Protection Visa and Appeals Legal Service
11-month snapshot (1 Aug 24 to 30 Jun 25)

About Our Service

Circle Green Community Legal provides an effective, government-supported legal service for protection claims and appeals. This reduces pressure on the protection visa system while upholding Australia's humanitarian commitments.

Our Vision	Our vision for a fair and efficient protection visa process includes:
	• Funded early intervention legal assistance
	• Sustainable and scalable legal service delivery
	• Fairer outcomes for clients and improved efficiency for decision makers
	• Expanded resourcing to the Administrative Review Tribunal (**ART**), to enable shared data across decision makers and service providers
	• Minimal/minor backlogs
	• Independent evaluations of legal service delivery and case management processes for decision makers to assess the impact of operations on preventing backlogs.

What have we been up to since our last snapshot?

Collaborated with the ART to collect data through a survey regarding the resources needed to manage existing protection caseloads. The ART have conveyed **a willingness to analyse trends in caseload data**, e.g. resource differences between represented and self-represented matters, while noting the need for additional resources and capacity.

Seen an average of **10 new clients each week.**

Restructured our service to accommodate for the lack of continued Appeals Backlog funding post 30 June, now **operating on a reduced scale** using underspent funds and available organisational resources.

Shared our data driven service delivery approach with Community Legal Centres and Legal Aid Commissions, promoting **impact-focused service delivery** across PPV fund recipients.

Commenced preparation for our presentation titled "*Outcomes: it is not that hard*", to be delivered at the **National Community Legal Centres Australia conference.**

Achieved a **75% remittal rate** for clients **we have represented**.

Case study

Our case study of Ama's journey is **an example of a remitted ART matter** for a client family group that we represented.

Our legal service played a critical role in ensuring accurate and correct information was provided to the ART, including addressing previously provided false claims. Access the full case study infographic **here** for more information.

Circle Green Community Legal

Protection Visa and Appeals Legal Service
Key Statistics

Legal Need

2 new clients on average each day, indicates a **high demand** for this legal service.

We have a reduced capacity to service legal need:

With the scale down of our service due to no funding after 30 June, some **clients are now waiting over 5 weeks** to get a 1st appointment with lawyers in our service. **Previously, with funding, the average wait time was 2 weeks** for a 1st appointment and we could support an average of 3 clients a day.

PV Initial

207	Primary applicants and **84** additional applicants
351	Total legal services
224	Legal advices
48	Representations

PV Appeal

124	Primary applicants and **22** additional applicants
226	Total legal services
155	Legal advices
9	Representations

JR Matters

32	Primary applicants and **4** additional applicants
42	Total legal services
22	Legal advices
0	Representations

Top 5 Countries of Origin

PV Initial

Country	%	Count
India	7%	15
Pakistan	7%	
Myanmar	5%	11
Palestinian Authority	4%	9
Ukraine	4%	

PV Appeal

Country	%	Count
Malaysia	41%	51
Fiji	12%	15
Pakistan	5%	7
China	5%	6
Indonesia	5%	

JR Matters

Country	%	Count
Malaysia	47%	15
Indonesia	13%	4
China	6%	2
Egypt	6%	
Pakistan	6%	

Priority Groups

PV Initial

Group	Count
Family violence	25
Single parent family	16
LGBTQI+	17
Client in custody	9
People with a disability	6

PV Appeal

Group	Count
Family violence	12
Single parent family	13
LGBTQI+	9
Client in custody	7
People with a disability	2

Merits Assessments

- What is a merits assessment?
- How much does it cost our service to deliver one?
- Why are they required to reduce backlogs?

What is a merits assessment?

An assessment carried out by a legal practitioner of a client's individual factual circumstances and evidence; and against the legal criteria of the protection visa framework.

How many people continue to lodge an application after receiving a 'no merit' assessment?

We continue to use our client survey to gain valuable insights on the impact of a 'no merit' assessment on clients' decisions to lodge an application or continue with an application following the provision of no merit advice.

PV Initial

104	**total** Merits Assessments
43%	**low or no merit**
7%	**had already lodged** prior to our service
29%	**chose to lodge/continue** following our low/no merit advice
3	**Clients** were **eligible** for **alternative visa pathways**

PV Appeal

60	**total** Merits Assessments
82%	**low or no merit**
90%	**had already lodged** prior to our service
81%	**chose to lodge/continue** following our low/no merit advice
2	**Clients** were made aware of **alternative visa pathways**

Learning Point

- Our data continues to suggest that our service has a greater influence on a client's decision to lodge if we engage with a client prior to them lodging an application or appeal.
- This strongly supports our call for a funding commitment to support early intervention legal services.
- Seeing clients early ensures greater fairness in improving clients level of understanding of the merits of their application and has more scope for resulting in reducing the backlog by encouraging clients to proceed with meritorious applications and supporting them to pursue alternative visa pathways where there is no or low merit assessed.

