

inTouch Submission: Whole of context approach to addressing family violence for women, children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
Wellsprings for Women
Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights
The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
Centre for Multicultural Youth
(Victorian) Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence

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Introduction

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, Wellsprings for Women, the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Centre for Multicultural Youth and (Victorian) Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence, welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government in the consultation for the Section Action Plan Under Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

Family violence remains one of the most significant issues impacting women, children and families in Australia. It also severely impacts gender equity and leads to other significant social harms including, youth disengagement, crime and lost potential of individuals, mainly women and children, who both experience this violence or those who are using violence. Each of the organisations supporting this submission jointly supports women, children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds along the continuum ranging from primary prevention to recovery, particularly those who have been subjected to family violence, and witnessed firsthand the complex and intersecting barriers they face in seeking safety, recovery and justice.

Collectively, these organisations provide culturally safe and responsive services and programs that work to stop violence before it happens and enhance access to support and resources. Through a range of activities including primary prevention programs, early intervention initiatives, as well as case management, community engagement and advocacy, sector development, training, and capacity building, each organisation recognises and addresses the unique cultural challenges that individuals from migrant and refugee backgrounds face when seeking support during and after their resettlement in Australia.

Women, children and young people from culturally, linguistically and racially diverse communities are disproportionately affected by structural and systemic barriers that increase their vulnerability to violence and hinder access to support. These barriers include housing and visa insecurity, financial hardship, or reduced access to government benefits, language barriers, social isolation, experiences of racism and discrimination, limited awareness of rights and available services, and reduced access to culturally safe and trauma-informed support.¹

For many women and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds, perpetrators may exploit insecure migration status, sponsorship arrangements, family and community pressures, or threats of deportation and separation from children as forms of coercive control. These factors can deepen dependence on perpetrators, deter help-seeking, and create additional challenges in accessing safety, justice and support services.

As the government develops the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, it is critical that the distinct experiences and needs of multicultural communities are meaningfully recognised and addressed. Despite the significant contributions and consultations made by the services in this joint

¹ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), *Prevention of violence against women and safer pathways to services for migrant and refugee communities: Ten research insights from the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Projects with Action Research (CALD PAR) initiative* (ANROWS, 2020).

submission, the insights and recommendations provided by these organisations across the country were not adequately reflected in the consultation paper. This omission is deeply concerning. It suggests that the experiences and expertise of multicultural communities, particularly those of migrant and refugee women facing violence, were not given the attention they warranted in shaping the national conversation. As a result, the voices of these communities have been rendered invisible within the narrative, and the specific barriers, risks, and support needs they face have remained largely unacknowledged.

This submission seeks to bring these voices back into focus, making visible the experiences and knowledge that have too often been overlooked, and calling for the meaningful and systemic change that is so urgently required to ensure that all women are included in efforts to end violence. A truly inclusive national response to family violence must ensure that no woman or child is left behind because of their cultural background, language, visa status or migration pathway. By embedding intersectional and culturally appropriate approaches across all aspects of the Second Action Plan, the government can better uphold the rights, dignity and safety of women and their families from culturally, linguistically and racially diverse communities and contribute to a future free from violence for all Australians.

The organisations urge the government to adopt a whole-of-context approach to addressing family violence nationally, recognising that family violence is shaped by interconnected individual, family, community, cultural, social, economic and systemic factors. Stronger commitments to equitable access to safety, protection and recovery for migrant and refugee women and children are needed, including investment in specialist services, housing, legal support and economic empowerment initiatives. Across all five priority areas of the Second Action Plan, this approach emphasises the importance of culturally safe, accessible and responsive services that reflect the diverse experiences and needs of women and children from multicultural and refugee backgrounds.

The recommendations presented in this submission have been shaped through consultation with the organisations, lived experience advisory groups, alongside contributions from internal teams from all organisations working across service delivery, projects, sector development, policy, and advocacy. Grounded in both lived experience and professional practice, these recommendations reflect the expertise and insights gained through direct engagement with migrant and refugee women and their families. Based on these collective perspectives, the following recommendations have been created with the intention to strengthen support systems and improve outcomes for victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

This submission endorses the one provided by Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance, as well highlighting some specific issues the organisations in this submission believe to be critical.

1 Victim-Survivors

Women from migrant and refugee communities experience complex and overlapping forms of disadvantage that increase their exposure to family and gender-based violence and create additional barriers to seeking assistance, securing safety, and rebuilding their lives. Consultation feedback emphasised the importance of implementing culturally appropriate, trauma and violence informed, tailored approaches that address both immediate needs and longer-term recovery outcomes. This includes recognising temporary migration status as a structural contributor to vulnerability and integrating this consideration across all prevention, response, and recovery initiatives.

