



ACCOMPANYING PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

Addressing the Growing Number of People Facing Destitution



Accompanying People Seeking Asylum

The Archdiocesan Justice & Peace Commission wishes to draw the attention of all Catholics in the Archdiocese to growing numbers of families and individuals facing destitution in our community. The women, men and children who have fled violence and persecution and who seek safety in Australia. The Australian Government has withdrawn income and accommodation support from many. Most are able to work if they can find a job, but, if there is no job or not enough work for them, they face destitution.

We make no judgment about the way they came to Australia. The only thing that matters to us is that they are human beings just like us, created in the image and likeness of God.

We urge all Catholics to join us in responding to the needs of destitute and desperate people with hearts of compassion and love, as Jesus taught us.

An Endless Desire to Show Mercy

In 2013, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation in which he invited the whole Church to renew its commitment to be a missionary Church spreading the joy of the Gospel. He invited us to step out of our comfort zone and to seek people who are vulnerable and rejected, showing them the same mercy which God has shown us:

...An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved...

- Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, No. 24.

The Pope has shown a particular concern for the plight of refugees and people seeking asylum. His Message for the World Day of Peace this year, Migrants and Refugees, Men and Women in Search of Peace, invites us to welcome and support them generously. The

Archdiocesan Justice & Peace Commission has also shown an interest in the plight of those who have come to Australia, seeking safety and a chance to start a new life for themselves and their family.

Inspired by the Pope's invitation, members of the Commission have stepped out of our meeting room and spent time with refugees and people seeking asylum in the Brisbane area. We have listened to their stories and concerns. We have tried to offer practical help to individuals where we can; and we have gained a better understanding of how our Government's policies on refugees and people seeking asylum cause harm and injustice.

We have met people who have been given a temporary protection visa, those who have been waiting for a number of years for a decision on their application for protection, others whose application for protection has been rejected and who have been left destitute, and those who were brought here from Nauru and Manus Island to receive medical treatment and who have now been left without accommodation or money.

What we have learned is:

Whether people have been given temporary protection or are still waiting for a decision or have been rejected, all show signs of serious distress – some are clearly deeply depressed;

Those who have been given a temporary protection visa face the anguish and uncertainty of their case being reviewed at a future date and worrying about being sent back to the place where they experienced persecution and violence;

In many cases, people who have been given protection are separated from their partners and children and have little prospect of reunion with their loved ones;

Those who have had most Government support removed face destitution and hardship;

Many who have had support withdrawn have the right to work and are desperate to find work rather than to rely on the generosity of others.

To cause such hardship and distress is simply cruel and unjust. To argue that cruelty is justified if people come to Australia by boat ignores the fundamental truth of our Christian faith, i.e., all those who have come to our country seeking safety are human beings created in God's image and likeness and, because of that, are entitled to be treated with respect and dignity.

The Justice & Peace Commission invites you to join us in taking the first step to meet refugees and people seeking asylum, to learn about their lives and concerns, showing mercy and compassion, and to ease their distress and give them hope.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge has publicly expressed a desire that the Church community be a sanctuary for refugees and people seeking asylum.

We invite you to make your parish community a sanctuary in which refugees and people seeking asylum find welcome. We invite you to replace the cruelty which so many of them experience with mercy, with compassion and with love.

There are a number of things you can do:

A number of organisations and groups in our Archdiocese work with and support refugees and people seeking asylum who face destitution and grave difficulty. They rely on community support and donations as well as volunteer help.

Donations of goods, donations of money for rent, offers of accommodation and work are welcome.

These organisations welcome you expressing an interest in providing support to refugees and people seeking asylum facing immense hardship.

