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# Freedom and hope after years waiting: *How permanent residency changed the lives of people who sought asylum in Australia*

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# Authors

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# Table of Contents

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| <b>Executive Summary .....</b>                        | <b>4</b>         |
| <b>Background &amp; Overview</b>                      |                  |
| <i>Background to Current Policy .....</i>             | <i>6</i>         |
| <i>Current Policy .....</i>                           | <i>9</i>         |
| <b>Research Design and Methodology .....</b>          | <b>9</b>         |
| <b>Key Findings.....</b>                              | <b>10</b>        |
| <b><i>“I’m free now” .....</i></b>                    | <b><i>11</i></b> |
| <i>Discussion.....</i>                                | <i>12</i>        |
| <b><i>“A new chapter is open” .....</i></b>           | <b><i>13</i></b> |
| <i>Family Reunion.....</i>                            | <i>14</i>        |
| <i>Overseas Travel.....</i>                           | <i>14</i>        |
| <i>Home ownership.....</i>                            | <i>15</i>        |
| <i>Building a business.....</i>                       | <i>16</i>        |
| <i>Work opportunities.....</i>                        | <i>17</i>        |
| <i>Australian citizenship.....</i>                    | <i>17</i>        |
| <i>Access to healthcare .....</i>                     | <i>18</i>        |
| <i>Enhanced community participation.....</i>          | <i>18</i>        |
| <i>Discussion.....</i>                                | <i>19</i>        |
| <b><i>Lost years and ongoing challenges .....</i></b> | <b><i>21</i></b> |
| <i>Ongoing concerns for family members.....</i>       | <i>22</i>        |
| <i>“I lost many years” .....</i>                      | <i>22</i>        |
| <i>Advocating for others .....</i>                    | <i>23</i>        |
| <i>Discussion.....</i>                                | <i>23</i>        |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>                               | <b>28</b>        |
| <b>Recommendations .....</b>                          | <b>29</b>        |

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# Executive Summary

In February 2023, the Australian Government announced a pathway to a permanent visa for people who arrived in Australia by boat to seek asylum before 2014 but were only granted temporary protection. More than 30,000 people seeking asylum, most of whom arrived between 2012-2013, were subjected to the deeply flawed Fast Track assessment process and approximately 20,000 were found to be a refugee and granted either a Temporary Protection visa (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise visa (SHEV). After a decade or more in Australia, TPV and SHEV holders were allowed to apply for a permanent visa – the Resolution of Status (RoS) visa (Subclass 851). This enabled people recognised as a refugee, who had experienced many years of uncertainty on a succession of temporary visas, to finally be granted permanent residency in Australia.

Drawing on interviews with seven new permanent residents of Australia who had first sought asylum in Australia more than a decade ago, this report explores the impacts of this policy shift and provides insights into the experience of receiving this status.

## Three overarching themes emerged from the interviews:



**“I’m free now.”** Receiving a permanent visa is a profoundly positive experience and includes finally feeling hopeful, positive and safe about life in Australia, and a sense of belonging to the Australian community.



**“A new chapter is open.”** A permanent visa enables making long term plans, including starting the process of family reunion, home ownership and building a business. It also enables overseas travel, greater access to study and work options, and healthcare, and Australian citizenship.



**Lost years and ongoing challenges.** Ongoing challenges are evident given the length of time people were forced to live without a permanent visa, and the policy landscape remains difficult.

This study found extremely positive outcomes for people as a result of receiving a permanent visa, as well as ongoing challenges given the length of time they had lived on temporary visas. This reinforces the importance of abolishing temporary protection and ensuring that all people seeking asylum can access a just refugee assessment process.

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Following these findings, we make the following recommendations to the Australian Federal Government:

- 1** The Australian Government should provide a permanent RoS visa pathway for all people subjected to the Fast Track assessment process, including those refused protection.
- 2** Temporary protection visas should be abolished from the Migration Act.
- 3** RoS visa holders should be provided with access to a family reunion process that is fair, timely, and affordable.
- 4** The Australian Government should implement meaningful and practical measures to redress the long-term harm and disadvantage caused by these punitive policies.

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# Background & Overview

This study was conducted to understand the impacts of obtaining permanent visas on refugees who arrived to Australia by boat more than a decade ago, and were subjected to the unfair Fast Track assessment process. Approximately 20,000 people in this situation experienced many years of uncertainty on a succession of temporary visas, which had a profoundly negative impact on many aspects of their lives, before finally being granted a permanent visa, the RoS. More than 7,000 others subjected to Fast Track continue to wait for a pathway to permanent residency.

## Background to Current Policy

Australia has long had a punitive policy landscape for people seeking asylum who arrive by boat. This includes mandatory detention, enshrined in law since 1992. Under this law, people who arrive without a valid visa are subject to mandatory immigration detention. They may be detained in closed detention settings or community-based forms of detention until they are granted a visa or removed from Australia. This has resulted in many people seeking asylum being detained for long periods of time on an indefinite basis. Many testimonials and much research highlight the damaging mental and physical health impacts of long term, indefinite detention.<sup>1</sup>

Another punitive measure supported by both major political parties has allowed Australia to remove people seeking asylum arriving by boat to sites of detention on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, where their refugee claims are processed without the option of being resettled in Australia. Known as offshore processing, this policy was first implemented between 2001-2008 and re-introduced in 2012. Thousands of people who arrived after this time have subsequently spent many years in extremely harsh conditions on those islands.<sup>2</sup> There is also much research and many testimonials that highlight the dreadful mental and physical health impacts of this policy.<sup>3</sup>

Most people seeking asylum who arrived by boat between 2012-2013 and were not sent to an offshore site of detention, were released from immigration detention in Australia into the community and issued with a succession of temporary bridging visas. However, they were initially not given the

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<sup>1</sup> W. Forrest and Z. Steel (2023) 'The impact of immigration detention on the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers', *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 36(3): 642-653. doi: 10.1002/jts.22944; K. Hedrick, G. Armstrong, G. Coffey and R. Borschmann (2020) 'Self-harm among asylum seekers in Australian onshore immigration detention: how incidence rates vary by held detention type', *BMC Public Health* 20: 1–0.

<sup>2</sup> J. McAdam and F. Chong (2019) *Refugee Rights and Policy Wrongs* Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press.

<sup>3</sup> B. Boochani (2022) 'Freedom, Only Freedom: The Prison Writings of Behrouz Boochani' London: Bloomsbury Publishing; P. Specker, B. Liddell, R. Bryant, M. O'Donnell and A. Nickeson (2025) 'Investigating whether offshore immigration detention and processing are associated with an increased likelihood of psychological disorders' *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 226(3):189-190. doi:10.1192/bjp.2024.184.

