

People seeking asylum who are living in the community

The situation

The conditions under which people seeking asylum live vary considerably, depending on how and when they have come, on the discretion of the Department of Home Affairs as well as decisions made by Ministers from time to time.

The undertaking of the present government is that the whole system dealing with applications from people seeking asylum will be improved, and the October 2022 budget provided funds for that. They have also undertaken to remove Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas and give people permanency, but progress is slow.

Life for people in the community is very difficult, whether they are in community detention or on Bridging or other visas which provide no certainty. Many are left without the means to live and some have been living with uncertainty and vulnerability for many years.

Because of the restrictive government policies, the inadequacy of financial support and the level of trauma (exacerbated by their treatment by Australia) some people have to depend on their ethnic communities and/or charitable agencies for food, clothing and shelter. This is not sustainable.

What should happen

The core of Catholic Social Teaching and the ethics on the treatment of people seeking asylum is the conviction that their human dignity must be respected. This means that they must not be denied conditions necessary for life such as income support, housing, employment, education, health care and family reunion. This is in accord with a number of international conventions such as the International Convention on the Status of Refugees and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which Australia is a signatory.

In order to flourish, people seeking asylum also need supports which will help them feel safe, heal from grief, loss and trauma and enable them to retrieve a sense of dignity and have some control over their lives.

It is clear that when seeking asylum in the community

- No one should be deprived of the right to work, and that
- All should have financial support that is adequate for housing, health care, education and other necessities, unless such costs are met through employment.