

NOT ALL PEOPLE ON TEMPORARY VISAS CAN RETURN HOME

There is a lot of talk in the media about people on temporary visas in Australia. Often no differentiation is made between those who visit Australia for a limited period, and those who have come seeking asylum. It is both misleading and possibly very dangerous to the rights of asylum seekers when the discussion is not clear.

In the current COVID-19 health and economic crisis, there is some public discussion suggesting that many people on temporary visas may need to return 'home', as these people can safely return to their home countries. However, this does not apply to asylum seekers and refugees holding Bridging Visas TPVs or SHEVs because they are either seeking protection or have been granted protection from the persecution they have fled.

Facts about the different groups of people in Australia on temporary visas:

- * About 10 million people come in a year as tourists. The average stay is a few weeks.
- * About 800,000 overseas students are studying in Australia at any time.
- * About 700,000 back packers come each year. Their average stay is about 10 weeks.
- * Short term work visas
- * At any one time, somewhere in the order of 60,000 people have overstayed their visa we are told.

The Australian government has said more than 2 million people on temporary visas, including students, skilled workers, and visitors, are in the country.

Facts about numbers and categories of asylum seekers on temporary visas:

- * Around 13,000 people who arrived by boat who are on Bridging Visas (BV). All have been in detention and then, when released, were given a Bridging Visa that means they are may be in Australia only while their application for protection is being processed.
- * Those whose application for protection have been completed and where the individuals recognised as refugees, only get a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) for 3 years or a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa. (SHEV) 5 years. There are about 8,400 people on TPV's and 16,000 on SHEVs in Australia. They are required to re-apply every 3 or 5 years to show they still need protection and then they are eligible only for another TPV or SHEV. These arrangements apply to people who arrived by boat after 2013.
- * There are about 24,000 people who arrived by plane on various visas and subsequently made an application for protection. If successful, they will get Permanent Protection Visas (PPV).

People who are seeking asylum: Bridging Visas and Centrelink

There are around 37,000 people who are seeking asylum on Bridging Visas. Some have the right to work and have been supporting themselves in casual insecure work such as in hospitality services, uber driving and construction. Most have lost their employment in the COVID-19 crisis.

None of these people currently have access to Centrelink payments (now Job Seeker or Job Keeper) or rent assistance when they lose their work. Some have never had the right to work.

Like us, all these people are anxious about the COVID-19 risk, and we need to ensure that they can feel secure about maintaining their housing and capacity to cover essential living expenses.

If you require further information email info@refugeeadvocacynetwork.org.au