

Easter edition 2023



Director's address: *Tamara Domicelj*

Dear friends of JRS and the people whom we serve,

Greetings from Lisbon where I have been meeting with a small group of JRS colleagues from all regions of the world, including incoming International Director Br Michael Schöpf SJ, to consider priorities for joint advocacy in upcoming years. Over productive days we considered, deeply, our role and contributions to tackling major global challenges, including displacement in all its forms, border closures and pushbacks, protracted and 'forgotten'

humanitarian crises, gender-based violence and discrimination, and the climate emergency.

Strong themes to emerge included:


- the importance of ensuring meaningful participation of people with lived experience of displacement in setting and delivering our joint advocacy agenda;
- the need for collaboration across organisations and communities to maximise collective impact amidst converging crises, recognising that

we all have a role to play; and

- the need for continuous learning, noting that as we understand more about what is working well, we can strengthen our contributions by scaling and replicating good practices.

I leave Portugal feeling privileged to have been invited to participate in these discussions, optimistic about the joint work and learning that lies ahead, and proud of what I was able to share about our work at JRS Australia.

I spoke about how our *cont on p2*

 JRS Australia co-organised an event for World Day of Migrants and Refugees with the Walking With People Seeking Asylum group of the Parramatta Diocese at the All Saints of Africa Centre in Parramatta.

cont from p1 advocacy is informed and enriched by the perspectives, expertise and drive of diverse leaders with lived experience of displacement from our diaspora networks, clients, staff, Board and volunteers. I spoke of the importance of parishes, schools and Catholic leadership in extending the reach and impact of our advocacy and supporting our work in so many other ways. I spoke of benefits that can arise from engaging with UN processes and aligning our efforts with those of colleagues in other countries.

And I spoke of the aims and achievements of our projects, including *Finding Safety*, which supports women and children with precarious visa status to recognise, escape and move on from domestic and family violence, while building the capacity of other agencies and community leaders to respond. This project is listed on a UN data base of good practices. And with its core funding due to end soon, we are exploring options to secure its continuation and support others to implement similar initiatives.

Having recently marked International Women's Day, and with news received daily from around the world, we are painfully aware of the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and discrimination. We need to tackle these scourges more effectively while

supporting women and girls battling to defend their human rights – including to education, livelihoods, freedom from violence, and in the context of climate change. The stories and articles that follow speak to these themes.

From here I travel to Rome for a Country Directors' workshop, providing further opportunities to connect with JRS colleagues and learn more about our global work, including engagement with the Vatican.

While there I will reflect upon the role of Pope Francis. Over the ten years since his election, he has been a powerful teacher, mobilizer and advocate on matters of forced migration and climate. He calls us to welcome and care for the stranger, as we care for our neighbour and our common home. He has travelled to sites of devastating trauma to offer comfort, while denouncing indifference and its consequences, including the tearing apart of families and loss of lives at sea. He shares stories of displaced people in ways that highlight their dignity and uphold our shared humanity. And he lends his voice in support of theirs. In the Mediterranean he implored, "Please, let us stop this shipwreck of civilization!" Closer to home he said, "I too kneel on the streets of Myanmar and say stop the violence! I too extend my arms and say

let dialogue prevail!"

At this time of holiness for so many around the world, I send every best wish to you and your loved ones, wherever they may be.

Recently, in Australia, we celebrated with joy the promised passage to permanent visas, with the prospect of family reunion, for many thousands of recognised refugees who have endured forced family separation and temporary protection for year upon painful year. And our hearts also ache for the many others with long-standing humanitarian claims who still suffer anguish and uncertainty. We welcome all positive reforms while recognising that there is much work ahead.

As ever, I extend deepest thanks for your vital support. Your donations, volunteer hours and advocacy help to save and rebuild lives, and strengthen our collective resolve as we strive for a just and brighter future for displaced people everywhere.