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right to work or study and could only access limited government-funded supports and services.<sup>4</sup> While the right to work and study began to be granted after several years, the election of the Coalition Government in September 2013 paved the way for this policy landscape to become significantly more punitive. This included the re-introduction of temporary protection visas.

Temporary protection visas were first introduced by the Coalition Government in 1999 and given to people who arrived by boat who were assessed to be refugees. These visas were later abolished by the Labor Government in 2008. The Australian Labor Party continues to oppose this form of temporary protection. When the Coalition was re-elected in 2013, temporary protection visas were re-introduced for people seeking asylum who arrived by boat. In addition, a new refugee status determination process known as Fast Track was introduced. This process was anything but fast, however, with people seeking asylum enduring long delays in the processing of their refugee claims and only having access to an extremely limited review of negative protection decisions.<sup>5</sup>

Those found to be a refugee were granted either a three-year TPV or a five-year SHEV. Unlike the TPV, the SHEV provided some prospects of applying for permanent residence if the visa's complex pathway requirements, and the criteria of one of the few permanent visas available under this visa, were able to be met. However, meeting the SHEV pathway requirements and criteria of the permanent visas available were ultimately out of reach for the vast majority of SHEV holders. This effectively meant that almost all SHEV holders as well as TPV holders could only re-apply for another TPV or SHEV when their visa expired.<sup>6</sup>

TPV and SHEV visa holders could access Medicare and a limited range of Centrelink supports, and had the right to work and study. However, as with people seeking asylum on a bridging visa, having a temporary visa meant they were subjected to international student fees if they did wish to access higher education, and could not access government funded student assistance.<sup>7</sup> TPV and SHEV holders, and those who remained on a bridging visa, also faced challenges in accessing secure

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<sup>4</sup> R. S. Field, D. Chung and C. Fleay (2021) 'The Influence of Policy, Cultural and Historical Contexts on Social Work and Human Service Practice Responses with People Seeking Asylum in Germany and Australia' *Ethics and Social Welfare* 3, 294-310 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2021.1879892>.

<sup>5</sup> C. Fleay, M.A. Kenny, A. Andevah, S. Askari, R. Hassani, K. Leaney and T. Lee (2021) "'Doing something for the future": building relationships and hope through refugee and asylum seeker advocacy in Australia', in *Handbook of Migration and Global Justice*, eds. Leanne Weber and Claudia Tazreiter (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing), 281–82.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2019) 'Lives on hold: refugees and asylum seekers in the "Legacy caseload"' *Australian Human Rights Commission: Sydney, NSW* <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/lives-hold-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-legacy>

<sup>7</sup> Some college and TAFE courses were made available to people seeking asylum, and some universities created a small number of fee-waiving scholarships, which allowed some people seeking asylum to study while waiting for their immigration process to resolve. See L. Hartley, C. Fleay, S. Baker, R. Burke and R. Field (2018) 'People seeking asylum in Australia: Access and support in higher education' *National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education* [https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/app/uploads/2018/11/Hartley\\_PeopleSeekingAsylum\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/app/uploads/2018/11/Hartley_PeopleSeekingAsylum_FINAL.pdf)

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employment given the temporary nature of their visa. Bridging visa holders in particular faced significant barriers because these visas are not always renewed in a timely manner, and employers are often not inclined to employ someone who is on a visa that is valid for only a few months.

People on temporary protection visas are also not able to apply for family reunion, which means any immediate family members (including spouse and children) outside of Australia were not able to join their loved ones here. While people on a TPV or SHEV could apply to the Department of Home Affairs for permission to travel to another country to visit family, the permission process was difficult to navigate. The process included applying for permission to travel on compassionate grounds, securing the required visas to enter a country other than their country of origin, and organising travel bookings for all family members. Given that dates of travel had to be specified when permission from the department was sought, many people faced challenges securing affordable travel arrangements when permission was granted very close to the travel dates. There were also people who did not receive permission to travel before the specified dates, or were not granted permission to travel at all. All of this exacerbated the trauma of being separated from families for many years.

Being forced to live on a series of temporary visas for more than a decade has had profoundly negative impacts on the lives of people seeking asylum and refugees who arrived to Australia by boat, and their families. For many years they have endured a state of perpetual temporariness and limbo.<sup>8</sup> Extensive research and testimonials have highlighted that living for a prolonged period of time with such great uncertainty can contribute to despair and suicidal ideation.<sup>9</sup> Living without family members over a long period of time also increases the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, and continuing anxiety.<sup>10</sup> All of this highlights the immense importance of permanent residency for people who sought asylum in Australia more than a decade ago.

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<sup>8</sup> M. Failla (2024) 'Providing permanent protection to refugees in Australia: Real change or window dressing?' *Alternative Law Journal*, 49(1). 47-54; R. S. Field (2022) 'Social work responses to differential inclusion: a comparison of how policy influences practice with people seeking asylum in Germany and Australia' PhD Thesis, Curtin University; K Lippi, L. Hanna, H. McKenzie and F. McKay (2023) 'Living in Limbo: The Experiences of People Seeking Asylum in Australia' *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 1–16.

<sup>9</sup> M. A. Kenny, C. Grech and N. Procter (2021) 'A trauma informed response to COVID-19 and the deteriorating mental health of refugees and asylum seekers with insecure status in Australia', *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 31(1): 62–69.

<sup>10</sup> L. Newman and S. Mares (2021) 'Mental health and wellbeing implications of family separation for children and adults seeking asylum', in *Together in Safety: A Report on the Australian Government's Separation of Families Seeking Safety* (Melbourne, VIC: Human Law Rights Centre), 20, <https://www.hrlc.org.au/reports/2021/9/1/together-in-safety-report>

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## Current Policy

In February 2023, the Australian Government announced a pathway to a permanent visa for people who had sought asylum in Australia but had only been granted temporary protection. The RoS visa (Subclass 851) allows for the permanent resolution of status for TPV and SHEV holders who arrived in Australia before 14 February 2023. This permanent visa differs greatly from TPVs and SHEVs. Many TPV and SHEV holders received a RoS in 2023 and 2024. Recipients of the RoS visa can access Medicare and all Centrelink supports (subject to meeting eligibility criteria), including Commonwealth assistance for higher education. RoS visa holders can sponsor eligible family members for permanent family visas through family reunion. A permanent RoS visa is also a pathway to Australian citizenship.

