

Net Overseas Migration in Australia in 2026-2027 and Annual Refugee Intake

According to the Federal Budget and official figures from the [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(ABS\)](#), the federal government's official **NOM forecast is 295,000 for the 2025–26 financial year and 245,000 for the 2026–27 financial year.**

Australia's **annual refugee and humanitarian visa intake ceiling** is currently capped at exactly **20,000 places.**

Australian Immigration Target Breakdown (2026)

- **Net Overseas Migration (NOM):** Forecasted at **295,000** (2025–26) and dropping to **245,000** (2026–27). This measures the net gain or loss of population through immigration and emigration.
- **Permanent Migration Program:** Fixed at a cap of **185,000 places.** This dictates how many permanent visas (skilled and family streams) are granted each year.
- **Humanitarian Program:** Capped at **20,000 places** per year.

Are you looking for information on a **specific visa category** (such as student or skilled worker caps), or would you like to see how **political party policies** compare on shifting these numbers?

What is timeline of Refugee changes

Australia's annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program intake has undergone significant changes over the last two decades. The highest intake ever achieved was **24,166 places in 2016–17**, driven by a special one-off intake.

The timeline of how Australia's annual refugee cap has fluctuated, leading up to the intense political debate, shows a shifting policy landscape:

The Modern Refugee Intake Timeline

- **1995–2012 (The 13,750 Baseline):** For nearly two decades, the annual intake target remained relatively stable, fluctuating strictly between **12,000 and 13,750 places.**
- **2012–2013 (The First Jump to 20,000):** Following the recommendations of an Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, the Gillard Labor Government raised the annual cap to **20,000 places.**
- **2013–2014 (The Reduction):** Upon winning office, the Abbott Coalition Government immediately reduced the base program back down to **13,750 places.**
- **2015–2017 (The Historical Peak):** In response to the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts, the Abbott/Turnbull Government announced a **one-off special intake of 12,000 additional refugees.** Combined with the standard cap, this pushed actual visas granted in 2016–17 to an all-time record of **24,166.**
- **2018–2019 (Gradual Increase):** The baseline cap was scheduled to incrementally rise, peaking at **18,750 places.**

- **2020–2022 (The COVID-19 and Morrison Cuts):** In 2020, the Morrison Government officially **cut 5,000 places**, dropping the cap back to **13,750**. Due to pandemic border closures, the actual number of refugees admitted fell drastically below this cap (to under 6,000 in 2020–21).
- **2023–2025 (The Return to 20,000):** The Albanese Labor Government raised the permanent annual cap back up to **20,000 places**.
- **August 2026 (The Present Day Contradiction):** The intake became the center of a major political whirlwind. The Department of Home Affairs and Minister Tony Burke's office initially confirmed that the target would lapse back down to **13,750** to help lower overall migration figures. However, following immediate internal backlash, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese intervened to overrule the department, declaring that **the 20,000-place target remains official government policy** and will continue.

Summary Table of Annual Targets

Era / Financial Years	Official Annual Target (Places)	Key Driver / Context
1995 – 2012	12,000 – 13,750	Long-term historical baseline
2012 – 2013	20,000	Gillard Labor Expert Panel increase
2013 – 2015	13,750	Abbott Coalition reduction
2016 – 2017	24,166 (Actual)	Special one-off Syrian/Iraqi intake added
2018 – 2019	18,750	Planned step-up under Coalition
2020 – 2022	13,750	Morrison Government cuts & COVID-19 drop
2023 – Forward	20,000	Albanese Labor policy (maintained after 2026 dispute)

Would you like to know more details about how the **Syrian special intake** was processed, or how the current political parties propose to change the **broader Migration Program** targets?

After 1948 till 1995 are there any stats

Yes, comprehensive data exists for the era between 1948 and 1995. During this period, Australia transitioned from a post-WWII "populate or perish" mass resettlement strategy to a highly structured, modern **Humanitarian Program**.

Between 1948 and 1995, Australia accepted approximately **530,000 refugees and humanitarian entrants**.

