

The impacts of COVID-19 on people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas

RESEARCH BRIEFING NOTE #1

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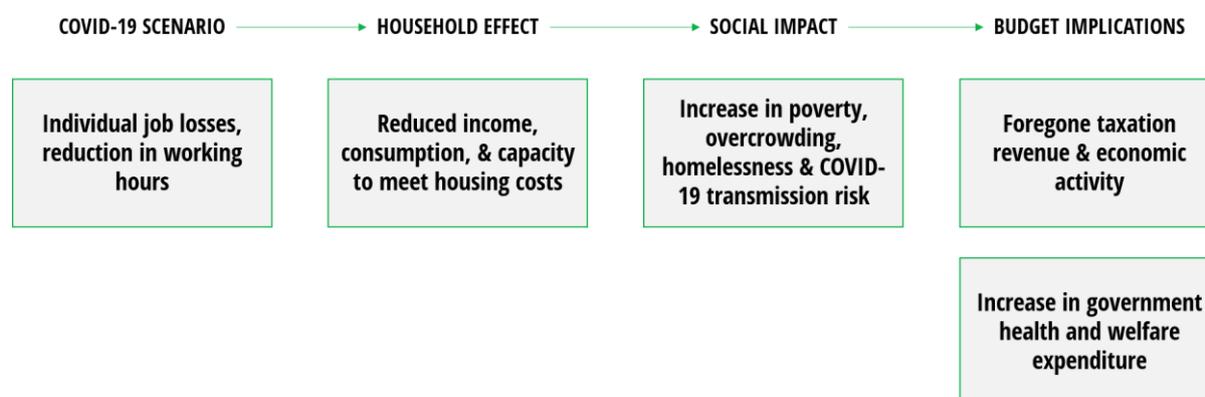
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Summary

This briefing focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on asylum seekers holding Bridging Visas (BVs “A”, “C” and “E”), and refugees on Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) and Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs).

The analysis demonstrates the vulnerability of these temporary visa holders to job losses as a result of the pandemic, which have flow-on effects for their housing situation and health. There are significant public costs associated with these effects (represented in Figure 1 below), including reduced economic consumption, foregone federal income tax, and increased rental vacancies/loss of rental income.

Figure 1. COVID-19 impact scenario model



Workers holding BVs, SHEVs or TPVs are vulnerable to job losses as they are mostly employed in casual jobs with low incomes, and often in industries most affected by COVID-19 (such as accommodation and food services¹). As a result of unemployment and lost income, there are likely increases in poverty, overcrowding in private accommodation, homelessness and, for BVE holders, detention—all of which are a threat to the progress Australia has made in reducing community transmission of COVID-19.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), [Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia](#), cat 6160.0.55.001, First Issue, Week ending 4 April 2020, 21/04/20.

Given the limited data available on BV/SHEV/TPV holders, we used data on permanently resettled refugees as a reference group to establish socioeconomic benchmarks. Based on this analysis, we estimate that:

- Nearly 22,000 asylum seekers, SHEV and TPV holders stand to lose their jobs as a result of the coronavirus outbreak
- Extending income support to 22,000 out of work asylum seekers and refugees will cost the government just 2% over the forward estimates on top of existing budget measures to extend Jobseeker and the Coronavirus supplement
- Without a job or any income support, this spike in unemployment will cost the government \$700,000 per week in lost tax revenue, or nearly \$43 million over the forward estimates (to 2020-21)
- Total loss of household income will take over \$10 million per week out of the economy until these incomes are replaced or supplemented
- 91% of this group are renters, who, if unable to pay their rent, will potentially cost private landlords up to \$21.5 million per month in foregone rental income
- Nearly 74,000 people in this group are also on short-term leases or do not have a rental agreement/contract, leaving those unemployed highly vulnerable to eviction
- Inability to pay rent could increase the rate of overcrowded dwellings for this group from 22% to almost 75%

The impact of coronavirus on asylum seekers, SHEV and TPV holders means likely increases in demands on sources of community support. Previous estimates show that 72% of SRSS clients are already accessing emergency relief services including food banks;² we expect that a spike in unemployment will increase this figure.

Overcrowding and homelessness also make social distancing virtually impossible, which could lead to higher rates of community transmission of COVID-19.³ As in other countries, providers of emergency services, including migrant resource centres, may become hazardous environments due to difficulties maintaining social distancing rules.⁴

Finally, should there be an increase in homelessness amongst asylum seekers, and breaches of social distancing rules on the streets or elsewhere, there is an associated increased risk of these individuals being sent to detention.⁵ As medical experts have warned, COVID-19 can rapidly spread through detention centres, posing risks to those detained, staff in these facilities and ultimately the broader Australian community.⁶

² J. van Kooy & T. Ward (2019), [An unnecessary penalty: Economic impacts of changes to the Status Resolution Support Services](#), Refugee Council of Australia.

³ H. Cohen & S. Mitchell (2020), [From sleeping rough to four-star hotels: How coronavirus is changing our approach to homelessness](#), *Background Briefing*, ABC News, 25/04/20.

⁴ S. D'Ignotti (2020), [How coronavirus hits migrants and asylum seekers in Italy](#), *The New Humanitarian*, 16/03/20.

⁵ K. Murphy (2020), [COVID-19: Some issues for asylum seekers and refugees in Australia](#), Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, 17/04/20.

⁶ Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases Limited (ASID) and Australasian College for Infection Prevention and Control (ACIPC), [Open letter to the Commonwealth Government](#), 19/03/20.