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Cuts to legal assistance for refugees another denial of justice

Today's Federal Government announcement of drastic funding cuts to the Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme are a further denial of justice for asylum seekers, and will leave many to navigate the legal process on their own.

The Minister for Immigration, Scott Morrison, has confirmed that the Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme (IAAAS) will no longer be available for people that arrive by boat or plane without visas, denying asylum seekers legal assistance when applying for protection.

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre CEO, Kon Karapanagiotidis states, "This is another attempt to undermine the right to claim protection as a refugee. These can be life and death decisions. When we get it wrong people are returned to significant harm, torture and death."

The refugee determination process is a legal process, requiring asylum seekers to provide sufficient evidence of their claims for protection. Departmental officers are trained to question and interrogate those claims. For asylum seekers to navigate this process unassisted is grossly unfair.

The removal of legal support leaves asylum seekers vulnerable to unfair decision making.

"The result will be poor decision making and burden shifting to the Refugee Review Tribunal and the courts for review. It will not save money. The legal services offered by IAAAS providers are incredibly good value and ensures a fair and robust refugee determination process," said Kon.

The Minister claims that the move will save \$100m over four years. Comparatively, the cost of offshore processing in 2013 alone was \$1b.

"This is further discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers by mode of arrival, something which is explicitly prohibited under the Refugee Convention.

The Minister states that the community can provide support. But Australia has a duty to facilitate the refugee determination process for all asylum seekers. Assistance should not be denied to anyone requesting our protection from harm," said Kon.

As an independent organisation, the ASRC does not accept federal government funding and is not an IAAAS provider. We expect to see an increase in demand for our free legal services as a result of the cuts and other community legal centres to be placed under pressure.

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