

Refugees who now call Australia home share their stories

From Ukrainian bomb shelters to Venezuelan chaos, these families have discovered Australia offers what their homelands couldn't – true freedom and safety. SEE THE VIDEO.

[Remy Varga](#) and [Georgia Palgan](#), January 25, 2026 - 5:00AM

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Olha Pudlo with her children Matvii, 12, and Ustym, 7, at their home in Parramatta. The family moved to Australia three years ago from the war in Ukraine. Picture: Rohan Kelly

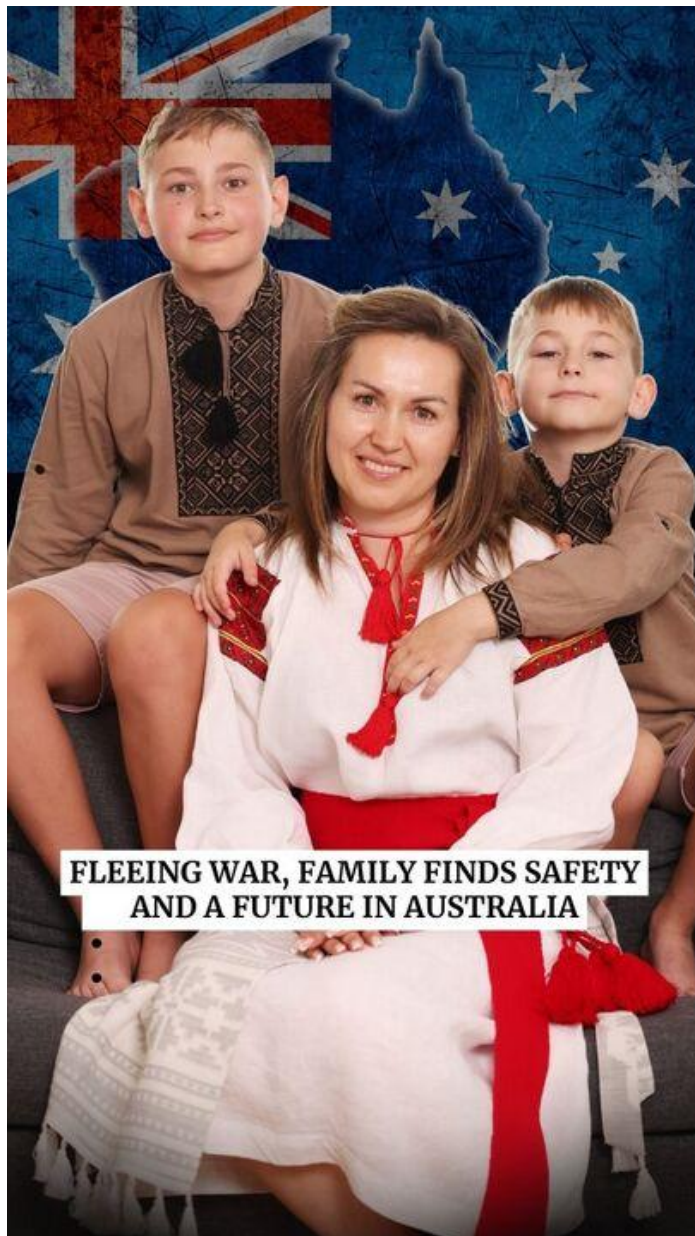
They fled war, violence and corruption with hopes for a better life. Some are Australian citizens and some are waiting for that final piece of paper confirming they belong in their new home.

But all came to Australia because of the freedom, prosperity and safety offered by the lucky country.

Olha Pudlo's reason for moving to Australia from Ukraine is simple. She wanted to live somewhere where her children would be safe and free from bombings, drone and air raids.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Ms Pudlo started looking for countries that would accept Ukrainian migrants and applied to come here.

"I was looking for a safe place for my children," she says. "For me it was very important to find a place without bombs, without alarms every day. And they [her sons] were scared."



**FLEEING WAR, FAMILY FINDS SAFETY
AND A FUTURE IN AUSTRALIA**

Months later Ms Pudlo arrived at Sydney Airport with her husband, two sons and two suitcases. Nearly four years later, she and her family are returning to Ukraine for the first time since they left their country of birth.

The return will be bittersweet.

“I’m a little bit afraid too, because all day is danger,” says Ms Pudlo.

“I think my village is small [and] is safe, but it’s not safety.”

The past years have been challenging for the family as they attempted to learn English and settle into their new home, starting new jobs and finding schools for their children.

But Ms Pudlo says the family is happy and grateful for their new home, for the safety and the opportunities to work and study and prosper.

“Thank you so much Australia,” she says.

“We receive permanent residency because now we can plan our future, for us, for our children and we can build our life here, and Australia is so supportive of my family.”

This January 26, a darkness undercuts the annual celebrations of the nation’s identity, a stain left by the devastating Bondi terror attacks that killed 15 innocent people, injured dozens and shattered the nation’s sense of security.

But for migrants from war ravaged and unstable parts of the world, Australia is still a place of safety and freedom.



At their business at Ingleside in Sydney is Jason Castaneda and Vicky Araque. They became Australian citizens in November last year, marking the culmination of a decade-

long journey that began when they left Venezuela with their young son. Picture: Richard Dobson

Jason Castaneda and his wife Vicky fled Venezuela with their young son when it became clear they were no longer safe in their home country.

“Everything was chaos with health, security, gun control,” he said.

“It wasn’t safe there anymore for us to live or to give the best opportunity for my kids.”

The Castanedas migrated to Australia about a decade ago and became Australian citizens in November 2025.

Despite arriving with very little English, the couple now run a busy cafe in Sydney’s Northern Beaches.

“The community from the Northern Beaches now are my friends and my family,” said Mr Castaneda.

“Anything I need from the community, they’re here for me. That’s part of getting our citizenship, they ask about Australian values and helping each other. I live that with my community. It motivates me.”



Independent politician Dai Le said migrants and refugees flock to Australia because of opportunity, egalitarianism and safety. Picture: NewsWire/Max Mason-Hubers

Independent Fowler MP Dai Le came to Australia as a refugee in the 1970s after her family fled war-torn Vietnam and spent time in refugee camps.

She says all she knew of the lucky country back then was that it had one of the best education systems in the world. Ms Le and her sisters became Australian citizens about four years later.

She says migrants and refugees flock to Australia because of opportunity, egalitarianism and safety.

“Successive waves of migrants and refugees have come to call Australia home because it’s seen as a country that provides a safe haven,” she says.

“It provides freedom for people to be who they want to be, freedom of speech, the freedom to practice their faith, the freedom to protest.

“It is a safe country for families and for people who fled war zones, especially because it [Australia] was so far away from everything.”



Ravi Ghimire, his wife Pooja, and their eight-month-old son Pravik will become citizens on January 26 after moving to Australia about a decade ago. Picture: Supplied

Ravi Ghimire, 34, and his wife Pooja will become citizens on January 26 after moving to Australia about a decade ago. The business owners are also the proud parents of eight-month-old Pravik, who was born in Australia.

Mr Ghimire said Australia was the “best place” to live and work, although he was sad he had to forsake his Nepalese citizenship to become an Australian citizen.

“We are happy, excited and at a certain point will be a bit nervous as well,” he said.

“Because we are becoming citizens of a completely different country than where we were born. “Because of that point we are a little bit nervous but overall we are really happy.”