

People seeking asylum who are living in the community

The situation

The conditions under which people seeking asylum live vary considerably, depending on how and when they have come, on the discretion of the Department of Home Affairs as well as decisions made by Ministers from time to time.

The [Refugee Council of Australia](#) notes:

On 30 June 2020, there were 12,450 people who had sought asylum in Australia by boat and were in the community, having been released on a Bridging Visa E. However, 2,205 were recorded as being in the community waiting for the grant of further Bridging Visa E.

These 2,205 people thus have no legal permission to stay in the community, and no rights to work, study or access Medicare – all through no fault of their own.

Others, almost 750 in August 2020, are in community detention which involves housing and income support from government but no work rights.

The Government has also, in 2020, introduced '[final departure bridging visas](#)' for people who have been transferred from offshore processing countries and are released into the community, but have no income support, housing or other supports. These are people who came by boat after July 19 2013 and successive governments have insisted they will never be allowed to settle in Australia.

Because of the variety and often arbitrary decisions taken about entitlements, some people have to depend on the generosity of their ethnic communities and of charitable agencies for food, clothing and shelter. This can be the case even when receiving government benefits because the payments are so low.

These harsh provisions form part of raft of measures designed

- to encourage the people who have sought asylum here to leave Australia voluntarily, and
- to deter others from seeking protection in Australia.

What should happen

The core of Catholic Social Teaching and the ethics on the treatment of people seeking asylum is the conviction that their human dignity must be respected and they may not be used as means to an end. This means that they must not be denied conditions necessary for life such as income support, housing, employment, education, health care and family reunion.

Such supports lie at the heart of a number of international conventions such as the International Convention on the Status of Refugees and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which Australia is a signatory.

In order to flourish people seeking asylum also need supports which will help them feel safe, heal from grief, loss and trauma and enable them to retrieve a sense of dignity and have some control over their lives.

It is clear that when seeking asylum in the community

- No one should be deprived of the right to work, and that
- All should have financial support that is adequate for housing, health care, education and other necessities, unless such costs are met through employment.