Many of our parishes are already responding to these needs generously. We hope that this support can grow and that this "Movement of the Heart" can make a real difference in the lives of our sisters and brothers who are facing immense struggles. You can find out more about how you and your parish can take the first step towards giving hope to these vulnerable people by contacting them directly. Contact details are as follows:

The Romero Centre: Beata Ostapiej-Piatkowski 3013 0100, 0438 112 076, beata.ostapiej-piatkowski@mercyys.org.au

Asylum Circle: Anne Hilton 0416 043 093, anea@communify.org.au

St Paul's Community Hub: Jon Sorohan, 3208 2868, jsorohan@bne.catholic.edu.au

Logan Together: Zahir Ul Husnian, 0413 169 240, shahzahir2006@yahoo.com

MDA (Status Resolution Support Service & Humanitarian Support Program): Tim Draper 3170 0432, 0413 417 830, timd@mdaltd.org.au, www.mdaltd.org.au

ACCESS: Samantha Chalmers 0428 092 267, 3412 9936, samanthac@acsl.org.au, www.accesscommunity.org.au

Attached to this document is an outline of the circumstances for different categories of people seeking asylum. We hope this will help you to get a clearer picture of the situation and to understand why the problem of destitution is growing.

The Justice & Peace Commission believes it is also important for us all to advocate for change which ends the cruelty and injustice that so many experience. Alongside the practical support you offer to refugees and people seeking asylum, we encourage you to challenge this cruelty and injustice in your local community, with your local MP and with the Government. The Commission can assist you to find ways to do this.

If your parish would like to explore how you might take the next step, the Justice & Peace Commission will hold a meeting for interested Catholics who want to learn more. This will take place in May and will be advertised widely once details are finalised.

Please contact the Catholic Justice & Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Brisbane on 3324 3451 or at cjpc@bne.catholic.net.au if you have any queries.

Information for Parishes

Refugees and People Seeking Asylum Living in Our Communities

Who are refugees and people seeking asylum?

Refugees

Refugees are people who have been found to have fled a well-founded fear of persecution. Their refugee status (their need for protection) has been already determined either by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) or the Australian Government.

People Seeking Asylum

People seeking asylum have come to Australia to seek protection. Many have come from a refugee like background because they are fleeing persecution. It is necessary for the Australian Government to determine their refugee status and whether they have a well-founded fear of persecution and therefore a need for protection.

Refugees Living In Our Communities

Each year, Australia accepts approximately 16,250 people as refugees through offshore resettlement. A small proportion arrived in Australia on a valid visa and then sought our onshore protection. All refugees in Australia are entitled to live and work as permanent residents and are eligible to apply for Australian citizenship after 4 years of residence.

Refugees come from any region in the world where there is protracted persecution and conflict. The main source countries at present are: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar (Burma).

Category	Support Available
<p>Refugee</p> <p><i>Offshore resettlement- Visa subclass 200, 201, 203</i></p>	<p>Approximately 6000 people (made up of individuals and families) arrive in Australia each year from overseas. From the time of arrival they are supported for between 12-18 months by the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) which is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS).</p> <p>In Queensland, the contracted HSP agency is MDA Ltd (Multicultural Development Australia). MDA provides direct support in Greater Brisbane, Toowoomba and Rockhampton areas. MDA subcontracts to ACCESS (in Logan and Gold Coast areas), Townsville Multicultural Support Group (in Townsville) and Centacare FNQ (in Cairns). The Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) assists survivors of torture and trauma.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Con'd on page 5)</i></p>

