



Refugee Council of Australia

19 October 2013

Return to Temporary Protection Visas is punishment not deterrence

The Australian Government's reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) is a punitive and counter-productive policy which will leave refugee families separated indefinitely, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

Under the policy reintroduced by regulation yesterday, refugees on TPVs will be denied permanent residency, the right to apply for citizenship, access to family reunion or the right to return to Australia if they leave temporarily for any purpose.

RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said the implementation of the TPV policy from 1999 to 2007 demonstrated that it was a cruel response to people found by the Australian Government to be in need of refugee protection.

"For people already traumatised by their refugee journey, living on a Temporary Protection Visa brings uncertainty, unfairness and fear for the safety of family members in dangerous and desperate circumstances," Mr Power said.

Mr Power said the Government could not justify its claim that the reintroduction of TPVs was part of its deterrence approach to stop asylum seekers from arriving in Australia by boat.

"As TPVs will be issued only to people already in Australia and all future arrivals will be sent to offshore processing centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea never to be settled in Australia, the Government cannot claim TPVs as a possible deterrent for future arrivals.

"Not only is this policy needlessly punitive, it will be counter-productive and ultimately against Australia's national interest.

"In the past we saw that the great majority of people granted TPVs were never able to return home safely and ultimately were given permanent protection.

"Of the 11,000 people granted TPVs under the Howard Government, more than 9,500 people had been given permanent protection by the Howard Government before it left office in 2007. The Howard Government had to face the reality that it is rare for conditions in refugees' countries of origin to improve quickly – and the Abbott Government will face the same reality.

"Punishing people seeking refugee protection and placing their lives on hold under a TPV will damage their mental health and leave vulnerable families separated for years, which is the worst possible start for people adjusting to a new life in Australia."

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Last month, RCOA produced a Policy Brief on the TPV policy, looking at how the policy was presented in the Coalition's election policies and summarising past research on the impact of TPVs on refugees. The Policy Brief is available at http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/pb/PB1324_TPVs.pdf

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The Refugee Council of Australia represents
non-government organisations and
individuals working with and for refugees
in Australia and around the world