

The Government and a safety net

We know that trapeze artists have a safety net. It is essential, even though it is not needed most of the time. In a similar way, Australia has long provided a safety net by having housing assistance and income support available when people need them. It can be critical to safety and life.

Individual people and social service organisations also provide care and support but sometimes the needs are beyond their capacity.

Government responsibility for in providing a safety net is based on two things:

- No one should be without the basic essentials for life
- There are times when it is only the government which has the capacity to provide all that is needed.



A net for people seeking asylum?

There is an ongoing battle to ensure the Federal government provides a safety net for people seeking asylum in Australia. In fact, many people who have sought asylum here have been left in a state that

- does not respect their dignity,
- does not cater for their basic human needs, and
- ignores the fact that they have already suffered great trauma.

Pope John XXIII wrote In 1963, another time of millions of refugees

Among people's personal rights we must include the right to enter a country in which they hope to be able to provide more fittingly for themselves and their dependants. Pacem In Terris n 106

The experience of people seeking asylum

The [Refugee Council of Australia](#) provides updates on the support that can be accessed. People seeking asylum are categorised into various bands, entitling them to different levels and kinds of support, such as housing, finance, health care and case management. It is a very complicated system but an example is the SRSS payment: for a single person that is 89% of the Newstart allowance, which in July 2023 is about \$616 a fortnight. [This article](#) from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre fills out the picture somewhat.

A good way to understand the impact of government policies over recent years is to hear something of **the stories** of the people impacted. You will find many stories in the [May 2023 Newsletter](#) of **BASP - Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project**. They, with the help of their many donors have supported thousands of people seeking asylum over many years.

ASRC, BASP and other groups, large and small, who support people seeking asylum are simply being stretched beyond their resources.

An economic approach

It is clear, from a humane standpoint and from a Christian standpoint, that the federal government has a responsibility to support people seeking asylum adequately and according to need. Apart from that ethical stance, it is very clear that even from an economic standpoint, adequate support for people seeking asylum is a good thing.

Research shows that when people are homeless, there is a significant increase in their contact with health system, (hospital stays, emergency visits, mental health services), the justice system (police, courts, prison) and homeless services.

All of these services cost governments a lot. It has been clearly established that the cost is in fact far greater than the alternative, namely supporting people into housing.



In the same way, it can be shown that it makes sense, economically and ethically, to

- provide housing from the start,
- allow people to work if they can,
- provide physical and mental health care from the start,
- ensure children and adults have access to education including tertiary, and
- ensure financial support is adequate to the needs.

**The human and economic costs
of not supporting people according to need
are much greater than providing what they need
from the time of their arrival.**