

Breaking Barriers

Critical support for temporary visa
holders experiencing domestic and
family violence in NSW

About Us

Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services in NSW. With approximately 200 member organisations across the state and diverse lived expertise advisory groups, we work to improve policy, legislative and program responses to domestic and family violence through advocacy and collaboration, while promoting good practice and primary prevention.

We exist to eliminate domestic and family violence from society.

DVNSW members represent the diversity of NSW specialist DFV services, working to support adults, children, families and communities impacted by domestic and family violence. Our member organisations consist of services such as crisis and refuge specialist homelessness services, domestic violence response enhancement, specialist DFV case management, Aboriginal controlled organisations, migrant and refugee specialist organisations, community housing, staying home leaving violence, women’s legal and women’s court advocacy services, men’s behaviour change programs, and general community, women and children’s support programs. It’s our role to ensure our members are listened to, respected and heard by the change-makers in society.

We recognise that lived experience is central to change. We understand that DFV impacts some communities disproportionately – which is why we ensure the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ people, migrant and refugee people and people with disability have a central voice in our advocacy. With guidance from lived experts, we elevate the experiences, voices and needs of victim-survivors through all work we undertake.

Together with victim-survivors, our members, our partners and our team – we will end gender-based violence in NSW.

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Acknowledgement

This report was written on the stolen and unceded lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We pay respects to the Elders past and present.

Domestic Violence NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first sovereign nations across the breadth and depth of Australia. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived and cared for Country for over 60,000 years and continue to do so, honouring ancestors and knowledge holders within community, and observing ancient cultural practices.

We acknowledge the damaging impacts of colonisation and hold their stories with great care.

We acknowledge that domestic and family violence are not part of Aboriginal culture and assert that the responsibilities of Aboriginal families and kinship systems do not align nor are reflected in current government policies. Domestic Violence NSW work to position ourselves as allies and give voice and strength to the unique position that Aboriginal and Torres Strait people hold in their own family systems and communities.



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Executive Summary

All women and children, regardless of their immigration status, should have access to safety, support, and pathways to independence when leaving domestic and family violence.

In NSW, roughly 31% of the population – close to one in three people – are born overseas in a majority non-English speaking country (ABS, 2021). While data on temporary visa holders is limited, estimates indicate that there are nearly 500,000 temporary visa holders (excluding New Zealand citizens) living in NSW (with 85% of these in Sydney), representing 6% of the population (ABS, 2023b).

In Australia, over 25% of people killed in the context of domestic violence between 2000 – 2022 were born outside the country, with 12.8% holding temporary visas at the time of their death (DVDRT, 2024).

Women on temporary visas face unique challenges – limited rights, little to no income and significant barriers to support – making immigration status a critical factor impacting the safety and survival of women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

To further understand the challenges and barriers faced by women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence, DVNSW held a Roundtable and disseminated a survey to member services and frontline workers in late 2024. The aim was to identify gaps in the current support system and explore potential solutions to better address their needs.

Key issues identified in the roundtable include inconsistencies in data reporting, ineligibility for federal and state support, financial burden placed on services, complexity of casework, limited exit pathways, and the need to prioritise clients based on immigration status.

Survey results found most women on temporary visas and their accompanying children are staying in refuges mostly located in metropolitan Sydney for extended periods, sometimes up to four years. Exit pathways are scarce and women on temporary visas and their children are largely reliant on transitional housing.

The financial impact on services is concerning, with the average cost per family close to \$5,000 for a three-month period. Funding to provide this support is typically secured through donations, brokerage and other philanthropic sources.

The absence of clear exit pathways exacerbates the strain on women's refuges and contributes to prolonged vulnerability and instability for victim-survivors. Addressing this issue requires a focus on providing pathways to financial independence and social support for victim-survivors on temporary visas.

We would like to give thanks to members of the DVNSW Migrant and Refugee Advisory Committee and the Women and Girls Emergency Centre (WAGEC), Muslim Women Australia and Jesuit Refugee Service who informed the advocacy in this report. Special mention goes to Settlement Services International and the Immigration Advice and Rights Centre who provided additional input into some of the costings and context to support our recommendations.

While national social security and migration system reforms are underway and are being led by the National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas, this report specifically addresses the urgent need for improvements in the NSW crisis refuge and housing systems. It advocates for women and children on temporary visas to have access to essential services and safe pathways to independence and long-term safety.