Historical data compiled by the [Australian Parliamentary Library](#) and the [Refugee Council of Australia](#) breaks down the specific statistics and waves of this era:

The 1948–1995 Statistics and Waves

- **1948–1954 (The Post-WWII Displaced Persons Wave): ~170,000 arrivals**
 - **The Stats:** Under an agreement with the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), Australia took in roughly 170,000 to 182,000 European "Displaced Persons".
 - **Context:** This remains one of the largest concentrated refugee spikes in Australian history, consisting mostly of people from Baltic nations, Poland, and Ukraine fleeing Soviet occupation.
- **1956–1968 (The European Cold War Wave): ~35,000 arrivals**
 - **The Stats:** Australia accepted roughly **14,000 Hungarian refugees** in 1956–57 following the crushed Hungarian Revolution, and over **5,000 Czechoslovakian refugees** following the 1968 Prague Spring.
- **1975–1995 (The Indochinese & Regional Diversity Wave): ~140,000 arrivals**
 - **The Stats:** Following the end of the Vietnam War, Australia resettled **over 100,000 refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia** between 1975 and 1982.
 - **Context:** The arrival of the "boat people" in Northern Australia directly forced the Fraser Government to create Australia's first formal, planned **annual Humanitarian Program in 1977**.
- **Late 1980s – 1990s (The Tiananmen Square Resolution): ~42,000 arrivals**
 - **The Stats:** Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the Hawke Government granted permanent humanitarian protection visas to roughly **42,000 Chinese students** and nationals already residing in Australia.

Consolidated Intake Summary (1948 – 1995)

Before 1977, refugees arrived via general assisted migration pathways. In the financial year 1977–78, fixed annual targets were implemented.

Year / Period	Estimated Refugee & Humanitarian Arrivals	Primary Source Groups
1948 – 1954	170,000+	Poles, Baltic states, Ukrainians (Post-WWII Displaced)
1956 – 1957	14,000	Hungarians (Soviet invasion)
1968 – 1969	5,500	Czechoslovaks (Prague Spring)
1972 – 1974	~7,000	Ugandan Asians, Chileans, Cypriots
1975 – 1985	110,000+	Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians (Indochinese Crisis)
1989 – 1993	42,000	Chinese nationals (Tiananmen Square protection)

Year / Period	Estimated Refugee & Humanitarian Arrivals	Primary Source Groups
1992 – 1995	~13,000 annually	Former Yugoslavia (Balkan Wars), Middle East

Terrific stats. Thanks for that. Doesn't get published much. :-)

You are very welcome! It is true—the historical data from the mid-20th century is rarely highlighted in daily news cycles, yet it forms the entire backbone of Australia's multicultural landscape.

The post-WWII and Indochinese eras completely rewrote Australia's approach to population growth and international policy. It is a fascinating history to dig into.

If you ever want to explore other historical immigration trends, look into the specific breakdown of the **1977 Fraser Government reforms**, or need any more modern data, feel free to ask. Have a great day!

Before 1948 we didn't have an immigration minister, but refugees arrived. Was it more a case-by-case situation.

Yes, it was entirely handled on a case-by-case basis. Before the Department of Immigration was created in July 1945, Australia had no formal, legal concept of a "refugee."

People fleeing persecution were simply processed under general "alien" (non-British) immigration laws. The entire system was highly individualised, ad-hoc, and governed by strict, discriminatory criteria.

The pre-1948 system operated under specific conditions:

1. The Gatekeeper: The White Australia Policy

The ultimate test for any arriving migrant or refugee was the *Immigration (Restriction) Act 1901*. To be accepted, an individual case had to pass racial and language barriers.

- Customs and Department of Interior officials used the infamous **Dictation Test** (a 50-word test in *any* European language chosen by the officer) to dynamically fail and deport non-European applicants on a case-by-case basis.
- Early refugees, such as [Russians fleeing the 1917 Revolution](#) or Armenians fleeing Ottoman persecution, were only let in as "unassisted migrants" if they individually proved they met strict European heritage and financial criteria.

2. The Financial and Sponsorship Bars

Because there was no government resettlement funding, a refugee applicant needed a personal guarantor. To be approved case-by-case, a person had to:

- Show they had a substantial **cash landing bond** to prove they wouldn't rely on the state.

- Secure a **local sponsor** (often coordinated by community groups like the Australian Jewish Welfare Society established in 1937) who formally promised to house and employ them.

3. The Only Quota: The 1938 Evian Pivot

The closest Australia came to an organized refugee quota before 1945 happened just before WWII. At the 1938 Evian Conference in France, which addressed the crisis of Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, Australia made its first group-based commitment.

- The Australian delegate, Thomas W. White, famously stated that Australia "had no real racial problem and was not desirous of importing one."
- However, Australia agreed to take a quota of **15,000 Jewish refugees over three years** (5,000 per year).
- Even with this quota, every single applicant still had to be vetted individually. Only about 7,000 to 8,000 made it to Australia before the outbreak of war in 1939 halted the program entirely.

4. The 1945 Turning Point

The ad-hoc approach ended when Arthur Calwell became Australia's first Minister for Immigration in 1945. Facing a severe post-war labor shortage, he launched the **"Populate or Perish"** campaign.