The Second Action Plan should:

- Increase the response period following the withdrawal of a partner visa sponsorship from 28 days to 90 days for victim survivors of family violence. Extending the timeframe to 90 days would improve access to legal and migration advice, reduce the risk of visa cancellation, and support safer pathways to independence and protection.
- Align migration reforms with the National Advocacy Group Blueprint for Reform, by creating a three-year substantive visa for victim-survivors excluded from current Family Violence Provisions, broaden the definition of family violence in migration law, and establish an Intergovernmental Committee focused on temporary visa holders experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Consider housing reforms that enable victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds to access public housing waitlists while their permanent visa applications are being processed.
- Strengthen financial supports for temporary visa holders by expanding access to Special Benefit across all temporary visa categories and consider improving the payment options with minimal eligibility restrictions for migrant women through the Leaving Violence Program.
- Recognise and respond to the risk of misidentification by police and other statutory systems, ensuring allegations made by the person using violence are assessed cautiously, acknowledging the heightened risk of victim-survivors being incorrectly identified as perpetrators.
- Improve access to culturally safe, trauma and violence informed, and language-appropriate support services. Strengthen capability through workforce upskilling and resource sharing between mainstream and specialist services.
- Establish recovery and healing as a priority, ensuring a consistent funding stream, and specialised workforce and invest in specialist workforce training and development.

- Acknowledge through funding formula the extended support required for migrant and refugee women who stay in the relationship and require closer monitoring and risk assessment.

2 Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention and early intervention are closely linked in multicultural communities and should be implemented as complementary approaches within the family and gender-based violence system. Prevention initiatives often provide an important entry point for migrant and refugee communities to access information, build awareness, and connect with support services. However, it is important to maintain a clear distinction between prevention and early intervention, ensuring that investment in immediate support and risk response does not come at the expense of long-term efforts to address the drivers of violence and prevent it from occurring in the first place.

The Second Action Plan should:

- Recognise the connection between prevention and early intervention and invest in early intervention programs.
- Address the underlying drivers of gender-based violence before it occurs, including embedding lived and living experience perspectives in the design and delivery of initiatives, particularly those related to engaging men and boys.
- Reform funding of settlement, multicultural, migrant and faith-based organisations to deliver prevention and early intervention services and support capacity building initiatives.
- Fund multicultural women's organisations to provide prevention and early intervention leadership, support and guidance to settlement, multicultural and migrant organisations, building on existing feminist expertise and to ensure consistency, coordination and shared learning across the sector.
- Services funded to deliver prevention activities should receive training, resources, and ongoing support to respond appropriately to disclosures of family violence, identify and assess risk, and facilitate safe referrals.
- Support skills recognition and provide subsidies for recognition of qualifications obtained overseas. The economic barriers to workforce participation are also barriers to safety.
- Remove excess testing requirements, including repetitive English language proficiency assessments such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), for international graduates working in the family violence, social work, and community services sectors, to support their pathway to permanent residence.
- Provide multiyear funding to specialist tailored services to deliver prevention programs across schools, workplaces, community organisations, and faith-based settings to promote gender equality and respectful relationships in culture and context.

- Strengthen the early identification of risk factors and provide timely interventions to prevent the escalation of violence.
- Improve information sharing legislation by enabling timely, secure and risk identifiable information exchange between relevant services across States and Territories and State and Federal funded services.
- Fund a second saturation-model site in a culturally diverse community with high rates of family violence, such as the City of Casey in Melbourne.

3 Children and Young People in Their Own Right

Recognising children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, requires acknowledging both their direct experiences of family violence and the barriers they face in accessing support. For too long, they have been viewed primarily as witnesses rather than as victim-survivors directly affected by its harms. Exposure to family violence can have significant and lasting impacts on their safety, wellbeing, development, and sense of belonging.

The Second Action Plan should more explicitly recognise the distinct experiences of children, adolescents and young adults from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including those navigating family violence, intimate partner violence, intergenerational conflict, settlement pressures, racism, education and employment transitions, and questions of identity and belonging. Responses must be youth-specific, culturally safe, confidential, developmentally appropriate and co-designed with young people themselves. Service responses must recognise these experiences and address the long-term impacts of family violence on their health, wellbeing, development, and future outcomes.

The Section Action Plan should:

- Recognise children and young people as victim-survivors with their own rights, needs, and experiences, including the impacts of conflict, forced displacement, and resettlement, whilst recognising the impacts of intergenerational trauma and violence.
- Ensure support for children and young people are age-appropriate and centred on children's voices, safety, wellbeing, and recovery.
- Establish dedicated child safety practitioner roles within case management services to ensure children who are subjected to violence can access independent, trauma-informed support, with a clear pathway to other multidisciplinary programs which incorporate cultural and language expertise.
- Support community- led, multicultural and faith-based organisations to provide mentoring, peer support and community connection activities that promote children's wellbeing, cultural identity and inclusion without being labelled as family violence programs.