Recommendations made to address the following urgent support needs for women on temporary visas include:

- Financial support for refuges to meet the complexity of need
- Increasing the domestic and family violence specialist workforce in refuges, migrant and refugee services, translator and interpreter services, and migration-related legal support
- Housing and homelessness system reform
- Improved data collection and reporting
- Investment in prevention and community awareness programs

Recommendations

Support for refugees to meet complex needs

Recommendation 1

Provide \$3.45 million over two years for a pilot program for all funded women's refuges across NSW to allow women on temporary visas access to essential support and by doing so, offset the cost of allocating beds to women on temporary visas.

Increase specialist workforce

Recommendation 2

Commit \$12 million over two years for a pilot program to provide victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds with increased access to culturally and religiously responsive support:

- a. \$6 million for specialist migrant and refugee workers to support migrant and refugee women in 20 refuges across NSW, based on need.
- b. \$6 million for specialist DFV workers in 20 migrant and refugee support services across NSW, based on need.

Recommendation 3

Commit \$5.1 million over two years for a pilot program to fund 12 additional migration lawyers and two support staff within existing specialist family violence migration services, to provide migration-related legal support for women on temporary visas.

Recommendation 4

Invest in the reform of translator and interpreter services to improve access to quality interpreters for victim-survivors:

- a. Provide fairer employment conditions for interpreters and translators including increasing minimum shifts and pay rates.
- b. Increase availability of quality interpreter services and access for victim-survivors.
- c. Provide incentives for free DFV training for interpreters and translators.

Housing and homelessness system reform

Recommendation 5

Extend eligibility for women on temporary visas to the NSW housing and homelessness service system, including access to social and affordable housing and temporary accommodation.

Recommendation 6

Increase the availability of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, including women on temporary visas, by providing incentives to private developers to fast-track the availability of meanwhile use properties.

Improved data collection and reporting

Recommendation 7

Improve data collection for women on temporary visas in NSW refuges to better understand the need, length of stay, outcomes, cost and turn away rates:

- a. Include women on temporary visas in Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) reporting and targets for all refuges.
- b. Introduce outcome-based reporting and exemptions for women on temporary visas to reflect the realities faced by victim-survivors.

Prevention and community awareness

Recommendation 8

Provide funding for co-designed place-based and faith-based, culturally appropriate prevention initiatives in migrant and refugee communities to ensure the success of the NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024–2028.

“There are women who have been forced to stay in crisis accommodation for years, with some enduring up to three years. This is a deeply distressing reality. We must work towards ensuring better outcomes for these women and their children, which requires both significant policy reforms and increased government funding.”

(DVNSW Roundtable participant, 2024)

Background

One in three women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia have experienced domestic and family violence (Segrave, Wickes & Keel, 2021). Women on temporary visas face unique barriers to accessing support and often have no source of income and few rights, as they are not covered under the Family Violence Provisions of the Migration Act – leaving them without essential protections (National Advocacy Group, 2022).

The NSW government currently does not provide funding for refuges to support women and children on temporary visas. These services bear the costs of accommodation, case management, health services, counselling, and other essential support needed for these women and children. Services are reliant on philanthropic funding and fundraising to provide this support.

Most women on temporary visas are ineligible for crucial Federal social support including access to Centrelink and Medicare or the NSW housing and homelessness system. With many women on temporary visas without work rights, it is difficult to escape an abusive relationship or support themselves and their children.

The process for women on temporary visas to obtain a permanent visa is slow and complex, often presenting many obstacles. In many cases, women on temporary visas are forced to choose between indefinite homelessness with no income or remaining with a violent partner (Vasil, 2024). Perpetrators also exploit the migration system to manipulate women into staying in unsafe relationships, with promises of a permanent visa that may never materialise (Segrave, et. al., 2021).

In addition to the trauma they experience as a result of violence, women on temporary visas often face language and cultural barriers, social isolation, poverty, difficulty accessing fair employment, and fear of retaliation from their communities after leaving an abusive relationship. They may also have unresolved trauma from events experienced in their country of origin.

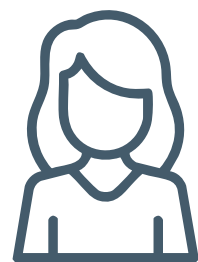
Many fear seeking help from police, government institutions and authorities due to threats of deportation, punishment or concerns that they won't be believed, further compounding their vulnerability.

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including women on temporary visas frequently encounter prejudicial attitudes and discrimination from police and the justice system. This can result in misidentification of perpetrators and may hinder a victim-survivors access to safety, keeping them trapped in abusive relationships.

