



Jesuit Refugee Service UK
Hurtado Jesuit Centre
2 Chandler Street
London
E1W 2QT

tel: 020 7488 7310 · fax: 020 7488 7329

e-mail: uk@jrs.net · web: www.jrsuk.net

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Contact: William Neal, 020 7488 7327; william.neal@jrs.net

Windrush crisis demands conversion of heart and radically different approach, says Jesuit Refugee Service

In the wake of the crisis engulfing the government over its treatment of Windrush-era citizens, the Jesuit Refugee Service in the UK (JRS UK) has called on the government to make a radical change in their approach to migration, saying the cruelty of the hostile environment agenda demonstrates the need for deep reflection on the inhumane and unethical assumptions that underscore it.

The stories of Windrush-era citizens being stripped of their rights following the aggressive stance heralded by the Government's hostile environment agenda has brought into the public eye the hostile environment's consequences for human lives. This complex web of policies was introduced to make life for those living in the UK without documentation as difficult as possible. In apologising to those Windrush-era citizens caught up in this system, the Home Secretary has admitted that their treatment has been "appalling" and arose because the Home Office "lost sight of individuals".

However, the Windrush citizens are not the only victims of the hostile environment agenda. JRS UK accompanies, serves, and advocates for the rights of asylum seekers who find themselves struggling to gain recognition of their status as a refugee, in the face of a Home Office system which often seems stacked against them. They too are subject to the hostile environment agenda, which imposes on them destitution, detention, homelessness, and difficulty accessing healthcare.

JRS UK Director, Sarah Teather, "**The terrible stories we have heard from individuals of the Windrush-era echo those we hear daily from asylum seekers we accompany at JRS UK, who came here in search of safety. Deprived of their rights, asylum seekers and other undocumented migrants rely solely on the goodwill of strangers and charities to survive day-to-day as they struggle with destitution and constant fear of detention.**

"The Home Secretary has openly apologised for the way her government has treated Windrush citizens. But it is not enough to tinker at the edges, make exceptions for a few without looking at the deeper rot. The hostile environment agenda is deeply cruel and is symptomatic of an approach which is inhumane and lacking sound ethical foundation. Now is the time for the government to reflect deeply on its approach, on its attitudes to human life and engage in some true conversion of heart. This crisis provides the government with an opportunity to stop and think; they should take it."

- Ends -

Notes to Editor

1. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation, at work in 51 countries around the world with a shared mission to accompany, serve and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. In the UK, our work currently focuses on those who find themselves destitute as a consequence of government policies and those detained for the administration of immigration procedures.
2. JRS UK runs a weekly Day Centre to assist asylum seekers who find themselves destitute as a result of the government's hostile environment agenda. The effects of this agenda on asylum seekers has been documented in our report 'Out in the Cold: Homelessness among destitute refugees in London', which highlights the reality of homelessness and unstable living arrangements of destitute asylum seekers, drawing on their own stories. This report can be found on our website.
3. JRS UK has an outreach service to the Heathrow Immigration Removal Centres where it undertakes pastoral and befriending work with all those held in detention, including asylum seekers, and others struggling to regularise their immigration status. It has previously expressed concern that many of those seeking its help appear to be victims of trafficking, and reacted with alarm at the rising numbers of EU citizens in detention also seeking its help. JRS UK is joining others in arguing for an end to indefinite detention.
4. Contact: William Neal, Communications Assistant william.neal@jrs.net; Sarah Teather, Director, sarah.teather@jrs.net