

**Home Affairs Portfolio
Department of Home Affairs
Supplementary Estimates Hearing – October 2025**

KEY BRIEF**Topic: Australians of CT Interest****Responsible Deputy:** Ms Ciara Spencer, Law Enforcement & Domestic Security**Key Top Lines**

- Approximately 60 Australia-linked men and women, who were known to have fought, or otherwise associated with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, remain offshore.
- The situation in Syria is extremely dangerous, severely limiting the ability of the Australian Government to assist Australians in the area.
- The Australian Government is aware of media reporting about a cohort of Australian citizens seeking to return from Syria.
 - o The Department of Home Affairs is not providing assistance to this cohort, beyond that normally provided to Australian citizens.
 - o Any return by this cohort would be considered self-initiated.

Handling Notes:

- The lead witness will be Ms Ciara Spencer, Deputy Secretary, Law Enforcement & Domestic Security.
- The Counter-Terrorism Coordination Centre leads counter-terrorism policy and operational coordination across the Australian Government, in addition to coordinating national counter-terrorism capability development through the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee.

Key PointsManaging Australians of Counter-Terrorism Interest

- The Australian Government actively manages risks associated with Australians of counter-terrorism interest offshore, including mitigating any risks associated with their return to Australia.
- The Department guides this work in close partnership with intelligence and law enforcement partners across the Commonwealth and jurisdictions.

Australians being held in Syria

- Approximately 60 Australia-linked men and women, who were known to have fought, or otherwise associated with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, remain offshore.
 - o While we know there are Australians in detention facilities and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Syria it is difficult to confirm exact numbers.
 - o The security situation in Syria and the Middle East has significantly deteriorated since the 2022 repatriations were undertaken.

Clearing Officer: Gemma Smyth, First Assistant Secretary, Counter-Terrorism & Violent Extremism Division

- The Australian Government's ability to provide consular assistance to those remaining in Syria is severely limited, due to the extremely dangerous security situation and because we do not have an embassy or consulate in Syria.
- Australia is partnering with humanitarian agencies who have the mandate and expertise to deliver assistance to affected populations, including Australians.

Reports of a cohort seeking to return to Australia

- The Australian Government is aware of media reporting about a cohort of Australian citizens seeking to return from Syria.
- The Department is not providing assistance to this cohort, beyond that normally provided to Australian citizens, i.e. provision of citizenship documentation.
- Any return by this cohort would be considered self-initiated.
- Our intelligence and security agencies constantly monitor threats to our national security.
- The Australian Government continues to monitor, as best we can, the welfare of Australians in the camps with the assistance of humanitarian partners.
- If you are an Australian citizen you have an automatic right of entry to Australia and need only present a current Australian passport on your arrival. Australian citizens without a valid Australian passport might have their entry delayed until their identity and claim to Australian citizenship has been verified.
- The safety of Australians and the protection of Australia's national interests remains the Government's overriding priority.
- Where Australians returning to Australia have allegedly breached Australian law, they will be investigated and where appropriate may be subject to law enforcement action.
- The Australian Government has a range of measures that are considered in managing Australians offshore who pose a terrorism risk, such as:
 - Temporary Exclusion Orders,
 - return permits with certain pre- and/or post-entry conditions imposed,
 - disengagement programs, and
 - criminal offences.
- Any individuals returning to Australia will be offered referral pathways to CVE programs and disengagement as needed.

Australian Government Repatriations

- In October 2022, the Australian Government repatriated four Australian women and their 13 Australian children from an IDP camp in Syria to New South Wales.
- All repatriations were voluntary and undertaken with the informed consent of the individuals.
- These families were supported by a full range of Commonwealth and New South Wales (NSW) services to assist their reintegration into communities.
- In June 2019, the Australian Government repatriated 8 unaccompanied orphan minors from Syria.

Clearing Officer: Gemma Smyth, First Assistant Secretary, Counter-Terrorism & Violent Extremism Division

Australians of CT interests onshore – Refer additional questions

- Additional questions regarding Australian of CT interest onshore and domestic security issues should be referred to:
 - The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - for consular assistance and humanitarian matters.
 - The Australian Federal Police - for law enforcement and prosecution matters.
 - Home Affairs Legal Group (HRTG branch) - for management of high-risk terrorist offenders.

