

## Country Backgrounders

### Australia

- Up until 1975, there were fewer than 1,000 Vietnam-born people in Australia due to the “White Australia Policy”.
- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, in 1954
- 1958 Migration Act attempts to deal with IMAs “Illegal Maritime Arrivals” The Racial Discrimination Act 1975, made racial discrimination illegal.
- Being a signatory to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, they agreed to resettle its share of Vietnam-born refugees under a refugee resettlement plan between 1975 and 1985.
- Australia has been part of the UN refugee resettlement program since 1977
- 1982 agreement between the Australian and Vietnamese governments (the Orderly Departure Program) allowed relatives of Vietnamese Australians to leave Vietnam and migrate to Australia.

### Belgium

- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
- Belgium had no specific legislation relating to resettlement until the Immigration Act of 1980, nor a formal humanitarian admissions programme.
- Belgium only accepts people who have been recognised as a refugee by the UNHCR

### Cambodia

- Also known as Democratic Kampuchea. Crisis from 1969 - 1993
- In 1970 it is estimated that 70,000 American and South Vietnamese soldiers invaded Cambodia to fight North Vietnamese who had taken sanctuary.
- It is estimated that USA dropped 500,000 tonnes of bombs on Cambodia 1970-1973 to “attack VietCong strongholds”.
- Seeing the cause of their suffering being the VietCong, Kampuchean mobs attacked ethnic Vietnamese citizens.
- Two weeks before Vietnam’s reunification, the government in Cambodia was overthrown by the Khmer Rouge, a genocidal communist regime led by Pol Pot, who was supported by China and the USA.
- This resulted in millions of refugees, mostly along the border of Thailand. The “Communist Party of Kampuchea”, murdered 1.8 million people, persecuting mostly ethnic Vietnamese, intellectuals/professionals, civil servants, business owners and anyone seen as anti-communist. Bodies were buried in mass graves known as the “killing fields”.
- The Khmer Rouge began launching attacks against Vietnam along their shared border because Pol Pot was paranoid Vietnam wanted to control Cambodia. In 1977, Vietnam retaliated with military strikes of its own, and by late 1978, began a more vigorous assault on the Khmer Rouge with over 60,000 troops. In January 1979, Vietnam with the help of the Soviet Union, overthrew the Khmer Rouge and replaced it with a government that was more favourable toward Vietnam. The leader was Heng Samrin. Later that year, China, as punishment for the overthrow of its ally, the Khmer Rouge, launched an attack on several northern provinces on Vietnam.
- Pol Pot escaped to hide in the jungle where he remained until he was captured in 1997 at the age of 71... he died under house arrest of a heart attack the next year.

### Canada

- Canada led a group of more than 20 countries with the United States, Australia, and France to speed up the refugee process to 25,000 per month.
- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees In 1976, the New Immigration Act was tabled

- First Canadian immigration legislation to recognize refugees as a special class of immigrants.
- The Act was to “fulfil Canada’s international legal obligations with respect to refugees and to uphold its humanitarian tradition with respect to the displaced and the persecuted.” The Act entrenched the definition of a Convention refugee, created a refugee determination system (decisions made by the Refugee Status Advisory Committee – RSAC), provided for admission on humanitarian grounds of designated classes and enabled the private sponsorship of refugees. The Act came into force April 1978.
- In June of 1979, the Canadian government announced that 50,000 South-East Asian Refugees would be resettled by the following year.
- Thousands of Canadians came forward to launch the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.
- From 1978-1981, refugees made up close to 25% of all immigrants to Canada.

### China

- China, a communist country, had just survived the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which resulted in at least 60 million dead, and widespread domestic instability. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, his “gang of four” effectively lost control over China. The Chinese economy was left in shambles after years of neglect. The accumulation of these events greatly undermined the leadership and legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). China was in need of nation-building and to re-establish its status in the international community.
- China had not signed the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- China resettled around 300,000 “ethnic Chinese” (Hoa) refugees, and had a full scale relocation and settlement program. Policy of “unconditional acceptance”. Media portrayed them as loyal, patriotic Chinese “Returnees”. Unskilled laborers were given training in farming, and skilled workers had help finding a job that matched their skill sets.
- China bombed North Vietnam in retaliation for their involvement of the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in 1978.
- 1979 Soviet Union increased to 650,000 troops along the Chinese border.