This has been a very welcome development for some 20,000 people who arrived to Australia more than a decade ago, and who are the focus of this research. As at May 2025, most TPV and SHEV holders have been granted a RoS visa.<sup>11</sup> However, there are several hundred people on a TPV or SHEV who are still waiting to be granted a RoS visa. There are also more than 6,000 people refused protection under the Fast Track process who remain without permanent residency, as well as more than 1,000 others who are waiting for their initial protection claim to be finalised.<sup>11</sup>

## Research Design and Methodology

This study explores the lived experiences of recipients of the RoS visa in order to understand the impact of this policy change. The study has followed the Kaldor Centre's (2023) Guidelines for Co-Produced Research with Refugees and Other People with Lived Experience of Displacement. Seven RoS holders were interviewed to explore the impacts of being granted a permanent visa on their lives as well as the experiences of living on temporary visas. These are people who received permanent residency in 2023 and 2024 after living in Australia since 2012 or 2013 on temporary visas. All participants were recruited through the existing networks of the research team.

Five men and two women were interviewed. The participants' ages ranged from 20s-40s. Two participants were married, one with children, and both were living in Australia without their families who remained in situations of great uncertainty in their country of origin. One participant was

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<sup>11</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, UMA Legacy Caseload Report on Processing and Outcomes, May 2025. <https://homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/unauthorised-maritime-arrivals-bve-31-may-2025.pdf>

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engaged. All participants were in full time employment and several were also studying. Three were working in legal positions and four owned businesses in the construction industry.

Interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2021) method of thematic data analysis. This involved six stages: data immersion, coding, identification of themes, data saturation, reviewing themes and, finally, producing a written report.

## Key Findings

All the interview participants expressed in very positive terms the fundamental impacts of receiving permanent visa. Across the seven interviews, the participants commonly spoke about the profound differences between living with a temporary protection visa for so long and now living with a permanent visa. However, ongoing challenges were also evident.

### Three overarching themes emerged from the analysis:



**“I’m free now.”** Receiving a permanent visa is a profoundly positive experience and includes finally feeling hopeful, positive and safe about life in Australia, and a sense of belonging to the Australian community.



**“A new chapter is open.”** A permanent visa enables making long term plans, including starting the process of family reunion, home ownership and building a business. It also enables overseas travel, greater access to study and work options, and healthcare, and Australian citizenship.



**Lost years and ongoing challenges.** Ongoing challenges are evident given the length of time people were forced to live without a permanent visa, and the policy landscape remains difficult.

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## “I’m free now”

*The participants reflected on the many long years of living with the uncertainty and restrictions of temporary visas, and the experience of a “freedom feeling” when transitioning to being a permanent resident. All had been living in Australia in a very precarious situation for more than a decade, and this was now finally resolved.*

A number of participants likened the restrictions of being on temporary visas to being “in jail” and receiving a permanent visa as “coming out of jail”. Another explained that before being granted a RoS visa:

*I couldn't do anything, I couldn't bring my family, I couldn't get a loan... when I get my permanent, the door opened for me.”*

One participant described the joyful feeling of receiving a permanent visa as energising. Another participant described what went through his mind when he received his permanent visa:

*11 hard years were over. All the challenges of the last ten years were going through my mind. Every aspect of life was impacted. From relationships where everyone thinks you want to be with them for a visa to work and doing business and study limitations. Not being able to get a home loan, I had to trust a ‘friend’ who then took my money and ran away. Not being able to see my family for so many years because of travel restrictions. All these events and thoughts went through my mind, and I cried.*

Many explained that they felt a massive weight had been lifted from them, and they felt much happier and less stressed. For example:

*All those years we had this stress, we had these feeling that what if we don't get a visa? What if we're just stuck and we can't do anything else for our future, for our family. And obviously that's not being able to plan anything at that time. Like right now, it's just that relief that we are feeling that, OK, like we can finally do something. You know, we don't have to have stress or we don't have to have those worries anymore.*

Another participant shared how they felt the moment they received their RoS:

*Probably the happiest I've ever been in my life. I feel free and there is nothing better than feeling free... It probably felt like a news that you are free from an acute illness and will no longer need painful procedures. The wait had been long and uncertain, worse than a prisoner's who has some idea about when they will be released. It was bittersweet.*

One participant remarked that he feels he can finally slow down and work on his mental and physical health, now that he has permanent residency:

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*The constant stressors were bigger than I can cope with and I am dealing with serious physical issues caused by stress. I feel like I need to and can slow down a bit hoping that my mental and physical health improve.*

All participants shared that being able to call Australia a permanent home had enabled a sense of belonging that was not there before. Many also commented that they felt a more meaningful connection to the broader Australian community now that they were had a permanent visa:

*Finally, I felt like I belong somewhere, I belong in Australia... more belong to the community and then more accepted.*

## **Discussion**

Participants overwhelmingly described receiving a RoS visa as like a huge weight had been lifted from their life and/or they had been set free from prison. Being granted a permanent visa has clearly had a significant positive impact on the participants' mental and emotional wellbeing. This finding complements existing research on the detrimental impacts that temporary protection has on people seeking asylum.<sup>12</sup>

The Australian Human Rights Commission condemns temporary protection arrangements as unjustifiably discriminatory and punitive towards certain people seeking asylum based on their mode of arrival.<sup>13</sup> Living with such a lack of security constrains peoples' ability to make long-term plans and imagine their future. They experience daily instability due to their ongoing temporary status. All of these factors have a compounding impact on mental health.<sup>14</sup> Social marginalisation and other experiences in the host nation may also "turn out to be even more traumatic than the previous

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<sup>12</sup> M. A. Kenny, C. Grech and N. Procter, 'A trauma informed response to COVID-19 and the deteriorating mental health of refugees and asylum seekers with insecure status in Australia', *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 31(1): 62–69.; L. Newman and S. Mares (2021) 'Mental health and wellbeing implications of family separation for children and adults seeking asylum', in *Together in Safety: A Report on the Australian Government's Separation of Families Seeking Safety* (Melbourne, VIC: Human Law Rights Centre, 2021), 20, <https://www.hrlc.org.au/reports/2021/9/1/together-in-safety-report>

<sup>13</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC, 2019), 'Lives on hold: refugees and asylum seekers in the "Legacy caseload"' (Sydney, NSW), 12, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/lives-hold-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-legacy>

<sup>14</sup>R. S. Field (2022) 'Social work responses to differential inclusion: a comparison of how policy influences practice with people seeking asylum in Germany and Australia' *Curtin School of Allied Health*, <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11937/92101>; K. Lippi et al. (2023) 'Living in Limbo: The Experiences of People Seeking Asylum in Australia' *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 1–16.

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migration experience”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, this study reinforces the importance of abolishing temporary protection and ensuring that only permanent protection is granted to people recognised as a refugee.