Client Feedback

> **She** [*Circle Green lawyer*] **was really understanding, and explained all the legal things to me. I am very grateful for all the help.**
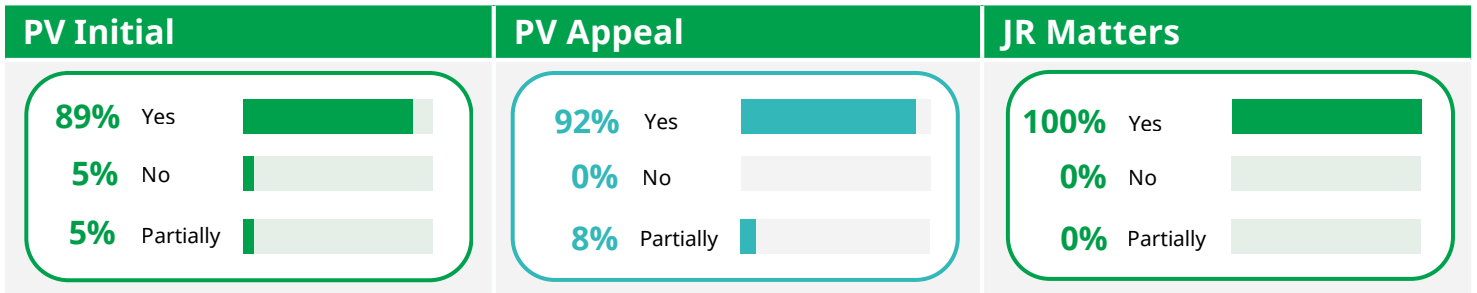
> **Perfect - very helpful, great manner, very patient**

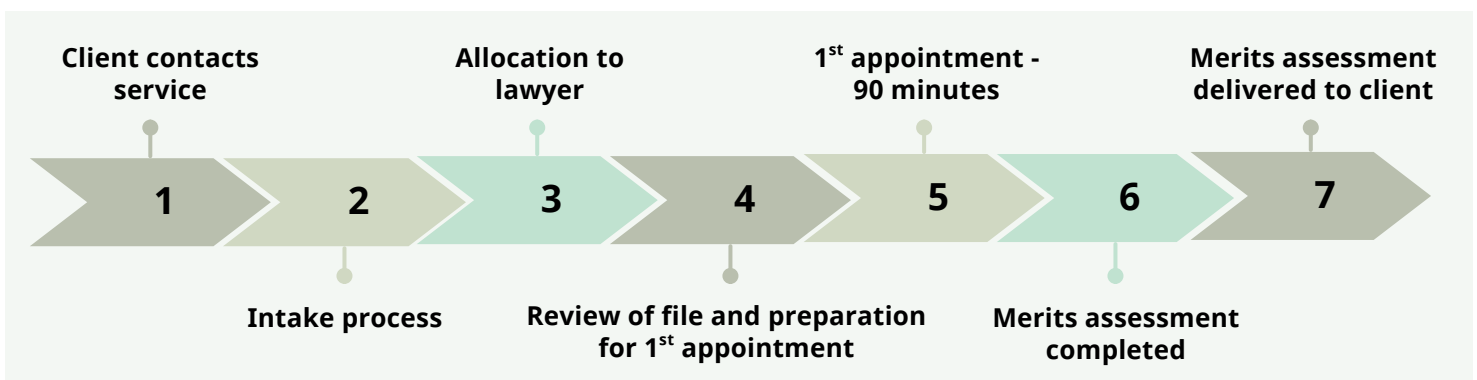# Do clients understand their protection matter and the likelihood of success?

We continue to use our client survey to gain feedback at the no merit advice and file closure service points. We ask them: *to what extent did they (client) gain a better understanding of their legal rights & responsibilities, including the merits of their case and options available to them?*

PV Initial

89%	Yes
5%	No
5%	Partially

PV Appeal

92%	Yes
0%	No
8%	Partially

JR Matters

100%	Yes
0%	No
0%	Partially

How much does it cost for us to deliver a merits assessment?

By assessing the total time spent working on a merit assessment, disaggregated across legal, non-legal and supervision time, we can derive a cost of delivering a merit assessment.

A merit assessment, involves time taken across the following key points of the client journey with our service.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1 Client contacts service
2 Intake process
3 Allocation to lawyer
4 Review of file and preparation for 1st appointment
5 1st appointment - 90 minutes
6 Merits assessment completed
7 Merits assessment delivered to client

The estimated **cost for conducting a merits assessment** from September 2024 to June 30 2025, is:

an **average** of **$4,266**
9.1 hr

a **maximum** of **$13,379**
25 hr
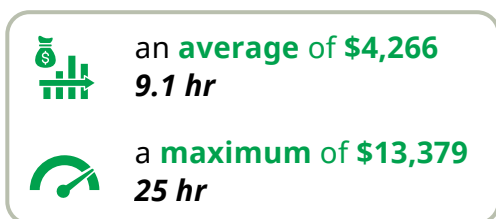
**Using data from one experienced lawyer. Rates used: Legal=$600, Nonlegal=$200, Supervisor=$650, Interpreter=$187.

