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Thousands of asylum seekers have protection visas lodgement times slashed

NSW Young Lawyers has raised concerns about a reduction in the amount of time that people seeking asylum in Australia are allowed to apply for temporary protection visas under the Fast Track Assessment process.

President of NSW Young Lawyers Emily Ryan said that the policy change by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection fails to afford access to justice for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

"We have worked with the Refugee Advice and Casework Service to assist their clients with temporary protection visa applications for the past six months, and we have seen an enormous number of volunteers who are willing to give up their time and expertise to offer assistance to people seeking asylum in Australia.

"But there are simply not enough hours in the day and not enough funding to employ appropriately skilled people to provide the urgent and specialist legal assistance that is required to meet the new timeframes.

"As a result of this policy change, thousands of people who have been waiting for legal assistance may now find that they are unable to access that assistance in the limited time allowed and face losing the right to seek asylum," she said.

Ms Ryan said that over the past year, an arrangement between the Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS) and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) has allowed people on RACS' waiting list additional time to lodge their applications for protection visas.

"However, we have become aware that the DIBP is now requiring some applicants, including RACS clients, to lodge their applications for protection within 60 days.

We estimate that around 11,000 people who arrived by boat between August 2012 and 1 January 2014 are subject to the Fast Track Assessment process but have not yet lodged their temporary protection visa applications.

"Whilst these people were permitted to apply for temporary protection in 2016, many were not able to do so immediately because they could not afford private legal representation.

Asylum seekers living in NSW have access to the Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS), the only community legal centre in NSW that provides free legal assistance to people seeking asylum under the Fast Track Assessment process.

RACS is the NSW Young Lawyers 2017 Charity of the Year. In NSW, people who wish to help fund free legal assistance for people seeking asylum can contribute to the Refugee Advice and Casework Service's urgent fundraising appeal at <https://www.givenow.com.au/racsaustralia>.

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