### Denmark

- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol.
- Ratification was made through the Danish Aliens Act.

### Finland

- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1968
- Received a quota of refugees through UNHCR.

### France

- France had accepted refugees as part of their constitution since 1793
- Vietnam was granted independence from France in 1954 in the Geneva Accord.
- Right of Asylum has value under French Law and codified under CESEDA
- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees Due to historical colonialism, there was already a well-established Vietnamese community in France, and there had been an influx of loyalist refugees since 1954. After the fall of Saigon, the community was staunchly divided into pro or against the communist government.

### Germany (West)

- Federal Republic of Germany
- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and has it implemented into German law. Right of asylum codified in Basic Law in 1948.
- Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled USSR, settling in the west, including FDG
- 1978 German media covers the plight of the Vietnamese Boat People, and government takes in 40,000 “humanitarian refugees”.
- 1979 independent charity ran “Cap Anamur” to rescue those lost at sea.

### Hong Kong

- Hong Kong was a country of First Asylum for the boat people. These countries agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes.
- 195,833 asylum seekers arrived in Hong Kong between 1975-95

### India

- Prime Minister of Britain pressured India to support international action in the refugee crisis. India was nervous about getting involved.
- Contributed significantly to the International Control Commission of Indochina (1954-1973)
- From 1947 - 1971, India fought several wars with Pakistan over disputed border territories
- In 1971 India had an influx of 10 million refugees fleeing Bangladesh
- From 1975 – 1977, Prime Minister Indira Ghandi declared a state of emergency due to a call for revolution and a wave of strikes.
- India was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement

### Indonesia

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- Indonesia was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement
- Galang Refugee camp opened 1976. Estimated that 250,000 refugees passed through this camp.

### Italy

- Post WW2, 3 million Italians emigrated back to Italy
- 20,000 Italians expelled from Libya in 1970 due to new dictator Muammar Gaddafi and the six-day war
- Metropolitan centres were overpopulated. Rural areas were underpopulated
- 1979 “Mission Vietnam” by the Marina Militare Italiana

### Japan

- 1940 Japan launched its attack of French IndoChina.
- Japan was a country of First Asylum for the boat people. These countries agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes.
- 11, 071 asylum seekers arrived in Japan between 1975-95

### Laos

- Part of French IndoChina. Invaded by Japan in 1940

- Japan's surrender in 1945 sparked a nationalist independence movement.
- 1950 the Pathet Lao, led by Souphanouvong is formed. It is essentially a branch of the VietCong
- 1953 Pathet Lao in a civil war. They are supported by VietCong, and Russia. Royal government backed by USA. Foreign aid only escalated the war.
- 1958 Pathet Lao help VietCong control the DM
- 1962 Geneva convention stated that Laos and the Royal Government was neutral in the IndoChina conflict.
- America broke Geneva convention by running over 500,000 bombing missions and having the CIA secretly train Laotian soldiers against the VietCong. "Operation barrel roll" used Thailand as a base. Also called "The Secret War"
- Vietnam also broke Geneva convention by running supply lines through Laos, and getting the help of the communist rebel group Pathet Lao in the maintenance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail
- Laos became communist in 1975 with the Pathet Lao as the government. Persecution of ethnic Hmong resulted in 400,000 murdered.
- During the Second Indochina war (1954-75) around 700,000 Laotian refugees either hid in caves or poured over the Vietnamese and Thai borders to escape their villages from being bombed by USA.

#### Macau (Portugal)

- During WWII Macau was flooded with refugees from Hong Kong. Macau actually turned over its entire gambling revenue to help their "guests".
- Carnation Revolution of 1974 resulted in Portugal relinquishing control and acknowledging it as a Chinese territory under Portuguese administration.
- Macau was a country of First Asylum for the boat people. These countries agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes.

#### Malaysia

- Malaysia was a country of First Asylum for the boat people. These countries agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes. Malaysia frequently resorted to pushing boats away from their coastline. By 1979, Malaysia announced they had "reached their limit" and would not accept any new arrivals.
- Malaysia used Bidong Island as a refugee camp. By 1979 there were 40,000 refugees crowded in an area of only 6000m<sup>2</sup>.

