

Review Panel for the Multicultural Framework Review
Department of Home Affairs
29/09/2023

Dear Review Panel for the Multicultural Framework Review,

Jesuit Social Services – who we are.

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Multicultural Framework Review (the Review) as part of supporting a cohesive and inclusive multicultural Australia, led by the appointed panel under the Australian Department of Home Affairs.

Jesuit Social Services has been working for more than 45 years delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where all people flourish. We are a social change organisation working with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities. Our services span Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory. Services include the [Settlement and Transition Support \(SETS\) Program](#), working alongside recently arrived migrants and refugees, and in addition we provide employment and training services to marginalised community members who experience systemic barriers to accessing employment, including those of migrant, refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Advancing social cohesion and inclusivity by supporting migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum to become integrated within the Australian community is a priority for Jesuit Social Services.

In addition to our direct engagement with refugees and people seeking asylum Jesuit Social Services is the founder and co-convenor (with Jesuit Refugee Service) of the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum which brings together the key Catholic agencies and peak bodies across Australia, who have a concern for and engagement with refugees and people seeking asylum. This provides Jesuit Social Services with comprehensive and current data and intelligence about the experience of these groups and the effect on them of Government policy. It also provides Jesuit Social Services with a unique and broad perspective on the way in which newly arrived refugees and people seeking asylum are welcomed, or not, across all jurisdictions.

As highlighted by the [Review](#), Australia is a multicultural society with its foundations rooted in its diversity. This includes migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum, with almost half of Australians having at least one parent who is born [overseas](#). However, many current policies and systems present a major barrier for newly arrived migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum being able to fully participate in our society. We recognise that settlement is a two-way journey – it is not simply about newly arrived people adjusting to life in Australia; it is also about Australia welcoming our newest arrivals.

Rights to work and study and social security

Many people seeking protection on temporary visas, such as Bridging Visas, do not have the right to work, study, access a financial safety net if needed or access to Medicare. We see the significant impacts of this policy on the health and wellbeing, and at times on the survival of refugees and people seeking asylum. Under these restrictions, refugees cannot utilise their own skills and talents and contribute to their local community, let alone rebuild their lives, plan their futures and resettle productively in Australia. Further, the nature of temporary visas perpetuates this state of limbo for extended periods. Many have been waiting for over 10 years. The inability to work or study, as well as the unpredictability of being on temporary visas, has significant impacts on health and wellbeing. This is in addition to the fact that people seeking asylum have already had to escape persecution and are often still dealing with the long-lasting impacts of trauma and family separation.

We would like to highlight the high rates of destitution, financial, food and housing insecurity experienced by many refugees within the community including those on temporary visas. Jesuit Social Services is concerned by these continuing high levels and the impacts on the health, wellbeing and survival of many already vulnerable people, families and children. Many have few alternatives as they have no right to work, access to a financial safety net or housing. This needs to be addressed through increased funding of services working on the frontline. Increasing access to a financial and support safety net, such as the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) is also vital.

The current housing crisis in Australia is disproportionately impacting people seeking asylum and refugees. People seeking asylum do not have a right to public housing. Even those who have been given permanent protection face systemic issues with accessing housing, including public housing, transitional housing, private affordable rentals and homelessness services. Further funding towards specialised housing services and increased eligibility for public housing including the right to access public housing for temporary visa holders is needed.

Detention

Refugees and people seeking asylum are also being excluded from Australian society by being detained both onshore and offshore, as well as Alternative Places of Detention (APODs). Detention has been demonstrated to have serious consequences on the physical and mental health of those detained. We recognise that currently, nobody is being detained in Nauru through Open Sovereign Borders; however, Jesuit Social Services remains concerned that this could change in the future. Further, the men who remain on Papua New Guinea (PNG) continue to experience impacts on their health and safety. Jesuit Social Services holds grave concerns for the wellbeing of the men if they continue to remain on PNG.

