

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the rights of women and children

Who we are

WESNET is Australia's national peak body for specialist women's domestic and family violence services, with almost 350 eligible members across Australia. WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses, and information/referral services.

Submission

WESNET thanks the committee for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. We are responding particularly in relation to the terms of reference regarding adequacy of support services, including legal services, available to affected women and children.

Temporary visa holders experiencing family violence in Australia face multiple barriers to accessing safety, support, and justice. These barriers can cause women to remain in situations that are harmful and dangerous. As the Australian Government moves towards implementing the *National Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*, it is imperative that all women and children are given access to safety and stability.

The migration system needs to provide a safety net for all temporary visa holders who experience family violence, not just those who hold partner visas.

The services system is too complex and often inaccessible. When a temporary visa holder experiences family violence in Australia, her visa status determines whether she can access social security, working rights, childcare, free public health, and housing support.

These barriers are used frequently by perpetrators of family violence to further coerce and control victims/survivors.

WESNET, along with other experts across Australia, is a member of the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence. We are calling on the Australian Government to adopt the recommendations from the *Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas* (the 'Blueprint') (attached). The Blueprint includes recommendations to ensure victims/survivors can access the safety and support they need in four key ways:

1. Improve the migration system so that all women on temporary visas who experience domestic, family and sexual violence and their dependants can access protections, services and justice.

2. Expand eligibility and access to social security (including Medicare) for women on temporary visas who are experiencing domestic and family violence.
3. Expand eligibility and access to social and public housing for women on temporary visas who are experiencing domestic and family violence.
4. Ensure long-term and sustainable funding for specialist and legal services that support women on temporary visas who are experiencing or are at risk of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Adopting and implementing the recommendations in the Blueprint will help to ensure safety and justice to victims/survivors of family violence, regardless of visa status and type.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at comms@wesnet.org.au if you have any questions.

Signed



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WESNET acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of all the lands on which we live and work.