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Australians increasingly support the rights of refugees to seek refuge but almost half want borders shut – Ipsos study for World Refugee Day 2020

June 19, 2020 — A new Ipsos global study conducted to mark World Refugee Day 2020 finds that the majority of those surveyed across 26 countries increasingly believe that people should have the right to seek refuge from war or persecution. Concerns over the Coronavirus pandemic, however, has meant many believe their country should accept fewer refugees.

Some attitudes have also hardened, for example, there is increasing scepticism about whether those coming into their country as refugees are genuine refugees. On the other hand, people have become more positive about the ability of refugees to successfully integrate into their new society.

Key findings for Australia:

- We are among the most supportive countries, with 78% of people believing in the fundamental right of refugees to seek refuge – including in their own country - to escape war or persecution, up 15 percentage points from 63% in 2019;
- Almost half of Australians surveyed (47%) say that we must close our country's borders and not accept refugees at this time. This is an increase of seven percentage points since 2019, from 40%. However, an equal number of Australians (47%) disagree that borders should be closed to refugees;
- When asked specifically about the Coronavirus outbreak, 44% of Australians say that their country should be less open to accepting more refugees. On the other hand, one in ten (10%) say it should be more open, while almost a third (31%) believe that Australia should remain the same as before the pandemic;
- Just 14% of Australians say that their country should increase spending to support refugees around the world because of Coronavirus and one in three want to keep it at the same level (32%). However, 40% say that spending should be decreased;
- In Australia, more than half those surveyed (56%) are doubtful that people coming to their country claiming to be refugees really are genuine, instead believing that they are coming for economic reasons or to take advantage of welfare services – an increase of seven percentage points on 2019. More than a third (34%) disagree – up one point since last year;

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- In Australia (and globally) people have, however, become more positive about the ability of refugees to successfully integrate into their new society. Australia is more positive than the global average, with more than half the population (55%) agreeing that refugees will integrate successfully into their new society – an increase of seven points from 38% since 2019. Overall, views on the matter remain fairly split, with 43% disagreeing (a fall of three points from 46% in 2019).

Globally, the study shows that:

- **Seven in ten (72%) believe in the fundamental right of refugees to seek refuge – including in their own country - to escape war or persecution, which is up 11 points from 61% in 2019. One in five (21%) disagree**
 - There is majority support in favour of the right for people to seek refuge across all countries, which is a noticeable change from last year when opinion was much more divided.
 - Those most likely to agree with the principle of the right to seek refuge are in Sweden (81%), Netherlands (80%) and Spain (79%). Levels of agreement have markedly increased in France, Belgium and Germany. Respondents in South Korea (55%), Hungary (57%) and Malaysia (60%) are less likely to agree than the global average.
- **Half of respondents globally (49%) agree borders should be closed to refugees, up nine points globally from 40% in 2019. More than four in 10 (43%) disagree with the statement.**
 - Respondents in Malaysia (82%), Turkey (71%) and India (68%) are most likely to agree that their country's borders should be closed to refugees at this time, compared with respondents in Spain (35%), Japan (37%) and Poland (37%) who are among the least likely to advocate a closed borders policy.
 - Countries, where views have hardened most about closing their borders since 2019 include Malaysia, Peru, South Africa and Chile.
- **When asked specifically about the Coronavirus outbreak, again half (49%) say that their country should be less open to accepting more refugees compared with one in ten (10%) who say it should be more open. Three in ten say that it should remain the same as before the outbreak.**
 - In no country is there majority support for being more open to refugees at this time. Countries where there is greatest support for being less open are Turkey (67%), Russia (66%), Peru (65%) and Malaysia (64%).

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- **More than one in ten (13%) globally say that their country should increase spending (13%) to support refugees around the world because of Coronavirus and one in three want to keep it at the same level (34%). Two in five (38%) say that spending should be decreased.**
 - People in India are most likely to support an increase in spending (33%) followed by Saudi Arabia and Chile (both 23%). Those most likely to say spending should be decreased are in Mexico (52%), Hungary and Canada (both 49%).
- **Globally, close to six in ten (59%) are doubtful that people coming to their country claiming to be refugees really are genuine – an increase of five percentage points on 2019. Three in ten people disagree – showing no change since last year and suggesting that overall the balance of opinion has become more sceptical about people's motives for trying to enter.**
 - Those most likely to doubt the authenticity of refugees coming into their country are in Malaysia (75%), India and Russia (both 74%) and Turkey (72%), while those among the least likely to question whether refugees are genuine are in Britain, Sweden, the US (all 51%), Brazil (47%) and Canada (44%).
 - Countries where scepticism has grown significantly (by 10 points or more) since 2019 are Malaysia, Russia, Chile and Japan.
- **People have, however, become more positive about the ability of refugees to successfully integrate into their new society than last year. Globally, close to half (45%) agree that refugees will integrate successfully into their new society – an increase of seven points from 38% since 2019. Overall, views on the matter remain fairly split, however, with 44% disagreeing (a fall of four points from 47% in 2019).**
 - Countries that are most optimistic about refugees successfully integrating into their new society are Saudi Arabia (65%), India (64%) and Argentina (61%).
 - Countries that are least likely to agree that refugees will successfully integrate are South Korea (26%), Hungary and Belgium (both 28%).
 - Views on this measure have shifted significantly (by at least 10 points) in a positive direction in the United States, Australia, Japan, Brazil and Saudi Arabia as well as a number of European countries including France, Italy and Poland. On the other hand, people in Peru have become less convinced since 2019 that refugees can successfully integrate into their new society.

Ipsos Australia Director, David Elliott, said: “We are seeing increased support for the principle of seeking refuge and increased beliefs that refugees integrate but perhaps in the current time of COVID-19, concerns about a second wave, and concerns about the economy and when Government assistance might be dialled back, there are increased negative perceptions regarding refugees being bona fide and that we should close our borders.

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“The increased support is encouraging and perhaps reflects a broader trend we are seeing in some of our COVID-related research around the globe. People around the globe are reporting that one of the positives to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic is a sense of global solidarity and a greater appreciation of others around the world. We are also hearing that with this new lens on the world people are taking real notice of the ‘black lives matter’ protests and thinking much more about their views and their position on racism.”

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Notes to editors:

- 17,997 online adults were interviewed in total and fieldwork was conducted from 22 May - 5 June 2020
- In the US, South Africa, Turkey and Canada adults aged 18-74 were interviewed and aged 16-64 in all other countries.
- 15 of the 26 countries surveyed online generate nationally representative samples in their countries (Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and United States).
- Brazil, China, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Serbia, South Africa and Turkey produce a national sample that is more urban & educated, and with higher incomes than their fellow citizens. We refer to these respondents as “Upper Deck Consumer Citizens”. They are not nationally representative of their country.
- Where results do not sum to 100 or the ‘difference’ appears to be +/-1 more/less than the actual, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of don't knows or not stated responses.
- The precision of Ipsos online polls are calculated using a credibility interval with a poll of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.1 percentage points and of 500 accurate to +/- 4.5 percentage points. For more information on the Ipsos use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website.
- Data are weighted to match the profile of the population

For more information on this news release, please contact:

Rochelle Burbury
Third Avenue Consulting
0408 774 577
rochelle@thirdavenue.com.au



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