

# Statement: Temporary visa holders must not be left behind

FECCA, along with many other advocacy groups, has for weeks been calling on the Federal Government to provide support for temporary visa holders who have been financially affected by coronavirus are unable to return home.

We welcomed the Government's JobKeeper payment package, particularly the announcement that the scheme would cover New Zealanders working in Australia on temporary visas, however we urgently called for the Government to extend this support to other classes of temporary visa holders.

On 4 April Acting Immigration Minister Alan Tudge further outlined the Government's position, stating that for temporary visa holders "it's time to go home".

FECCA agrees with the sentiment that temporary visa holders who are able to return home should do so to ensure they are best looked after by their respective Governments. However, for many, returning home is not an option.

Some temporary visa holders have lived in Australia for many years and have established roots in our community, and many do not have a home to return to.

For those who would like to return home, some face challenges with finding flights or re-entering countries that have shut their borders. Others may not have the financial means to return home even if they wanted to.

Temporary visa holders in Australia include temporary workers, refugees, international students and skilled migrants, and many are expected to sustain themselves while they are in Australia. This unprecedented global pandemic and economic crisis, however, requires that Government solutions reflect these new circumstances we all find ourselves in together.

Right now, many temporary visa holders in Australia are going through their migrant journey with the goal of becoming Australian citizens. We should not abandon them as we tackle this crisis as a nation.

Those currently in the process of applying for permanent residency also require further support at this time. The temporary nature of our migration system means that people wishing to migrate to Australia permanently must navigate a pathway from temporary visa to permanent visa and then on to citizenship.

FECCA welcomes the Government's announcement that citizenship ceremonies will not be delayed and will now be conducted online. However, we call on the Government to also prioritise the processing of permanent residency applications for temporary visa holders to ensure those who are eligible can access Government support during this crisis.

FECCA wholeheartedly welcomes the Government's JobKeeper announcement, however, its intention to protect those impacted by the COVID-19 is compromised unless it includes temporary visa holders who are unable to leave Australia. This scheme was designed to assist businesses by helping them retain staff. By excluding temporary visa holders from this scheme, the Government is denying support for businesses that have employees on temporary visas.

FECCA urges the Federal Government to support temporary visa holders in Australia and not leave anyone behind during this unprecedented crisis by:

- Assisting and facilitating the safe return of those who want to return to their home country
- Extending the JobKeeper payments to everyone who had a job, regardless of visa status
- Confirming all efforts are in place to ensure efficient processing and fast tracking of applications for those on temporary visas applying to become permanent residents
- Providing a safety net for those temporary visa holders who cannot return to their country of origin including refugees and migrants who have permanently relocated to Australia
- Allow access to Medicare to all people in Australia affected by COVID-19 who need healthcare as a matter of public health

As Parliament sits today, we urge our political leaders to work together to find a pragmatic solution to the dire situation temporary visa holders face.

**The following case studies illustrate the complex situation many temporary visa holders find themselves in:**

*Mia, a 19-year-old New Zealand national arrived in Australia aged 10 with her family. Mia has finished school and since October has been working 38 casual hours per week at a restaurant, has recently moved out of home for the first time—signing a 1 year*

*lease and taking out a loan for a car to get her to and from work. Mia has lost her job due to coronavirus impacting the business. Under the current rules, Mia is encouraged to return to New Zealand if she is unable to support herself.*

FECCA welcomes the Government's JobKeeper scheme being extended for NZ residents in Australia, however, in this situation Mia will not be able to access JobKeeper or JobSeeker payment. FECCA calls on the Government to find a pragmatic solution to support those temporary visa holders who cannot return to their country of origin, including situations where Australia is their home.

***Elias** migrated with his wife and two children to Australia on the Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 494) to make Australia their new home and has worked hard since his arrival. His children have been attending school and his wife has started a small business at home. To apply for permanent residency Elias worked for 3 years then applied for the Skilled Regional visa Subclass 887 permanent visa but is now facing a processing time of 24 months. Elias has invested his savings into his life in Australia, has no home to return to or way to get there.*

Elias is on his way to permanent residency and FECCA urges the Federal Government to confirm all efforts are in place to ensure efficient processing of applications for those on temporary visas applying to become permanent residents.

***Hanan** is in Australia currently seeking asylum and is on a bridging visa. She was cut off from access to financial assistance under the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program because the government had deemed her 'work-ready'. Hanan cannot secure employment in this crisis, she cannot access social support and she cannot return to her country of origin.*

We ask the Federal Government to provide a safety net for refugees and people seeking asylum on bridging visas who do not have access to SRSS.

***Franco** is an international student from the Philippines and has been in Australia for 2 years and wishes to return home. As Franco's life in Australia is funded by a part-time job and his family who have lost their jobs due to their unprecedented crisis, Franco does not have the finances available to return home. Franco's home city of Manilla has shut down all travel into and out of the capital until April 14. Franco has rent due, is running out of money and, with the global disruption to travel, cannot find flights to return home.*

We ask the Federal Government to assist and facilitate the safe return of those who are willing to return home, by negotiating a pathway with other countries to repatriate their citizens.

We urge the Government to work with peak bodies in good faith to find solutions to the problems many temporary visa holders face today.

FECCA is the national peak multicultural body representing people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia.

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