

# Pulling our weight on refugees? Nope, nope, nope

By Robin Davies  
10 August 2015

Australia, readers of *The Australian* have [learned](#), is well and truly ‘pulling its weight on refugees’. Australia is said to be the most generous receiver of refugees in the world. What authority is cited? Why, the Refugee Council of Australia. The newspaper has simply taken the Refugee Council’s statistics on refugee resettlement in 2014, which were [released](#) at the end of July, and helpfully displayed them thus:

**HOW GENEROUS ARE WE?**  
**Refugee resettlement 2014** (by country, population, GDP)

Rank	Country of arrival	Total	Per 1000 population	Rank	Per \$bn GDP	Rank
1	US	77,011	0.227	4	4.20	6
2	Canada	12,277	0.346	2	7.72	2
3	<b>Australia</b>	<b>11,570</b>	<b>0.491</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10.63</b>	<b>1</b>
4	Sweden	1971	0.205	5	4.41	5
5	Norway	1286	0.253	3	3.70	7
6	Finland	1089	0.200	6	4.92	3
7	Netherlands	791	0.047	11	0.99	9
8	Britain	787	0.012	16	0.31	15
9	New Zealand	737	0.164	7	4.86	4
10	Austria	388	0.046	12	0.98	10

Source: Refugee council

As you can see, right there in red, Australia ranked first in the world as a refugee resettler in 2014, whether measured in terms of refugees resettled per head of recipient country population, or in comparison with recipient country GDP.

Impressive? No. Breathtakingly selective and disingenuous reporting? That’s more like it.

In releasing the 2014 numbers, the Refugee Council stated very clearly that, ‘the fairest comparison is to look at how the refugee *recognition* and resettlement within Australia’s total Refugee and Humanitarian Program compares on a global basis’ (emphasis added). The ‘recognition’ part makes all the difference. In the overwhelming majority of cases—97

per cent in 2014—refugees acquire that status by arriving somewhere as an asylum seeker and subsequently being recognized domestically as a refugee. The statistics quoted by *The Australian* relate only to the comparatively miniscule number of cases—just over 100,000 out of 3.4 million in 2014—in which refugees are recognized offshore and then resettled in developed countries.

The Refugee Council itself decidedly does not make a point of saying Australia ranks first or even highly on any meaningful measure of generosity as a refugee-receiving nation. In fact, in drawing what it considers the fairest comparison, as outlined above, it says:

*By this measure [recognition plus resettlement], the 14,350 refugees recognised or resettled in Australia during 2014 made up 0.43% of the global total, with Australia ranked 22nd overall, 27th on a per capita basis [actually 28<sup>th</sup>] and 46th relative to total national GDP. The 2014 statistics are similar to those of the previous decade. In the 10 years to 31 December 2014, the 141,047 refugees recognised or resettled by Australia accounted 1.16% of the global total of 12,107,623 - with Australia ranked 23rd overall, 27th per capita and 46th relative to national GDP.*

So which countries were in fact the most generous refugee-receiving nations on a per capita basis in 2014? On the basis of the statistics released by the Refugee Council, which in turn were got from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the top seven in the generosity rankings were of course developing countries including, coincidentally, Australia's diminutive neighbour Nauru. Sweden and Malta are the only developed countries that figure in the top 10.

## **Refugee recognition and resettlement, 2014**

<i>Country of asylum or resettlement</i>	<i>Refugee recognition and resettlement</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Per 1000 popn</i>	<i>Rank2</i>	<i>Per \$b GDP</i>	<i>Rank3</i>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>364,129</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>73.3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,490</b>	<b>2</b>
Nauru	389	68	38.9	2		
Jordan	133,924	8	17.8	3	1,682	5
Turkey	1,027,137	1	13.5	4	681	9
Afghanistan	283,575	3	9.1	5	4,677	1
Cameroon	149,670	7	6.6	6	2,226	3
Uganda	159,046	6	4.1	7	2,067	4
Sweden	34,318	14	3.6	8	77	22
Malta	1,478	45	3.4	9	107	20
Sudan	122,699	9	3.2	10	771	8
All other	1,091,792					
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,368,157</b>					
[Australia	14,350	22	0.6	28	13	46]

If, for any reason, you are interested in comparisons only between Australia and other developed countries for 2014, the situation is as shown below.

<i>Country of asylum or resettlement</i>	<i>Refugee recognition and resettlement</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Per 1000 popn</i>	<i>Rank2</i>	<i>Per \$b GDP</i>	<i>Rank3</i>
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>34,318</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>22</b>
Malta	1,478	45	3.4	9	107	20
Russian Fed.	250,307	4	1.8	14	70	23
Switzerland	14,123	23	1.7	15	30	31
Norway	6,364	34	1.3	18	18	38
Cyprus	1,243	48	1.1	19	46	27
Denmark	6,014	35	1.1	20	24	34
Netherlands	14,041	24	0.8	22	18	41
Belgium	8,513	31	0.8	25	18	40
Canada	22,220	15	0.6	27	14	43
Australia	14,350	22	0.6	28	13	46
Germany	40,843	13	0.5	32	11	50
Finland	2,435	40	0.4	33	11	49
Luxembourg	200	80	0.4	36	3	65
Greece	3,852	37	0.3	37	14	44
Italy	20,582	17	0.3	38	10	51
France	21,203	16	0.3	39	8	53
USA	96,459	10	0.3	40	6	60
New Zealand	891	51	0.2	43	6	58
UK	12,555	25	0.2	44	5	62
All other	2,796,166					
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,368,157</b>					

Australia is with Canada in the middle of the developed-country pack. Those toward the top of the pack, even if we leave aside the exceptional cases of Sweden and Malta, are settling two to three times as many refugees per head of population as Australia and Canada.

Somebody at *The Australian* had to burn a few calories in undertaking the statistical manipulation described above, which involved constructing a new and meaningless country ranking based only on refugees resettled and ignoring asylum seekers recognized as refugees. Let it not be thought that the Refugee Council of Australia, let alone UNHCR, actually did this themselves.

## About the author/s

### Robin Davies

Robin Davies is an Honorary Professor at the ANU's Crawford School of Public Policy and an editor of the Devpolicy Blog. He headed the Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security and later the Global Health Division at Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

(DFAT) from 2017 until early 2023 and worked in senior roles at AusAID until 2012, with postings in Paris and Jakarta. From 2013 to 2017, he was the Associate Director of the Development Policy Centre.

Link: <https://devpolicy.org/pulling-our-weight-on-refugees-nope-nope-nope/>

Date downloaded: 26 April 2024



Australian  
National  
University

The Devpolicy Blog is based at the Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.