



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

VINCENTIAN REFUGEE NETWORK

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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BACKGROUND

Around 2011 the Vincentian Refugee Network ('VRN') was established as a coalition of like-minded members and employees of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia ('the Society') to share knowledge and information on asylum seeker, refugee and migrant issues.

In 2013, the VRN was constituted into a Strategic Plan Group under the National Council in recognition of the fact that asylum seeker and refugee advocacy was part of the National Council's Strategic Plan and one of its Priority Focus Areas. In 2014, the VRN's status as a Strategic Plan Group under National Council lapsed. From 2014 to 2017, teleconferences were held to share information and discuss asylum seeker and refugee issues.

In November 2020, the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council in Australia Inc ('National Council') approved the Social Justice Advisory Committee (SJAC) Priority Areas, with one of the Priority Areas including newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

1. PURPOSE

The VRN, through the SJAC, will assist the National Council to fulfil its Vision of being a caring Catholic charity that offers "a hand up" to people in need by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

The role of the VRN is to:

- (i) provide advice to the SJAC,
- (ii) share information and knowledge of refugee and asylum seeker issues in Australia, and
- (iii) provide a forum for Vincentians to organise and inform coordinated advocacy and services for refugees and asylum seekers.

The VRN will also assist the SJAC to enact the Vincentian value of advocacy by working to transform the causes of poverty for people seeking asylum and refuge and challenging the causes of human injustice in this area.

2. SCOPE

The scope of the VRN includes to:

- (i) investigate, research and provide advice to the SJAC on matters relating to newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with respect of policy, service delivery and advocacy,
- (ii) share information relevant to newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to Society members at the national, state and territory levels,
- (iii) act as a conduit for the sharing of resources and information on newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers matters more broadly across the Society,
- (iv) facilitate the welcoming, protecting and supporting of people seeking asylum and refuge through Society members, structures and policies,
- (v) share information from other relevant networks including, but not limited to, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum,
- (vi) encourage refugees to speak for themselves and provide input to the Society's advocacy and policy activities, and
- (vii) ensure the Society's public materials on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are accurate, complete, up to date, easy to read and accessible.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF THE VRN

The VRN will comprise:

- (i) a Chair who will be appointed by the VRN,
- (ii) Society members or employees with expertise in matters relevant to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and
- (iii) Society members or employees who work with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Ideally, each State and Territory Council will nominate a representative to be a member of the VRN.

4. MEETINGS

The VRN will meet as required to fulfil its scope as outlined in these Terms of Reference.

The Chair will be responsible for preparing the Agenda for meetings.

The Chair will determine when the VRN meets and the method of convening meetings.

The Chair may invite observers to VRN meetings.

5. WORK METHODOLOGY

5.1 Work Plan

The VRN will prepare an annual Work Plan and this will be submitted through the SJAC to the National Council for approval.

5.2 Administrative Support

The Chief Executive Officer of National Council (CEO) will work with the Chair to ensure the VRN receives the required level of administrative support required to allow the VRN to fulfil its scope.

6. RESPONDING TO URGENT REQUESTS

From time to time the National Council may be called on, with short notice, to comment or provide a policy statement on issues relating migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. Such situations include requests from refugee organisations such as the Refugee Council of Australia or the need to respond quickly to government proposals or actions.

In these instances, the Chairs of the VRN and SJAC will work with the CEO to formulate a policy position or public statement which will then be forwarded to the National President, for approval.

7. LEVEL OF AUTHORITY

The VRN has no authority to make public statements on behalf of the National President, the National Council or the Society.

The VRN has no authority to make any binding decisions on behalf of the National President, the National Council or the Society.