

CSSA's vision is for a compassionate and just Australia, a place where all people are treated with respect and have the opportunity to fully participate and contribute to society and live a dignified, healthy and meaningful life.

We look to our elected representatives to prioritise people experiencing poverty and vulnerability, through the development and implementation of social and economic policies that increase opportunities for all people to realise their potential.

We believe that anyone whose life is threatened has the right to protection. Human life is sacred and human dignity is inalienable. The human dignity and human rights of asylum seekers must be respected, regardless of their citizenship, visa status or mode of arrival.¹

CSSA agencies support newly arrived individuals and families, refugees and humanitarian entrants and new and emerging migrant communities and groups through the following services:

- settlement case management
- employment services
- community education and development
- youth work
- advocacy services.

The policy of mandatory detention especially in off shore centres has led to community perception that there is something intrinsically criminal about seeking asylum. People who seek to arrive in Australia by boat without a visa are presently being confined in conditions that are punitive. The location and the physical design of detention centres reinforces the misconception that seeking asylum is a punishable offence. To pursue such a policy of deterrence is highly questionable.

People who seek asylum, and especially children and their families, should generally live in the community. Detention should be used only for necessary processing or when ordered by the Courts. Asylum seekers should be treated with respect and given the right to work and provided with some financial support if they cannot find work, or are restricted by visa conditions from working.

We believe that the present practice of placing children in immigration detention centres fails to demonstrate due regard for their human dignity. It also disregards the due care that must be taken of those who are more vulnerable or dependent on others for support and protection.

Due to their dependent status, children are inherently vulnerable and, in times of crisis, are in need of special protection. Their vulnerability is increased by imbalances of power between children and adults who are both the providers of services and the holders of authority.² This vulnerability is even more evident when children are subject to the traumas associated with seeking asylum in another country or are separated from their families.

There are a range of human rights instruments that challenge the present use of immigration detention of children, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the UN International Convention on the Status of Refugees, all of which Australia is a signatory. In addition to these human rights international conventions, our view is that the obligation for any society to care for children is primarily a moral one.

We recognise and acknowledge that issues relating to refugee and asylum entry are complex, often contentious and can be clouded by misinformation. It is our hope that we see a more balanced approach towards our treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia in the near future.



What we have seen over the last 10 years has been an ever increasingly hard line and harsher treatment of people in need of our protection. For example, the establishment of off shore detention centres and compulsory resettlement to third countries that do not have a human rights governance framework, all point to a worsening of Australia's treatment of vulnerable people.

While we urge governments to continue to address the complex issues that give rise to the need for people to flee their homes, we would ask that the interim solutions that Australia adopts have regard for the humanity and vulnerability of people fleeing conflict and persecution.

Some of the most vulnerable people are those seeking refuge and asylum. CSSA believes that people who seek asylum should generally live in the community.

1 Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (2014) What the Catholic Church Teaches on Asylum and Migration pamphlet

2 Adapted from Truth Justice and Healing Commission (2013) Issues Paper 3: Child Safe Institutions Submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse P8

3 As at November 2015 - Australian Human Rights Commission

Detention should be used only for necessary processing or when ordered by the Courts. Accordingly we ask that:

- **No children be in detention centres on or off shore, and that unaccompanied children be in the care and protection of an independent guardian. Children must have access to education and medical services to support their social and mental health; and**
- **Asylum seekers living in Australia waiting for their protection claims to be resolved need to be able to work, access education and other health, community services and financial support. There are 29,008 people (including 3,979 children)³ who have been permitted to live in the community on Bridging Visas but have been left in limbo with unresolved protection claims. These people also need their situation resolved in a fair and timely manner rather than face the current protracted situation.**