Cost components of Protection Visa Service

- Urgent advice — cost to run service **?**
- Time allocation (%) — % hours in each category **?**
- Statements & submissions — cost to produce **?**
- Overflow service — cost per client and % of service model **?**
- Merits assessments — cost per assessment ✓
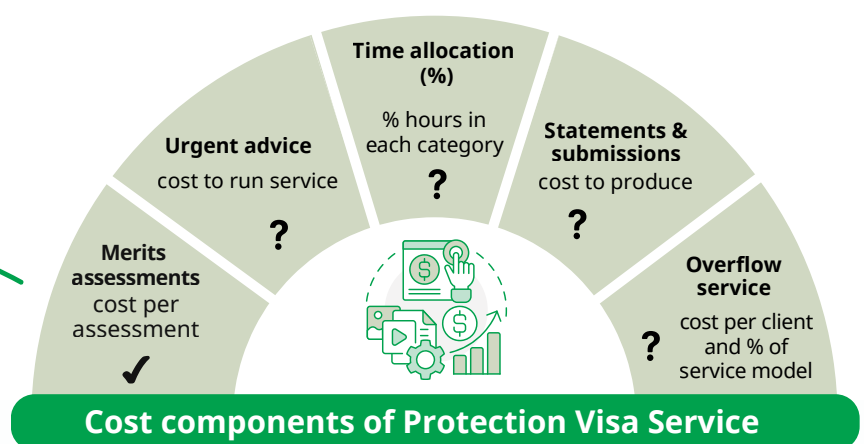
Note: this is **NOT the full cost** of running a whole protection matter, **only the cost of a merits assessment.**

Listen here to our data explainer for more information on our cost of service 'pilot', what we are engineering and why it may be useful to inform your decision.

What is the role of a merits assessment in addressing the backlog?

Recently, we conducted a merits assessment reflection exercise with our lawyers. Their front-line perspectives provide valuable insights that strengthen our service delivery and inform strategic priorities.

What perspectives do our lawyers have on the role of merits assessments?

> **Merits assessments play a vital role in supporting a fair and efficient protection visa system.**

For **no/low merit** claims, a merits assessment:
- ✔ Helps individuals **understand the protection visa framework** and how it applies to their situation.
- ✔ Provides **clarity on a client's prospect of success** and options available to them.
- ✔ Enables clients to make **informed decisions** about '*whether lodging a protection visa or continuing with an appeal is going to help them to arrive at the outcome they are seeking.*'
- ✔ Can **deter clients from applying or continuing** with their application.
- ✔ Can **encourage** clients to explore **more viable options** for their future, contributing directly to reducing the backlog.

Even **if clients proceed with a low-merit claim**, they do so with **greater insight and awareness** into the legal process, sometimes leading to other options being pursued. For a **meritorious protection claim**, providing **a merits assessment can '*alleviate stress and anxiety*'** faced by a client, allowing more productive engagement in the process. Engaged clients can present clear and relevant information to the decision-maker, thereby reducing the time it takes for the decision-maker to reach a conclusion.

What do our lawyers find most challenging about conducting a merits assessment?

An overview of key challenges our lawyers reflected on is shown in the table below, noting the high volume of 'no/low merit' assessments our service engages with.

Level	Examples
Individual challenges	Impacts on mental and emotional wellbeing, pressure, risk of burnout and working with clients in stressful situations where they do not meet legal criteria for protection but still face significant distress and challenges at the prospect of returning home (e.g. family and historic violence, sexual abuse).
Organisational challenges	Access to adequate resources/lawyers, workload sustainability, staff retention, training and professional development (e.g. trauma-informed training) and building capacity to complete merits assessments.
Systemic challenges	Challenges stemming from broader systemic issues within the legal sector included: working with complex evidence, perceived political influence, managing complex risks, engaging with the ART merits review process and ethical challenges arising from these structural issues.

Next snapshot report: October 2025

A snapshot of our work developing a Social Return on Investment Forecast (**SROI**). The findings from this forecast will provide insight into the effectiveness of the protection visa legal service model in creating benefit for key stakeholders, improving systems thinking and efficiency of protection and appeals processing to reduce backlog, improve long-term cost savings, and efficient allocation of stakeholder resources.

Links to further service information
- Protection Visa and Appeals Legal Service webpage
- Six-Month Progress Report
- Eight-Month Progress Report
- Funding Priorities for Protection and Appeals Reform