

# JRS ASIA PACIFIC IN BRIEF 2013



Asia Pacific  
accompany · serve · advocate

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.

## What makes our work different?

We promote justice and dignity, walking together with the most vulnerable populations, filling the gap and offering closeness through accompaniment

The cornerstone of the JRS mission is to offer holistic human services to forcibly displaced persons. All the subsidies in the world will never be able to replace the warmth of assistance rendered by one individual human being to another. JRS recognises the human dignity in refugees through its accompaniment.

It is this direct and personal approach of individual interaction and cooperation with refugees which mutually empowers refugees and JRS personnel alike. It is through providing accompaniment to refugees, touched by their reality in camps, conflict zones, detention centres or wherever else they may be, that JRS staff understand how best to serve and advocate on their behalf.

## JRS Asia Pacific 2013

JRS Asia Pacific, founded in 1981 by Pedro Arrupe SJ, assists forcibly displaced persons (IDPs) in eight countries: Australia, Singapore, Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia and Timor Leste.

The Asia Pacific region is an area which sees large-scale human move-

ment. In an attempt to ascertain and address the long-term consequences of involuntary migration, JRS conducts research and advocacy into forced displacement, using this information to advise governments and support initiatives for lasting policy change through national, regional and international refugee agencies such as the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) and the International Detention Coalition (IDC).

People Served in 2013	
Education	11,196
Psychosocial/ Pastoral	17,463
Emergency	98,506
Livelihoods	1016
Advocacy/Protection	10,444
Healthcare	30,302
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>168,927</b>

## JRS Australia

Focuses their work on local involvement through accompanying refugees and asylum seekers within Australia- practically supporting their right to seek and enjoy asylum in Australia- as well as advocacy research work on forced migration in the Pacific Region.

### Detention Issues

The detention of asylum seekers and refugees is a key area of concern for JRS. Refugees who arrive in Australia are subject to a set of detention protocols which are unique to this country, with Australia being the only country in the world to mandatorily detain asylum seekers who arrive without authorisation. In response to this policy, JRS has developed a methodology of accompaniment and assistance that will be of best use to both those people who are placed in “held” detention (secure institutions) and those who live in the more flexible form of community detention.

In 2013, JRS Australia provided pastoral support to 4901 individuals in 3 held detention centres both on and off-shore.

### Community Detention

JRS Australia played a key role in the government’s decision in October 2010 to release unaccompanied minors into the community as an alternative to detention.



JRS lobbied for and agreed to pilot (alongside several other key agencies) a Residential Determination Program for minors awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications, opening Australia’s first community detention house in December 2010.

In 2013, JRS Australia supported 84 vulnerable adults and 13 unaccompanied minors as part of their Residential Determination or Community detention project.

### The JRS Shelter Project

One of only three agencies in Sydney providing medium to long-term housing for asylum seekers, JRS now manages several properties in the city which provide affordable housing and accessible services for asylum seekers living in the community. In 2013, JRS assisted 92 people with shelter through the project as well as many others with services such as legal aid, preparation for employment, healthcare, English lessons and financial management support. JRS also advocates within the housing sector to raise awareness about the threat of homelessness faced by this group of marginalized people.

## JRS Singapore

JRS presence in Singapore was re-established during 2013. JRS Singapore works with the parishes to raise awareness about the plight of refugees and encourages parishes to support the work of JRS organisations in the Asia Pacific and South Asia regions.

JRS Singapore supports the work of JRS International and is made up of volunteers who seek to serve and accompany refugees all over the world, especially in Asia. JRS' priorities are in the areas of education, skills training, pastoral and health care, and advocacy for peace and reconciliation.

JRS Singapore has given financial aid, sent volunteers for visits or short-term voluntary work, and supported projects managed by the local JRS organizations in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and Africa.

## JRS Philippines

In cooperation with local partner organisations, JRS Philippines offers support to persons who have been forcibly displaced (IDPs) within the country due to armed conflict and natural disasters. In 2013, JRS Philippines served 1844 people, providing educa-



tion and advocacy trainings to 1024 persons, emergency support to 317 individuals, livelihoods to 117 families (583 individuals) and food assistance in the southern Philippines, supporting also the initiative of the peace process in Mindanao.