By 1947, instead of looking at individual applications case-by-case, Australia signed its first mass-group international agreement with the International Refugee Organisation. This opened the floodgates to over 170,000 Displaced Persons from European camps, shifting Australia from a case-by-case gatekeeper to a mass-resettlement nation.

Were refugees who arrived without government aid, returned before 1945. In 1914 many Turks were apparently locked up. A different time. Are there many real stats.

Yes, the data is very real. Before 1945, there was a harsh, strict policy framework that meant thousands of unassisted, vulnerable refugees were legally rejected, returned, or, during wartime, locked up in camps as "enemy aliens".

Because Australia kept no official "refugee" stats prior to 1948, researchers have had to reconstruct these numbers from shipping logs, customs records, and police archives.

1. The Reality of Returns (Pre-1945)

Refugees arriving without government funding or pre-arranged local sponsors were legally classified as "prohibited immigrants" under the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*.

- **The Total Pool:** The [Australian Parliamentary Library](#) estimates that between Federation (1901) and 1947, only about **20,000 refugees successfully settled** in Australia.
- **Turned Away at the Ports:** Hundreds of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany in the late 1930s arrived on unassisted, independent tickets. If they could not produce a **£200 landing bond** (equivalent to years of wages at the time) or did not have a document signed by a local guarantor, they were physically kept on their ships and returned to Europe.

- **The Dictation Test Barrier:** Anyone deemed racially "undesirable" under the White Australia Policy was given a reading test in a language they didn't speak (specifically designed so they would fail) and immediately placed on the next outbound vessel.

2. The 1914 "Turks" Internment Statistics

Your memory is entirely correct. When World War I broke out in 1914, Australia passed the *War Precautions Act*, allowing the military to arrest and lock up civilians from enemy nations.

While Germany was the main focus, the **Ottoman Empire (Turkey)** was also an official enemy.

- **The Overall Stat:** Australia interned **6,890 civilian "enemy aliens"** during WWI.
- **The Ottoman/Turkish Numbers:** Records from the [National Archives of Australia](#) show that **several hundred Ottoman subjects** were rounded up. However, "Turk" was used loosely by wartime police. The group actually included:
 - Ethnic Turks.
 - Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian migrants (whose homelands were under Ottoman rule at the time).
 - Minorities fleeing Ottoman persecution who, ironically, were locked up by Australia as "enemy allies" of the regime they were escaping.
- **Where They Were Sent:** The majority of the Turkish and Syrian prisoners were stripped of their property and sent to the **Holsworthy (Liverpool) Concentration Camp** in New South Wales, the largest internment site in the country.
- **The Aftermath:** When the war ended, the government systematically deported most of them. Over **6,100 of the WWI internees were forcibly repatriated** to Europe and the Middle East, destroying decades of local community roots.

It was indeed a vastly different, deeply bureaucratic, and heavily militarised time for anyone seeking safety or trying to live quietly as a migrant.

Passports, id papers were only slowly being issued. While unwelcome, many doubtless sneaked in. If they could speak English, it would have helped.

You are completely right. The early 20th century was a chaotic "wild west" for identity documents. Passports as we know them today—with photos, security seals, and standardized international rules—were only just starting to exist, largely catalysed by World War I.

Before that, people moved using simple letters of introduction, certificates of nationality, or often no papers at all. If someone wanted to "disappear" or slip into Australia undetected, it was entirely possible, and speaking fluent English was the ultimate camouflage.

Historical records show how people managed to sneak in and the distinct role English played in their survival:

1. The Power of English: Bypassing the Gateway

The primary weapon of the White Australia Policy was the **Dictation Test**. However, customs officials did not test everyone. They only administered it if they *suspected* a person was an undesirable or non-European immigrant.

- **Blending In:** If an undocumented migrant stepped off a ship from the Mediterranean, the Middle East, or Eastern Europe and spoke fluent, unaccented English, customs officials often waved them through without a second glance. They simply assumed the person was a British subject or a legal immigrant.
- **Beating the System:** Even if they were tested, the law initially required the dictation test to be in an "infamous" European language. If a migrant spoke English well, they could pass the initial hurdle before the government later rigged the rules by using obscure languages (like Gaelic or Romanian) to intentionally fail specific people.