## “A new chapter is open”

*In addition to feeling a sense of freedom upon receiving a permanent visa, a common sentiment expressed by participants was that they were finally able to start living their life in Australia. Across the interviews, there were reports of feeling safe and being able to plan their lives and pursue their goals and ambitions without the fear of having to leave Australia.*

All participants shared examples of how they had continued to work hard both before and after receiving a permanent visa, and how they had taken advantage of work and study opportunities. Despite the enormous restrictions of living on a SHEV/TPV, they had tried to pursue their goals through the few opportunities that were available to them to study, including free English courses provided by community groups, a small number of courses at some colleges, and university scholarships. In spite of great challenges, all participants shared they had worked consistently since receiving the right to work.

One participant reflected on how differently he looks at his future with the RoS:

*I studied and worked since I had a visa with work permit. So didn't feel I wasted a lot of time. But there was a lot of restrictions on finding jobs, study options and funding, and generally the amount of risk I could take. Some things that felt far-fetched are now within reach because I am now an Australian resident and will soon be a citizen of this country. I think most importantly, I now feel safe and secure. I feel safe enough to take risks and reach up for my goals and dreams. And I can feel free.*

It was clear that a sense of freedom and opportunity had accompanied receiving a RoS visa, as echoed by another participant:

*When I was on temporary protection visa, I felt like I am in second class, just because I had limited services that were available to me to access. For example, I couldn't see my family, I had to put a request, wait for that permission. But now I feel like I can do anything.*

Other participants also shared the significance of their change in circumstances:

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<sup>15</sup> P. Boccagni and E. Righard (2020) 'Social work with refugee and displaced populations in Europe: (dis)continuities, dilemmas, developments', *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(3), 375–383.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1767941>

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*And now you've got this privilege, you live in this beautiful country... no matter how difficult it gets going into the future, the significance of having a permanent residency will always be up there.*

*Getting this visa feels like as if we have just started living in Australia... It's just like I've started living in Australia fresh... I can plan my future properly.*

Participants noted the specific aspects of their lives that had changed and the opportunities that had become available to them due to the RoS visa. This includes family reunion, home ownership, building a business, overseas travel, greater access to study and work options, applying for Australian citizenship, and access to health care.

### ***Family Reunion***

After more than ten years in Australia with no opportunity for family reunion, an overwhelming priority expressed by participants was reuniting with their family. For those with children and/or a partner in another country, applying for family reunion was paramount after being granted a RoS.

One participant, whose wife remained in their country of origin, described how significant the day he received his RoS visa was for his wife:

*...obviously she was really happy, excited... it was really helpful, in a way, for her side of the story because you know, living alone by a very long time.... For her, it was really a memorable day as well...*

While the ability to apply for family reunion once receiving a RoS is a profoundly positive step, significant challenges in the family reunion process remain. For example, even though participants with children and/or a partner living overseas have taken steps to apply for family reunion, none had been reunified at the time of interviewing.

Being granted a RoS has also benefited those with a partner who is in Australia but on a temporary visa. As one participant outlined:

*In my personal life, I can support my partner who is not a permanent resident. I otherwise had to separate from my partner because she had to leave upon her visa expiry. But now I am helping her to stay here with me. So, I could plan a long-term life with my partner and support her to stay here. Without a permanent visa I couldn't have done this.*

### ***Overseas Travel***

Travelling to meet up with family overseas was also a priority. As a recipient of a RoS visa, participants were now able to travel as a permanent resident of Australia, no longer needing to seek

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travel approval from the Department of Home Affairs as they did when on a SHEV/TPV. This has made it much easier for people to travel overseas to see family members. As one participant noted:

*On SHEV, the process of getting permission to leave Australia for a trip to visit family in a third country was very difficult and unworkable. In many instances, it was too hard that it was not practical to plan a trip with your family who are coming from another country to a third country. With permanent visa that issue is now resolved so I can plan my trips in advance and not feel that I can never see my family.*

One participant, whose pregnant wife and children lived in their home country, was in the process of going to see his family after a long time when he received his RoS visa. Having a permanent visa made his plans much easier. Within two weeks of receiving his visa, he was able to visit his wife and children in a neighbouring country and spent approximately three months with them.

Another participant remarked that travelling as a permanent resident meant having a much less stressful trip:

*I made a trip to [country] to meet my wife again, to see her. And that was the first time that I was travelling without having any sense of worry... I was like, whatever happens, I think I've got enough to call on the Australian Government to get me back, you know. But before, despite having the travel rights, you did not have that certainty. If something would happen to you with that temporary visa, you would stay there, that was for sure. So yeah, even the trip was really joyful going, coming back, it was joyful.*

In addition, being a permanent resident means that travel for any purpose is now possible. One participant noted that they were now able to travel overseas as a family, like other families. Once granted a RoS visa, another participant was able to study a unit in her university degree in another country, noting the importance of this as:

*one of the biggest experiences that I could get in my life... It definitely wouldn't have been possible if I didn't have the permanency.*

## **Home ownership**

Having a permanent visa allows for the process of home ownership to be commenced. While saving money for a deposit, getting a mortgage and entering the housing market has become difficult for many people across Australia, it is at least now a possibility for RoS visa holders. Unlike temporary visa holders, a permanent resident can seek a bank loan.

This was significant for multiple participants. As one said:

*Yeah, it's difficult for everybody, especially this time like the interest rate is high and the cost of living is high for everybody in Australia. But for us, in the past, we cannot do anything. Even, it was very hard to get a mobile plan or SIM card plan for the, you know, for the business. It was*

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*very hard, but now we got that opportunity to get the loan for business, for the house... I did, yeah, I got a loan from the bank and then I bought the land. So I'm planning to build.*

Another participant shared a similar sentiment:

*The first thing that I did was as soon as I got my visa, I looked to buy a house because I was, I've put an application for my wife and then sooner or later, she's going to come here. So, I was hoping to get a house. So, that was the first thing that I was not able before.*

A third shared that he was able to get a loan amount approved, even though he considered house prices were too high and decided not to proceed:

*Before wherever I used to go, trying to get registered, buy a car or loan they couldn't approve that. But when I got my permanent visa, when I applied for home loan, I signed the paper in the morning 8:00 am. And [at] 4:00 pm, they called me and they said, "Your application been approved."*

### ***Building a business***

The ability to get a bank loan also impacts people's working lives. One participant explained that he knew

*a lot of people who are really smart and are business minded but they could not apply for a business loan while on a TPV or SHEV to start or grow their business.*

As another participant commented:

*Your visa status is very important in Australia based on the field of work and study you want to pursue and there are real limitations for temporary visa holders... With this limitation gone, you feel there is a lot more that you can do and plan for. Things will not change overnight, but you are also open to taking risks in business and entrepreneurship efforts.*

### ***Access to higher education***

As a permanent resident, the barriers to study in higher education are significantly reduced. In particular, RoS visa holders no longer have to pay international student fees and are eligible for government funded student assistance. As one participant commented about receiving a permanent visa:

*I know that at least I can do the study. If I can't get the job, I can at least do the study for now.*

Another participant shared the significance of having a permanent visa in determining secure access to higher education:

*I know that a lot of refugees... they had to give up on their aspirations. For people who are in the fast-track cohort who are rejected like my mother and my husband, those students had to be dragged out of higher education, because they were not eligible for study rights, when they*

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*even secured a scholarship for themselves... I've witnessed for three students, that they their study rights be taken by the Department of Home Affairs and they had to be removed from law school. They have to be removed from medical school. All they worked really hard to secure those scholarships. It's just bizarre.*

### ***Work opportunities***

After receiving the right to work, participants had been working in professional jobs, construction or running a small business while on temporary visas. Many had completed courses, and some are studying part time while working full time. Permanent residency and citizenship status open more opportunities to refugees as many jobs are only available to permanent residents or citizens.