Warmly,
Tamara

 Zahra Hashemabadi-Barat, JRS Foodbank and Material Aid Officer, pictured at JRS Australia, speaks to ABC News 7.30 about the urgent need for a solution for the thousands of people, like her and her family, who are on bridging visas. The announcement made by the Federal Government in February, to transition TPV and SHEV visa holders to permanent visas did not provide a way to resolve the status of thousands of people, like Zahra, who are in Australia on bridging visas and not part of the 'legacy caseload.' JRS Australia will continue to speak up alongside this cohort of people and will stand with Zahra as she shares more about her advocacy efforts.



'Tough but broken': Maryam's long road to family reunion

*Maryam has worked hard to raise her son on her own.
But as temporary protection visa holders get permanent status,
family reunion remains a distant and costly prospect.*

For Maryam, family is everything. She is a dedicated mother who has worked hard to raise her son, 13-year-old Mazyar (not his real name), who enjoys going to school and playing sports.

There are few other joys in life for Maryam and Mazyar, whose family has not always been this small. Maryam embarked on a life-changing journey 10 years ago, seeking the safety of Australian shores and looking to give Mazyar a better life.

'You have a life and a family, but one day you pack your life in a suitcase and go,' she recalls her journey to Australia.

Maryam and her son spent three months in immigration detention on Christmas Island before the government deemed them eligible for a protection visa. But instead of being granted permanent protection, they received temporary protection visas. Her visa excluded the right to apply for her family to join her in the safety of Australia.

'In my worst nightmares I would not have imagined that I would go through all of this alone, but I have,' Maryam recalls the past decade of her life raising Mazyar.

In all this time, Maryam had difficulty applying for permanent jobs, getting a mortgage, or doing anything that requires the certainty of permanent life in Australia. 'You can't feel that you're part of the community. You feel you're being discriminated if you don't have a permanent residency or citizenship because you can't even apply for the job.'

Maryam and her son were amongst the more than 19,000 people who were granted Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) that

denied people family reunion. The result was mental anguish and psychological harm to thousands who had to live in uncertainty and isolation. It was not any easier on their families, who have had to live in danger overseas.

Middle-aged people grew old without watching their children grow into adolescence and adulthood, and children grew up without their parents or other family members. On separate sides of the world, families lived in danger, uncertainty, and anguish.

Mazyar missed out on playing with his cousins and being around his aunts, uncles and grandparents. A decade of separation in time and space is just too long for a 13-year-old to hold onto whatever memories he had or sustain affectionate relationships.

'Sometimes he's shy to talk to them,' Maryam describes Mazyar's relationship with his family in Iran. 'He doesn't even know who his family are...he can't even remember any face.'

But good news came last February when the government announced that TPV and SHEV visa holders like Maryam will be granted permanent visas and allowed to apply for family reunion. It was welcome news for Maryam and thousands of others who had lived in uncertainty. They could now plan their lives, apply for permanent jobs, and think about mortgages.

All of it was good – it was the start of healing decade-long scars. But it left unaddressed an important source of pain for people on temporary visas: they are still a long time away from reunion with their loved ones because the Government did not provide for expedited pathways for family reunion.

The complication is both related to cost and time. TPV and SHEV holders who become permanent residents cannot apply for family reunion using the humanitarian pathway, which is free. The regular family pathway is not just costly – visa applications for a partner are \$8,085 and for each adult child \$4,045 – they can also take years to process.

As a result, families like Maryam's must pay thousands of dollars in visa application fees and could still wait for years before seeing their loved ones. Some will struggle to pay the fees, others will suffer through the

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It's been uncertainty...not knowing if you can see your family, when you can see your family. This entire decade, I've been thinking about my family every day. It has affected almost every aspect of people's lives who are in this situation...work, study, people who have been separated from their immediate family members like kids, wives, partners, parents and siblings. My son and I have been alone, with no support from any of my family members. My parents, my siblings.'