Evidence collection and key data insights

To better understand the challenges and barriers faced by women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence, DVNSW held a Roundtable in August 2024 and disseminated a survey to refugees to identify gaps in the current support system and explore potential solutions.

Survey results gathered over a three-month period:



195
women supported
on temporary visas

with



112
accompanying
children (including
36 Australian citizens)

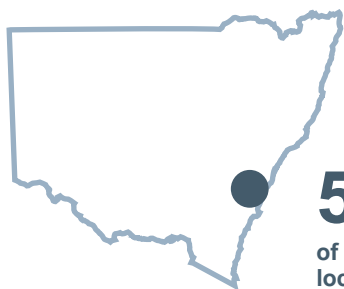
from



38
women's
refuges



77%
of services were
funded by the
Department of
Communities and
Justice (DCJ)



56%
of services were
located in metro
Sydney

Cost to services:



\$320,000
Total cost incurred by
refuges over three months
supporting women on
temporary visas



\$4,800
Total cost per family
over three months

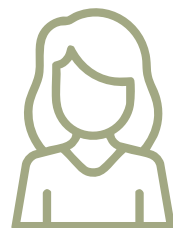


\$20,000
Cost incurred to the
refuges per service

Length of stay and exit pathways:



Average stay in refuge =
12.4 months



57%
of women stayed longer
than six months

14%
of women stayed
two-four years



57%
were exited
into transitional
accommodation



43%
were exited into
private rental
accommodation

*Note women on temporary visas are ineligible for social or affordable housing, or subsidised private rental and were therefore not exited into these types of accommodation.

Roundtable themes, survey findings and solutions

Support for refugees to meet complex needs

Roundtable participants highlighted the significant time and resources required to support victim-survivors on temporary visas as opposed to those with Australian residency or citizenship. Casework support for victim-survivors on temporary visas is more intensive, with some roundtable participants reporting that it takes up to three times longer due to the additional legal, financial, language and cultural complexities tied to immigration status. Services must absorb the cost of supporting women on temporary visas, as they are not funded to provide support to this cohort by DCJ.

Survey findings highlighted the high cost to services supporting women on temporary visas, with 38 women's refugees spending approximately \$320,000 collectively over a three-month period. Each service spent approximately \$20,000 on average and the average cost to support each family was \$4,800 in the three-month period. This figure includes living allowances, medical costs, food, clothing, transport and, vouchers. The actual costs may be much higher, as some survey respondents noted in that the figure provided was a conservative estimate.

Services spent approximately seven hours per week on average supporting each woman (and dependent children), and some up to 14 hours per week. The actual time spent supporting women on temporary visas is likely even higher, as services are not funded to support this cohort and therefore may not track all time spent, potentially underestimating the support required.

The complexity of casework and high financial cost to refugees often forces them to make difficult decisions about which victim-survivors they can support. As a result, many women on temporary visas are turned away from vital support.

Urgent funding is needed to ensure women on temporary visas have access to refugees and to alleviate the financial burden on services. A modest funding injection will allow refugees to transition victim-survivors on temporary visas through the refuge system faster by ensuring their migration status and related legal proceedings are prioritised, in turn, providing vacancies for other victim-survivors in need.

Direct quotes from the DVNSW Roundtable highlight the critical need for funding:

“Specialist services [for women on temporary visas] are in high demand, but they also come at a high cost.”

“We are heavily dependent on donation services. Accessing legal and medical services has been immensely challenging.”

A 2020 research project that surveyed 25 Sydney based refugees with a total of 253 rooms found 10 rooms (4%) were occupied by women seeking asylum, 62 rooms (25%) were occupied by women on other temporary visas, and up to a total of 96 rooms (38%) could be offered to women with no income under the refugees' current financial operating model (Foundations Housing Project, 2020). Five years on, in a post-COVID context where services are buckling under pressure, compounded by the housing and cost of living crises, women on temporary visas have even more difficulty finding refuge accommodation.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria highlighted the complex support needs of women and children without permanent residency, particularly within the refuge system. The Royal Commission heard that women on temporary visas face significant barriers in both accessing and exiting refuge and crisis accommodation, and subsequently recommended the Victorian Government “review the contractual arrangements for crisis supported accommodation to remove barriers for particular groups, such as women with no income” (State of Victoria, 2016). As a result, the Victorian Government has introduced a \$1.8 million support package over four years for victim-survivors on temporary visas in refuge accommodation. Funding is allocated based on

refuge capacity and average length of stay.