The importance of employment

Those who have come here seeking asylum and as refugees have become part of our communities and bring a variety of skills and experience; they are doctors, athletes, politicians, construction workers, caseworkers, nurses. Refugees and people seeking asylum can contribute to our society socially and culturally, but also have potential to contribute economically to a greater extent if they are given the opportunity. This includes giving work and study rights to those on temporary visas. Programs such as [Talent Beyond Boundaries](#), that are already working with the Federal Government as part of delivering the [Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement pilot program](#) as a migration pathway could be further expanded.

Even newly arrived migrants who do have the right to work still experience systemic barriers in being able to gain employment, and employment that provides sufficient income to live on. Some professional qualifications are not recognised from their country of origins in Australia, and there is often a significant cost in gaining accreditation from the relevant professional body which is not affordable for many. We have observed through our employment support program that finding employment which is consistent with qualifications and experience often takes time, with the process being quite demoralising impacting on self-esteem and mental health. This is particularly challenging for migrants and refugees, who often have already had to face a loss of agency and self-determination over their own lives in leaving their country of origin.

Further, those who do find employment are often 'underemployed', only being able to gain part-time positions as well as roles that are below their level of skill and experience. Jesuit Social Services has also observed that most who gain employment are often financially supporting family in their country of origin, which often leads to financial hardship even for those who do have a 'reasonable' income. The emotional and psychological impacts of this is not always disclosed to employers nor understood more broadly in the community. Workplaces can also often lack understanding of the ongoing effect of traumatic experiences of refugees and asylum seekers and the complications related to family relationships in countries of origin. Workplaces can be supported to be more culturally safe and Jesuit Social Services provides significant support and advice to employers around these issues. Broadening this to other employment placement agencies including government-run agencies would be important in increasing inclusivity within Australian communities.

Governments also need to invest in more programs that create these opportunities for those of migrant and refugee backgrounds, to gain meaningful employment that is based on their skill set. Jesuit Social Services currently operates the Corporate Diversity Partnership placing new arrivals in employment. This program began as the [African Australian Inclusion Program, with](#) 500 people from African communities having been placed in employment with the NAB and other corporate partners. A further 100 from other culturally diverse backgrounds have now been placed in employment. The program now includes the [Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program](#) (VPDRP) which has 200 people being placed in administrative roles and also to train as Police officers.

Resettlement and community integration

Jesuit Social Services also believes that programs such as community refugee sponsorship or [Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot \(CRISP\)](#) are great examples of building social cohesion, where local groups and members of the community come together to support newly arrived refugees to resettle and rebuild their lives within the Australian community. While CRISP may still be in a relatively early stage in Australia, it has been highly successful in other countries, such as [Canada](#). While Jesuit Social Services welcomes the recent announcements made by the Federal Government to increase its humanitarian intake, we believe there is still more that needs to be done to provide a place of safety, support and protection in Australia to people who are escaping persecution in their country of origin. Expanding the CRISP program would be a valuable and vital pathway in achieving this objective.

As part of improving support to those who have been given refugee status in Australia, we believe that greater funding and resources need to be allocated towards holistic supports and services for those who are newly resettled, including expansion of the SETS program. Humanitarian program allocations for settlement services have been cut by 13.7 per cent in recent times, and these cuts have been felt directly by both participants receiving much-needed support, and staff delivering this support.

In addition, access to Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS National) is no longer free for Jesuit Social Services and other SETS providers and this becomes an additional cost in the context of reduced funding overall. This additional financial burden means agencies may not be able to use an interpreting service when it may be necessary, or have to 'save up' important conversations. This is creating further language barriers, as well as barriers to accessing information and services. Education, specific training and awareness raising on issues faced by newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers- for Government institutions particularly - will be important in providing culturally appropriate and trauma informed services. We also find that place-based initiatives that seek to bring together government representatives and services that all work in the settlement field, are the most effective.