Having permanent residency, and knowing they could soon apply for citizenship, gave participants a feeling of security and courage to go after their professional and career goals much more than before. This included starting or expanding a business, or pursuing a career previously not available to them. For one participant, the experience of seeking asylum in Australia motivated her to become a lawyer and specialise in migration law so she could support refugee communities as a lawyer and advocate.

### ***Australian citizenship***

All participants discussed their aspirations to apply for Australian citizenship as soon as they were eligible to do so. At the time of their interview, most participants had held a permanent visa for nearly 12 months, the time period after which they can apply for citizenship. As one participant expressed it:

*So, in two months' time, I'm going to apply for citizenship. I'm going to finally get citizenship of a country that I've been in for 11 years.*

While the experience of receiving a permanent visa was profound, many spoke of how citizenship would open further doors for them and increase their sense of security in Australia. Being an Australian citizen comes with access to an Australian passport which makes overseas travel more accessible compared with being on a permanent visa. Some participants also noted that certain jobs they wished to pursue are only available to Australian citizens and not permanent residents.

There were some concerns about applying for citizenship, however. One participant noted that the lack of information on how his citizenship application was progressing was frustrating. Another said he was nervous that if there was a change in government at the next election, there may be delays in processing citizenship applications, and this was causing him stress.

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## ***Access to healthcare***

Being granted a permanent visa has meant being eligible to access all government funded healthcare supports and services. This allows RoS visa holders to access a much greater range of healthcare supports and services than they did on a temporary visa.

Some participants explained the difficulties they and their family members had faced accessing health care services while on a temporary visa. People on a Bridging Visa E, TPV or SHEV are eligible to access Medicare, however, the Medicare and immigration systems are not linked. This means that every time a temporary visa is renewed, the visa holder has to re-apply for Medicare, leading to interrupted Medicare access. As one of the participants noted:

*And with all the barriers that we had, you know, in terms of studies, in terms of travelling, in terms of buying a house, even Medicare... So with the previous visas that we had, we had to basically renew it [Medicare] every year. And right after our visa, temporary visa expired while we were in the process of getting the PR, it was only, I think, extended for another six months. And then we were just lucky that our PR came right before the Medicare expired.*

For people with ongoing medical issues, this has meant paying extra costs to access healthcare. This included the parents of the above participant:

*That's especially for my parents because I mean, they're in their 50s and 60s, so they would need that healthcare there... So, they really had a lot of issues trying to, going to appointments and then Medicare is not working... A few times both mum and dad when they went for their appointments and sometimes when they had to do some scans and stuff, they wouldn't like check it for you straight away. They would be like, OK, we're going to send it to Medicare and then they would get like invoice or a call saying oh, your Medicare didn't go through. So, you have to pay this invoice now.*

Being granted a permanent visa has enabled RoS visa holders' continuous access to Medicare, and the eligibility to apply for other government-funded healthcare supports and services, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

## ***Enhanced community participation***

Permanent residency has given all of the participants a sense of purpose and belonging to the Australian community. Despite enduring Australia's deterrence policies for more than a decade, all participants have contributed to the Australian economy for years through their employment, and many pursued the few study options accessible to them while on a temporary visa. Most have also developed significant community links, including through volunteering. All participants noted that since being granted a permanent visa, they had become very motivated to contribute to Australia in new ways.

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This reflects their deeper connection with and sense of belonging to the Australian community, as expressed by one participant:

*The situation is much better than before. We can feel like now we belong to the community and then we can do some volunteer. And be active more in the community and then just it's much better. Like, we are more connected than before. You can feel it, you know.*

Participants were keen to give back to the community beyond being hardworking, tax paying citizens by donating, volunteering and participating in political debates, as well as voting after obtaining Australian citizenship.

## ***Discussion***

Participants discussed a range of opportunities that had become available to them since receiving a permanent RoS visa, and these findings complement and build upon existing research.

### ***Family Reunion***

The overwhelming first priority for the participants interviewed, the first thing they wanted to do in this new chapter, was reunite with their family. Most participants had close family members that they had been living apart from for many years due to policy approaches that restrict people with temporary protection from applying for other family members to join them in Australia, or to even visit them overseas. Thousands of people who sought asylum by boat before January 2014 have been separated from family members for more than a decade.<sup>16</sup> Being granted a permanent visa has finally enabled people granted protection under Fast Track to take actions to end this distress. Although challenges remain in securing family reunion due to other policy settings (discussed further in the “Lost years and ongoing challenges” section), this is a profoundly important outcome.

### ***Increased Access to Housing***

Many of the participants also planned to buy homes and secure greater housing stability. This common goal complements previous research which found the significance of housing and the re-establishment of home for people from asylum-seeking and refugee backgrounds. People seeking asylum on temporary visas in Australia have been overrepresented in precarious housing.<sup>17</sup> While being granted a permanent visa has meant that people recognised as a refugee under Fast Track can finally apply for a bank loan to purchase a house, they also have the considerable barriers to home

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<sup>16</sup> M. A. Kenny, B. Maudarbocus, K. McDonnell and S. Powe (2023) ‘Family separation and family reunion for refugees: a reform proposal’, SCALES Community Legal Centre, Murdoch University, p. 9. <https://apo.org.au/node/323241>

<sup>17</sup> A. Ziersch, M. Walsh and C. Due (2024) ‘Housing and health for people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds: findings from an Australian qualitative longitudinal study’ *BMC Public Health*, 24(1): 1138. doi: 10.1186/s12889-024-18616-5.

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ownership that many others in Australia similarly face. In addition, there are considerable inequities evident for people seeking asylum and refugees who have lived on temporary visas for years (discussed further in the “Lost years and ongoing challenges” section).