Safe and Equal, the Victorian peak body for domestic and family violence, notes that for the last financial year, Victorian refuges supported 170 women on temporary visas and their families, spending approximately \$4,000 per family. This money covered legal support including immigration, document translation for Centrelink, family law and family violence-related criminal matters, medical costs, facilitating reengagement of employment, English classes and in some cases repatriation flights.

This financial support is crucial to victim-survivors on temporary visas obtaining permanent residency faster and therefore allowing them to move into more secure housing. This then frees up spaces for other victim-survivors to move into the refuge – reducing wait times and the burden on an overwhelmed system.

Victoria has 36 specialist family violence refuges, whereas NSW will have 138, including the upcoming Core and Cluster refuges due to open by 2026. We are therefore recommending that the NSW government allocate \$3.45 million over two years to support women’s refuges, specifically to support women and children on temporary visas.

Recommendation 1

Provide \$3.45 million over two years for a pilot program for all funded women’s refuges across NSW to allow women on temporary visas access to essential support and by doing so, offset the cost of allocating beds to women on temporary visas.

Increasing specialist support

Strengthening the domestic and family violence sector’s ability to respond to the specific needs of migrant and refugee victim-survivors is essential. This requires investment in both the diversity of the workforce and the uplifting of capabilities for culturally responsive practice. Bilingual and bicultural DFV practitioners with expertise in responding to the cultural dynamics and structural systems that impact migrants and refugees, are essential for building client trust and engagement with services.

Given the diversity of the NSW population, ensuring quality, safety and equity requires the DFV workforce to be equipped to respond to the unique needs of migrant and refugee women and children. These needs are shaped by culture, language and migration experiences. This includes skills in culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice, as well as adequate resources to support practitioners responding to the complexities of migrant and refugee women’s experiences. Equitable access irrespective of migration status is crucial from a human rights lens.

Specialist DFV and migrant and refugee workforce

Funding workers in both mainstream women’s refuges and migrant and refugee support services will ensure that migrant and refugee victim-survivors receive specialist domestic and family violence support, tailored to their cultural, social, language, and faith needs in both crisis and early intervention stages.

Victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds may feel more comfortable accessing support services that are equipped to understand and respond to their cultural, language and religious needs. Local migrant and refugee services often act as a soft entry point for women in the local community to disclose experiences of DFV. Providing funding for specialist DFV workers in migrant and refugee support services will support victim-survivors to receive an appropriate DFV-informed response within the context of their cultural, social and religious background.

In addition, funding refuges to ensure that victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds receive a culturally and religiously appropriate response will assist in addressing the barriers mainstream organisations face in assisting diverse community groups.

Recommendation 2

Commit \$12 million over two years for a pilot program to provide victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds with increased access to culturally and religiously responsive support:

- a. \$6 million for specialist migrant and refugee workers to support migrant and refugee women in 20 refuges across NSW, based on need.**
- b. \$6 million for specialist DFV workers in 20 migrant and refugee support services across NSW, based on need.**

The pilot costings are inclusive of salaries and ongoing operational costs, including travel and interpreter fees. The cost per worker over two years, including overheads, is \$300,000.

Case study

This case study, provided by the Women and Girls Emergency Centre (WAGEC), illustrates the importance of access to migration lawyers for women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence. It also demonstrates the role of women's refuges in offering safety, case management, financial support, material assistance, access to health services and legal support for women on temporary visas. All names have been changed for privacy.

Fatima came to Australia on a temporary visa, found a room in a share house and was building a good network of friends. Fatima met Josh, they had a whirlwind romance and Fatima thought she had met the one. Things started to change soon after, Josh started to criticise her friends, saying they were jealous of their love and encouraging Fatima to spend less time with them and more with him. Josh started to make comments about what Fatima was wearing and began choosing her outfits to wear.

Within two months of meeting Josh, Fatima was pregnant. Josh asked Fatima to stop working, stating he would look after her. Josh started to physically assault Fatima during her pregnancy, and she became increasingly isolated and scared. Josh threatened Fatima that if she went to the police, he would get her deported.

At seven months pregnant Josh strangled Fatima, and she was scared he would harm her baby, so she left the relationship. Fatima came to the Women and Girls Emergency Centre (WAGEC) for support. Fatima was on a temporary visa but did not know which one, as Josh had taken her passport and immigration information. Fatima had no access to money and was ineligible for income support through Centrelink. WAGEC welcomed Fatima into one of their women's refuges.

WAGEC provided Fatima with accommodation, food, toiletries and clothing and ongoing support. WAGEC assisted Fatima to access immigration legal advice and supported her to apply for a bridging visa while her application for a protection visa was being reviewed. The bridging visa did not allow Fatima rights or any access to financial support.

