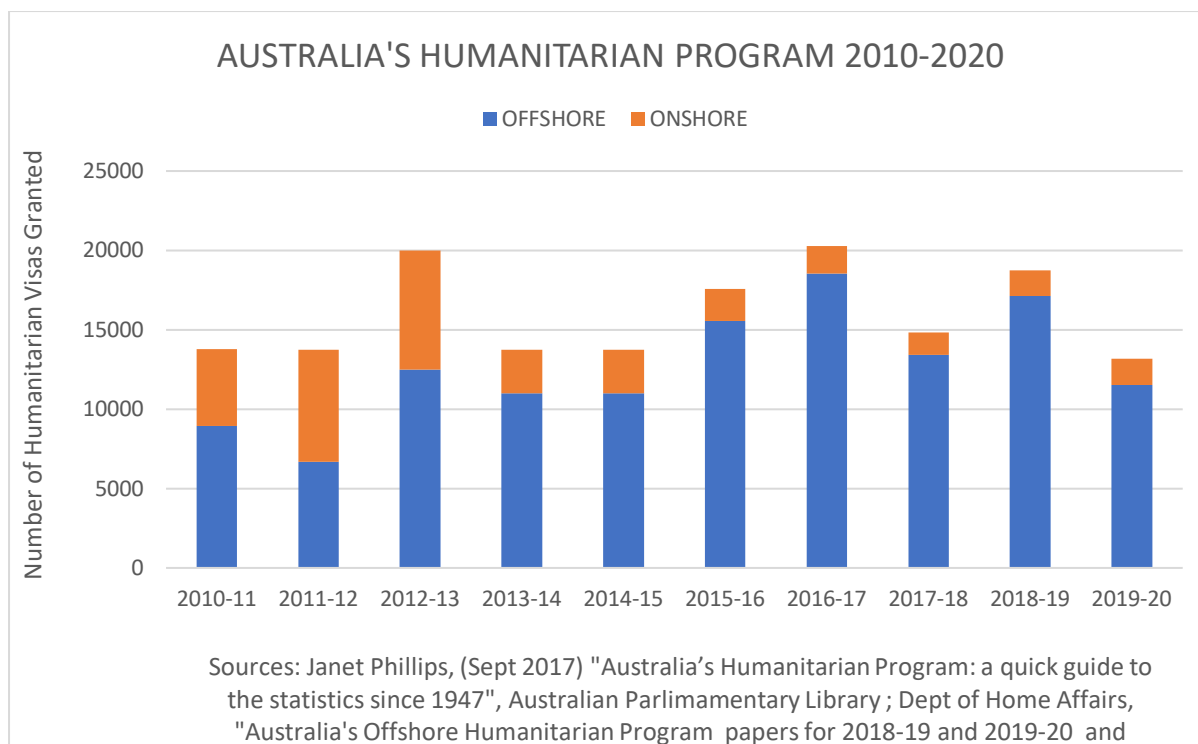
Australia's isolation has made it possible to maintain one of the world's few refugee resettlement programs. This is not required under the terms of the Refugee Convention, but is consistent with the role nations such as ours can play in the international protection system as identified in the Global Compact for Refugees.

The provision of asylum to refugees arriving in Australia by boat has been the most contested area of refugee policy since such boats started arriving in the 1970s. Successive Governments imposed measures designed to deter boat arrivals and to satisfy public anxieties. Today these measures include the use of naval force to turn asylum boats away from Australian waters and a refusal to allow refugees who arrive by boat to ever be settled in Australia. Australia also hosts a significant number of refugees who arrived by boat prior to the turnback/no settlement policies and were granted only temporary protection visas.

Each year the Australian Government determines the number of refugees (or people in a refugee like situation) it will provide with permanent protection visas. Our capacity to welcome refugees is substantial. The UNHCR offers two indicators of country capacity – ratio of refugees to GDP and to population. With 0.1 refugees per \$1000 GDP Australia ranks 98th in the world and 3.1 refugees per 1000 members of population Australia ranks 57th. Compared to other OECD nations Australia is one of many who have substantial capacity.



In 2019-20 the Government had planned to offer visas to 18,750 people, with a minimum of 17,100 places to those living “offshore”, that is, refugee living in another host country and have applied for protection in Australia. Measures to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus saw the offshore program suspended in March 2020. As a result, only 13,171 visas were granted in 2019-20, 11,521 to those in the offshore component and 1,650 to those in the onshore component (ie people who applied for protection after arriving in Australia).ⁱⁱⁱ The 2020-21 Commonwealth budget indicates that the Australian Government will maintain a reduced cap of 13,750 for 2021-2025.



1. **Increase the number of visas back to the 18,750 level as soon as COVID-19 quarantine and travel restrictions allow, and in the longer term establish a timetabled plan to raise the number to at least 30,000.**
2. **Conduct fair and timely assessment of all claims for refugee status.** [addcriteria for fair and timely]
3. **Support people seeking asylum to live in the community with adequate income and access to health care during assessment of their claims** (if they are unable to find work to support themselves.) Aside from being far more humane, this costs far less than the current system. [criteria]
4. **Introduce a community sponsorship program** that is accessible by community groups, affordable and in which the number of refugees entering through the community program are additional to the number entering through other programs. [criteria]

ⁱ The 2020 Global Peace Index, which ranks countries from most to least peaceful measured across three domains – societal safety and security; domestic and international conflict; and militarisation – ranks Australia as the 13th most peaceful nation. Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*, Sydney, June 2020.

ⁱⁱ UNHCR (June 2020), Global Trends, Statistical Annex, Table 20

ⁱⁱⁱ Public Information and Reporting Section of the Department of Home Affairs (Septemebr 2020), Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program: 2019–20 p1