Consultation

- Legal Group, Department of Home Affairs

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KEY BRIEF**Topic: Australians of CT Interest****Responsible Deputy:** Ms Ciara Spencer, Law Enforcement & Domestic Security**Key Top Lines**

- While we know there are Australians in detention facilities and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Syria, it is difficult to confirm exact numbers.
- DFAT's ability to provide consular assistance to those remaining in Syria is severely limited, due to the extremely dangerous security situation and because we do not have an embassy or consulate in Syria.
- As advised in October, two women and four children who were previously in a Syrian Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp returned to Australia independently on 26 September 2025.
 - The Department did not provide assistance to this cohort beyond that normally provided to Australian citizens, i.e. provision of citizenship documentation.
- The Australian Government is not repatriating any individuals from Syrian IDP camps.
 - The Department of Home Affairs is not providing assistance to the remaining cohort, beyond that normally provided to Australian citizens.

Handling Notes:

- The lead witness will be Ms Ciara Spencer, Deputy Secretary, Law Enforcement & Domestic Security. The Counter-Terrorism Coordination Centre leads counter-terrorism policy and operational coordination across the Commonwealth.

Key PointsAustralians held in Syria

- While we know there are Australians in detention facilities and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Syria it is difficult to confirm exact numbers.
 - The security situation in Syria and the Middle East has significantly deteriorated since the 2022 repatriations were undertaken.
- DFAT's ability to provide consular assistance to those remaining in Syria is severely limited, due to the extremely dangerous security situation and because we do not have an embassy or consulate in Syria.
- Australia is partnering with humanitarian agencies who have the mandate and expertise to deliver assistance to affected populations, including Australians.

Recently returned cohort return to Australia

- On 26 September this year, a group of 6 individuals, comprising of 2 women and 4 children, returned to Australia independently.

Clearing Officer: Gemma Smyth, First Assistant Secretary, Counter-Terrorism & Violent Extremism Division

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- The Department did not provide assistance to this cohort, beyond that normally provided to Australian citizens, i.e. provision of citizenship documentation.
- Australian citizens have a right to return to Australia. Commonwealth officials have an obligation to process eligible applications (e.g. for citizenship-by-descent).
- As advised by the Australian Federal Police in Senate Estimates on 8 October 2025, the location or identity of these individuals cannot be provided due to ongoing investigations under Operation Howth.
- Any questions in relation to any law enforcement action against this cohort should be referred to the Australian Federal Police.

Reports of a cohort seeking to return to Australia

- The Australian Government is aware of media reporting in relation to other Australian citizens seeking to return from Syria.
- The Department is not providing assistance to this cohort, beyond that normally provided to Australian citizens.
- The Department does not want to put the safety and security of Australian citizens at risk. On that basis we do not intend to provide further detail.
- Where Australians returning to Australia have allegedly breached Australian law, they will be investigated and where appropriate subject to law enforcement action.
- The Australian Government has a range of measures to manage Australians offshore who pose a terrorism risk, such as:
 - Temporary Exclusion Orders,
 - return permits with certain pre- and/or post-entry conditions imposed,
 - disengagement programs, and
 - criminal offences.
- Any individuals returning to Australia will be offered referral pathways to CVE programs and disengagement as needed.

Save the Children Australia (STCA)

- The Department is aware that STCA have been an advocate of this cohort of women and children in Syria since at least 2021.
- The Department is aware that STCA met with the Minister for Home Affairs on two occasions: The first meeting occurred on 9 October 2024 at Parliament House (Secretary Foster in attendance), and the second meeting on 13 June 2025 in Sydney with a Departmental notetaker present.
- On both occasions, STCA requested the Australian Government repatriate the cohort of women and children in Syria, and on both occasions their requests were declined by the Minister.

Background

Engagement with communities

- Home Affairs Regional Directors (RDs) and Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) across Australia are actively engaged with Syrian, Assyrian and Yezidi Australian communities.
- During these engagements, community stakeholders discuss relevant topics and provide insights, opinions and sentiment on behalf of their communities, this has included discussion on the women and children who departed Syria.
- Between January and October 2025, the CLOs have undertaken more than 50 engagements with Syrian, Assyrian (including Christian Assyrians), Druze, Alawite and Yezidi communities.

Managing Australians of Counter-Terrorism Interest

- The Australian Government actively manages risks associated with Australians of counter-terrorism interest offshore, including mitigating any risks associated with their return to Australia.
- The Department guides this work in close partnership with intelligence and law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth and jurisdictions.

