

## Press Release

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**Contact:** Joanna Biernat [Joanna.biernat@jrs.net](mailto:Joanna.biernat@jrs.net), 07395 416045  
or Sarah Teather, Director, [sarah.teather@jrs.net](mailto:sarah.teather@jrs.net)

### **UK failing to respond to sanctuary seekers as human beings, finds new report rooted in Catholic Social Teaching**

The UK asylum system is failing to respond to people seeking sanctuary as human persons in need, concludes a new report by Catholic organisation, the Jesuit Refugee Service UK<sup>1</sup>. The report, *Being Human in the asylum system*<sup>2</sup>, draws on principles of Catholic Social Teaching and on Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, to reflect on the experience of refugees and asylum seekers in the current asylum system and make recommendations for reform. The report also analyses the latest government proposals for the asylum system and concludes that they will "deepen hostility to refugees" and even "threaten the fabric of society". The report argues that a radically new "human-centred" approach to asylum is needed, with the purpose of protection enshrined at the heart of the asylum system, and greater transparency for people who must navigate it.

The report has been produced to aid a richer, longer term discussion of what a good asylum system might look like, and to encourage Christian policy makers and communities, and "indeed all people of good will, who want to engage with this and future government proposals, to work together to create a more just human centred asylum system". Drawing heavily on Pope Francis's thinking in his latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*<sup>3</sup>, *Being Human* deploys a series of key Catholic Social Teaching principles on migration to help concretise an asylum and immigration system that welcomes, protects, promotes, and integrates. This new ethical perspective, centres around four key principles which drive a more just vision of an asylum process, putting protection of refugees at the centre; The Universal Destination of Goods, Human Dignity, The Common Good and Solidarity. Quoting *Fratelli Tutti*, *Being Human* rebukes the Government's recent proposals for reform, describing them as displaying "signs of major social sickness" which will ultimately be "self-destructive, threatening the very fabric of our society and culture as a whole."

Sarah Teather, Director of JRS UK said: "**It is possible to make the asylum system work. But we have to be prepared to really listen to people who are asking for sanctuary. That begins with dropping our sense of suspicion and letting go of the false assumption that everyone in need is trying to steal something that is 'ours'.**

**"An asylum system that enshrines protection and transparency at its heart and enables those seeking asylum to flourish would foster such values for everyone. We need to stop treating this as a zero-sum game and recognise that everyone benefits from a culture that values human dignity and promotes welcome with genuine openness."**

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**Jesuit Refugee Service UK**

Hurtado Jesuit Centre · 2 Chandler Street · London · E1W 2QT

T: 020 7488 7310 | F: 020 7488 7329 | E: [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net)

[www.jrsuk.net](http://www.jrsuk.net) | Twitter: [@JRSUK](https://twitter.com/JRSUK) | Facebook: [/jesuitrefugeeserviceuk](https://facebook.com/jesuitrefugeeserviceuk)

JRS UK is a work of the Jesuits in Britain registered charity in England & Wales, 230165, and Scotland, 40490

JRS UK works with many people who are let down by the asylum system and have to pursue fresh asylum claims to secure the protection they badly need. Many live in destitution, sometimes punctuated by detention, for over a decade before they are eventually recognised as having been refugees all along.

*Being Human* highlights how this current asylum system greets asylum seekers and migrants with hostility: enforced destitution and detention are antithetical to the welcome, protection, promotion and integration of refugees called for by the Church. Through testimonies of those who have experienced it, *Being Human* concludes that often it was the indignity of the process, as much as the final outcome, that leads to a long-term sense of injustice: “By starting with the aim of refusal, decision-makers lost sight of the human person, and of what was due to them.” This is interwoven with Pope Francis’s assertion that forced migration – whether for political, economic, cultural, religious or environmental reasons – points to the failure of the human family to uphold the intention of social order: that the goods of the earth are available to meet the needs of each unique person. He emphasises that whilst no-one should be forced to leave their homeland – being uprooted is one of the worst things that can happen to a person – the migrant is nonetheless a potential source of renewal and hope, as well as simply having the natural right to seek their own survival and flourishing.

The government’s “New Plan for Immigration”<sup>4</sup> includes proposals to deny people recognised as needing protection the chance to settle in the UK, and proposals to house asylum seekers in ‘reception centres’ – likely to resemble the highly controversial and ghettoised accommodation at Napier and Penally barracks. They follow widespread condemnation of the hostile environment and culture of disbelief after it was revealed to have destroyed the lives of numerous ‘Windrush’ citizens.

*Being Human in the asylum system* instead calls for a system that protects human life and dignity and welcomes refugees and asylum seekers. It makes recommendations aimed at enshrining dignity and protection within the asylum system. It includes calls for the government to abandon the hostile environment, ensure that asylum claimants have safe and dignified accommodation in the community, and ensure that people recognised as refugees can settle in the UK.

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### Notes to Editor

1. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation, at work in over 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. Report will be available at [www.jrsuk.net/being-human](http://www.jrsuk.net/being-human) from **00:01 on Sunday 18th April**. Embargoed press copies available on request.
3. Full text of Fratelli Tutti is available at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papafrancesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papafrancesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html)
4. The “New plan for immigration” can be accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>
5. Contact: Joanna Biernat [Joanna.biernat@jrs.net](mailto:Joanna.biernat@jrs.net) or Sarah Teather, Director, [sarah.teather@jrs.net](mailto:sarah.teather@jrs.net)