

Friday, 18 September

Statement in response to the Australian Government's immigration reforms

Immigration reforms risk making it harder for women on temporary visas to find safety

At a time when multicultural and migrant communities are under increasing attack by some politicians and media, the Government should focus on making laws that promote inclusion, safety and fairness for all people who call Australia home.

Immigration reforms announced by the Australian Government yesterday are alarming and are likely to make people on temporary visas more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

As the peak body for Women's Legal Services, we are concerned that these reforms will have gendered impacts. In particular, that they will deny some women experiencing gender-based violence an equal chance to find safety and stay safe because of their visa status.

No person experiencing family violence should face additional barriers to safety and recovery because of their visa status.

One in three migrant and refugee women in Australia have experienced domestic and family violence. For women on temporary visas, that figure rises to 40 per cent. For many, the legal and migration systems act as barriers to safety.

The Government's proposed reforms, with a focus on detention and deportation, risk making it even harder for women living in Australia on temporary visas trying to escape and recover from gendered violence.

In doing so, they risk undercutting the Government's ambitions for a Second Action Plan that ends violence against all women and children.

The Government's announcement suggests that updates to Ministerial Direction 110 will better protect victims of domestic and family violence. Ministerial Direction 110 is focused on visa refusal and cancellation considerations, not on ensuring pathways to safety for victim-survivors.

Women's Legal Services Australia has outlined a number of positive reforms to Australia's immigration system that would ensure women are not trapped in violence because of their visa. These include a substantive family violence visa and access to essential services, including health, housing and legal services.

Now, these reforms are more urgent than ever.

Women's Legal Services Australia calls on the Australian Government not to proceed with reforms that will make people on temporary visas more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and to instead focus on reforms that promote the safety and dignity of all, regardless of visa status.

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Further Information

You can read our full submission to the Government's consultations on a Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children here:

<https://wlsa.org.au/the-second-action-plan-submission-by-womens-legal-services-australia/>

Women's Legal Services Australia last week released an independent study into the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot delivered by seven women's legal services and funded by the Federal Government. Women who accessed the legal services found that the trauma-informed "one stop shop" model centred their safety, autonomy and support. The study also called for a stand-alone family violence visa to help address the very specific risks faced by women on temporary visas. You can read the Evaluation here:

<https://wlsa.org.au/evaluation-of-womens-legal-services-temporary-visa-holders-experiencing-violence-pilot/>