JRS continues its presence in two provinces in Mindanao which are heavily impacted by the present armed violence namely, Maguindanao and Lanao del Norte.

In Maguindanao, JRS focuses on IDP returnee communities by enhancing sustainable livelihoods. In Lanao del Norte, JRS strengthens sustained participation of returnee IDPs, especially women, in additional communities included in the Framework Agreement Bangsamoro through increased knowledge and representation in public dialogues on the peace process.

Since 2011, JRS has assisted the return of about 250 families in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte by providing farm and garden tools, seeds, livestock and tri-sikad (passenger bikes) to start anew and earn a living. JRS is also supporting them by giving training on how to manage their livelihood projects and sessions on values formation to enhance sustainable livelihoods.

Due to the continuing tension in Mindanao, JRS is determined to sustain its presence to accompany women and serve the survivors of the violence happening in Mindanao. In 2013, JRS partnered with a Jesuit university in helping survivors of the Zamboanga siege with relief and recovery assistance.

JRS also reached out to communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan by supporting Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (Church in Service of the People), a local Jesuit-led organization, sending both program and field staff for technical support.

## JRS Myanmar

In 2013, JRS established a presence in Myanmar, assessed education and youth needs and began giving support to education providers serving IDPs in Kachin and Kayah States.

With a focus on girls' education, JRS has been making preparations to run teacher trainings for

female teachers in Kachin State and is undertaking an extensive education needs survey amongst IDPs, in cooperation with other service providers, in Kayah State.

As Myanmar tries to catch up economically with its ASEAN neighbours, it is quite clear that there is a huge need to build the capacity of the people. Education will add something to peoples' lives not only in terms of the skills they will have but especially the way in which to think and to look at the daily reality they face. It is also clear that there is a need for qualified teachers who can deliver knowledge to students. As JRS establishes its work and collaboration with the local Church and organizations in Myanmar, it sees that education in the IDPs' camps can be an added value to children, improving their future prospects. Along with that, training future teachers by recruiting local youth is another activity that may contribute to building hope for the future of the youth and the children of the country .



People living in an IDP camp in Kachin State, Myanmar. Fr. Peter Balleis SJ.



## JRS at the Thai-Myanmar border

Although it may be several years before refugees living in camps on the Thai-Myanmar border can safely return to their home states, JRS Thailand, along with The Karenni Education Department (KnED)- the Karenni refugee body responsible for education in the camps where JRS works- have begun preparations to make sure that the learning of refugees in the camps will be recognised when they re-enter the Myanmar education system.

During 2013, reciprocal visits took place between NGO workers and State Officials from Kayah State and those working on refugee education in the border camps. Education officers from Kayah State met with KnED staff and discussed, among other things, an agreement that students from the camps with report cards issued by KnED may be accepted at schools in Kayah State when and if they return to Myanmar.

## JRS Thailand

The Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand (JRS Thailand) oversees six projects in camps, detention centres and in the cities of Bangkok, Mae Sot, and Ranong. JRS Thailand serves refugees, asylum seekers and other forced migrants in the areas of education, emergency assistance, legal assistance, psychosocial/pastoral services, livelihoods, medical services, and advocacy/protection.

In 2013, JRS Thailand teams served 146,585 persons, with 7,638 students receiving education, 8,240 receiving pastoral and psychosocial care, and 2,223 benefitting from advocacy or other protection services. In addition, 98,101 individuals in need of emergency assistance benefited from JRS support, 184 received livelihoods assistance and 30,199 benefitting from JRS healthcare services.

