

What happened as a result of TPVs and the Pacific Solution?

(From Crikey 6 September 2011)

Crikey Canberra correspondent Bernard Keane writes:

MALAYSIA SOLUTION, MANUS ISLAND DETENTION CENTRE, NAURU SOLUTION, PACIFIC SOLUTION, TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISAS

How did Australia's last attempt to deter maritime-arriving asylum seekers fare? Data on the fate of those processed under the Pacific Solution, and given Temporary Protection Visas, provides some evidence.

A comprehensive analysis of every asylum seeker who found themselves fetched up on a Pacific island between 2001 and 2007 isn't possible from Department of Immigration data, but several trends are clear. These are the fates of asylum seekers who ended up on Nauru:

Arriving between 2001 and 2007 (Nauru Only) Total outcomes (not just those who came to Australia)

Outcome	Present	Resettled Refugee	Resettled Non-Refugee	Returned Voluntarily	Deceased	Total
Nationality						
Afghan		329	36	420	1	786
Bangladeshi			3	3		6
Burmese		7		1		8
Iranian		2	1	16		19
Iraqi		327	37	24		388
Pakistani		1	1	6		8
Palestinian		19				19
Sri Lankan		84		4		88
Total	0	769	78	474	1	1322

That is, 64% ended up being resettled in Australia or elsewhere, and nearly all of the rest -- mostly Afghans -- returned voluntarily (there are claims that some of those who returned were later killed in Afghanistan).

That's for Nauru only. Other data is available for asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island. Seven hundred and five people sent to Nauru or Manus Island were later resettled in Australia, nearly all of them Afghan, Iraqi or Sri Lankan. Where did others end up being resettled? Basically, New Zealand:

Total Persons Resettled by Nationality and Destination
(Includes Both Caseloads Nauru and Manus)

Nationality	Australia	Canada	Denmark	Norway	New Zealand	Sweden	Total
Afghan	230	7		2	121	5	365
Bangladeshi	2				1		3
Burmese	7						7
Iranian	2				2		4
Iraqi	376	9	6		257	12	660
Pakistani	1				2		3
Palestinian	5			2	12	2	21
Sri Lankan	82					2	84
Stateless					4		4
Turkish					2		2
Total	705	16	6	4	401	21	1153

Without New Zealand, the Pacific Solution would have been almost entirely a process of either encouraging Afghan asylum seekers to go back once they'd arrived, or letting them come to Australia.

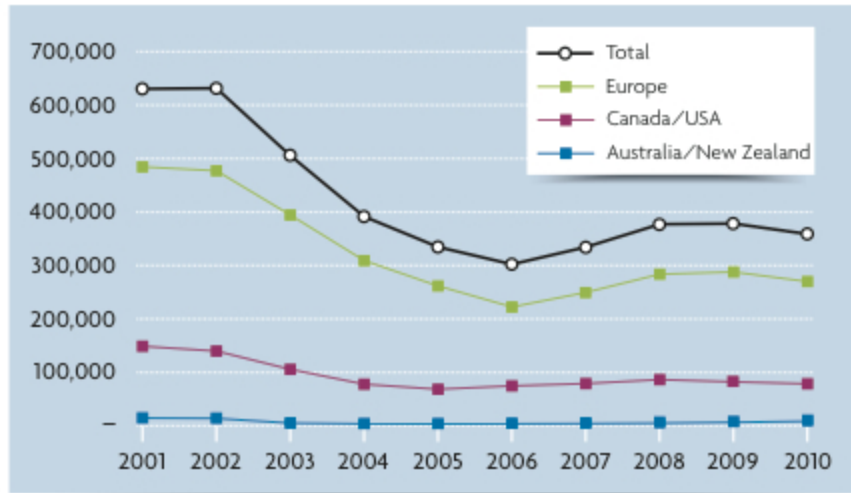
The numbers on Temporary Protection Visas are clearer. They were introduced in 1999 and ended in 2008. There were 11,206 issued. When they were abolished, 88% of temporary visa holders had already been granted permanent status. Just over 1000 people were still on TPVs when they were abolished; 815 of these were made permanent afterward. Of the 11,000 or so TPVs issued, 379 holders had left Australia in the interim; that is, "temporary protection visas" ended up being temporary for 3.4% of those issued them.

What TPVs were successful at was encouraging women and children onto boats, because TPVs did not allow for family reunion. Not merely was there a rise in the number of boat arrivals in the two years after TPVs were introduced in 1999, but there was a rise in the proportion of women and children on them. In 1999, just over 12% of asylum applications from Iraqi and Afghan people arriving by boat were from women and children. By 2001, just under 42% of applications of those applications were from women and children.

While TPVs acted as a clear pull factor for families where one member was already in Australia, did the Pacific Solution deter boat arrivals? Arrival numbers fell dramatically after it was introduced in 2001, from more than 5000 to double figures, and stayed at a low level until 2008. That, however, is also the global pattern for refugees everywhere. The UNHCR's data on asylum applications:

FIGURE 1

Asylum applications lodged in 44 industrialized countries | 2001-2010



Moreover, the refugee burden shifted away from our region elsewhere during that period. In 2003, the UNHCR reported "the total population of concern to UNHCR decreased most significantly in Asia (-34%), followed by Europe (-9%), North America (-8%), Africa (-7%) and Oceania (-6%)." That is, the likely sources for refugees most able to reach Australia reduced much more significantly than elsewhere in the world.

Still, the sheer scale of the fall in boat arrivals between 2002 and 2008 leaves open the question of whether the Pacific Solution added incrementally to the reduction in boat arrivals caused by a worldwide fall in asylum seekers and a particular fall in asylum seekers in our own region. If this was a result of the Pacific Solution, it was despite the high probability that anyone who was sent to Nauru or Manus Island and who refused to return home would be settled in either Australia or New Zealand.

The logic of the government's Malaysian Solution, of course, was that asylum seekers were guaranteed not to make it to Australia, because they'd be swapped for five asylum seekers who couldn't get on a boat, in Malaysia.

And any return to offshore processing as a means of deterring boat journeys would rely on people smugglers and asylum seekers remaining unaware that, if run by the same process as the Howard government's Pacific Solution, being sent to Nauru is a guarantee of resettlement, and most likely in Australia.