During her stay in the women's refuge, Fatima gave birth to a little boy she named Mohammad. WAGEC paid for Fatima's pre- and post-natal medical care, and with the support of donations, provided Fatima with all she needed to look after her newborn baby.

Fatima's protection visa took 18 months to be reviewed and granted. During that time Mohammad went from a tiny baby to an energetic, thriving toddler. Once Fatima had her visa granted, WAGEC was able to support her into a transitional housing property, she was able to find day care for Mohammad and employment – providing her and Mohammad independence and autonomy.

Specialist migration-related legal support

Women on temporary visas face significant barriers due to their immigration status, which impacts their ability to leave a violent relationship. Their visa status limits access to critical supports, such as social security, housing and healthcare, and is often used by perpetrators to control them. Women on temporary visas often report immigration-related abuse, including threats to cancel their visa, deport them, or separate them from their children who may be Australian citizens. In many instances, perpetrators also withhold information regarding a victim-survivors visa status, control communication relating to pending visa applications, and retain crucial documents like passports.

There is a significant shortage of free legal immigration services, particularly for women on temporary visas. The Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (IARC) is one of the few services providing free legal advice and representation for women on temporary visas. While IARC prioritises temporary visa holders experiencing family violence, lengthy wait times are common due to limited resources.

We recommend funding a two-year pilot project to fund 12 additional migration lawyers and two support staff within existing free specialist family violence immigration services, like IARC. These services have expertise in navigating the complex intersection between immigration and family violence. This pilot would leverage the expertise of these services to address the significant unmet need across NSW.

Increasing access to free specialist migration legal services would ensure that women on temporary visas can make informed decisions about their safety and remove the barriers to leaving violent relationships. This would enable faster access to permanent visas, access to more housing pathways, and a greater likelihood of securing employment and financial stability. It would also reduce the length of time that victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds stay in refuges, easing the strain on services.

Recommendation 3

Commit \$5.1 million over two years for a pilot program to fund 12 additional migration lawyers and two support staff within existing specialist family violence migration services, to provide migration-related legal support for women on temporary visas.

This costing is based on salary and ongoing operational costs. The cost per worker, over two years and including overheads, is \$364,000.

Translator and interpreter reform

Roundtable participants identified a significant lack of quality interpreters available for victim-survivors. Furthermore, the DVNSW Migrant and Refugee Advisory Committee identified the lack of interpreters to be a systemic issue, due to the poor working conditions interpreters are under. The minimum paid shift for a face-to-face interpreter is only one hour (previously reduced from three) and they are often required to travel long distances. Many interpreters find alternative work as the employment conditions are poor and the pay is very low. There are minimal protections for interpreters, and they can be exposed to verbal abuse on the job.

One member of the DVNSW Migrant and Refugee Advisory Committee, who also works as an interpreter, said that she was regularly disrespected and spoken down to on the job, and said that employment conditions take advantage of new arrivals in Australia who are unaware of their work rights.

The 2020 research project, Foundations Housing Project, found that across 25 Sydney-based refuges, only 42% offered bi-cultural support, including the use of the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) and 10 services (40%) had staff who speak other languages.

Victim-survivors from non-English speaking backgrounds need access to quality interpreters who are appropriately trained to work with people experiencing DFV. This will improve interpreter quality and reduce instances of interpreters attempting to give victim-survivors advice, making inappropriate comments, or breaching victim-survivor confidentiality.

Recommendation 4

Invest in the reform of translator and interpreter services to improve access to quality interpreters for victim-survivors:

- a. Provide fairer employment conditions for interpreters and translators including increasing minimum shifts and pay rates.**
- b. Increase availability of quality interpreter services and access for victim-survivors.**
- c. Provide incentives for free DFV training for interpreters and translators.**

Increasing housing stock and eligibility

A lack of exit pathways from refuges forces women on temporary visas to remain in crisis accommodation for extended periods, further straining an already overburdened system. Roundtable participants highlighted the lack of medium to long-term exit pathways from refuges, particularly for women on temporary visas, creating a bottleneck in the system.

Survey findings echoed this issue. The average stay for a woman on a temporary visa in a refuge was over 12 months, with nearly 60% of women staying longer than six months, and some remaining for up to four years, or until they could secure permanent residency. Over half were exited into transitional accommodation (57%), while less than half moved into private rental accommodation (43%). Women on temporary visas are ineligible for social or affordable housing, or subsidised private rental and were therefore not exited into these types of accommodation.

