

## **Australia's Humanitarian Program 2022–23 Submission from JRS Australia**

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia appreciates the opportunity to make a submission on the management and composition of Australia's 2022-23 Humanitarian Program.

JRS has a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for and with refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants in situations of vulnerability. We recognise that people may traverse and often straddle these categories. Globally, JRS works with over a million people across 57 countries. And here in Australia we are regularly approached by country offices in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere to support urgent applications for protection from diverse conflict-affected and displacement contexts.

In Australia we worked with 3,000 beneficiaries last year, delivering a record near 30,000 instances of service, as we scaled to meet increased demand for our emergency relief, complex casework, access to legal assistance, sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response, and employment support services.

Our perspectives are informed by JRS' direct work with displaced populations overseas and with refugee, asylum seeker and vulnerable migrant communities here in Australia. We are pleased to make the following brief submission from that vantage point.

### **TPV/SHEV-holders' transitions to permanent status and family reunion**

We note with appreciation the priority that the government attaches to transitioning Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and Safe Have Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders to permanent status and urge that this transition begin as soon as possible and continue at pace until completion. We acknowledge the significant scaling of staff levels required to manage this caseload and note that measures are being taken to that end.

The development of bespoke mechanisms to ensure that opportunities for family reunification may be swiftly engaged by this population as soon as permanent status is secured is extremely important. We recommend that additional places be provided, and that their allocation be triaged, with due consideration to severity of protection risks, levels of vulnerability and duration of separation. Quick progress on reunifying families torn apart for so long will reduce the likelihood of family separations extending beyond the 9-12 years already endured and help the new Australian permanent residents to settle into their new lives better. Speedy family reunion can also help ameliorate the devastating mental health impact of prolonged, enforced family separation.

We urge the swift development and rollout of a trauma-informed communications strategy to ensure that affected communities have access to clear, consistent and accessible information regarding processes and timeframes, with a view to ensuring effective expectations management. In the lead-up to the election we observed a significant spike in despair within this population and are concerned that, without tangible and timely progress and clear communication, we may see a recurrence.

As the transition from TPV/SHEV rolls out, it will also be important to simplify and expedite international travel procedures to enable people to travel to see their families as they prepare for full reunification in Australia. Such 'mini reunions' after 10 years will be important in helping families prepare for a life together in Australia.

### **The broader humanitarian program**

We support rapid measures to scale the overall humanitarian program to reach the ALP's stated goal of 27,000 humanitarian places annually; a figure which we believe can and ought to be progressively surpassed. Restoring our humanitarian program to prior levels, at least, will assist in managing the cumulative challenges associated with successive cuts to the program, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and escalating demand with the proliferation and longevity of crises world-wide – including in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Ukraine. As the Labor government works to reach its stated goal, it will be important not to deduct visas processed onshore from the overall allocation of places.

### **Resettlement from Indonesia**

Thousands of refugees remain in limbo in Indonesia, many of them since Australia's policy decision not to resettle refugees registered after July 1, 2014. Australia should reverse this decision to give these refugees, who have been waiting at our doorsteps for years, a chance at putting their lives back on track. In doing so, Australia would also address what is fast becoming a protracted refugee situation.

Australia should also resume the processing of cases that were registered in Indonesia before July 2014 but the processing of which stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic. JRS has identified several such cases and has observed the severe adverse impact on the lives of the refugees, some of whom have been awaiting resettlement after health checks and an interview with the Australian embassy as early as 2013.

### **Afghanistan response**

JRS Australia commends the bipartisan support for the 16,500 new places for Afghans announced in March and underscores the importance of these places being additional to the broader humanitarian intake.

As the situation in Afghanistan worsens and the coping ability of at-risk Afghans displaced to the region diminishes, it is critical that Australia starts to issue visas in response to the 42,000

offshore applications from Afghanistan submitted through the SHP nearly a year ago. Priority should be given to those in immediate danger, members of persecuted communities, and those with links to Australia, including family members of TPV and SHEV visa holders. This will help Australia reunite Afghan refugees and those in refugee-like situations with their families in Australia.

### **Community sponsorship**

We support the significant progress made on establishing a viable model for community sponsorship with the commencement of the Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP). Australia should scale CRISP to make 5,000 additional places available annually for community sponsorship to allow Australians to demonstrate their support for refugees in their communities and benefit from their contributions. JRS Australia is confident in the capacity and inclination of Catholic leadership to support and receive refugees in Australia under this program.

### **Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)**

Major cuts to the SRSS funding have left many people seeking asylum in desperate circumstances. JRS Australia has observed significantly increased rates of homelessness and destitution amongst those whom we serve and urges the government to increase SRSS funding and base eligibility on vulnerability and financial hardship rather than the perceived ability to work.

### **Emergency response capacity**

Australia demonstrated commendable flexibility and creativity in its response to the crisis situations in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Australia's agile response saved lives and earned us international goodwill as a country able to respond proactively in global emergencies.

Australia should bake this capacity into our immigration policy and programs so that we are well placed to respond to the next and ongoing emergencies. It is also important that Australia undertakes to learn from the Afghan and Ukrainian experiences, including the importance of applying non-discriminatory practices, of scaling capacity to meet demand, and of maintaining clear and consistent channels of communication with the diaspora and community sector.

We welcome all opportunities to discuss these matters further.