



Refugee Council
of Australia

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM AND REFUGEES ON TPV AND SHEV VISAS

Young people seeking asylum have constantly expressed to RCOA their keen desire to improve their English and to undertake further education in order to contribute to Australia. There are currently around 30,000 asylum seekers living in Australia who arrived by boat and are waiting to have their claims processed. If they are found to be refugees, they will not be eligible for permanent residency in Australia and will instead be granted either a Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) or a Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV).

As they are not permanent residents of Australia, people seeking asylum and refugees on TPVs and SHEVs do not have access to the same services and entitlements as permanent Protection Visas holders or refugee and humanitarian entrants who are resettled from overseas. Some of the most significant differences in entitlements are those relating to tertiary education. These people face significant barriers to tertiary education which will effectively prevent most people on these visas from pursuing further study, in turn diminishing their employment prospects and undermining positive settlement outcomes.

Young people living in the community while they await decisions on protection claims or who have been found to be owed protection and granted SHEVs or TPVs are also exposed to barriers to participation in high school education.

Ineligibility for Federal Government and State Government financing programs

Unlike holders of permanent humanitarian visas, people seeking asylum (such as those on bridging visas) and refugees on temporary visas (such as those on a TPV or SHEV) are not eligible for Federal Government programs designed to assist students with financing tertiary study, including higher education loans schemes, such as FEE-HELP and HECS-HELP, and Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP). Further, most people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas are also unable to access concession rates for TAFE from states and territories. Without Government support, people are forced to pay international student rates to attend TAFE and university, in the thousands of dollars, effectively preventing them from furthering their education. These fees are likely to be unaffordable for the vast majority of people.

RCOA is aware of one university providing scholarships to asylum seekers on Bridging Visa Es (BVEs), which covers the entire cost of tuition for a degree and provides a small allowance. We would highly encourage other education providers to consider offering similar programs. Further, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, through Victorian Government funding, provides 300 places for asylum seekers to complete Vocational Education Training for courses up to a diploma level.

Question 1: What scholarships for asylum seekers and refugees on temporary visas are you aware of? Are you aware of any work being done to develop such programs?

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Limited access to income support for refugees on TPVs and SHEVs to undertake higher education beyond 12 months duration

Unlike permanent residents, refugees on TPVs and SHEVs who require income support receive payments through Special Benefit, rather than through standard income support programs such as the Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance or Austudy. Recipients of Special Benefit who wish to pursue tertiary study can only continue to receive income support if they are undertaking a vocational course that is likely to enhance their employment prospects and which can be completed in 12 months or less. As such, refugees on TPVs or SHEVs undertaking courses which take more than 12 months to complete will not be able to receive income support during this time. This is likely to seriously limit tertiary education opportunities for these visa holders.

However, RCOA understands this issue does not directly affected people seeking asylum, as they receive support through the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS). Unlike Special Benefits, SRSS payments are not impacted by participation in education, although the limit financial support does impact access to education more broadly.

Question 2: Are you aware of any refugees on temporary visas being denied income support through Special Benefit because they are enrolled in a course longer than 12 months?

Question 3: How will this policy affect young people once they receive a Temporary Protection Visa or a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa?

Specific implications for refugees on SHEVs

These barriers have particularly significant implications for refugees on SHEVs. In order to become eligible to apply for permanent residency, SHEV holders must either work without receiving income support or be enrolled in full-time study for 42 months. However, the second option is not practically available to most people on SHEVs without concession rates, CSP and HELP. Further, if SHEV holders cannot undertake study for more than 12 months without losing income support, it will be far more challenging for them to meet these requirements. Thus while study is an option to meet the requirements of the SHEV, this requirement is virtually impossible for the vast majority of SHEV holders to meet. Furthermore, limited access to tertiary education may reduce the employment opportunities available to SHEV holders, further compounding the difficulties they will face in meeting the eligibility requirements to apply for permanent residency.

Enrolment into secondary school for older young people

While policies vary between states and territories, many states allow young people to remain in schools until they turn 21, if they are enrolled in an accredited senior secondary course. RCOA understands this policy also applies to young people seeking asylum. However, RCOA has heard from refugee community members and service providers that many young people who are 18 years old are being told they are no longer eligible to attend secondary school and that they need to complete their secondary education through a TAFE provider. Further, once young people seeking asylum turn 18, they are no longer eligible for financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government (see below).