Individuals seeking to return to Australia

- Our intelligence and security agencies constantly monitor threats to our national security.
- The Australian Government continues to monitor, as best they can, the welfare of Australians in the camps with the assistance of humanitarian partners.
- Australian citizens have an automatic right of entry to Australia and need only present a current Australian passport on their arrival.
- Australian citizens without a valid Australian passport might have their entry delayed until their identity and claim to Australian citizenship has been verified.
- The safety of Australians and the protection of Australia's national interests remain the overriding priority.

Australian Government Repatriations

- In October 2022, the Australian Government repatriated four Australian women and their 13 Australian children from an IDP camp in Syria to New South Wales.
- All repatriations were voluntary and undertaken with the informed consent of the individuals.
- These families were supported by a full range of Commonwealth and New South Wales (NSW) services to assist their reintegration into communities.
- In June 2019, the Australian Government repatriated 8 unaccompanied orphan minors from Syria.

Australians of CT interests onshore – Refer additional questions

- Additional questions regarding Australian of CT interest onshore and domestic security issues should be referred to:
 - The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - for consular assistance and humanitarian matters.
 - The Australian Federal Police - for law enforcement and prosecution matters.

- Home Affairs Legal Group (HRT0 branch) - for management of high-risk terrorist offenders.

Consultation

Legal Group, Department of Home Affairs

Additional Information

Statistic and Financial Reporting Period:

Statistics Date Ranges – Supplementary Estimates December 2025	
Since last hearing	1 February 2025 – 30 September 2025
Financial Year	1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025

Back Pocket Brief Number: CTVE-06

BACK POCKET BRIEF

**Home Affairs Portfolio
Department of Home Affairs
Supplementary Estimates Hearing – October 2025**

BACK POCKET BRIEF**Topic: Australians of CT Interest****Group: Law Enforcement and Domestic Security****Division: Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism****Consular case – Lebanon**

- The Australian Government is aware that a family, previously in a Syrian IDP camp, has returned to Australia from Lebanon.
 - The Department was aware of the family's plan to return to Australia.
- Australian citizens overseas are eligible to seek consular support.
- For privacy reasons the Department is unable to comment on individual cases.
- Questions regarding consular assistance should be referred to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

National security / community safety

- The safety of Australians and the protection of Australia's national interests remains the Government's overriding priority.
- Where Australians returning to Australia have allegedly breached Australian law, they will be investigated and, as appropriate, subject to law enforcement action.
- The Australian Government has a range of measures available including disengagement programs, control orders, and criminal offences.

Reports on S. 47F(1)

- The Australian Government is aware of reports that S. 47F(1) is detained in S. 47F(1).
- For privacy reasons, the Department is unable to comment on individual cases.
- Questions regarding consular assistance should be referred to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Reports of a Brisbane man accused of terrorism offences

- The Department is aware of media reporting about the arrest of a Brisbane man accused of terrorism offences by the Queensland Joint Counter-Terrorism Team.
- For privacy reasons, the Department is unable to comment on individual cases.
- Additional questions regarding this matter should be referred to the Australian Federal Police.

Clearing Officer: Alexander Goldie, a/g First Assistant Secretary, Counter-Terrorism & Violent Extremism Division

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As at 3 October 2025

The Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Repudiation) Act 2023

- The Act enables the Minister to make an application to a court for an order to cease a person's Australian citizenship, where that person is a dual national and other criterion are satisfied.
 - This must include that the person has been convicted of one or more serious offences, such as terrorism, espionage or treason.

Home Affairs Corporate Plan – Target 19

[100% of known persons of counter-terrorism interest offshore or foreign fighters seeking to return/travel to Australia are assessed and appropriate mechanisms are developed to manage the risk associated with their return.]

- The Australian Government actively manages risks associated with Australians of counter-terrorism interest offshore, including mitigating any risks associated with their return to Australia.
- The Department guides this work in close partnership with intelligence and law enforcement partners across the Commonwealth and jurisdictions.
- Our intelligence and security agencies constantly monitor threats to our national security.
- The safety of Australians and the protection of Australia's national interests remains the Government's overriding priority.
- The Australian Government has a range of measures that are considered in managing Australians offshore who pose a terrorism risk, such as:
 - Temporary Exclusion Orders,
 - return permits with certain pre- and/or post-entry conditions imposed, and
 - criminal offences.
- Individuals returning to Australia will be referred to countering violent extremism disengagement program as needed.