## Education and pastoral accompaniment in Mae Hong Son

JRS has been present in two of nine official refugee camps since 1997. Located in Mae Hong Son on the Northwestern Thailand/Burma border, the two camps host more than 16,000 people, largely of the Karenni and Karen ethnic groups from Burma. JRS partners with the Karenni Education Department (KnED) to implement and deliver basic, special, vocational and adult literacy education. In 2013, JRS helped 2,400 primary school students and 2,000 secondary school students had access to quality education. The JRS team also assisted those affected by the major fire incident that took place in the camps in December 2013, especially in helping the 29 children displaced by the blaze to return to school.



### Outreach to the Shan and Lahu people on the northern border

Presently, JRS provides financial support to three community-based education programmes: nursery school, primary school, and night classes for Shan refugee students from Krung Jor camp in Wieng Haeng town.

Beyond primary level, JRS offers scholarships – 27 in 2013 – to Shan and Lahu refugee students to continue their secondary education in Thai schools. Since 2005, JRS has been supporting training for primary and nursery school teachers, and currently focuses on Thai language methodology. In 2014, JRS plans to provide university scholarships to nursery and primary school teachers to gain formal teacher accreditation in Thailand and further serve their communities in the long-term.

### Livelihoods in Mae Sot

JRS has established a full presence in Mae Sot, on the Thai-Burmese border, since 2004. As the majority of organisations in Mae Sot focus on assisting the nearby refugee camps, there is little support for over one hundred thousand migrants from Burma living outside of the camps. JRS remains one of the few international non-governmental organisations working with this population, especially in rural communities. The number of communities that JRS works with has increased from 6 communities in 2012 to 17 communities in 2014. Presently, JRS aims to increase the self-reliance of migrants from Burma, particularly those who were forcibly displaced from their homes.

### Southern border migrant education in Ranong

In 2013, JRS shifted its strategy in Ranong to focus on supporting migrant children to attend Thai school as this is the most sustainable educational option. JRS supported one learning centre which prepared around 70 migrant students for Thai school. Through advocacy during parent meetings and home visits, JRS encourages parents to send their children to Thai school by explaining the benefits of this schooling option. In addition, JRS provides financial support for the most vulnerable students who cannot pay for transportation to Thai school.

## Bangkok Immigration Detention Centre health, legal and release-return project

Since Thailand is not a signatory 1951 UN refugee convention, asylum seekers and refugees are considered 'illegal immigrants' and subject to arrest and detention similar to others without the appropriate visa or permits, in one of the immigration detention centres throughout the country. The Bangkok Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) hosts the largest number of detainees in appalling conditions; this motivates JRS to maintain a presence within the detention centre.

JRS provides legal assistance to asylum seekers and refugees applying for refugee status determination with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) and third-country resettlement. In addition, JRS provides supplementary food, medical care, psychosocial activities and assists other detainees wishing to return home by arranging airplane tickets, providing financial assistance to those with insufficient funds, and facilitating the release of travel documents from embassies.

In 2013, JRS offered legal assistance to 85 asylum seekers and refugees and helped 312 detainees return home through the Release Programme. As an alternative to detention, JRS has also facilitated the bail out of 111 refugees and asylum seekers from 2011-2013. Moreover, JRS seeks to develop constructive relationships with immigration officials as a way of improving the well-being of detainees.



## Urban refugee outreach and support programme in Bangkok

Although half of the world's refugees live in urban areas like Bangkok, most assistance to refugees is channelled to those living in camps. The work of the urban refugee team is guided by the vision of the Jesuit Refugee Service to serve refugees in the most vulnerable circumstances. In Bangkok, the team works with groups of asylum seekers and refugees to provide emergency financial assistance, psychosocial services, and legal support.

At the end of December 2013, there were nearly 8,000 asylum seekers and refugees in Bangkok. Approximately 4,600 were registered with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).

The number of new arrivals from Pakistan, Syria, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka has been increasing drastically. As one of the only organisations providing assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in Bangkok, the JRS urban refugee programme has experienced an increased workload in accommodating this higher demand for services. JRS provides emergency financial assistance, psychosocial services and legal support to the most vulnerable

## JRS Indonesia

JRS currently organises educational and cultural activities offering important psychosocial support to persons in vulnerable circumstances. In 2013, JRS Indonesia served 1951 persons the majority, 782, receiving psychosocial and pastoral care, 623 participating in the advocacy and protection programme, 319 received education, 161 were support in their livelihoods and 66 with healthcare.