### *Employment and study opportunities*

One significant contributor to these inequities relates to the restrictions people faced in accessing secure employment and study opportunities while on a temporary visa. Research highlights that short-term, conditional visas result in employer risk aversion, segmentation into insecure work, and in-work instability and mistreatment. This was certainly the experience of people holding temporary protection visas in Australia.<sup>18</sup>

Participants highlighted that being granted a permanent RoS visa provided them with opportunities to move beyond this employment precarity and further their goals in this area. This included being eligible to apply for a bank loan to start or expand their own business, access higher education without paying international student fees, and apply for jobs that were only available to permanent residents. High levels of motivation to pursue these goals were evident in all of the interviews. Australian research outlines the economic benefits of granting permanent visas, highlighting that there are ‘long-term economic returns on investment’ when people are enabled ‘to upgrade their skills, sustain and grow their own businesses, [and] employ other workers’.<sup>19</sup> Granting permanent visas to people subjected to Fast Track not only enables their opportunities to access more secure employment; it also benefits the Australian economy.

### *Access to healthcare*

Having ongoing access to Medicare and other government funded healthcare supports and services was another area cited by most of the participants as an important outcome of their permanent status. People from refugee backgrounds often have higher rates of long-term physical and mental health issues compared with other migrants, due in large part to the refugee journey which may expose them to deprivation, persecution and human rights violations as well as post-migration stressors of resettlement.<sup>20</sup> Yet, an additional barrier for people seeking asylum and refugees in Australia on temporary visas is lack of continual access to Medicare.

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<sup>18</sup> J. van Kooy and D. Bowman (2019) ‘Surrounded with so much uncertainty: asylum seekers and manufactured precarity in Australia’ *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1427563>

<sup>19</sup> J. van Kooy (2021) ‘Supporting economic growth in uncertain times Permanent pathways for Temporary Protection visa and Safe Haven Enterprise visa holders’. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-09/apo-nid314128.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). (2024). ‘Healthcare for people from refugee backgrounds and people seeking asylum’ <https://www.racgp.org.au/advocacy/position-statements/view-all-position-statements/health-systems-and-environmental/healthcare-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

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Delays in processes and communication issues between the Department of Home Affairs and Services Australia means that there are gaps in Medicare access when temporary visas are renewed.<sup>21</sup> Participants in this study confirm that TPV and SHEV holders lived without access to Medicare for periods of time. In addition, in 2021 it was reported that an estimated 20% of people seeking asylum on bridging visas were without access to Medicare at any given time.<sup>22</sup> This leaves people extremely worried about accessing healthcare, even in emergency situations, as they may be required to pay expensive fees.<sup>23</sup> Consistent access to Medicare reduces the expense of accessing healthcare, which is likely to lead to better health outcomes and improved physical and mental wellbeing for people who have experienced forced migration.

### *Citizenship and Community*

Other opportunities cited by participants were the importance of being to apply for Australian citizenship after 12 months on a permanent visa, and wanting to give back to the community. Research on the impacts of restrictive policies on people seeking asylum who arrived to Australia by boat highlight that their temporary status produced “interconnected levels of precarity, both in the labour market and as a generalised condition of social life”.<sup>24</sup> These layers of precarity have combined and compounded the insecurity and alienation felt by people seeking asylum in Australia. This study suggests that permanent residency addresses these factors. All of the participants in this study highlighted that receiving permanent visas increased their feelings of security and community belonging, as well as a desire to contribute more to the Australian community.

## **Lost years and ongoing challenges**

*Despite being granted a permanent visa and experiencing many positive feelings and opportunities as a result, participants also reported ongoing concerns and challenges. In part, this reflects that they had been forced to live an extremely precarious existence for more than a decade before receiving the RoS visa. It also reflects the ongoing punitive policy and political landscape impacting refugees in Australia. Concerns were expressed for family members yet to be brought to safety, and other people seeking asylum in Australia without permanent protection, as well as feelings of great loss.*

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<sup>21</sup> Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (2023) ‘The extent and nature of poverty in Australia: Poverty by policy’ <https://asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ASRC-Submission-The-extent-and-nature-of-poverty-in-Australia-2.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Rick Morton ‘Asylum seekers and Medicare access’ *The Saturday Paper*, (2021) <http://bit.ly/42Nipok>

<sup>23</sup> Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (2023).

<sup>24</sup> J. van Kooy and D. Bowman (2019) ‘Surrounded with so much uncertainty: asylum seekers and manufactured precarity in Australia’.

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### *Ongoing concerns for family members*

At the time of interview, three participants had close family members remaining in situations of great uncertainty or danger in their country of origin or a neighbouring country. As outlined earlier, receiving permanent residency is just the first step to family reunion. Two participants with children and/or a partner living overseas had applied for family reunion visas, but none had been granted at the time of interviewing. Since the interviews were completed, one has recently reunited with his partner in Australia, while the other continues to wait for his family to be granted visas. The significance of this cannot be overstated. He has been living apart from his wife and children for over 12 years.

As many participants reported, the process of applying for family reunion is very expensive. Costs that need to be met include visa application fees per family member, migration assistance to prepare the application(s), required medical tests, and flights to Australia.

*The fees of the applications are horrendous, you know, the amount of money that they charge for a partner [visa]. There's a lot of people that have a lot of kids... And by the time they get here, the flights, I mean, the expense, it's just unbelievably expensive.*

Participants also expressed concerns about the lack of transparency and clarity about the processing timelines.

Some of the other participants arrived to Australia with close family members. However, under the flawed Fast Track assessment process, individual family members did not always receive the same outcome on their protection claim. One participant's mother, who arrived to Australia with other family members, was the only member of the family not to be granted protection under the Fast Track process. The participant's fiancé has also been refused protection under Fast Track. This meant that even though she had received a RoS visa, the distress of the Fast Track process was not over for this participant and her family:

*It was such a surreal moment because on one hand, I did have certainty in this country, meaning that I could fight harder for my mother and my husband. But in another hand I was sad to see that my loved ones are still ignored. Not being included again...*

### *"I lost many years"*

Some participants said they may have taken a different career path if they had been given a permanent visa earlier. They may have pursued different fields of study or employment had they had greater options available to them.

Four participants of this study had secured a university scholarship while on a SHEV visa and appeared to have more satisfaction about their career progression. In comparison, one participant expressed he would have liked to access university studies years before being granted a RoS. He said

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that he felt like he had missed out on this crucial opportunity, and that it was now too late to pursue a career in his area of interest:

*I lost many years and lost my window to study. I probably will never go to university now but if I was given a permanent visa around the time I came to Australia 11 years ago I may have gone to university which is something I liked to do. I tried to do some TAFE courses but it was very expensive, so I didn't pursue a university course. As someone with temporary visa, your ability to study, work, learn English and everything is impacted and when this limitation goes on for so many years, your life can dramatically change. I know people who never had a chance to learn the language, work or study so they have a very limited life socially and professionally and they probably feel it is too late to do some of these things.*

### ***Advocating for others***

In the absence of policies that have promoted the wellbeing of people seeking asylum, including that there are still no pathways to a permanent visa for many who were refused protection under Fast Track, some participants reported a sense of obligation and responsibility to support their family and community. Although the participants themselves have reached a great milestone, there is still much to be done for their families and their communities – whether through family reunion, or advocacy, or both. Many participants shared that as soon as they received confirmation of their permanent residency status, they were thinking about their partners or their families.

