

CAPSA

CATHOLIC ALLIANCE FOR PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

Preparing students for action in support of people seeking asylum

GOALS

This preparatory activity aims to:

- To provide students with some basic information about seeking asylum and present government policies in regard to people seeking asylum
- To provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their own attitudes
- To encourage a compassionate stance in line with Jesus of the gospels and Catholic social teaching

Please note that Steps 1 and 2 can be done very quickly, like a brainstorm, with no discussion of the rights or wrongs.

1. OPINIONS

Ask students to name some of the opinions/words/labels that are expressed for and against asylum seekers and make a note of them on a board.

2. WHAT THE MEDIA REPORTS

Ask students to name some of the “facts” (real or not) that are mentioned in the media or by people they know and make a note of them on a board (see attached).

3. FACTS

Provide a page of facts about asylum seeking and government policies. Ask students to read through the page then make comments to one other student about which facts they were aware of and what they agree/disagree with (see Page 3).

4. SUPPORTIVE QUOTES

Provide a page of quotes from the gospel and Catholic social teaching. Ask each student to choose

one or two of these quotes to provide support for a community attitude or government policy, OR to provide a challenge to a community attitude or government policy.

5. FINDINGS

Invite students to share their findings in small groups.

6. CONNECTION

Make a connection between what has been covered and the particular action in which your students are to participate, e.g. the need for solidarity, an expression of empathy and love of neighbour or challenge to unjust policies.

7. STORIES

Read the story of [Mohsen](#) and/or [Najeeba](#) – you can do this by splitting the story amongst small groups or my reading it individually or together. After the story, ask students what stood out, what shocked, what seems unfair (available in school resources section of the CAPSA website).

8. PRAYER

God, no one is a stranger to you and no one is ever far from your loving care. In your kindness watch over refugees and asylum seekers, those separated from their loved ones, those who are lost, and those who have been exiled from their homes. Bring them safely to the place where they long to be, and help us always to show your kindness to strangers and those in need.

What the Church and Gospels tell us

POPE JOHN PAUL II (1993) 'REFUGEES: A CHALLENGE TO SOLIDARITY'

"... in countries which had in the past offered a generous reception to refugees, there is now a disturbingly similar trend of political decisions aimed at reducing the number of entries and discouraging new requests for asylum (...) respect for the fundamental right of asylum can never be denied when life is seriously threatened in one's homeland It is troubling to witness the reduction of resources earmarked for the solution of the refugee problem, as well as a weakening of political support for the structures purposely created for such humanitarian service."

JUBILEE CHARTER OF THE RIGHTS OF DISPLACED PEOPLE (2000)

The charter was produced by a number of groups including the Catholic church and the UN commission for refugees.

Below are just a few points:

- The right to not be turned back at the borders of the country where they seek protection and to receive a fair and prompt response to the request to be recognised as refugees and obtain asylum;
- The right to live in dignity and to receive the help necessary while the asylum application is being considered;
- The right to have a dignified life in the country of asylum for as long as the conditions of insecurity in the country of origin last through active participation in the social and productive life of the host country;
- The right of children and of adolescents to education, medical care and a secure environment where they can creatively develop their energies and potentials; and
- The right to correct and objective information provided by the media that avoids unjust criminalising or false alarmism about the events and situation in both the country of arrival and in those of origin.

GOSPEL

Matthew 25:35 Jesus' way of judging a life

'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in.

Matthew 2:13-15 Jesus the asylum seeker

Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

Luke 14:12-13 Jesus' advice on hospitality

Then he turned to his host. "When you put on a luncheon or a banquet," he said, "don't invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, and that will be your only reward. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Mark 12:30-31 The great commandment

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.

Matt 5:46-47 The way of Jesus

If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.

The global situation for people seeking asylum

- During 2017, 44,400 individuals per day had to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere **Developing** countries hosted 85% of global refugees. **Least Developed** countries provided asylum to 33% of the total numbers.
- Lebanon hosted the largest number of refugees compared to its national population (1 in 6 people are a refugee).
- 17,668 applications currently in Australia is 0.56% of total applications for asylum worldwide.
- In 2017, UNHCR submitted 75,200 refugees to States for resettlement, a 54 per cent drop from 2016 due to the decline in resettlement quotas. 102,800 refugees were admitted for resettlement during the year, with or without UNHCR's

Source: UNHCR (2017) *Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2017*

Some facts about the Status Resolution Support Services

1. A regular payment to help with basic living costs while someone who is seeking asylum waits to hear about the results of their Refugee status determination process.
2. Access to some case management and counselling for pre-existing trauma. The intensity of case management depends on which 'band' the government places you. There are 'band one' through to 'band six', with band 1 requiring the most intensive levels of support and band six being deemed in the least need of support.
3. The Government does not directly deliver SRSS services but rather sub-contracts a variety of Non-Government agencies across the country to deliver services.
4. SRSS is the name given to the current form of support for many people seeking asylum who are living in our community. The Australian Government has had support in place for many years: two prior versions of SRSS were the Asylum Seekers Assistance Scheme (ASAS) which was established in 1992 and the Community Assistance Support (CAS Program) from 2005.
5. **The Department of Home Affairs has recently changed its SRSS policy to restrict access.** Some changes have already been applied while others are yet to be rolled out. People studying full-time and those who have sent money home to family and friends have already started losing their SRSS support. Exclusions have also applied to new applications and people seeking asylum who are on tourist, student, or work visas before applying for refugee protection, and whose initial visa has not yet expired.

To qualify for the support people seeking asylum will need to demonstrate they meet a high threshold of vulnerability, including:

- Physical health barriers that are ongoing, permanent disability, or cognitive impairment
- Mental health barriers, with a current diagnosis and treatment plan in place;
- Single parents with pre-school aged children *(children under six), pregnant women with complications, a primary carer for someone with a significant vulnerability, people aged 70 and over
- A major crisis for the client (family violence, house fire, flood, etc.)

Under the revised rules the Government has stated it intends to reduce the number of people receiving assistance to fewer than 5000. This means around 8000 currently on the program could lose access to basic income assistance, and thousands more will be unable to access any support if they need it at some point in the future.

The new rules are being rolled out progressively, initially targeting single adult men and women with work rights. From late-May 2018, families and other groups will be notified if they have failed to meet the restrictive criteria.

Source: St Vincent de Paul Society briefing (2018) *How have the rules for receiving the SRSS payment changed.*