After years of involvement in conflict and natural disaster-affected areas of Indonesia, JRS work in the country has gradually broadened towards supporting the needs of asylum seekers in Cisarua on Java Island, refugees in the nearby city of Yogyakarta and a detention centre in Surabaya, Java.

Immigration detention centres in Indonesia hold about 1,000 asylum seekers for prolonged periods of time as they are considered in violation of national immigration laws until their refugee status is confirmed. This process takes from six months to many years in extreme cases. The consequent uncertainty about the future, confinement, and lack of contact with loved ones negatively affect the psychosocial health of asylum seekers, often leading to incidences of severe depression and self-harm.

For the past 5 years the JRS Indonesia team has been providing psychosocial support and sports activities to detainees in and outside an immigration detention centre in Medan, with the aim of improving their physical and mental health. In 2013 however, JRS began following a planned exit strategy, handing over the provision of accompaniment services to local volunteers.



Children forced to flee with their parents participating in English language classes organized by JRS at Immigration Detention Center (JRS Indonesia)

## JRS Indonesia and JRS Thailand - Collaboration for Refugee Legal Aid

For the past two years, JRS Indonesia has provided support to the establishment of a network of lawyers and advocates who provide pro-bono legal advice and assistance to vulnerable asylum seekers undergoing the RSD process. In October 2012, the SUAKA Network, comprised of existing civil society organisations and individual volunteers came together and committed to assisting refugees and asylum seekers as part of their ongoing promotion and protection of human rights.

JRS Indonesia continues to provide support to SUAKA's growth and development. In November 2013, JRS Indonesia invited the Director of Legal Services of JRS Thailand to give a RSD representation training to lawyers in the SUAKA network, as well as advice on establishing the organisational structure required to effectively manage a growing case load and successfully access sustainable funding, all of which has enabled SUAKA to begin effective representation.





## JRS Cambodia

**In Phnom Penh, JRS social workers and lawyers assisted 89 refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar, Pakistan, Vietnam, Sudan, and Somalia during 2013. Education, setting up small roti cart businesses, assisting with voluntary repatriation or resettlement, writing legal briefs or appeals listening to hopes and dreams and trauma were all part of the accompaniment and service.**

**Others forcibly displaced by trafficking, land evictions or experiencing statelessness were counseled, and the situation monitored. We published a book of stories on the situation of stateless people, including Rohingya, ethnic Vietnamese, and Khmer Krom. With colleagues associated with the Khmer Rouge trial we published our research into the status of long term ethnic Vietnamese residing in Cambodia for generations.**

**In its campaign to implement the Mine Ban Treaty, JRS researched the Quality of Life of 3,448 people with disability in over 20 provinces. Crucial findings were that 90% said they were happy they were alive even though 30% do not have enough food to eat and 52% did not have enough income to live in dignity. The findings are being considered by the government as they begin their new Strategic Plan. Wheelchairs, housing, toilets and wells assisted the vulnerable along with listening hearts and response to emergency needs.**

**We still advocate for Cambodia to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) and to complete clearing land and upholding rights of survivors. The death of King Sihanouk, a champion of disarmament was mourned deeply by our survivors .**



The teams of JRS and JSS Timor Leste, JRS

## JRS Timor Leste

JRS exited Timor-Leste in 2013, having provided social and livelihoods support to displaced people for the previous seven years. A new development organization run by the Jesuit Church - Jesuit Social Services - has opened up in its place. The JRS mandate is geared towards assisting communities in need of aid and accompaniment while displaced from their lands.

Now, however, the majority of the 150,000 persons previously displaced in Timor-Leste have returned to their homes. What is called for at this time are development initiatives, continued livelihoods support and peace and reconciliation efforts within the returned communities, as they attempt to recover from the violence in their recent history .

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A legal representative speaks with a refugee.  
Helen Pardo-JRS AP

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