Some have continued to use their education and their voice to support and advocate for their communities. This includes advocacy in support of the more than 6,000 people who went through this deeply flawed process but were refused protection. One participant has been tireless in her ongoing advocacy in this area:

*A lot of people in my community are voiceless, and if I have the privilege to study law and be their voice and fight against this awful narrative.*

Engaging in this advocacy is experienced by this participant as a sense of agency. However, it also creates additional stress as it involves dealing with a complex legal and political landscape in which getting a fair outcome for people seeking asylum is very challenging. This landscape includes the negative narratives that continue to be perpetuated by a range of senior politicians and some sections of the media. As this participant outlined in her interview, these narratives are “criminalising and demonising refugees” and portraying them as “lazy people who don’t want to contribute”.

### ***Discussion***

While permanent visas for this group of individuals is a welcome change, the participants in this study articulated that clear challenges remain.

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## *Family reunion concerns*

As outlined in the previous section, an immediate priority for participants with family members overseas was the ability to apply for family reunion. The importance of taking these actions reflects extensive research that highlights the serious impacts of prolonged and indefinite family separation, including increased “risk of complicated grief, persisting [post-traumatic stress disorder] and depression” of indefinite and long-term separation from family.<sup>25</sup> Prolonged family separation and worry about family in their country of origin has had serious impacts on people seeking asylum as well as significant impacts on their families overseas. However, as reflected by the participant interviews in this study, “current laws and policies continue to add unnecessary barriers to family reunion for refugees, compounding their trauma”.<sup>26</sup>

Firstly, RoS holders must rely on the complex and expensive Family Migration Program (primarily Partner visas) in order to reunify with their family. Because they have sought asylum by boat, they are barred from proposing family members through the Humanitarian and Refugee Program. Former TPV and SHEV holders can only apply to reunite with their partner and dependent children. While visas for parents are possible, they are very expensive and have very strict criteria, which make them very difficult to obtain. The Partner visa scheme is also expensive; it can cost tens of thousands of dollars for a family with children. For example, sponsoring a partner with three children through this program would cost the family approximately \$22,000 in visa charges and other expenses, including legal assistance, travel costs, biometric tests, police checks and a range of other documents. There can also be difficulties in securing all of the required documents, particularly when applicants have had to flee their country of origin.<sup>27</sup>

For refugees with LGBTQIA+ backgrounds, there can be challenges in securing the required evidence for the recognition of a de facto partner in their home country. Their partner may be “in a particularly precarious situation, being subjected to cultural shame, stigma, and discrimination” and official evidence of a partnership may be difficult or impossible to secure.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Louise Newman and Sarah Mares (2021) ‘Mental health and wellbeing implications of family separation for children and adults seeking asylum’, in *Together in Safety: A Report on the Australian Government’s Separation of Families Seeking Safety* (Melbourne, VIC: Human Law Rights Centre), 20, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/580025f66b8f5b2dabbe4291/t/6082667935d08840b1aaba8/1619158657519/HR LC Together in Safety REPORT.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/580025f66b8f5b2dabbe4291/t/6082667935d08840b1aaba8/1619158657519/HR+LC+Together+in+Safety+REPORT.pdf); G. Fogden, D. Berle, and Z. Steel (2020) ‘The Impact of Family Separation and Worry About Family on Psychological Adjustment in Refugees Resettled in Australia’ *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 33(6): 848-907 DOI: 10.1002/jts.22568.

<sup>26</sup> M. A. Kenny et al. (2023) ‘Family separation and family reunion for refugees: a reform proposal’.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 9.

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There are also challenges for people who wish to reunite with their older children under the Partner visa scheme. In many cases, these children were very young when their parent sought asylum in Australia and have only ‘aged out’ of the process (where they can no longer be considered dependent children) due to the many years of forced separation. Many families are having to make the tough decision to leave their older children behind, often in unsafe conditions.<sup>29</sup> Although the RoS status provides a possible pathway for family reunion, there needs to be “fairer, faster, and more affordable family reunion” for people who have sought asylum in Australia.<sup>30</sup>

### *Permanent but still politicised*

Further, as this section outlined, participants flagged concerns about how people seeking asylum continue to be described by politicians and the media. This has been raised by other recent studies, arguing that the political and journalistic response to the introduction of the RoS policy demonstrates that the Australian Government under Labor has perpetuated previous governments’ hostile treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia.<sup>31</sup> Most significantly, the Labor Government has clearly explained that their decision to not abolish TPVs and SHEVs is because they will not be allowing future “unauthorised arrivals” to apply for a RoS visa. The Labor Government argued that this decision is an effort to maintain Australia’s border security and to discourage hazardous boat journeys and people smugglers<sup>32</sup>, perpetuating the political discourse that supports punitive, detrimental deterrence policies. This highlights that this shift in policy was not designed to be long-standing, and that people seeking asylum in Australia will continue to be subject to indefinite limbo. The deterrence approach remains, including offshore processing. There are currently approximately 100 people who sought asylum in Australia being detained in Nauru.<sup>33</sup>

Even when eligible for citizenship, people with refugee and other migrant backgrounds are not immune to politicisation. In the lead up to the 2025 Federal Election, former Opposition Leader Peter Dutton accused the Australian Government of escalating citizenship ceremonies so that migrants could vote in crucial seats, questioning the quality of the security checks and whether it was in the nation’s best interest for these people to receive citizenship.<sup>34</sup> Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke

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<sup>29</sup> Refugee Council of Australia (2025) ‘Reuniting refugee families: How to fix family reunion for refugees’ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/reuniting-refugee-families-how-to-fix-family-reunion-for-refugees/>

<sup>30</sup> M. A. Kenny et al. (2023) ‘Family separation and family reunion for refugees: a reform proposal’, 1.

<sup>31</sup> M. Failla (2024) ‘Providing permanent protection to refugees in Australia: Real change or window dressing?’ *Alternative Law Journal*, 49(1). 47-54.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International (2025) *Nauru detention centre must be urgently evacuated in light of UN ruling* <https://www.amnesty.org.au/nauru-detention-centre-must-be-urgently-evacuated-in-light-of-un-ruling/>

<sup>34</sup>J. Butler (2025) ‘Peter Dutton claims Labor is fast-tracking citizenship so that migrants can vote. Here’s what we know’ *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/feb/21/peter-dutton-says-labor-is-fast-tracking-citizenship-so-that-migrants-can-vote-heres-what-we-know-ntwnfb>

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refuted these claims and denied any electoral incentive, pointing out that there was an extensive backlog of citizenship applications and that many eligible for citizenship had been waiting many months for a ceremony. This highlights that, despite attaining permanent residence, RoS recipients continue to be at risk of having to endure the politicisation of their refugee background and mode of arrival to Australia.

