

# **Australians Face Influx of Immigrants Smuggled Ashore By Boat**

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## **Body**

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During the last six months, **Australians** have been surprised by an **influx** of people from Iraq and Afghanistan arriving by **boat** who, officials say, are first being delivered to nearby Indonesian islands by smugglers from the Middle East and then moved to Australia's north coast, where they try to claim asylum.

According to information provided by the Australian mission to the United Nations, the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs reported that 34 **boats** with passengers originating in the Middle East were intercepted off the northern and northwestern coasts of Australia between July and November. The **boats** carried 1,643 people -- more than the total of people reaching the country by **boat** in the last three years.

Australian officials say that many of the refugees and asylum seekers appear to have been brought to Southeast Asia by **smuggling** rings operating in Amman, Jordan. Once in Southeast Asia, those who have been **smuggled** can easily obtain fraudulent documents in Bangkok, long known as a center for forgeries and a frequent stopover point for illegal emigrants from China, many of whom also try to land in Australia.

Travel from Thailand to Indonesia is relatively easy. Australian officials say that the people headed for their shores are assembled on a number of Indonesian islands for **boats** to Australia.

Australia may be a stopover for those who arrive that way, Philip Ruddock, the immigration and multicultural affairs minister, said in October, when he announced measures to discourage the flow of arrivals.

"In a growing trend that has become known as 'forum shopping,' these people are trying to exploit Australia's generous arrangements for refugees to gain residence in their country of preference," he said. To plug that loophole, Australia will grant only three-year "temporary protection" visas to people deemed to be genuine refugees -- including most of the Iraqis and Afghans -- but will not allow them to bring in other family members. If they leave Australia for another destination, they will lose the right to return.

"Australia simply cannot afford to be seen as a potential soft target by forum shoppers and the increasingly sophisticated people-**smuggling** rackets," Mr. Ruddock said. As in other countries that attract asylum seekers -- like the United States, Canada and Germany -- an **influx** of illegal **immigrants** in Australia can lessen the chances of asylum for refugees languishing in camps, **Australians** say.

## Australians Face Influx of Immigrants Smuggled Ashore By Boat

Illegal **immigrants** also erode sympathy for other refugees, **Australians** have found, and officials say they do not want Australia to become a gateway for illegal immigration.

Illegal migration also conceals the movement of terrorists, international law enforcement agencies and experts on immigration say. The sophistication with which fraudulent identity and travel documents are produced adds to their concern.

Until the 1960's, when Australian immigration laws began to be changed substantially, Australia had an all-white immigration policy, seeking primarily European settlers. Now, about 40 percent of **immigrants** are Asians. Australia, a country only slightly smaller than the United States with a population of 18 million, actively recruits students from Southeast Asia for its universities.

In addition to those arriving by **boat**, there has been an increase of nearly 35 percent a year in illegal arrivals by air. Last year, more than 2,000 people were refused entry at airports.

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