

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## CSSV stands in solidarity with our Afghani communities across Victoria

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) stands in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan at this time, with particular thought for those in Victoria on temporary protection and bridging visas. CSSV's members, and a number of parish communities across the state, provide practical and pastoral assistance to people living in Victoria who are originally from Afghanistan. Our members also have staff that were born in, or have family connections, to Afghanistan.

In light of the recent events in Afghanistan, 'we want to ensure that those in our communities know we see them, we hear them, and we stand in solidarity with them,' said Joshua Lourensz, Executive Director of CSSV.

'We stand in solidarity with our local Afghanistan-born community members who are suffering in a particular way due to the recent takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan,' he said.

'We are deeply concerned for and recognise the pain and difficulty of those 5100 people who have come from Afghanistan and are on a temporary protection visa in Australia – many in Victoria – who are unable, due to current policy stipulations, to apply for visas that would allow their family to come to Australia through the humanitarian program. In addition, they have no pathway to secure settlement. This group continue to live with an added layer of anxiety given the changing state surrounding their families who are back in their homeland.

'While the Australian Government continues to withhold the ability to apply for humanitarian family reunification for this cohort, this places their lives and families in a tenuous situation. With the situation in Afghanistan fundamentally changed, Australia's policies also need to fundamentally change.'

Currently, there are about 50,000 Afghanistan-born people living in Australia, who are a vibrant part of our communities.<sup>1</sup> We stand with their [asks](#) to Government, and the recent [asks](#) of the Australian Catholic Bishop Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge.

'Thousands have fled Afghanistan to Australia for refuge over the past decade, and many are living in our community, having been here in Victoria for years but still only have been issued temporary visas. They're "refugees" but have no certainty in their future. In the meantime, even with the changing situation in Afghanistan, they're currently precluded from bringing their families to safety in Australia through our humanitarian program,' said Josh.

Josh added, 'The good work, support and care provided by our member Catholic social services organisations in Victoria continues to be made more complex and difficult by current Federal Government policies and rhetoric towards people who have sought asylum and are living here.'

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/mca/files/2016-cis-afghanistan.PDF>

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Despite this, CSSV member organisations (including [CatholicCare Victoria](#), [Brigidine Asylum Seeker Support Project](#), [Cabrini Outreach](#), [Jesuit Social Services Victoria](#) and the [St Vincent de Paul Society](#)) along with local parish communities are committed to providing continued practical support and solidarity for those Afghan-born refugees, particularly those on temporary protection visas and for those seeking to be reunited with their families safely in Australia.

'In light of the recent [announcement by the Prime Minister](#), we're particularly concerned for the mental health and well-being of the Afghani refugees within our communities,' said Josh.

'Our members have been dealing with enormous need in mental health and other supports for people seeking asylum before this situation in Afghanistan,' said Josh. 'Furthermore, COVID has seen many people seeking asylum lose income through employment — they have limited, in most cases no, safety net from the Australian Government and the protracted situation of family separation and uncertainty has been going on for many years and taken its toll.'

CSSV's members and local parish communities will continue to stand with, pray for, and provide meaningful pastoral and mental health support during this difficult time for those who are here, and we call for the Government to centre their response on compassion and justice.

### Media enquiries:

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CSSV stands in solidarity with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Caritas Australia, CAPSA—Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum, Refugee Council of Australia:

- [Increase Afghan intake, Archbishop Coleridge urges PM](#), Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 20 August 2021
- [Over 300 organisations, businesses and community groups call on all Parliamentarians to respond to the crisis in Afghanistan](#), Refugee Council of Australia, 20 August 2021
- [Australian Government must respond to unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan](#), Caritas Australia, 18 August 2021
- [Church joins call for Australian support for Afghans](#), Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 19 August 2021