— Maryam

Climate (im)mobility: Women on the frontline

*Our climate-displacement intern, Lottie Evans,
explores what worsening climate change means for women and children.*

Over the last 10 weeks I have been attending conferences and meetings to connect JRS Australia with others looking to support people forced to leave their homes for reasons related to climate change. I've met with Catholic organisations, policy experts, and leaders from Pacific Islands to explore a role for JRS Australia aligned with our pillars of accompaniment, service and advocacy. We are learning how best to support people on the move to amplify their voices so that policy and decision makers will hear them and meet this challenge. As Laudato Si' calls us to Care for Our Common Home, faith-based organisations are called to respond to these interconnected environmental and human challenges.

All countries across the globe are now feeling the impact of the climate emergency. The latest UN report issues a 'final warning' to humanity, urging drastic action to prevent irrevocable damage. With the recent droughts, floods, and wildfires occurring in Australia, the reality of the climate crisis is increasingly evident before our very eyes.

However, people around the world experience climate change differently, with some regions and communities affected much worse than others. People living in the regions at greatest risk – largely in the Global South – are also least responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions which have caused climate change. They are also often the least resourced to cope and adapt. Climate change is a justice issue, interweaving threads of environmental justice, gender equality and decolonial action.

People already living with vulnerability and inequality are experiencing the worst of climate change; for instance women and children are over 14 times more likely to be killed by climate fueled disasters than men, according to UNHCR figures. In our Asia Pacific region, between 40-67% of rural women work in farming, and climate change is making it much harder for them to support their families as the land they work becomes less arable.

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Climate change makes life much harder for women and children within climate vulnerable locations, and also at all stages on the move. Climate-related displacement (CRD) is a growing challenge which demands action, especially in the absence of clear protection pathways, and requires attention to these gender dimensions. As we talk about climate mobility, it is essential to also recognise climate immobility: those left behind. It is women and children that are often least able to migrate in the context of climate change and disasters because they live in societies that don't encourage them to travel alone; their family may choose male relatives to make the trip, or they lack the funds to travel. Those left behind are often at risk from extreme climate but also from follow-on impacts such as disease and malnutrition; dangerous working conditions, such as extreme heat; and heightened risk of gender-based violence.

Since CRD impacts people differently, we not only need human rights-based policies, but also approaches which safeguard and empower women and girls. Women are already using their skills and resources to adapt to climate change and decision makers must make sure that

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women's voices are meaningfully included at every stage as we work together both to adapt to and prevent further climate change. We need to work with women and girls to protect their rights, but also recognise that they are a huge part of the solution. Through education, female leadership, and gender-sensitive policies, we must ensure that our heating world recognises the rights of women – whether they choose or are forced to leave home, to stay, or are on the move.

I invite you to join us on this journey: as we follow this growing area of work and seek practical ways forward, wherever we are, to care for our own corner of our beautiful planet in small but significant ways.

To learn more about JRS Australia's work on climate-related displacement, please visit aus.jrs.net/en/crd



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additional years of separation – many will struggle with both.

JRS Australia has been advocating for expedited and affordable family reunion pathways in light of the decade of separation that Australia has forced TPV and SHEV holders to endure.

‘I tried to put all the pressure on me so that Mazyar doesn’t feel like he’s being discriminated, that we cannot have things that others can,’ Maryam said. ‘We never went on a holiday. All I did was to try to pay the bills.’

Maryam and Mazyar have shown extraordinary strength and resilience despite many difficult years. ‘Even though it has been a very challenging journey, it made me a different person: tough but broken.’

Expedited and affordable family reunion pathways can help heal past scars, make families whole again and give them a fair start as new Australian permanent residents. And JRS will continue to fight for fairness and justice for these families.

 Shuja Jamal, head of policy, advocacy and communications met with elected representatives and other officials in Canberra to advocate for swift family reunion pathways for TPV and SHEV visa holders. Here, he is seen (above) with MPs Kylea Tink, (right) with Max Chandler-Mather.



'I am independent': Women create safety and autonomy after experiencing violence

Women on temporary visas have fewer options and face greater difficulties when they experience domestic violence. But our Women's Space is there to walk with them toward independence.

It was a proud moment when Clarise (not her real name) received her student visa. She had worked hard to secure admission into a master's program, and the visa was the first step in her academic journey that she hoped would lead to a fulfilling career in Australia. It was an exciting time and life felt full of promise.