The experience of pre-arrival trauma as a result of the journey to seek safety is a common experience for newly arrived refugees which we continue to see through our SETS program. Seventy-five per cent of our program participants are women, and we note the high level of gender-based violence experienced by this cohort. Trauma is complicated and nuanced, bringing with it a range of interrelated complexities. It is our experience that humanitarian arrivals tend to require more intensive support than other eligible visa streams. Building inclusion and social cohesion therefore requires more than basic casework and information provision about Australia's service systems, and current supports through SETS programs are insufficient in managing the complexity and trauma-focus of the work required. SETS and other resettlement programs need to be part of a broader holistic community development approach providing casework in the context of broader community integration activities. For instance, Jesuit Social Services provides a volunteer-based [Homework Club](#) to primary and secondary school students, as well as other community-based activities, however these are not currently funded as part of the SETS model.

The Federal Government announced earlier this year that the five-year eligibility requirement for participants accessing settlement support would be removed. Jesuit Social Services is keen that this restriction be removed as soon as possible. Many families continue to have greater vulnerabilities and complexities and need more time to address these than is currently provided. In addition to removing this time limitation, eligibility for accessing SETS be expanded in recognition of this complexity.

Universal Services

It is increasingly difficult to gain access to health, mental health and alcohol and substance misuse services for this population. Our experience is that mainstream services are becoming harder to access for newly arrived people, with many not providing culturally safe processes or practices. This may be an inadvertent consequence of organisations running mainstream services without having understood the needs of a more culturally diverse population. However, as a result, a lack of culturally-informed and culturally accessible services leads newly arrived refugees to experience discouragement, isolation and racism. In addition, it appears that mainstream health and wellbeing services are not well equipped to understand or respond appropriately to people who have experienced trauma as refugees and those seeking asylum.

Early intervention and prevention

Through our extensive work in youth and adult justice, Jesuit Social Services also holds concern about the trajectory of young people coming into the youth justice and adult justice systems that can be linked to the inadequate support provided to families as new arrivals. This is particularly so with large families where there is a single parent, who has experienced trauma and violence before

arrival in Australia. Addressing these intergenerational impacts requires intensive support and early intervention strategies, to prevent the drift of young people from newly arrived families into the justice system.

Conclusion

In order to support a cohesive and inclusive multicultural Australia that celebrates the contributions that refugees bring to our society, we must change existing policies that prevent refugees from having the opportunities to fully participate and be part of the Australian community. We must address the significant impacts of health, wellbeing and destitution many refugees face currently, as well as other barriers in accessing healthcare, services and employment. The Commonwealth Government can further foster cohesive and supportive communities between refugees and the broader community through programs such as CRISP and must expand eligibility and increase funding for settlement supports. Lastly, it is vital that Governments and communities draw from the lived experiences of refugees in societal and legislative reform and in decision-making that will affect their lives.

Jesuit Social Services recommends:

1. Policy amendments specifically for people seeking asylum, including:
 - Giving those on temporary visas the right to work, study, have access to Medicare as well as access to a financial safety-net
 - Increasing funding to services within the community to be able to provide more adequate support to those experiencing destitution, financial and food insecurity
 - Reducing extensive wait times for processing protection applications
 - Allow refugees and people seeking asylum to be able to live within the Australian community while awaiting for their protection claims to be processed. This includes evacuating those remaining in PNG and ending offshore detention permanently
2. Expanding alternative pathways including skilled refugee visas, community refugee sponsorship programs and CRISP
3. Expanding eligibility and funding for SETS program, and steps to a holistic, community development approach to supporting new arrivals
4. Allocating greater resources to ensure accessibility of services that culturally sensitive and trauma informed
5. Addressing systemic barriers to accessing employment for migrants and refugees, including governmental policies and community exclusion
6. Providing intensive support and early intervention strategies to address intergenerational impacts leading young people to enter the justice system

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Review and welcome further discussion with the Department regarding the feedback detailed in this letter.

Sincerely,

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