

Moving Beyond Australia's Responses to People Seeking Asylum

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Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkjJpz7nxWM> Accessed 21 October 2021

Terms

Refugee

- Someone who has a well-founded fear of persecution should they return to their country, because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

People seeking asylum

- Those who arrive in another country seeking to be recognised as a refugee.

Australia's Humanitarian Program

- Offshore and onshore refugees.

Policies imposed on people seeking asylum who arrive by boat

- Mandatory detention laws since 1992.
- Onshore and offshore sites.
- We know the harms this causes.



Policies imposed on people seeking asylum who arrive by boat



Photo: Peter Thompson

- 30,000 people in community waiting years for refugee claim to be processed.
- Those recognised as refugees only granted a temporary protection visa.
- Many live without their family.

People seeking asylum during COVID-19



- Escalated risk of contracting COVID-19 in confined spaces.
- People remain on Nauru and Manus Island.
- Lack of access to most federally funded COVID-19 supports.
- Temporary visa holders not permitted to travel overseas.

Photograph: James Ross/EPA. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/dec/15/playing-games-with-us-the-medevac-men-languishing-in-hotel-detention-for-almost-two-years>
Access 21 October 2021

How can we understand this?

- Colonised Australia has a long history of locking up those considered “deviant” (Sidoti 2001, v).
- Also, a long history of preventing the arrival of people who are not white.
- The ‘absolutism’ of the White Australia policy now ‘embedded’ in Australia’s ‘culture of control’ (Manne 2016).
- There have been exceptions, including Vietnamese refugees in 1970s, but this was controlled.

How can we understand this?

- Policies imposed on people seeking asylum have been largely bipartisan.
- Political rhetoric – “queue-jumpers”; “illegal” (Doherty 2015).
- When boat arrivals increase, political rhetoric tends to increase.
- “Border security” and “Stop the Boats”.
- But also “Saving lives at sea”.
- Role of mainstream media.



<http://www.smh.com.au/content/dam/images/2/y/g/a/m/image.related.wideLandscape.620x349.2ygak.png/1385695779777.jpg> Accessed 21 October 2021

A somewhat settled narrative?

But...this is not the whole picture

Mobilising in support of people seeking asylum

- Some evidence of public opinion shifting away from hardline views.
- Growing number of groups and individuals mobilising.



<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-18/qld-protesters-refugee-immigration-detention-bita-anniversary/100302690> Accessed 21 October 2021

WA Refugee and People Seeking Asylum Network



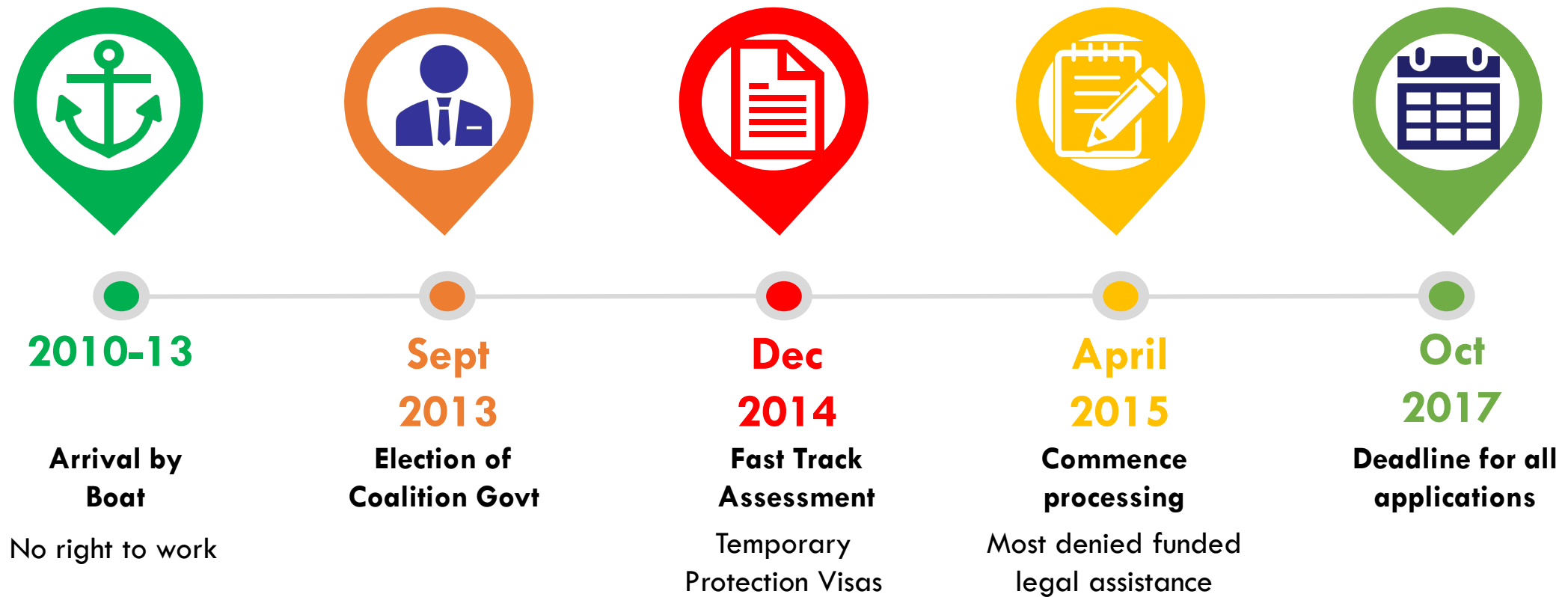
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**People from
asylum seeking
backgrounds**



Policy timeline



Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV)

- Five year temporary protection visa.
- At the end of five years, may be eligible for a permanent visa but only if worked or studied in a designated regional area for at least 3.5 years.
- Many have lived in cities that are not SHEV “regional” areas for years.
- No pathway to permanency for vast majority.
- Granting permanency and family reunion would lead to better labour market outcomes for temporary visa holders, incentivise domestic consumption and investment, and reduce the cost of reprocessing visa applications (\$300m)
 - John 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>

Looking forward

- People who have come to Australia to seek asylum must be allowed to settle here.
- And their families must be able to join them.
- Permanency and family reunion needs to be extended to all people seeking asylum in Australia, and those remaining on Nauru and Manus Island.
- It is time to stop punishing people.