Services report being under pressure to move victim-survivors out of refuge accommodation within a three-month timeframe set by DCJ. However, as the survey data reveals, this is not achievable for women on temporary visas due to limited exit pathways resulting from ineligibility for social support payments, exclusion from the broader housing system, and limited or no income.

The three-month support period forces services to turn away women on temporary visas and prioritise other clients, effectively marginalising women on temporary visas and leaving them without access to essential safety and support. This is a human rights violation. The current model, designed to ensure swift transitions out of refuge accommodation, does not account for the unique circumstances of women on temporary visas and needs to be reconsidered to address their prolonged need for support.

To support long-term stability and independence for victim-survivors on temporary visas, it is essential to create pathways to medium and long-term safe and affordable housing options. Providing these opportunities will empower women on temporary visas to transition from

crisis accommodation into secure housing more quickly, rather than remain in limbo for extended periods or until they obtain a permanent visa. Increased access to social and affordable housing will also alleviate the bottle neck in refuges caused by the lack of exit pathways.

A quote from the DVNSW Roundtable highlights the need for housing solutions for women on temporary visas:

“Solutions forward must integrate into the broader women’s safety system, particularly the SHS System. This includes not only crisis accommodation but also future transitional housing and long-term exit pathways to ensure an effective outcome.”

Women on temporary visas must also have access to temporary accommodation. While it’s only a stopgap solution, temporary accommodation is an important feature of the homelessness service system for women experiencing DFV who cannot immediately secure a vacancy in a crisis refuge.

In lieu of extending eligibility for victim-survivors on temporary visas to the broader housing and homelessness system, at a minimum, the NSW government should extend eligibility to parents on temporary visas, who have children that are Australian citizens.

A direct quote from the DVNSW Roundtable highlights the need for housing pathways for children of temporary visa holders who hold Australian residency or citizenship:

“Children who are Australian citizens should be given housing rights even if their parents are on temporary visas.”

Recommendation 5

Extend eligibility for women on temporary visas to the NSW housing and homelessness service system, including access to social and affordable housing and temporary accommodation.

The lack of transitional properties in NSW is another contributing factor to the bottle neck in refuges, with women on temporary visas heavily reliant on transitional properties as an exit pathway. The Homes NSW portfolio includes only 1,500 transitional properties across the state, most of which are reserved for women and children experiencing DFV. However, they become available so rarely, due to long stay lengths, typically two to three years.

As women on temporary visas are ineligible for housing support through the broader Homes NSW system, more than half of survey respondents reported that women on temporary visas were exited into transitional properties (57%).

A direct quote from the DVNSW Roundtable highlights the critical need for funding:

“If our Community Housing Provider rejects them [a woman on a temporary visa] for transitional [accommodation], there are no other options for permanent housing.”

Transitional properties tend to be managed by Community Housing Providers rather than Homes NSW, therefore this is the only type of medium to long-term accommodation outside the private rental market that women on temporary visas may be eligible for once they leave refuge. Increasing the availability of transitional properties is another mechanism to expand exit pathways out of refuges.

The NSW government have indicated plans to redevelop appropriate properties for meanwhile use transitional housing for women experiencing DFV. To further increase supply of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors, the NSW government should offer more incentives to private developers to fast-track the availability of meanwhile use accommodation.

44% of refugees surveyed were located in regional and remote parts of NSW including the Central West, Far West, Hunter, Mid-North Coast, Murrumbidgee, North-Western and South-Eastern NSW.

Focusing on the availability of properties in regional and rural areas, particularly where the new Core and Cluster refuges are being built, will help create exit pathways where they are most needed.

Recommendation 6

Increase the availability of transitional housing properties for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, including women on temporary visas, by providing incentives to private developers to fast-track the availability of meanwhile use properties.

Improving data collection and reporting

The lack of comprehensive, reliable data significantly hampers efforts to understand the full extent of the challenges faced by women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence.

Roundtable participants highlighted limitations in reporting systems, particularly the Client Information Management System (CIMS) where all data is recorded for DCJ. Because women on temporary visas aren't included in DCJ targets, it is not possible to provide accurate data on the number of women requiring support or the cost involved. This represents a systemic failure in measuring the demand for services prevents the appropriate allocation of funding.

The problem is further compounded by discrepancies between data from service providers and official government reports. For example, crisis accommodation providers report a much higher number of women on temporary visas using their services than what is reflected in government data. An underestimate of need hampers advocacy for increased funding and policy reform to better support women on temporary visas.

