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LEGAL AID STAFF CLAIMS 'FAST TRACK' ASSESSMENT IS PUTTING PEOPLE AT RISK

April 27, 2017

By Emilie Ng



Unfair: "There is pressure from the Government to submit the statements and forms in a shorter time but not enough funds to help these people."

QUEENSLAND'S only two clinics offering free legal services for asylum seekers whose claims are being assessed in the Fast Track assessment say the process is unfair for refugees.

Salvos Legal Humanitarian Asylum Seeker Clinic and Refugee and Immigration Legal Services are the only legal clinics in Queensland offering free assistance for asylum seekers being processed in the Fast Track cohort.

Fast Tracking took effect on April 19, 2015, to deal with a backlog of claims for asylum seekers seeking protection after the Gillard government's decision to pause processing.

The Fast Track process was put in place to process people who arrived in Australia by boat between August 13, 2012, and January 1, 2014.

Asylum seekers are required to fill out a 41-page application form within 60 days and a statement outlining their claims for protection, and sit an interview to claim protection in Australia.

The process was instigated to ensure claims were assessed more efficiently and within shorter timeframes.

Salvos Legal Humanitarian senior associate Charlotte Yellowlees estimated the ASC saw up to 30 asylum seekers, and finalised a minimum of 20 protection visa applications, every month.

The ASC provides 10 hours of face-to-face time with a client and up to 15 hours of assistance with their forms and statements.

Ms Yellowlees said the Federal Government was putting pressure on refugees to submit their applications but was not offering any resources to make it easier for asylum seekers.

"There is pressure from the Government to submit the statements and forms in a shorter time but not enough funds to help these people," she said.

Ms Yellowlees said it was unreasonable to expect the amount of paperwork required by "a person who does not speak English, is isolated, unemployed and has a complex history of mental health as a result of the traumas that led them to seek asylum".

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Cardinal Mueller to graduates: 'Dare to be great' May 17, 2017

, May 17, 2017 / 03:01 pm (CNA/EWTN News).- With God's grace, you can accomplished great things, Cardinal Gerhard Mueller challenged young Catholics at Christendom College last weekend at their 2017 commencement ceremony. "The summary of all natural and Christian anthropology is to say, 'Dare to be great in the grace of the Father and [...]"

Medjugorje, the findings of the Ruini report May 17, 2017

Vatican City, May 17, 2017 / 10:29 am (Vatican Insider / La Stampa).- Thirteen votes in favor of recognizing the supernatural nature of the first seven appearances in Medjugorje, one vote against and one "suspensive" ballot, which will give a final answer later. A majority of suspensive votes and many doubts instead, concerning the apparition [...]

Priest stabbed during Mass at Mexico City cathedral May 17, 2017

Mexico City, Mexico, May 17, 2017 / 06:04 am (CNA/EWTN News).- A Mexican priest is in "delicate but stable" condition after being

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RAILS director Greg Mackay shares the concern, saying instead of making assessments more efficient, the Fast Track process was "code for 'We don't care'".

Mr Mackay said that attitude was confirmed when the Government laid a "ridiculously undoable" deadline for processing the claims.

In March this year Mr Mackay was informed that all refugees eligible for processing with Fast Track would be finalised by June 30 next year, but all applications needed to be sent to the Australian Immigration Office by November 1, 2017.

Mr Mackay said the new timeframe was unrealistic given only two clinics in Queensland offered pro-bono support for refugees.

"We will need to do three times or more the amount of applications per month to keep up with the Government's timeframe," he said.

"I'm hoping this is not the case and that the Government will extend their timeframe."

Earlier this year the Department of Immigration and Border Protection released a report into the status and processing outcomes of asylum seekers, and included figures for those in the Fast Track process.

By February 2 there were a total of 737 asylum seekers who were yet to apply for the Fast Track process' two possible visas, the Temporary Protection Visa or the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa.

That figure has come down to 450, and from previous referral patterns, Mr Mackay expects RAILS volunteers, all of whom are experienced lawyers, will assist between 300 and 350 claims.

At the moment, RAILS volunteers can see between 23 and 25 asylum seekers per month, spending between nine and 10 hours of work for each application.

Mr Mackay said officials processing the claims on behalf of the Government were rejecting applications by nit-picking on "minor matters".

"That percentage is rising and flies in the face of some years of data showing that successful refugee applications come from people that arrived into Australia by boat and not by plane," he said.

Rejected applications are referred to a newly formed Immigration Assessment Authority for a review but applicants do not have the ability to provide further information on their claim.

Asylum seekers can have their case brought to a conditional review but Mr Mackay expected this would "clog up the courts" and cost money that refugees did not have.

"It's just wrong," he said.

"The whole process is unfair."

Brisbane Refugees and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS) Network sent an email in late March urging donations to Queensland's two clinics offering pro-bono legal assistance to refugees.

Brisbane archdiocese's Catholic Justice and Peace Commission executive officer Peter Arndt, who was instrumental in forming the BRASS network, said the Government was being "unrealistic" about the time needed for refugees to complete their applications.

"The resources just aren't there to get claims done up and lodged," Mr Arndt said.

"It increases the unfairness and injustice and ends up being more inefficient."

Machorro Alcalá, 55, was stabbed in the neck and torso May 15 at the [...]

Pope points to Mary Magdalene as an apostle of hope May 17, 2017

Vatican City, May 17, 2017 / 03:36 am (CNA/EWTN News).- By calling Mary Magdalene by name after his resurrection, Jesus shows us just how personal his relationship with mankind is, Pope Francis said Wednesday, adding that after this intimate encounter, Mary then becomes an apostle of hope for the world, announcing the Lord's rising. "Mary: [...]

What the littlest children can teach us about suffering May 17, 2017

Denver, Colo., May 17, 2017 / 03:02 am (CNA/EWTN News).- "There will be saints among the children." So said Pope Pius X, when he lowered the age that children could receive their First Holy Communion. Previously, children had to be 10 or 12, now they are typically in second grade, or about seven or eight [...]

Sign of hope in Syria – Aleppo consecrated to Our Lady of Fatima May 17, 2017

Aleppo, Syria, May 17, 2017 / 12:01 am (CNA/EWTN News).- Still reeling from the Syrian civil war, the city of Aleppo saw a ray of hope this weekend with a consecration to Our Lady of Fatima on May 13. The Mass of Consecration took place in Saint Francis of Assisi Roman Rite Cathedral, which is [...]

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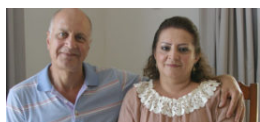
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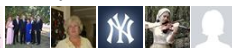
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