- Invest in youth-specific prevention, early intervention and recovery pathways delivered through schools, TAFEs, universities, youth services, settlement programs, sports clubs, community organisations and online spaces, ensuring young people can access confidential, culturally responsive support without fear of stigma, family repercussions or punitive system involvement.
- Recognise and respond to technology-facilitated abuse experienced by young people, including image-based abuse, monitoring, coercive control through phones and social media, online harassment and digital isolation, with culturally safe education, support and referral pathways.
- Strengthen coordination between the Second Action Plan and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse, with a focus on culturally appropriate pathways for disclosure, support and intervention.
- Consider the complex experiences of children and young people impacted by modern slavery and forced marriage, and ensure they can access specialised, culturally safe and trauma-informed prevention, early intervention, recovery and support services to promote healing and wellbeing while reducing the need for legal and justice system involvement.
- Provide tailored, culturally responsive support for young people who use violence within family, intimate partner, or other close relationships.

“Children and youth need to be supported in their own experience because as a mum, I can say, how could I advocate effectively for my son when I was subjected to all the abuse.”

– Noor survivor advocate

4 People Who Use Violence

To create safe and inclusive communities, effective prevention requires engaging men and boys as partners in challenging harmful gender norms and promoting respectful relationships within society. This involves fostering shared responsibility for creating safe and inclusive communities with consideration to multicultural families. Investing in early education, community leadership and culturally appropriate accountability and behaviour change initiatives can help address the underlying drivers of violence, and ensuring responses do not contribute to stigma, racism or social exclusion.

The Second Action Plan should:

- Strengthen accountability for people who use violence by improving system responses to acknowledge violence perpetrated by family and/or community members overseas.
- Invest in programs for those who use violence delivered in language and in culture.

- Enhance early intervention responses to prevent repeat offending and improve victim-survivor safety.
- Build workforce expertise in understanding coercive control in multicultural settings, to recognise culturally specific patterns of abuse, including violence perpetrated by extended family.
- Fund services to partner with specialised multicultural organisation to implement and deliver culturally safe sessions on respectful relationships, consent, healthy parenting and gender equality for men, boys and families.
- Improve information-sharing protocols to enable specialist services to identify and coordinate supports being provided to individuals using violence, while maintaining appropriate privacy safeguards.
- Leverage existing multicultural programs, such as the Health in my Language program, to deliver early intervention in-language education to women to build capacity to access DFSV services at an earlier point.
- Ensure responses for adolescents and young people who use violence are non-criminalising, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive and trauma-informed, including support that understands exposure to family violence, forced displacement, racism, settlement stress and family or community dynamics.

5 System Integration and Workforce

A well-integrated family violence system relies on consistent, coordinated and culturally safe responses across all organisations. This can be achieved by strengthening workforce capability across specialist family violence services, settlement, ethno-specific and community sectors through reciprocal investment in both family violence expertise and cultural capability. It also requires investment in community and system navigation through trusted multicultural organisations, community leaders and specialist navigators to support culturally responsive pathways to assistance.

The Second Action Plan should:

- Centre multicultural women's lived experience and leadership within the policy development, governance, implementation and evaluation of the Second Action Plan, ensuring community-informed and co-designed responses.
- Strengthen culturally safe and inclusive service delivery by embedding anti-racism frameworks within family violence services and supporting workforce capability through mandatory anti-racism, cultural safety and anti-oppressive practice training.
- Develop National Cultural Safety Standards for the gender-based violence sector.

- Improve coordination across justice, health, community, family violence, and settlement services through collaborative case management approaches that mitigate risk and support shared responsibility.
- Build a skilled and culturally responsive workforce that can effectively meet the needs of diverse communities. Establish community hubs and safe spaces that are culturally appropriate and equipped with relevant resources and supports.
- Mandate the collection of data on perpetrators, including their cultural, linguistic and racial background where relevant, and strengthen information-sharing across systems to improve risk assessment, identify patterns of perpetration, and reduce the misidentification of victim survivors.
- Model cross-sector collaboration, and co-location opportunities to deliver more effective, accessible, and coordinated outcomes for victim-survivors.
- Strengthen the language services sector through increased funding to NAATI Certified Translators to develop additional accreditation to interpreters to specialise as Family Violence interpreter.
- Fund partnerships between settlement, multicultural and family violence services, working alongside trained women leaders and male community leaders, to strengthen prevention, early intervention and healing responses for migrant communities, where family and community play a central role.
- Ensure the Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey measures ethnicity and captures family-perpetrated emotional and economic abuse, so that the experiences of multicultural communities are reflected in the evidence base informing policy and service responses.
- Incentivise emerging language groups to attract interpreters where there is limited availability in minority languages. Bring together and leverage the established relationships, evidence-based resources, long term expertise and infrastructure of multicultural women's organisations to support a nationally consistent and coordinated approach to prevention, early intervention and response in multicultural communities.

"What would have changed my experience, is a crisis response system that is resourced, that looks beyond one presentation or issue."

– Noor survivor advocate

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