

## **Response to Discussion Paper on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2021 – 2022**

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia welcomes the opportunity provide a response to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) discussion paper on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2021 – 2022.

JRS is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, that they may heal, learn, and determine their own future. JRS works in 58 countries, including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Colombia and South Sudan. In 2020, more than 687,000 people were the direct beneficiaries of JRS' projects worldwide.

In Australia, JRS accompanies, serves, and advocates for the rights of people seeking asylum, refugees, and migrants in situations of vulnerability. An unprecedented proportion of people seeking asylum and other temporary visa holders in Australia lost employment from March 2020 onwards. People seeking asylum and a majority of temporary visa holders were ineligible for *JobKeeper* and *JobSeeker* support packages, greatly exacerbating material and psycho-social vulnerabilities for people in these communities. As a result, demand for JRS Australia's support grew by 150%, and by more than 260% in relation to food bank alone.

In 2020, JRS Australia worked with 3,882 persons, providing 21,834 unique instances of service. This included providing more than 6,500 instances of specialist casework assistance - 12,072 to families and individuals experiencing food insecurity, supporting 733 women on temporary visas experiencing or at risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and assisting more than 250 people to be job ready. JRS Australia also worked with dozens of schools, parishes and other community groups across Australia to assist people seeking asylum and other temporary migrants.

JRS Australia endorses in full the submission made by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) to the discussion paper on Australia's Humanitarian Program 2021 – 2022.

In addition, JRS Australia welcomes the extension of funding to the Federal Government's Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot program for three years. Targeted one-off emergency relief payments of up to \$3,000 and legal assistance for women experiencing or at acute risk of SGBV is a positive development. More can be done to address systemic issues. JRS Australia welcomes the opportunity to discuss these challenges further.

JRS Australia also strongly recommends that consideration be given to upscaling the Women-At-Risk program and expediting the processing of claims and travel into Australia of women in situations of greatest vulnerability, along with their dependents. As noted by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed violence against women and girls as a global emergency – a "shadow pandemic" - requiring urgent action at all levels.

As an organisation with country offices in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Singapore, and a committed member of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRNN), JRS Australia is deeply involved in policy development and advocacy with regards to the rights of forcibly displaced peoples in the Asia-Pacific region.

Of particular concern to JRS Australia at present is in the ongoing crisis in Myanmar and its impacts on the safety and lives of people affected by violence, and forced displacement.

JRS Australia welcomes the Federal Government's decision to allow "Myanmar nationals currently in Australia on temporary visas to extend their stay until it is safe to return home." JRS Australia is in ongoing discussions with colleagues, and partners on specific issues pertaining to the overall crisis, as it unfolds. JRS Australia brings to DHA's attention two recent public statements on the situation in Annex A.

JRS Australia welcomes the opportunity to engage in dialogue with DHA and the Federal Government on all matters outlined in this letter in existing or extraordinary forums, as relevant.

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**Annex:**

[Joint Inter-faith statement on crisis in Myanmar](#) – 3 June 2021

[JRS calls for protection of those displaced by crisis in Myanmar](#) – 21 May 2021