

## 150 Days of Action for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum



In December last year Bishop Vincent Long, chair of the Catholic Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service (who was himself a refugee) established *Catholics for Refugees*. This network brings together the many Catholic organisations and individuals supporting refugees and people seeking asylum in our country.

The network allows Catholic refugee supporters to inform and support each other and, in doing so, to help create a more compassionate and caring Australia for the vulnerable people who have come to our country seeking protection. <https://catholicsforrefugees.org.au/>

2021 is the year of Saint Joseph, who was also a refugee, and recently named by Pope Francis as Patron of Refugees. So, *Catholics for Refugees* is supporting a campaign, *150 Days of Action for refugees and people seeking asylum*, led by the Sisters of St Joseph and the Justice and Peace Office of the Archdiocese of Sydney. The campaign seeks to engage with Australians, advocating

those seeking our protection. The campaign includes a coalition of Catholic organisations and individuals supporting refugees in our community.

Bishop Terry Brady launched the campaign on 1 May, St Joseph's feast day. The campaign will conclude on the Church's World Day of Migrants and Refugees on Sunday 26 September.

For the past twenty years, many refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia have experienced inhumane and cruel treatment. After two decades, it is clear that Australia's treatment of those who come to us seeking protection needs to change. The campaign focuses on the tens of thousands of refugees and people seeking asylum who live in our community.

There are nearly 20,000 refugees who have been living in Australia for almost a decade, but who have only been given temporary visas. Many of these visas are expiring so these refugees are now being forced to re-apply for protection and will only receive another three-to-five-year visa. Under current policy they have no prospect of permanent re-settlement.

Since these people do not have permanent residency, they cannot apply to have their family members join them here. Such prolonged family separation impacts on people's physical and mental wellbeing. It affects their ability to integrate in Australia and, for many, it causes a breakdown in relationships with family members overseas. <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.72/9bn.ab6.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Family-Reunion-Policy-Brief-June-2021.pdf>

Finally, like the 'Biloela' family, there are about 10,000 people in Australia who are still struggling through a refugee application process, which has been condemned as unfair by the Australian Human Rights Commission. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/publications/lives-hold-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-legacy>

Many of these individuals are unable to work and are left destitute without any Federal Government assistance other than a Medicare card. So, refugee support groups and charities must do what they can to help. But it is still insufficient and not sustainable.

Therefore the *150 Days* campaign is calling on the Federal Government to:

1. provide income support and a financial safety net for all people seeking asylum in Australia
2. end temporary protection visas and create a clear pathway to permanent residency, and
3. ensure access to family reunion for refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia

The campaign is raising awareness of the plight of these people in parishes, schools and social justice groups, holding vigils and writing to and visiting politicians seeking support for the campaign's proposed changes to Australia's policies.

The campaign has also launched a [petition](#) seeking wider support for its proposals and has prepared a [video](#) encouraging further action.

On 26 September, the campaign will take up Pope Francis' call for us to move "towards an ever wider we" by lamenting the exclusion of these vulnerable people from permanent protection in our country, from family reunion and from financial support when they are unable to work. And on this its last day, the campaign will issue a final call for action to re-dress this injustice.

Information on the key issues and other campaign resources are on the *Catholics for Refugees* [website](#).

For more information please contact: Julie.Macken@sydneycatholic.org, Jan.Barnett@sosj.org.au or Susan.Connelly@sosj.org.au.