Category	Support Available
	<p>Refugees receive wide ranging support through HSP including: case management, settlement lifeskills orientation, support to find housing, assistance to link to key services including English, schools, health, Centrelink and QPASTT. They are also supported to gain employment and/or link to vocational education.</p> <p>For more information: https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/visa-1/200-</p>
<p>Humanitarian Arrival (Special Humanitarian Program)</p> <p><i>Offshore resettlement – Visa subclass 202</i></p>	<p>Approximately 6000 people (made up of individuals and families) arrive in Australia each year from overseas.</p> <p>They have an Australian sponsor (relative, friend, Australian member of the public) who has paid for their travel costs and agreed to help them settle in Australia.</p> <p>They are entitled to the full range of support through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (above).</p> <p>For more information: https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/visa-1/202-</p>
<p>Woman at Risk (and their families)</p> <p><i>Offshore resettlement – Visa subclass 204</i></p>	<p>Approximately 1500 Woman at Risk (and their children) are settled in Australia each year. Woman at Risk do not have the protection of a male relative and are in danger of harassment or victimisation because of their female gender.</p> <p>They are entitled to the full range of support through the Humanitarian Settlement Program (above).</p> <p>For more information: https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/visa-1/204-</p>
<p>Community Support Program</p> <p><i>Offshore resettlement – Visa subclass 202</i></p>	<p>Approximately 1000 refugees who have been fully sponsored (all costs covered) by an Australian Supporter with Approved Proposing Organisation (APO) in Australia. In Queensland, the Approved Proposing Organisation is MDA Ltd. It is the responsibility of the APO to ensure that clients receive necessary assistance to settle.</p> <p>For more information: https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/refu/offs/community-support-programme</p>
<p>People who are granted refugee status on shore</p> <p><i>Onshore protection – Visa subclass 866</i></p>	<p>Approximately 1500 people are granted permanent refugee protection after they have claimed asylum while in Australia. They have previously arrived in Australia on a valid visa and then claimed asylum.</p> <p>People who are granted refugee status onshore are <u>not</u> eligible for support through the HSP program. For more information: https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/visa-1/866-</p>

Refugees and People Seeking Asylum Living in Our Communities

People Seeking Asylum Living in Our Communities

Since 2010, approximately 30,000 people have come to Australia to seek asylum. The majority have arrived by boat. Others have claimed asylum in Australia after arriving on a valid visa. All people who are seeking asylum require the Australian government to determine their claim for refugee protection (this is referred to as refugee status determination). They are also subject to character and security assessments. If people's claims to protection are not found to be valid or there are adverse character or security assessments, they are expected to return to their country of origin. This may be voluntarily or involuntarily.

Since 19 July 2013, all people who arrived by boat and sought asylum were transferred either to Papua New Guinea (Manus Island) or Nauru as part of offshore processing arrangements. Only single, unaccompanied men (whose families are elsewhere) have been sent to PNG. In Nauru, there are single (unaccompanied) men and women, couples as well as families with children.

In Queensland, since 3 April 2017, all people seeking asylum are eligible for half-price bus fares. Additionally, all people who have sought asylum and are on return pending (finally determined pathways) are eligible for free health support through public hospitals.

Category	Support Available
<p>People seeking asylum in Immigration Detention</p>	<p>People seeking asylum who arrived without a prior valid visa continue to be subject to indefinite mandatory immigration detention.</p> <p>Today, there are only small numbers of asylum seekers who are held in immigration detention including those who have been re-detained (for various reasons including adverse character or security assessments or prior to being deported). Also, people who have arrived from Nauru or PNG for medical assessment and are awaiting return may be in immigration detention if they are not living in the community.</p> <p>In Queensland, the Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation (BITA) is an immigration detention facility.</p>
<p>Community Detention</p>	<p>People seeking asylum who have significant vulnerabilities may be placed in community detention. People living within community detention are able to live in the community however are subject to some restrictions including a requirement that they live at an address specified by the Minister for Immigration.</p> <p>Accommodation is provided; therefore people live off a living allowance that is approximately 50% of Centrelink special benefits (as well as 50% of family benefits if eligible). All medical support is received from the International Health and Medical Service (IHMS) unless hospitalisation is required which is through a public hospital. People living in community detention are not eligible to work.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Cont'd on page 7)</i></p>