Additional References

- Key Issues Brief – SB25-001206.

Media

Brisbane man accused of terrorism offences granted bail, ABC News, 11 September 2025 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-11/qld-terror-charges-the-gap-afp-qps-asio/105760476>

- Notes arrest by the Queensland Joint Counter-Terrorism Team of man allegedly found in possession of nationalist and racist material and chemicals used to make explosives.

Back Pocket Brief Number: CTVE-06

BACK POCKET BRIEF

Home Affairs Portfolio
Department of Home Affairs
Supplementary Estimates Hearing – December 2025

BACK POCKET BRIEF**Topic: Australians of CT Interest****Group: Law Enforcement and Domestic Security****Division: Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism****Consular case**

- The Australian Government is aware that a family, previously in a Syrian Internally Displaced People (IDP) camp, returned to Australia on 26 September 2025.
 - The family, comprised of two women and four children, returned to Australia independently.
- Australian citizens overseas are eligible to seek consular support.
- For privacy reasons the Department is unable to comment on individual cases.
- Questions regarding consular assistance should be referred to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

National security / community safety

- The safety of Australians and the protection of Australia's national interests remains the Government's overriding priority.
- Where Australians returning to Australia have allegedly breached Australian law, they will be investigated and, as appropriate, may be subject to law enforcement action.
- The Australian Government has a range of measures available including disengagement programs, control orders, and criminal offences.

The Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Repudiation) Act 2023

- The Act enables the Minister to make an application to a court for an order to cease a person's Australian citizenship, where that person is a dual national and other criterion are satisfied.
 - This must include that the person has been convicted of one or more serious offences, such as terrorism, espionage or treason.

Home Affairs Corporate Plan – Target 13

[100% of known persons of counter-terrorism interest offshore or foreign fighters seeking to return/travel to Australia are assessed and appropriate mechanisms are developed to manage the risk associated with their return.]

Clearing Officer: Gemma Smyth, First Assistant Secretary, Counter-Terrorism & Violent Extremism Division

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As at 11 November 2025

- The Australian Government actively manages risks associated with Australians of counter-terrorism interest offshore, including mitigating any risks associated with their return to Australia.
- The Department guides this work in close partnership with intelligence and law enforcement partners across the Commonwealth and jurisdictions.
- Our intelligence and security agencies constantly monitor threats to our national security.
- The safety of Australians and the protection of Australia's national interests remains the Government's overriding priority.
- The Australian Government has a range of measures to manage Australians offshore who pose a terrorism risk, such as:
 - Temporary Exclusion Orders,
 - return permits with certain pre- and/or post-entry conditions imposed,
 - disengagement programs, and
 - criminal offences.
- Individuals returning to Australia will be referred to countering violent extremism disengagement program as needed.

Foreign fighters

- The Australia Border Force (ABF) profiles or targets individuals departing Australia to commit offences in contravention of Australian law, such as travelling to fight with or join a terrorist organisation.
- Australians who fight with or recruit for (including inducing, inciting, or encouraging) proscribed terrorist groups may be committing a criminal offence under the Criminal Code Act 1995 (Criminal Code).
- Where the ABF suspects a Criminal Code offence, the traveller is referred to the Australian Federal Police (AFP). AFP is the lead agency for investigating foreign incursion and recruitment offences under the Criminal Code.
- The Attorney-General's Department is responsible for the review and oversight of counter-terrorism legislation, including legislation relating to the return of foreign fighters under the Criminal Code.
- It is not an offence to serve in or with the armed forces of a foreign country, including the Israeli Defence Force, Russian Armed Forces or Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Australians of CT interest onshore – Refer additional questions

- Additional questions regarding Australians of CT interest onshore and domestic security issues should be referred to:
 - The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - for consular assistance and humanitarian matters.
 - The Australian Federal Police - for law enforcement and prosecution matters.

Clearing Officer: Gemma Smyth, First Assistant Secretary, Counter-Terrorism & Violent Extremism Division

- Home Affairs Legal Group (HRT0 branch) - for management of high-risk terrorist offenders.
- Attorney-General Department – for matters relating to foreign incursions offences and legal administration of foreign fighters.

Additional References

- Key Issues Brief – SB25-001206.

Media