### *The disadvantages of lost years*

The findings of this study also point to the importance of being granted permanent visas as soon as possible in order to advance career goals and reduce financial disadvantage. To some extent, a permanent RoS visa removes financial barriers that TPV and SHEV-holders faced when seeking to access higher education, particularly in the university sector. By providing access to HECS and categorising RoS visa holders as local students, they are more able to pursue a career that requires a qualification.

The delays and restrictions that TPV and SHEV holders were subjected to also contributed to their significant financial disadvantage. Even though many now have a permanent visa, they have been disadvantaged, despite living and working in Australia for the last decade, due to their restricted access to education, employment and bank loans for business and housing for much of this time. As participants mentioned, many have long been eager to purchase their own home but were prevented from securing a mortgage until granted a permanent visa. Like many other first home buyers in Australia, they now face considerable financial barriers to accessing the housing market in contrast to a decade ago.

There is a need for Australian Government recognition of these ongoing challenges and the provision of supports for people as they continue on this new chapter of their lives. This could include access to concession Partner visa fees to assist with family reunion expenses<sup>35</sup> as well as financial assistance to access housing.

### *The remaining impacts of Fast Track*

Despite the recognised flaws of the Fast Track assessment process, many who endured this process remain on a temporary visa. In addition, temporary protection visas remain in the Migration Act. This is contrary to the Australian Labor Party's 2021 National Platform that committed to replacing TPVs and SHEVs with permanent visas:

*Temporary Protection Visas place refugees in an ongoing state of uncertainty and prevent meaningful settlement, creating hardship for refugees and denying Australia the benefit of*

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<sup>35</sup> M. A. Kenny et al. (2023) 'Family separation and family reunion for refugees: a reform proposal'.

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*their contribution... Labor will abolish Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas and transition eligible refugees onto permanent visa arrangements.*<sup>36</sup>

The 2023 amendments to the Migration Act did not remove TPVs and SHEVs from the migration laws. Instead, the Australian Government under Labor only provided a pathway to permanency for a limited cohort of people: existing TPV and SHEV holders, certain former TPV and SHEV holders (such as those whose visa had lapsed and had not reapplied), and people who applied for their first TPV or SHEV prior to the commencement of the amendments and would subsequently be found to be a refugee.<sup>37</sup>

There remain more than 6,000 people in Australia who were subjected to the Fast Track assessment process and were not granted protection under this deeply flawed process. All have now been living in Australia for more than a decade. While a small number to date have had their cases reviewed by the Minister for Home Affairs and been granted a pathway to a permanent visa, the vast majority are yet to receive this. There are also more than 1,000 others who continue to wait for their initial protection claim to be finalised.

Further research has found that the ongoing uncertainty and difficulties associated with visa insecurity can result in a potentially “lethal hopelessness”.<sup>38</sup> At least thirty people subjected to the Fast Track process have ended their lives by suicide since 2012.<sup>39</sup> In recognition of this growing mental distress, and that Fast Track was a deeply flawed process, all urgently need access to a pathway to a RoS permanent visa.

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<sup>36</sup> ALP National Platform, 2021, p. 123. <http://alp.org.au/media/2594/2021-alp-national-platform-final-endorsed-platform.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> M. Failla (2024) ‘Providing permanent protection to refugees in Australia: Real change or window dressing?’

<sup>38</sup> N. Procter et al. (2018) ‘Lethal hopelessness: understanding and responding to asylum seeker distress and mental deterioration’, *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 27, no. 1 (2018): 448–54.

<sup>39</sup> M.A. Kenny, N. Procter and C. Grech (2022) *Temporary Protection Visas in Australia: A Reform Proposal*. UNSW Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law.

[https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/sites/kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/files/Policy\\_Brief\\_13\\_Temporary\\_Protection\\_Visas\\_Australia\\_Reform\\_Proposal.pdf](https://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/sites/kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/files/Policy_Brief_13_Temporary_Protection_Visas_Australia_Reform_Proposal.pdf)

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# Conclusion

This report explores the impact of the recent changes introduced by the Migration Amendment (Transitioning TPV/SHEV Holders to Resolution of Status Visas) Regulations 2023. This change has enabled approximately 20,000 people who sought asylum by boat and experienced many years of uncertainty on a succession of temporary visas, to finally be granted permanent residency in Australia through the RoS visa. Drawing on interviews with seven permanent residents of Australia who sought asylum in Australia by boat more than a decade ago, this report provides in-depth insights into the experience of receiving this status.

This study highlights the extremely positive impact receiving a permanent RoS visa has had on the lives of the participants. Every participant compared their lives before and after receiving permanency in Australia and stressed how wonderful the change has been. In addition to finally feeling free, hopeful and secure, participants shared that they could finally pursue their goals, most notably family reunion, study, employment and purchasing a house. These findings support the extensive research on the harmful and punitive nature of indefinite temporary protection visas. Temporary protection visas must be permanently abolished from Australian law and never reinstated in our migration laws. In recognition that all people subjected to the Fast Track process have been in Australia for more than a decade, the remaining people on temporary visas should receive a RoS visa pathway, including those refused protection.

Despite the positive outcomes of receiving permanent residence, the study also reveals that years of living on a temporary visa has come at a great cost to people's lives, their family relationships and their mental health, as well as opportunities delayed or lost. The participants shared their ongoing concerns about their families, friends and their community. In particular, the study highlights that family reunion needs to be accessible. This can be enabled by allowing RoS visa holders to access an application concession fee for a Partner visa.<sup>40</sup> In addition, other practical supports should be considered to help people overcome the disadvantages of living on temporary visas for years.

While this study provides insights into the long-term psychosocial, financial, education and employment impacts living in limbo has had on people seeking asylum in Australia and their families, further research is needed in these areas. This includes research to identify the unique needs of families post reunion in transitioning to life together after a decade or more of separation. This is especially pertinent considering family members of RoS holders are currently exempt from settlement support services.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

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# Recommendations

**1**

The Australian Government should provide a permanent RoS visa pathway for all people subjected to the Fast Track assessment process, including those refused protection.

**2**

Temporary protection visas should be abolished from the Migration Act.

**3**

RoS visa holders should be provided with access to a family reunion process that is fair, timely, and affordable.

**4**

The Australian Government should implement meaningful and practical measures to redress the long-term harm and disadvantage caused by these punitive policies.