Those who are no longer able to attend high school are required to complete their senior secondary course at a TAFE. However, as discussed above, asylum seekers and refugees on temporary visas do not have access to concession rates and loan schemes to pay for their senior education at a TAFE. This leaves many young people unable to complete their secondary education – further impacting their future employment and education.

Many young people are keen to continue attending high school past 18 years of age, as this provides them with an opportunity to gain similar experiences and fit in with other young people. This can only happen if they are given the chance to access formal education, socialise with other people their age and experience what other Australians experience. By forcing young people out of school and

suggesting they attend TAFE or an alternative school, there is a risk that people will be further isolated and disengage from education.

Question 4: From your understanding, what is the policy for young asylum seekers who are over 18 and wish to attend secondary school?

Question 5: What policies and practices are you aware of that support or hinder access to secondary school for older young people?

Financial, social and other support

ROCA also understands that there is a lack of financial support for young people seeking asylum in secondary education. People seeking asylum who are living in the community receive only a basic living allowance. This limited financial support, well below the poverty line, creates significant difficulties for those trying to cover the basic costs associated with attending school. These difficulties are particularly substantial for young unaccompanied asylum seekers living without the support of their families.

This issue also significantly impacts young people who turn 18, as they move from more intensive support while they are in Community Detention to very limited support on a BVE. When the change to payments and living arrangements occurs, and this drop off in supports is so acute that young people cannot sustain their attendance in high school and simultaneously lose access to supports to re-negotiate access when/if they move schools or to TAFE.

Limited support is provided by the Federal Government for students under the age of 18 who are seeking asylum and who are living in the community awaiting processing of their claims. The Federal Government provides funding for primary and secondary school students through the Status Resolution Support Service. This allowance provides \$450 to the school for uniforms (shirts, shorts, pants, skirts, dress and shoes), schoolbooks, stationery and school bags. However, the funds cannot be used for excursions or travel to school and is often not enough for those in secondary school. ROCA has heard of many young people missing school claiming they are sick, as they cannot afford to attend these activities.

Other states may provide additional assistance for young people to participate in secondary education, but this support varies across states and may also cut off once a person turns 18.

Two young people seeking asylum highlighted this issue to ROCA at a recent community conference. They shared their experience of being denied funding for secondary education because they were over 18 years old and the resultant financial difficulties in affording basic necessities for school:

Schools provide a uniform, but they don't provide a raincoat or school shoes, forcing young people to buy these for themselves from the limited amount of money they receive. This money also needs to pay for their accommodation, bills and food. The money does not last until the end of the fortnight, forcing people to go without food. Some students spend \$40 to \$50 on public transport in order to attend a school that will accept them. Many young people walk 40-50 minutes almost every day to the local library to do their homework as they don't have a computer or laptop at home...They don't have enough government funding for asylum seekers. Some don't have work rights and those who have work rights leave school in order to earn enough money to support themselves.

These issues have directly or indirectly affected the life of all asylum seekers in high school. Very few numbers of those asylum seekers are left in high schools. I faced all these issues but still I am happy to continue with my education because it took me one and half years to be enrolled in school.

Question 6: Are you aware of initiatives that provide financial, social or other support for young people seeking asylum and refugees on temporary visas to continue secondary and post-compulsory education?

Benefits of addressing barriers to education

The key benefit of addressing barriers to education is improved employment outcomes. Being able to obtain or upgrade qualifications which are recognised in Australia will broaden career options for people seeking asylum and refugees on TPVs and SHEVs and enhance their capacity to secure employment. For young people who are exiting secondary school and have not yet had the opportunity to undertake further education or skills training, access to tertiary study will be particularly important.

Access to education will also contribute to more positive settlement outcomes for TPV and SHEV holders. While they remain temporary residents, they will nonetheless be residing in Australia on a long-term basis (at least three to five years). Moreover, as international crises continue to escalate, it is very likely that those on TPVs and SHEVs will remain in Australia for extended periods of time. The last time TPVs were introduced, more than 9,500 of the 11,000 people granted TPVs received a Permanent Protection Visa when their TPVs expired. As well as the unnecessary trauma caused by inconclusive status processes, denying refugees on temporary visas access to education support prevents people from increasing their skills and contributing to Australia's economy, effectively forcing people into lower-skilled and lower-paid work.

Providing opportunities for asylum seekers and TPV and SHEV holders to develop their skills, secure sustainable employment and establish a meaningful career pathway will help to ensure that they are able to settle successfully in Australia.

Question 7: What recommendations do you have for the Federal and State Governments to support young people seeking asylum and refugees on TPVs and SHEVs in accessing education?