

## How to Wear Masks and Answer the Call of Jesus to Look After One Another

The following article appeared on the website of Global Citizen ([global citizen.org](https://globalcitizen.org)) written by Madeleine Ketch where Madeleine discusses how we can be compliant with the government's rule of mandatory mask wearing and support employment of the most marginalised at the same time.

You'd be hard-pressed to find many positives from Melbourne's latest, six-week COVID-19 lockdown. But increased economic and employment opportunities for migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women is one of them.

With face masks now mandatory in Melbourne, social enterprises that employ migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women in Victoria have shifted operations to focus on manufacturing face coverings in order to keep vulnerable women in jobs.

Ifrin Fittock, the chief executive of the not-for-profit social enterprise Sisterworks – Work Empowers Women (<https://sisterworks.org.au/>), says her team of employees, who all work from home, has grown from eight to 30 and produce between 7,000 and 10,000 masks per week. In an interview with SBS, Fittock stated,

"They are very excited because this is an opportunity for them to try and earn some income and work from home. It's definitely a silver lining kind of situation, where some of the sisters' husbands have lost jobs and are not working anymore."

SisterWorks seeks to improve the "confidence, mental wellbeing and sense of belonging" for migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women. The enterprise typically produces ethically made homewares, handmade body care, jewellery and toys.

According to Fittock, their main income stream stems from in-person speaking engagements and market stalls — which have all dried up in the past few months. Fittock says without the mask opportunity, SisterWorks may have been forced to close.

Like SisterWorks, not-for-profit organisation, The Social Studio ([thesocialstudio.org](https://thesocialstudio.org)) has pivoted its workforce to produce masks. Chief Executive Cate Coleman has urged all Melburnians to purchase masks, where possible, from social enterprises that focus on skills training and employment opportunities for refugees and migrants — as opposed to large supermarkets and chemists.

Experts say refugees and people seeking asylum are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Two issues seem to be most prevalent for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. The World Health Organisation and the Australian Department of Health have both highlighted overcrowded detention centres as places that are particularly susceptible to COVID-19 outbreaks. The Latest report from the Australian Department of Home Affairs shows there were 1,373 people in immigration detention facilities in Australia at the end of March.

The second issue relates to the economic impacts of the virus. Refugees with permanent visas can access the Australian government's income assistance packages, like the JobSeeker payment. Asylum seekers who have yet to have their refugee claims assessed and live on Bridging Visas however, are ineligible for government income support — as are refugees living on temporary protection visas. Without income assistance, and with widespread job across the nation, the risk of poverty for refugees and asylum seekers is particularly high.

**Visit the websites of the organisations mentioned in this article to order DHHS compliant face masks and contribute to their financial survival. We are all in this together.**