Category	Support Available
Bridging Visa E	<p>The majority of people seeking asylum whose protection status has not been resolved live within the community on a Bridging Visa E (BVE). They are eligible to receive 89% of Centrelink special benefit (plus 89% of FTA & FTB if eligible).</p> <p>Since December 2014, people have had an entitlement to work. They are also eligible for health assistance through Medicare including free use of Queensland public health services. They are required to pay for all of their own living expenses including accommodation, medicines, food, transport, clothing.</p> <p>People who are not working and are eligible to receive case management support through the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) which is funded by the Department of Home Affairs. In Queensland, the providers are MDA Ltd and ACCESS.</p> <p>Some people on a BVE have lost their entitlement to income support from Centrelink. This may be because they are working or have savings. For people who have lost their employment, they may be eligible to reapply for support through SRSS and living allowance through Centrelink. The process of reapplication can be managed by either MDA or ACCESS.</p>
Return Pending – Finally Determined.	<p>People who are seeking asylum who have been found to be finally determined are those whose claim for protection has not been upheld by the Department of Home Affairs (previously Department of Immigration and Border Protection – DIBP).</p> <p>It is expected that they voluntarily return to their country of origin. If they choose not to return voluntarily, they may be subject to involuntary return (deportation).</p> <p>People who are pending return are eligible to lodge a request for Judicial Review through the Federal Circuit Court. Until this is resolved, people cannot be subject to involuntary return.</p> <p>People are entitled to live within the community. However, they are not in receipt of any government assistance in terms of living allowance or support through SRSS. They do have work rights as well as Medicare entitlements.</p> <p>This means that people who are finally determined and on a return pending pathway are living within the community without any access to finances unless they are working. This can have a significant impact on their ability to maintain housing as well as pay for food, medicines and transport etc.</p>
Voluntary Return	<p>Some people who are seeking asylum make the decision to voluntarily return to their country of origin either before or after the resolution of their protection status. The agency that assists with voluntary return is the International Organisation of Migration (IOM).</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Cont'd on page 8)</i></p>



Information for Parishes

Refugees and People Seeking Asylum Living in Our Communities

Category	Support Available
Temporary Protection Visa (TPV)	<p>People seeking asylum who have been found to be refugees (and they have passed character and security clearance) are eligible to apply for a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV). TPVs are valid for up to 3 years during which time people have work rights as well as entitlement to Medicare and Centrelink.</p> <p>People on TPVs are not eligible to study unless they are able to pay the equivalent of international student rates.</p> <p>After the three years, people are eligible to re-apply for extension, however at this point their claim for protection, character and security will be reassessed.</p>
Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV)	<p>People seeking asylum who have been found to be refugees (and they have passed character and security clearance) are eligible to apply for a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). SHEVs are valid for up to 5 years during which time people have work rights as well as entitlement to Medicare and Centrelink. People who are on a SHEV are eligible to work in regional areas. In Queensland this is basically anywhere outside of the capital city region (all of Brisbane Local Government Area and some parts of Logan City are excluded).</p> <p>People on TPVs are not eligible to study unless they are able to pay the equivalent of international student rates.</p> <p>After the three years, people are eligible to re-apply for extension, however at this point their claim for protection, character and security will be reassessed.</p>
People who claim asylum after arriving on a valid visa	<p>Some people seeking asylum have arrived in Australia on a valid visa and then sought protection. There are complex rules around their visa type and eligibilities. People in this situation who are found to be in need of Australia's protection are eligible for a permanent protection visa (see section above).</p> <p>Assistance can be provided to people within this category via the SRSS program through MDA or ACCESS.</p>
People living in the community who have been transferred from PNG or Nauru.	<p>Some people who were previously transferred to PNG or Nauru after 13 July 2013 have come to Australia for medical assistance. They may be living in the community either in Community Detention or on a BVE.</p> <p>People from PNG or Nauru who are living in the Australian community may or may not have had their refugee status determined. For example, a person who was transferred from Nauru for medical reasons and is now living within the Australian community may have been found by the Government of Nauru to be a refugee and in need of protection. However, the Australian government has not recognised this status and people are not eligible to be subject to Australian refugee status determination.</p> <p>From October 2017, some people who had been transferred from PNG or Nauru lost their entitlement to living allowance support. They do have work rights however may be living within the community without any access to money to support themselves. This can have a significant impact on their ability to maintain housing as well as pay for food, medicines and transport etc.</p>