

OPEN LETTER:

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT MUST SUPPORT VULNERABLE MIGRANT WOMEN ESCAPING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Dear Prime Minister

We write to urge you to ensure that migrant women on temporary visas are supported when escaping violent relationships through access to crisis payments.

The immigration status of women who experience family violence has a significant impact on their experience of that violence and their ability to leave a violent relationship. Visa dependence is one of the main barriers to migrant women accessing legal and justice support for family violence.

Domestic violence service providers report that the principal concern experienced by migrant women on temporary visas is that these women have no source of income. Women on spousal visas who can access the family violence exception often wait up to 12 weeks or more for their visa to change, during which time they have no access to Centrelink payments. Migrant women on temporary visas who do *not* have access to the family violence exception to change their visa status are often left indefinitely without income and rely on charities to get by.

Many temporary visa holders are not eligible to access services through Centrelink. Without income, they cannot meet their basic needs and the needs of their children. Many women on temporary visas return to their abusive partners because of a lack of financial resources.

In its report, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence recommends that women escaping violent relationships are entitled to crisis payments regardless of their visa status. Similarly, the Final Report of the Council of Australian Governments Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children Advisory Panel recommends that the Commonwealth ensure that migration rules and eligibility requirements for support services should not disempower victims of violence or discourage them from leaving violent relationships.

The Judicial Council on Cultural Diversity's 2016 consultation report 'The Path to Justice: Migrant and Refugee Women's Experience of the Courts' reinforced that access to Government funded services and payments is tied to visa class categories, which is a major issue for women experiencing violence.

Safety from domestic and family violence should not be contingent on an individual's visa status. Violence against women is currently a national priority. However, the major reforms leave vulnerable migrant women behind and without access to basic services.

Prime Minister, we urge the Government to ensure that migrant women on temporary visas who seek to escape violence are entitled to crisis payments regardless of their visa status.

This open letter is supported by the following organisations:

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)
ACT Multicultural Council Incorporated
ActionAid
Addison Road Community Centre Organisation
AMES Australia
AMPARO Advocacy Inc
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA)
BaptistCare NSW & ACT
Berry Street
Brisbane Domestic Violence Service (BDVS)
Caboolture Regional Domestic Violence Service Inc.
Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service Inc.
Carrie's Place Domestic Violence and Homelessness Services inc.
Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA)
Centacare Toowoomba
Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University
Centre for Refugee Research, UNSW
Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence Service of South Australia
cohealth, Victoria
Community Legal Centres Association (WA) Inc.
Council for Women of Diverse Cultural Backgrounds
Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network Inc (DASSAN)
Darwin Community Legal Service
Dawn House Inc
Diversitat (Geelong Ethnic Communities' Council)
Diversity and Disability Alliance
Domestic Violence Action Centre (DVAC)
Domestic Violence Crisis Service (ACT)
Domestic Violence Legal Workers' Network
Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW)
Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc.
Domestic Violence ProActive Support Service Armidale
Domestic Violence Resource Service (Mackay & Region) Inc.
Domestic Violence Victoria
economic Security4Women
emerge women & children's support network
Ethnic Communities Council of Logan Inc
Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland
Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
Ethnic Communities' Council of Western Australia
Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc.
Georgina Martina Inc.
Gippsland Ethnic Communities' Council
Gippsland Multicultural Services Inc
Gippsland Women's Health
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
Homelessness NSW
Human Rights Law Centre

Illawarra Legal Centre
 Immigrant Women's Health Service
 Immigrant Women's Speakout Association of NSW
 Immigrant Women's Support Service (Qld)
 Immigration Advice & Rights Centre
 Inner West Community Support Services (St Vincent de Paul Society)
 inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
 Luke Batty Foundation and Never Alone campaign
 Melaleuca Refugee Centre Torture & Trauma Survivors Service of the NT Inc.
 Men's Behaviour Change Network NSW
 Migrant Women's Support Service Inc. SA
 Migrant Women's Lobby Group SA
 Migration Council of Australia
 Migration Institute of Australia
 Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
 Multicultural Communities Council of Gold Coast
 Multicultural Communities Council of SA
 Multicultural Council of Griffith Inc
 Multicultural Council of Tasmania
 Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory
 Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga Inc
 Multicultural Services Centre of W.A. Inc
 National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC)
 National Ethnic Disability Alliance
 Non English Speaking Background Domestic Violence Action Group SA (NESBDVAG)
 North East Multicultural Association
 North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service, Townsville
 North Queensland Women's Legal Service
 Northern Domestic Violence Service
 Northern Settlement Services Ltd.
 Nova for Women and Children
 NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
 Older Women's Network New South Wales (OWN NSW)
 Orana House Inc
 Patricia Giles Centre
 Penrith Women's Health Centre
 Quantum Support Services Inc.
 Queensland Advocacy Incorporated
 Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services Inc
 Queensland Domestic Violence Services Network
 Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia
 Refugee Advice & Casework Service (Aust) Inc
 Refugee Council of Australia
 Ryde Family Services
 safe steps Family Violence Response Centre
 SCOPE (Suncoast Cooloola Outreach Prevention and Education) Maroochydore
 Sector Connect Inc
 Sexual Assault Support Service (Inc.), Tasmania (SASS)
 Shakti Australia
 Shakti Migrant & Refugee Women's Support Group Melbourne Inc.
 Shakti Migrant & Refugee Women's Support Group NSW Inc.
 Sisters Inside Inc.
 South Australian Council of Social Service
 St George Sutherland Community Support Services (St Vincent de Paul Society)

St Vincent de Paul Society, National Council of Australia
Staying Home Leaving Violence Penrith
Sydney Women's Counselling Centre
Tamworth family Support Service Inc
The Humanitarian Group
The Salvation Army's Freedom Partnership- *to End Modern Slavery*
Western Community Legal Centre Ltd
White Ribbon Australia
WIRE Women's Information
Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre
WISHIN (Womens Information Support and Housing In the North)
Women's & Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC)
Women's Community Shelters
Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service NSW Inc.
Women's Electoral Lobby NSW
Women's Health in the North
Women's Health NSW
Women's Health West
Women's House Shelta
Women's Housing Limited
Women's Legal Service NSW
Women's Legal Service Victoria
Women's Legal Services Australia
Women's Law Centre of Western Australia
Women's Services Network (WESNET)
Working Against Violence Support Service (WAVSS) Inc
YES Youth & Family Services
Young & District Multicultural Association Inc
Zonta House Refuge Association Inc.