The current data management system used by DCJ-funded refuges does not capture data on women on temporary visas accurately, creating a gap in measuring service demand and justifying funding allocation. Upgrading the existing Client Information Management System (CIMS) and standardised reporting protocols is crucial to accurately tracking data on women on temporary visas. The existing reporting system does not reflect the additional costs associated with supporting women on temporary visas, nor does it capture the number of women on temporary visas turned away from services.

A direct quote from the DVNSW Roundtable highlights the critical need for tracking turn away rates:

“Tracking turn away data is also crucial, particularly given the capacity constraints that exist in a system with limited funding.”

Unfunded refugees supporting women on temporary visas must also be included in data collection to accurately reflect the need. In our survey conducted in late 2024, 23% of respondents were unfunded by DCJ and another 8 per cent only received partial funding.

DCJ's outcome-based targets require adjustment to better reflect the realities faced by victim-survivors on temporary visas. Outcomes that prioritise a three-month support period and quick transitions out of crisis accommodation are not feasible for women on temporary visas. Shifting the focus to outcomes-based measures – such as access to stable housing, employment, or social support - would be a better way to evaluate the success of service provision.

Exceptions should be made within the targets for women on temporary visas, allowing longer stays in recognition of the additional barriers to accessing social support, employment, and housing. A more flexible approach could focus on individual progress and the complexity of each case rather than a rigid time limit.

Recommendation 7

Improve data collection for women on temporary visas in NSW refuges to better understand the need, length of stay, outcomes, cost and turn away rates:

- Include women on temporary visas in Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) reporting and targets for all refuges.**
- Introduce outcome-based reporting and exemptions for women on temporary visas to reflect the realities faced by victim-survivors.**

Investing in prevention initiatives

Over the last decade, the NSW government has centred its activity and investment on crisis responses, supporting victim-survivors to safety and strengthening law enforcement activities. These efforts are crucial and continue to be an important part of our response as reports of DFV increase across the state and demand for services continues to rise.

We are now at a pivotal point in time where we must expand our focus to a coordinated, whole-of government service system to stop the violence before it starts. This requires a service system that actively works to reduce the root causes of DFV.

The NSW government launched the first ever standalone prevention strategy, NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024–2028 in 2024. People from migrant and refugee backgrounds are recognised in the Strategy as being at greater risk of DFV than the broader population in NSW. Therefore tailored prevention initiatives are required that recognise the diverse cultural, social, religious and economic backgrounds of place-based communities.

The NSW government must provide funding for co-designed, place and-faith-based prevention initiatives in migrant and refugee communities. For example, Saving FACE is an initiative undertaken by Muslim Women Australia (MWA) to develop and deliver key prevention activities to encourage men in preventing violence against women and children. It is centred on the premise that prevention activities must be rooted in faith-based principles to make a sustainable change in faith-based communities. The program seeks to raise awareness of DFV, build capacity to increase responses and pilot appropriate community programs. Existing prevention initiatives, including Muslim Women Australia’s Saving Face Sector Guide (MWA, 2023) should be evaluated and receive ongoing funding.

Recommendation 8

Provide funding for co-designed place-based and faith-based, culturally appropriate prevention initiatives in migrant and refugee communities to ensure the success of the NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024–2028.

Conclusion

Women on temporary visas in NSW are at an increased risk of experiencing domestic and family violence compared with the general population (Segrave et. al. 2021). They face unique barriers to accessing support due to ineligibility for most Commonwealth and state-based support, requiring women’s refuges to absorb the cost. As a result, women’s refuges often have to make difficult decisions about which victim-survivors they can support, and women on temporary visas are often unable to secure a place in refuge. When refuges accept women on temporary visas, they tend to stay for extended periods due to ineligibility for the NSW Housing System and a lack of exit pathways. They also require high levels of support to address due complex legal, cultural and language needs related to migration status.

Funding refuges to meet the complex needs of women on temporary visas would alleviate some of the financial pressure and enable them to obtain permanent residency faster. This would allow them to move out of refuge into more secure housing, freeing up space for others in need.

Investment in the specialist workforce in refuges, migrant and refugee services, translator and interpreter services, and migration-related legal support would ensure that migrant and refugee victim-survivors receive specialist domestic and family violence support, and legal support, tailored to their migration, cultural, social and language needs.

Providing access to the NSW Housing and Homelessness System for women on temporary visas and increasing the availability of transitional housing would allow women on temporary visas the opportunity to move into long-term accommodation and alleviate the bottle neck in refuges caused by the lack of exit pathways.

