

## 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.