

UCA's Advocacy for Refugees and people on temporary visas

During COVID-19 we have learnt: **people on temporary visas are particularly**

vulnerable. There remains a role for temporary migration, such as international students, working holiday makers and programs that provide income opportunities to people from the Pacific to improve their lives and the lives of people in their communities. At the same time, where possible migration should allow people to become permanent Australian residents and citizens. Permanent migration means migrants are more invested in becoming part of the Australian community and reduces their vulnerability to exploitation.

Therefore, we ask: that the Australian Government review and expand current pathways for migrants to become permanent residents and citizens of Australia.

BUILD BACK BETTER: A JUST RECOVERY POST-COVID-19, 2020

[HTTPS://UNITING.CHURCH/BUILD-BACK-BETTER/](https://uniting.church/build-back-better/)

No fair process and permanent protection for people seeking safety in Australia

- The current 'fast-track' process for assessing people's claims for protection deliberately discriminates against people who came to Australia by boat. It's created a complex system that's incredibly difficult for people in the community to navigate.
- Since 2014, people who arrive by boat and do not have a valid visa have no right to meaningful, independent review of their case. As a result of this process, many more people seeking asylum are being denied protection and face a greater risk of being sent back to danger.
- Around 15,000 people, including children, are currently in the community waiting for their claims to be processed under 'fast track' or are having the outcome for their claim reviewed.
- Those found to be refugees are currently placed on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for three years or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) for five years. They must reapply for their visas every three or five years for the rest of their lives.
- Those on a TPV or SHEV live in a state of limbo – they do not have the same access to family reunion, services, support, education and employment as those with a Permanent Protection Visa.

Key Actions:

1. A fair, robust and timely process for assessing the protection claims of people seeking asylum.

2. Those found to be refugees are granted permanent protection so they can begin to rebuild their lives and contribute to Australian society

OUR VISION FOR A JUST AUSTRALIA, UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA ASSEMBLY, 2020

[HTTPS://UNITING.CHURCH/VISIONSTATEMENT/](https://uniting.church/visionsstatement/)

How does Australia treat people seeking asylum?

Australia's asylum policy punishes rather than protects people. The harsh policies cause terrible suffering to vulnerable people.

Australia is stopping people seeking asylum from coming (by boat or plane). If any do come by boat, they are sent to Nauru or Papua New Guinea to be 'processed'. They are then left there with little prospect of living safely and supporting themselves.

Those who enter Australia without a visa must be detained by law. They can be released only if the Minister allows it. There is no time limit to their detention. No one can independently review whether they should be detained. People are detained even if they haven't committed a crime. They are being held for longer and longer, on average for around 450 days. Some have now been detained for as long as nine years.

In recent years, most people seeking asylum have been released into the community. While this is very welcome, their difficulties do not stop.

Many of them are forced into poverty, because they are not given enough (or sometimes anything) to live on. For years, the government stopped them from working. The government has not offered them any help to settle. Meanwhile, the government takes years to process their claims.

Even when they are found to be refugees, the punishment continues. Under current policy, refugees who come by boat are forced to live on temporary protection visas forever. They must apply every three or five years to stay in Australia. They cannot be reunited with family, or even visit them without the permission of the government.

In recent years, more people seeking asylum by plane have been waiting longer for their claims to be determined. While these people face fewer restrictions than those who come by boat, they can still face enormous challenges.

They live in the community, usually on the conditions of their original visa. For some visas, such as tourist or student visas, this means they cannot get Medicare, cannot get income support, and may be unable to work. They are also often unable to access other supports, such as women's refuges.

REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA: A QUICK GUIDE, REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA, 2020

[HTTPS://WWW.REFUGEECOUNCIL.ORG.AU/QUICK-GUIDE/](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/quick-guide/)

SEVEN YEARS ON: AN OVERVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S OFFSHORE PROCESSING POLICIES, 2020

[HTTPS://WWW.REFUGEECOUNCIL.ORG.AU/SEVEN-YEARS-ON/](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/seven-years-on/)