

## Statement

### Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT)

The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) is a network of Australia's eight specialist rehabilitation agencies that work with survivors of torturer and trauma who have come to Australia from overseas.

FASSTT acknowledges the complex challenges faced by the Australian Government responding to the irregular arrival of people seeking asylum to Australia. We, however, consider that the policy to deny permanent protection visas to any person who arrived without a valid visa will seriously harm vulnerable people. We also believe this harm will be caused without achieving positive policy outcomes.

FASSTT worked with many people recognised as refugees by Australian authorities who were originally only granted temporary protection visas (TPVs) in the 1990s and 2000s. It is apparent to us that the mental and physical wellbeing of people granted TPVs was significantly and adversely affected by their inability to rebuild their lives because of prolonged uncertainty about their futures, separation from family who remained in precarious circumstances abroad and restricted entitlement to key services. The damage inflicted was often long-term, impacting on people even after they were eventually granted permanent residence and reunited with families. As a consequence, whole families suffered from the deleterious effects of the temporary protection visa policy.

There are negative impacts for Australia as well. People granted protection in Australia have a strong desire to contribute economically, socially and culturally to the community but the granting of visas for only relatively short periods significantly constrains their capacity and opportunity to do so. It is in the interests of society at large as well as the affected individuals for public policies to enhance and not diminish the capacity of people to apply and develop their skills in all domains.

The Government has provided no compelling explanation for the imposition of this harshly punitive policy. It is not designed to be a deterrent to people who might want to come in the future because they are all subject to being transferred

to other countries for processing and not permitted to ever settle in Australia whether temporarily or permanently.

In this context, FASSTT believes that those people found to be refugees, or who have other compelling human rights or humanitarian grounds for remaining in Australia should be granted permanent residency and access to family reunion. Those who have been determined to have no grounds to remain after due consideration of their claims in fair procedures, should be assisted to return to their country of origin or returned in accordance with appropriate standards.

To escape persecution and find safety elsewhere, refugees are frequently forced to leave and enter countries without documentation and authorisation: they should not be denied the opportunity to re-establish new lives in safety and with dignity for doing so.