

Temporary Protection Visas

What are Temporary Protection Visas?

The re-introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for asylum seekers who arrive by boat is a core Coalition policy. TPV holders are not eligible for permanent residency and are thus placed in limbo. The visa lasts for three years and once the visa expires after three years the holder has to re-apply for another 3 year TPV. Holders will have access to some medical and welfare services, but no access to family reunion or travel rights. To gain welfare, TPV holders will have to work for the dole and a TPV does not include genuine work rights. TPVs will retrospectively apply to the 30,000 asylum seekers who arrived by boat currently awaiting permanent protection applications.¹ Around 11,000 TPVs were issued between 1999 and 2007 under the Howard Government and 90 percent of TPV holders were eventually issued with protection visas.² To be granted permanent residence, a TPV holder requires ministerial approval.³

What's wrong with TPVs?

TPVs will create a second class of refugees. During 1999 – 2007, in contrast to permanent visa holders, TPV holders faced ongoing limbo and uncertainty about their ability to remain in Australia, as well as deliberate exclusion from basic welfare and integration services, such as:

- No right to apply for family reunion with spouses and children who remained overseas in high risk situations;
- Barred from most forms of Centrelink support;
- No right to funded English classes, interpreting or translation services;
- No access to emergency accommodation and limited access to state housing⁴.

Australia was the only country to introduce TPVs for refugees as a form of penalty⁵ and the policy damaged Australia's international reputation. It is not

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-16/coalition-promises-return-of-temporary-protection/4893524>

² Australian Parliamentary Library – Boat Arrivals in Australia since 1976
http://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary_library/pubs/bn/2012-2013/boatarrivals#_Toc347230716

³ <http://www.scottmorrison.com.au/info/pressrelease.aspx?id=1047>

⁴ Dr Don McMaster, 'Temporary Protection Visas: The bastard child of the One Nation Party,'
http://www.adelaide.edu.au/apsa/docs_papers/Aust%20Pol/McMaster.pdf,
Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, 29 September – 1 October 2004.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch Commentary on Australia's Temporary Protection Visa for Refugees*,

clear whether the Coalition Government will implement similar restrictions on these after the 2013 election.

While they may have been harsh, didn't they work?

Contrary to popular belief, 'tough' immigration policies in the past have not succeeded as an effective deterrent:

- In 2000, the first full year after TPVs were introduced, there were 2939 arrivals. In 2001, by the time the policy was in full force, arrivals rose to more than 5000.⁶
- Under this policy, denying the right to refugees on TPVs to apply for family reunion pushed the wives and children of asylum seekers onto boats in an attempt to be reunited.
- In 2001, 353 people drowned in the tragic SIEVX disaster while travelling by boat to Australia. Most of the 288 women and children aboard the SIEVX were family members of TPV holders already in Australia.⁷

TPVs are a form of punitive punishment that did not previously deter boat arrivals nor stop deaths at sea. They ignore push factors such as the increasing number of asylum seekers moving across borders worldwide.⁸ The fact that 90% of TPV holders were eventually granted permanent residency during the previous era of TPVs is an indication that the re-introduction is more politically based than proper long term policy aimed at solving the issue.

<http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/refugees/australia051303.htm>, accessed April 2011.

⁶ Refugee Council of Australia. <http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/stat-as.php>

⁷ <http://sievx.com/articles/disaster/200111xxEITelegraph.html>

⁸ UNHCR Global Trends: <http://unhcr.org/globaltrendsjune2013/>