When she arrived in Australia, she brought a few of her belongings in her luggage along with a commitment in her heart to work hard. This was her opportunity and she was not going to let it go.

But before long, her partner became violent and she and her child had to flee.

Dealing with a violent partner is difficult for anyone, but when you are on a student visa with limited income and no family, your options are fewer and your difficulties greater. This is where JRS Australia stepped in to help Clarise.

Her ex-partner's family started making phone calls to pressure her to return to him. But Clarise was determined not to let anyone hurt her or her child again. She could not return to her country of origin, though, because she has no support there and would be at risk of further violence as a punishment for escaping the violent relationship.

Another organisation that had been providing her with financial aid referred Clarise to the JRS Australia's Women's Space. Our case workers quickly identified the many ways that the violence Clarise had experienced was impacting her and her son's lives.

'JRS helped me very much financially because I was bankrupt. I told them my needs and they listened and supported me immediately,' Clarise recalls.

Clarise's difficulties are many and inter-related. Clarise wants to work, but because she is not entitled to the childcare subsidy, she cannot afford to put her son in childcare. As she cannot work without childcare, she needs ongoing financial support.

But our case workers also saw that she was determined to create safety and independence for herself and her son, and they committed to help her.

Unable to maintain a private rental with the financial assistance she had received, Clarise had to seek other living arrangements and eventually, with the support of her JRS caseworker, she and her son were able to move to a women's refuge, where they are staying safely.

'When I got evicted from my home, JRS helped me settle in my new place. I felt safe and secure with my son.'

It is not her preferred place to live, but she knows it is only temporary until she can become more financially secure. She also knows that JRS Australia will continue to walk with her on her journey to independence. 'Sometimes things got tricky in my new home, but the case workers helped me to advocate for myself and my son's needs.'

JRS Australia's Sexual and Gender-Based Violence case workers helped Clarise successfully apply for the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS), a federal program that provides support to people who do not qualify for Centrelink, JobSeeker or other social safety net payments. Clarise no longer requires financial aid from JRS Australia and can concentrate on her recovery and the next steps towards a safe and happy life with her son.

Recently, Clarise had to go to court to extend the judge's order for her and her son's protection. She was nervous to see her ex-partner again, but she had built up enough self-confidence to attend and was pleased to report that the court extended the protection orders.

'I feel free to be able to concentrate on other things, like going to court which is very foreign to me. The caseworkers helped me build confidence and strength to face the courts and be able to give my evidence.'

This gives Clarise a sense of relief and a freedom to continue taking steps towards her goals of employment, financial stability and her own choice of accommodation for herself and her son.

'I feel I have the capacity to be who I am, I am myself, I am independent. JRS has helped me be the best person I can be. I feel comforted and respected.'



Josephine Rechichi, coordinator of JRS Australia's Finding Safety Project, shows the community artwork led by local artist Linda during the International Women's Day celebrations that JRS co-organised with the Parramatta City Council and other organisations.

As part of the JRS Schools Program, students at St Angela's Primary School got to hear Helen speak about her experience of coming to Australia as a refugee. The Schools Program is an opportunity for students to learn about issues affecting refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia and the world. People with lived experience like Helen share their stories and experiences as guest speakers.



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What JRS Does

JRS Australia advocates for policies of welcome and protection at all tiers of government. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, JRS Australia continues to provide emergency assistance, a foodbank, professional casework support, an employment support program, facilitates free legal advice, as well as conducting targeted advocacy work, and a project to empower women.

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How your donation will help

Your support allows us to continue to advocate for policies of welcome and protection and to provide people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations with COVID-19 safe specialist casework support, employment support, emergency payments and assisting women who are experiencing violence as well as providing food via our JRS Refugee Foodbank to people who have been otherwise left behind.

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia • ph: 02 9356 3888 • email: info@jrs.org.au • web: aus.jrs.net

If undeliverable return to:
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
PO Box 522
Kings Cross NSW 1340

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