

Project SafeCom Inc. - Information Sheet 9

Refugees Deserve a Permanent Future:

4000 TPV (temporary protection visa) Holders in Australia

The Howard government has officially recognised TPV holders as genuine refugees. They're working hard in our communities, but our government makes it almost impossible for them to gain permanent status. Instead they can only be temporary Australians.

In the future, the government may remove these workers from the country ... and from Australia. It's unfair to the refugees, it's unfair to their employers and it's unfair to our communities. We call on the Howard government to abolish temporary protection visas and give refugees a real chance to put down roots in our land. In September 2003 the government started on its campaign to refuse further protection to TPV holders.

The Problem

Temporary Protection Visas (TPV's)

Temporary Protection Visas were introduced in October 1999. They are issued to those who arrive in Australia without valid documentation and are subsequently found to be refugees. The TPV is valid for 36 months; after 30 months refugees may have their second applications for protection reassessed by the Department of Immigration.

By the end of 2002, a total of 8589 TPV's had been issued - 48% to Iraqi refugees and 42% to refugees from Afghanistan. Many of these people are living and working in rural and regional Australia. **The Temporary Protection Visa leaves refugees in limbo, always uncertain about their future.**

Multiple Restrictions

Temporary Protection Visas have multiple restrictions, which make it difficult for refugees to put down permanent roots.

- No access to federally funded English language programs
- Not able to leave Australia without jeopardising their visa
- Imposition of full international student fees for higher education. (approx. \$17,000/year); able access TAFE in some states, subject to state government policy
- No family reunion rights, including spouse and children
- Must re-apply for protection every three years; some refugees will never be able to apply for a permanent visa.

These rules also restrict refugees' ability to make a contribution to Australia. Temporary Protection Visas are unfair to the refugees, unfair to their employers and unfair to our communities.

"Walk in our shoes for just a little while - feel the constant threat of expulsion, the rejections and most importantly, the uncertainty we face every day." - as stated to the Refugee Council of Australia by a Year 11 Iraqi student.

Put Yourself in Their Shoes

If you had to flee your homeland.... Imagine if you had to flee your homeland. Maybe you criticised the government. Maybe there was a war in your country. Maybe your family had been living under a harsh and cruel regime. Or maybe you were targeted for your beliefs or how you looked. You might have been a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a journalist, an artist, a mother, a father or a child. Maybe you were tortured; maybe you were threatened with death. Maybe they threatened your family.

Whatever the reason and whatever your profession you had to flee your home land to escape persecution.

Seeking Refuge

Now imagine what you would do. How would you flee? What would you take with you? Who would you take with you? You can't get your passport because those who issue the papers are the same people you are fleeing. There's no embassy in your country and no guarantee of safety if you go to refugee camps across the border.

Project SafeCom Inc. P.O. Box 364, Narrogin WA - Phone 041 70 90 130
Email: admin@safecom.org - web: <http://www.safecom.org/refugees.htm>

We acknowledge our friends at Rural Australians for Refugees for compiling this information: <http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org/>

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You decide to escape using any means possible. You are desperate. You come to Australia by boat and seek the protection of a safe and democratic country. You are locked up for three years in a desert camp. You don't understand. You've committed no crime.

You are a recognized refugee.

Finally, after years in detention, the Australian government might recognize you are a legitimate refugee. You might be released into the community and hope to rebuild your life. But you are only given a temporary visa. You have no access to federally funded English classes, so it's difficult to find a job. Eventually you join a fruit picking crew.

You find out you cannot bring your wife and children to Australia. You may learn you will never qualify for a permanent visa and need to reapply every three years. You try to rebuild your life. You settle into a community. Make friends and play soccer. Conditions may change in your country, but you fear it is not safe to return. There are no guarantees. You watch as your friends and former countrymen despair. You know after three years your temporary visa expires. You must prove your case all over again. If you lose, you face deportation. You live a life of fear and uncertainty.

People want TPV holders to stay

"I've had an Afghani picking crew on my farm for the past two years. They are great blokes. They really miss their families and the uncertainty of their situation takes its toll on all of us." - IAN SKILLER, HORTICULTURALIST, TOOLEYBUC, SOUTH WEST NSW

"One of them was a doctor, but he can't study because he's only got a temporary visa. That's a real shame, because we really need doctors up here. It would be a great blow to my farm and to my region if they were sent back. They should be allowed to stay." - JOHN WALKER, MAYOR OF YOUNG, CENTRAL NSW

"We've had up to 90 refugees on temporary visas living in Young for the past three years. Most of them have been working in the local abattoir. A study released by the University of Sydney has shown they have contributed more than \$2.5 million over 18 months to our local economy. For a small country town like Young, it would be a huge economic loss if the refugees were sent back. If the government was serious about helping country Australia, it would review these visas and make them permanent." - TRISH BRYANT, MUM, SHEPPARTON, NORTH-EAST VICTORIA

"I met Abdullah, his wife Asma and their four children through my work with Rural Australians for Refugees. I really admire their strength in fleeing Iraq and have marvelled how they kept their family together under really tough circumstances.

It is mind-boggling the Howard government has this policy of Temporary Protection. Abdullah was a qualified engineer in Iraq and could make a real contribution to our community and to our country if he and his family had a secure future. Australia is missing out on so much by keeping people with Abdullah's spirit and skills in limbo.

What you can do

The policy of granting only temporary visas to recognized refugees is unfair and unjust. It must be changed. In order to do this, temporary protection visas must be abolished and all people currently on temporary visas should be granted permanent protection.

If you are concerned about this please:

Write to your local member of parliament. - *Become informed* - Organise a guest speaker for a church or community organization to speak about this issue. This can be done through Project SafeCom Inc. Join many other concerned Australians and become involved with a group like Project SafeCom.

For further information about this and other refugee issues, see our website.

Don't just be concerned about this issue, do something to bring about positive change .

Together, we can make a real difference.

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