



STORIES OF THE STRANDED AUSSIES

THE CASE TO BRING THEM HOME

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



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FOREWORD

“I would hope that those who are looking to come home, that we’d be able to do that within months and I would hope that we can get as many people home, if not all of them by Christmas”.

Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, 18 September 2020

COVID-19 has changed the world. Governments have done much to alleviate the impacts of the virus and to keep economies and people’s lives moving forward. But with the reforms and restrictions, the Australian government has left some people behind.

There are more than 35,000 Australians stranded overseas. They can’t get home. Stuck.

The Australian government has an obligation under international law - including Article 12(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 12(4) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - to bring these people home. They are not meeting this obligation.

Australians are stranded right around the world, including many in the United Kingdom, India, the Philippines, Thailand and South Africa. Each one of them has a story about why they were left behind, and what they are missing out on by not being home.

The stranded Aussies are people separated from their families, people who have been unable to be with sick or dying relatives, people who have missed the birth of their child, and people that have been left jobless and homeless in other countries.

This report highlights these stories, and proposes a way to get the stranded Aussies home. The Australian government needs to listen to these stories, and take the steps to bring them home as soon as possible.

Sam Klintworth
National Director
Amnesty International Australia

THE PLAN TO GET THE STRANDED AUSSIES HOME

To meet its obligations under international law, the Australian government must act now and avoid violating the human rights of more than 35,000 Australians.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 the Australian government requires anyone entering the country to quarantine in a hotel for two weeks. This is fair enough.

The quarantine program can only cater for as many people as there are hotel rooms. This is where the problem begins.

To ensure the quarantine program did not become overburdened, the Australian government introduced a weekly cap on how many people can enter the country. This effectively created a waiting list for people trying to get home -- with many, many people missing out on flights because of the cap.

The government has since taken a piecemeal approach to bringing Aussies home. It has gradually increased the caps in partnership with the states, but not enough to bring a large number of Aussies home. The government has also chartered eight repatriation flights from India, Britain and South Africa that will take 1300 Aussies to the Howard Springs Quarantine Facility in the Northern Territory. This is a good initiative, but it is at small scale and leaves thousands of people stranded overseas.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

This arbitrary cap needs to be significantly increased, or removed, to allow people to come home. To do this, the quarantine program needs to be significantly expanded and alternatives adopted.

Amnesty International Australia has a 7-point plan to bring the stranded Aussies home.

The Australian government should:

1. Support all states and territories to increase the capacity of their existing hotel quarantine programs. This means more hotel rooms so that more people can quarantine.
2. Adopt a home quarantine program. Where safe to do so, allow returning Australians to quarantine at home for two weeks, with checks from the authorities to ensure compliance.
3. Use federal quarantine facilities to allow people to isolate.
4. Significantly raise, or remove, the cap on the amount of Australians who can return home per week.
5. Work with the airlines to maximise the number of flights coming to Australia, and to prioritise returning Australians safely.
6. Charter additional repatriation flights, including using RAAF resources if necessary.
7. Open Melbourne Airport and airports other than Sydney, Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane to cater for an increased number of returning Australians.



THE STORIES OF THE STRANDED AUSSIES

The more than 35,000 stranded Aussies represents more than 35,000 stories. Many are of hardship. Thank you to Pieter den Heten from removethecap.com for sharing the stories of thousands of people trying to get home, and for contributing to this report.

CARMELINA

Carmelina went to Italy in late-2019 with her son Oscar, to be with her dying Mum. She left her husband and elder son, Oliver, at home. Her Mum had cancer and needed support to go through treatment. Carmelina's mum passed away in August 2020.

Since then, Carmelina and Oscar have been stranded. Whilst grieving her Mum, she is trying to get home. They have had multiple flights home cancelled at the last minute because the airlines are booking numbers outside the cap. Carmelina has now spent around \$15,000 on tickets to get home.

Carmelina feels like she has been abandoned. She is getting no assistance from the Australian Embassy, and has written letters to Australian Members of Parliament pleading for help.

LYNNE

Lynne's son needs her home. He is 13 and has Autism Spectrum Disorder and anxiety. Lynne is stranded in Scotland. She counts herself as lucky because she has been able to get accommodation and borrow money from friends. Lynne is a single-parent, so her son is currently staying with a friend -- he has been deeply affected by her absence.

Lynne originally left Australia to be with her dying Mum. Her mum has since passed away.

Lynne also has major health concerns that were being closely monitored at home and are now going unchecked. Lynne needs to return to Australia as soon as possible.

EMILY

Emily cries daily. She is stranded in South Korea, where she has been teaching since 2019.

When COVID-19 broke out, Emily couldn't afford to come home. By September, her contract was up and she had been able to save for a flight; since then, she has had three flights cancel her seat. She has had to borrow money from her brother because airlines are taking up to 10 weeks to give refunds for cancelled flights.

Emily is now concerned that she won't be able to get home before her visa runs out. It's another stress that is adding to her depression.

COLIN¹

Colin was stranded in France. For months he has been seriously ill and basically homeless. He had a major fall, cracking his skull twice and losing a chunk off the end of his nose. He was told he could not fly.

As he recovered, his access to specialists was limited due to lockdowns, and the owners of the home he was staying in asked him to leave. He ended up living in the back of his car.

Multiple flights home were cancelled, and they weren't being refunded. He finally got home after a three-leg flight through Amsterdam and Hong Kong.

DEANNE

Deanne is stranded in the United Kingdom with her husband and five children. Her family faces having to spend \$70,000 on flights to get home to Australia.

She is worried that they will lose their home, and their jobs. Everything.

Her children can't go to school. Deanne has been picking up books for them to read, trying to keep them engaged.

¹ ABC Illawarra, [Australians stranded overseas 'betrayed', says a man telling of months of injury, illness and homelessness](#)