

SAFETY: A universal safety net for all refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia

All people in Australia should have access to safety nets and mainstream social support. Unfortunately, tens of thousands of people seeking asylum in Australia are prevented from mainstream social support such as Centrelink, housing assistance and family reunion, with some having limited access to Medicare and work rights. ASRC supports having a universal safety net for all people seeking asylum and refugees in Australia and enabling all people to contribute to a supportive and welcoming community.

Recommendations

1. People seeking asylum and refugees can access a safety net such as access to housing, income support, right to work/study, access to education and Medicare for the duration of the process, regardless of how they arrived.

Policy Background

Seeking asylum should be a point in someone's life, not what defines them. However, due to our current immigration regime, people seeking asylum and refugees living on temporary visas face additional barriers and challenges. These challenges have led to financial hardship, deteriorating mental health and poorer settlement outcomes.

Family Reunion

The current immigration regime deliberately separates families and prevents reunification. Refugees have consistently identified a lack of family reunion as their primary source of distress. Under Direction 80 applications for family reunion from people who arrived by sea are given the lowest priority, constantly moved to the bottom of the list. In the context of low quotas for family reunion visas, these applications in practice have no prospect of success.

People on TPV/SHEV need Ministerial permission before they can travel outside of Australia, however, they cannot travel to their country of origin, and people on bridging visas cannot leave at all. Leading to families being separated for decades.

Healthcare

One of the few protections that the Government offers people seeking asylum and refugees in Australia on temporary visas is Medicare. However, there are 2,400 people who are currently waiting for their temporary visas to be renewed and are not receiving health care services due to the temporary nature of their visas and delays in the renewal process.

Work Rights

There are many barriers to employment for people on temporary visas, especially for people seeking asylum and refugees as a temporary visa status has a significant negative impact on employment prospects and renewals will periodically leave people without work rights.

There are currently around 12,000 people seeking asylum on Bridging Visa E (BVE). This visa does not have an automatic entitlement to work rights and it is estimated that around 20% of people do not have a right to work on this visa. Those waiting for their visa to be renewed also lack work rights. Around 83% of people who access ASRC's foodbank have no income.

Even for those with work rights, including those of TPV/SHEV, temporary visa status means people are living their lives in uncertainty and limbo. Employers are often reluctant to hire people when visas will expire in a short period.

Betlehem Tebubu, human rights activist and survivor of Offshore Processing on Nauru - "We have been without a home for eight years now. We are all on short bridging visas and lost too many years to detention. We can not start a new life as free people and live our dreams without a permanent home." - [source](#)

Education and training

Accessibility and affordability are the two major barriers to education and training for people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas. People on temporary visas are ineligible for a range of skills and training that would support their employment options and most education opportunities they are eligible for are unaffordable as they receive no HECS or domestic fees.

Social Support

People who sought asylum in Australia have been systematically excluded from the social support system that others in Australia enjoy. Furthermore, the funding of the social support systems that are accessible has been gutted, from \$139.8 million in 2017-2018 to \$33 million in 2021-2022.

Why change these policies?

- Refugees have been living in Australia for a decade working and paying taxes. It's only fair that they can access a safety net if needed.
- Education and employment are key pillars to our thriving society, arbitrarily preventing people from accessing this is detrimental to those affected and the country.
- Family separation is one of the most important issues facing people seeking asylum, deprioritisation based on refugees mode of arrival in Australia is needlessly cruel.