



# Asylum seekers

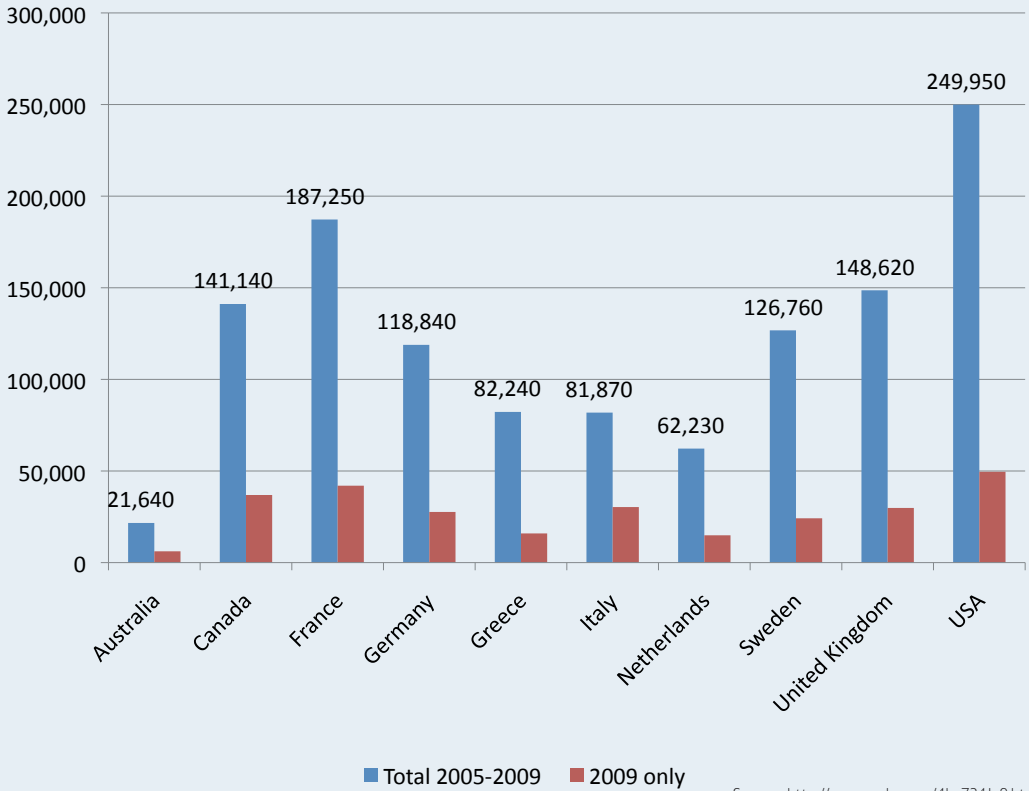
An asylum seeker is someone who has fled their home and is seeking protection from another country. They are waiting for their claim to be a refugee to be evaluated.

In 2009, Afghanistan was the main country of origin of asylum applicants (26,800 claims). Iraqis (24,000) and Somalis (22,600 claims) are the second and third largest groups as conflict continues in those countries. The other main countries of origin are China, Serbia, Russia, Nigeria, Mexico, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, said: "These statistics show that ongoing violence and instability in some parts of the world force increasing numbers of people to flee and seek protection in safe countries. There is a serious need for countries to keep their asylum doors wide open to those who are in genuine need of international protection."

Here is a graph showing the number of asylum seeker applications for 10 developed countries.

### Asylum Seeker Applications 2005-09



Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/4ba7341a9.html>



This is the Otash IDP camp in Darfur, Sudan. It is home for more than 56,000 people who fled their original homes due to the conflict in this region.

## Social justice and human rights

Over the past 10 years, one of the major social justice and human rights issues in Australia has been the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. The United Nations, the Human Rights Commission and a number of non-government organisations have criticised the Australian Government for the way it has treated asylum seekers.

In 2004, the Australian Human Rights Commission found that child asylum seekers held in Australian immigration detention centres between 1999 and 2002 did not have their rights protected. Over those years, 5,298 children were held in detention centres while the Australian Government decided whether they could stay in the country as refugees. The average length of stay was one year, eight months and 11 days. It reported:

"All Australians should look at these findings, read the examples and think of their children, their grandchildren or

the children of their friends and ask themselves – how would I feel if my children were raised behind barbed wire and their human rights were abused? The treatment of some of these children has left them severely traumatised and with long-term mental health problems."

Then in 2009, the Human Rights Commission found that while children are no longer held in detention centres, they are held in other closed detention facilities on the mainland and Christmas Island (2,600 kilometres from the nearest Australian city). It found that "detention of children in any type of immigration detention should only be used as an absolute last resort".

After health and security checks, most NGOs argue that asylum seekers should be able to live in the Australian community while their claim for refugee status is evaluated. This would allow them access to good quality education, health and legal services.



Cover of HREOC National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention Report - A Last Resort.

[www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)



[www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au/cartoon\\_6921.html](http://www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au/cartoon_6921.html)

## For You To Do!

1. The top three source countries for asylum seekers are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Since 2005, the three most popular countries for asylum seeker applications are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Suggest reasons for and against the detention of asylum seekers and conduct a classroom debate on the topic.