#### The Netherlands

- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

#### New Zealand

- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1960
- New Zealand had no formal resettlement programme until 1987 where they established the Refugee Quota Branch
- New Zealand only accepts people who have been recognised as a refugee by the UNHCR

#### Philippines

- Philippines was a country of First Asylum for the boat people. These countries agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes. By 1979, the Philippines announced they had “reached their limit” and would not accept any new arrivals.
- 51, 722 asylum seekers arrived in the Philippines between 1975-95.

#### Singapore

- Singapore was a country of First Asylum for the boat people.
- Singapore agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes.
- By 1979, Singapore announced they had “reached their limit” and would not accept any new arrivals. In 1979, 54,000 boat people arrived in June alone.
- 32, 457 asylum seekers arrived in Singapore between 1975-95, but they refused to let any disembark who did not have a guarantee of resettlement in other countries within 90 days.

#### South Korea

- South Korea was a country of First Asylum for the boat people. These countries agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes.
- 1,348 asylum seekers arrived in South Korea between 1975-95.

### Soviet Union

- Supported countries and groups who wanted to become communist.
- Supported Vietnam and Heng Samrin in attacking Pol Pot of Cambodia, and the Pathet Lao of Laos
- Initially Kremlin adopted a “no comment” policy regarding the refugee crisis and maintained that it is an internal affair of Vietnam.
- 1978 signed the Soviet-Vietnamese friendship pact
- Soviet Official Samayatin stated in 1979 that it is impossible to stop the outflow of refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam, and will not help the Vietnamese refugees in any way because they are capitalist. Has also refused to offer assistance to the International Red Cross because they are not “socialist”.
- Breznev annoyed that US President Carter brought up issue during SALTII talks but then shifted policy on involvement in the crisis.
- Sent 2.5 million USD\$ a day into Vietnam for “humanitarian purposes”.
- Saw China as number one enemy, USA as number two.
- By 1979 had increased to 650,000 Soviet Troops along the Chinese border

### Switzerland

- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

### Thailand

- Thailand was a country of First Asylum for the boat people along with Malaysia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Indonesia. These countries agreed to provide only temporary asylum under two conditions: that Vietnam implement the Orderly Departure Programme, and that other countries act more quickly to provide the refugees permanent homes. Thailand frequently resorted to pushing boats away from the coastline.
- By 1979, Thailand announced they had “reached their limit” and would not accept any new arrivals. Their most notorious camp was Khao I Dang.
- Thailand is upset with Vietnam’s position of inaction in Cambodia, and at Soviet Union who keeps flying missions into Vietnam over Thai airspace without permission, but when requested they said no.
- About 500,000 Kampuchean (Cambodia) waited on the Thai/Laos border for entry.

### United Kingdom

- Initially just 32 Vietnamese people were allowed into the country and 300 were given permission to remain in 1975.
- Signatory of the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
- At first, they were reluctant to allow for refugees after the 1979 UN Conference. Not until border disputes with China and the subsequent Chinese invasion of Vietnam in the late 1970’s that the United Kingdom began to allow more refugees to settle.

### United States

- USA involved in conflicts in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. “Red Scare”. “Domino Effect”.
- Refugees chosen for the “conditional entry” status must either have close relatives in the United States, have been trained in the United States during the war or have worked closely with American forces or agencies. Their families were allowed to accompany them, but under a nonprivileged immigration status that causes long delays.
- After withdrawing from Vietnam in 1975, the United States imposed a trade embargo on Vietnam, and encouraged allies to do the same.
- In 1989, USA actually increased the number of Soviet refugees by 39% and decreased the quota for refugees coming from Asia.

### Vietnam

- Ho Chi Minh died, and Ton Duc Thang became the leader of communist Vietnam. He persecuted ethnic Chinese who owned businesses, and anyone who was a supporter of the south during the war.
- In 1962 Vietnam broke the Geneva accord stipulating that Vietnam must stay out of Laos, who was neutral.
- Vietnam and the Soviet Union backed Heng Samrin against Pol Pot’s regime in Cambodia, but in 1979 took the official position of that the Khmer Rouge was an “internal problem” and would no longer get involved.
- Received 2.5 million USD\$ a day from Soviet Union, and got 8 warships with missiles.
- Vietnam relied on the Soviet Union for protection, political support, and financial aid.