2. How People "Sneaked In" (Pre-1945)

Because Australia has an enormous, unpoliced coastline and relied entirely on physical port checks, thousands of people entered outside the official system:

- **Deserting Sailors (The "Jump Ship" Phenomenon):** This was the most common way to sneak into Australia. Thousands of foreign sailors on international merchant ships would wait until their vessel docked in Sydney, Melbourne, or Fremantle, and simply walk off into the night. If they spoke English, they could secure a job under a false name the very next day.
- **The "Clandestine Luggers" of the North:** In Northern Australia (around Broome, Darwin, and Thursday Island), the pearl-shelling and fishing industries relied heavily on Asian and Pacific Islander labor. Many migrants slipped ashore undetected from Indonesian or Japanese fishing boats, moving straight into remote outback communities where white authorities rarely traveled.
- **Identity Swapping:** Because ID papers lacked photographs or fingerprints before the 1920s, a legal migrant who decided to return home would frequently sell or give their entry papers to a friend or relative. The new person would arrive in Australia using a completely real document belonging to someone else.

3. The 1920s Crackdown

The government eventually realized how easy it was to slip through the cracks. In response, Australia introduced the *Passports Act 1920*, making it a strict legal requirement for *all* arrivals to possess a passport with a photograph.

Even with the new law, the lack of centralized computer networks meant that if an undocumented migrant could speak English, adapt to local customs, and avoid trouble with the police, they could easily live out their entire life in Australia without the government ever knowing they were there.

Between 1945-1948, are there any stats on refugees during those 3 years

Between 1945 and 1948, Australia underwent a staggering statistical transformation, transitioning from **virtually zero refugee arrivals to a massive, industrialised resettlement pipeline**.

Official statistics were not strictly categorised under a modern "Humanitarian Program" visa framework until July 1948. However, meticulous shipping records from the [National Archives of Australia](#) map out the exact progression of these three pivotal years:

The Year-by-Year Statistical Breakdown

- **1945 – 1946 (The Near-Zero Baseline): < 1,000 arrivals**
 - **The Stats:** Almost no refugees arrived during these immediate post-war months.
 - **Context:** International shipping was entirely devastated by World War II. Prime Minister Ben Chifley and Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell established the Department of Immigration in July 1945 with a strict goal: **9 out of 10 migrants must be British**. Refugees from continental Europe were not yet actively permitted or logistically able to travel.
- **1947 (The Floodgates Open): 844 arrivals**
 - **The Stats:** Exactly **844 refugees** officially arrived on a single historic date: **November 28, 1947**.
 - **Context:** Realising Britain could not supply enough migrants due to its own post-war shortages, Calwell pivoted. In July 1947, Australia signed a historic pact with the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) to accept European "Displaced Persons" (DPs). The initial cohort—844 young people from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—arrived in Melbourne aboard the *SS General Stuart Heintzelman* and were sent to the newly opened **Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre** in Victoria.
- **1948 (The Scaling Up): ~10,000 arrivals**
 - **The Stats:** Close to **10,000 displaced persons** arrived across the calendar year 1948, rapidly expanding the operation.
 - **Context:** This period marked the beginning of a massive logistical operation. The United States provided military transport ships to help Australia cart refugees out of European camps. This rapid growth laid the groundwork for **1949**, which remains the absolute peak of the post-war era, when arrivals skyrocketed to over **118,000 in a single year**.

The 1945–1948 Refugee "Deal"

The refugees arriving in this tight window were processed under very rigid, distinct criteria compared to later generations:

1. **The Two-Year Labor Contract:** In exchange for free passage and resettlement in Australia, every adult refugee was legally forced to sign a contract pledging **two years of continuous hard labor** to the Australian government. Men were sent to heavy infrastructure projects like the [Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme](#) or rail expansions, while women were largely funneled into domestic work or textile factories.
2. **The "Beautiful Balts" Policy:** To appease a highly skeptical, insular public still fiercely protective of the White Australia Policy, Arthur Calwell deliberately hand-picked the first intakes from the Baltic states. He chose fair-skinned, blond, and blue-eyed refugees, explicitly using them as a public relations tool to prove to voters that non-British migrants could seamlessly blend into the Australian community.

Would you like to explore how **Arthur Calwell bypassed union objections** to get these first 1947–48 refugees into the workforce, or track how **Bonegilla Camp** handled its first arrivals?

No, just after some specific numbers during what was a major change.
Thanks.

You are very welcome! It was indeed a monumental turning point that fundamentally shifted Australia's population trajectory forever.

Between the near-zero baseline of **1945–1946**, the first **844** arrivals in **1947**, and the surge to roughly **10,000** in **1948**, those three years completely broke the old ad-hoc system and built the modern foundation.

Thanks for a fascinating dive into Australian history. If you ever need to dig up specific numbers or historical stats again in the future, just let me know. Have a wonderful day!

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