

Last update: May 2024

The exact financial cost of Australia's asylum seeker policy can be very difficult to establish. This is because expenditure ranges across a number of government programs and portfolios. Sources detailing expenditure in this area of policy are listed below.

How much does it cost to detain asylum seekers?

The annual cost, per person, to the Australian government of detaining and/or processing refugees and asylum seekers has been estimated as follows:

- almost [A\\$22m](#) to hold someone offshore in Nauru;
- [A\\$429,000](#) to hold someone in detention in Australia; and
- [A\\$3,962](#) for an asylum seeker to live in the Australian community on a bridging visa while their claim is processed

Other resources

In the 2022-

[A illi](#) July 2012 to the June 2024 financial year.

In February 2021 the Kaldor Centre's Madeline Gleeson made a [submission](#) to the United Kingdom House of Commons detailing the economic and human costs of Australia's offshore processing model.

In 2019 the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Save the Children and GetUp! published a report titled '[At What Cost?](#)', outlining the human and financial costs of Australia's offshore detention policies. The report [found](#) that offshore detention and processing cost around A\$9 billion over the period 2016 to 2020. The report built on a 2016 [publication](#) by UNICEF Australia and Save the Children, which stated that Australia's policy of onshore and offshore detention, and of [turning back boats](#), had cost [A\\$9.6 billion](#) between 2013 and 2016.

In April 2014, the National Commission of Audit [reported](#) that between 2009-10 and 2013-14 spending on the detention and processing of asylum seekers who arrived by boat increased from A\$118.4 million per year to \$3.3 billion per year.

A 2015 [report](#) by the International Detention Coalition on alternatives to detention found that Australia spends [twice as much](#) detaining an asylum seeker onshore than the United States, Canada, or countries within Europe, at an estimated \$655 per person per day. A 2011 study indicated that the cost of mental health care over the course of one person's lifetime can [increase considerably – by up to 50% more than the average person, or \\$25,000](#) – if that person has been held for a lengthy period in immigration detention.

Some additional details on expenditure for individual detention centres, both onshore and offshore, can be found through [Senate Estimates](#) transcripts and related documents, and through [federal budget](#) papers. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Library has a