Improving data collection for women on temporary visas in NSW refuges will help us better understand the service demand, length of stay, outcomes, cost and turn away rates and would justify funding allocation and in turn improve service delivery and outcomes for these women.

Investment in targeted prevention and awareness programs in migrant and refugee communities will, in the long run, reduce the instance of domestic and family violence.

References and Appendices

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Terminology

Domestic violence

Interpersonal violence or abuse perpetrated by an intimate partner or ex-partner. Domestic violence can include a variety of forms of abuse including but not limited to, physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse, physical stalking, and intimidation. Domestic violence is gendered and is most commonly underpinned by coercive control, which is a pattern of behaviour utilising many different tactics to create a web of entrapment, often involving the exploitation of power imbalances.

Family violence

Violence perpetrated by a family member, carer, guardian, child, or kinship carer. Family violence can include a variety of forms of abuse including but not limited to, physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse, physical stalking, and intimidation. Family violence is gendered and is most commonly underpinned by coercive control, which is a pattern of behaviour utilising many different tactics to create a web of entrapment, often involving the exploitation of power imbalances.

People with lived expertise

People with lived expertise are people who have experience of sexual, domestic and/or family violence whose expertise as context experts due to their lived experience is noted.

Specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector

The specialist sexual, domestic, and family violence sector includes crisis and refuge services, transitional accommodation and community housing providers, family support services, Aboriginal controlled organisations, specialist multicultural community organisations, specialist LGBTIQ+ organisations, counselling services, sexual violence services, specialist homelessness service providers, men's behaviour change programs and networks, community organisations working with high-risk communities, specialist women's legal and support services, women's health centres, women and children's support services, Safe at Home programs and the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services.

Victim-survivor

Victim-survivor refers to a person who is being or has experienced violence, acknowledging that people who have been victimised are survivors and are also victims of crime. We acknowledge that people who have been victimised are survivors and are also victims of crime. This is not intended as an identity term. In the specialist domestic and family violence sector, the preferred term is victim-survivor.

Appendix 2 - Survey methodology

DVNSW surveyed its members, inviting refugees to provide data on women on temporary visas accessing their services. The 13-question survey, which included both open-ended and multiple-choice questions, was open from 22 October to 8 November 2024.

The survey aimed to gain insights regarding the experiences of women on temporary visas in women's refuges across NSW, as reliable data on this cohort is unavailable. The survey sought to understand the number of women and children on temporary visas accessing crisis accommodation in NSW, their locations, length of stay, time spent supporting this client cohort and associated costs, and exit pathways.

The survey was distributed via email to DVNSW members, receiving 46 responses. This is a high response rate, especially considering not all refuges accommodate women on temporary visas due to lack of government funding and lack of exit pathways.

Data from 20 responses was removed before analysis due to contradictory answers or because the service was either not providing support to women on temporary visas or was not a refuge provider. This highlights the difficulty services face in accessing the data relating to this group and underscores the broader issue: data on women on temporary visas is not readily available or understood.

Data analysis was conducted through univariate analysis.

Appendix 3 - Survey questions

General Information

- Is your service funded by DCJ
 - Yes
 - No
 - Other (please specify)
- If you are completing this survey for multiple refuges, how many refuges are you providing data for? *(open-ended response)*
- Where is your service/s located geographically? *(Select all that apply)*
 - Metro Sydney
 - Central West
 - Far West
 - Hunter
 - Illawarra
 - Mid-North Coast

- Murray
- Murrumbidgee
- North-Western
- Northern
- Richmond Tweed
- South-Eastern

Service Statistics

- How many women on temporary visas did you accommodate in your service/s? *(open-ended response)*
- How many accompanying children did you accommodate in your service/s? *(open-ended response)*
- Were any of the children citizens or permanent residents?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- If yes, how many? *(open-ended response)*

Cost and Resource Allocation

- What were the total costs for the reporting period to support women on temporary visas (and their dependent children)? Include any allowance given, medical, food, clothing, transport, etc. You can provide an estimate here if you don't have exact costs. *(open-ended response)*
- What was the time spent on average to support each woman on temporary visa (including dependent children) in case management hours? This can be an estimate. *(open-ended response)*
- What was the time spent on average to support women (including dependent children) with permanent residency/citizenship in case management hours? Again, this can be an estimate. *(open-ended response)*

Length of Stay

- On average, what is the length of stay for a woman on a temporary visa in your service? *(open-ended response)*
- On average, what is the length of stay for a woman with permanent residency/citizenship in your service? *(open-ended response)*

Exit Pathways from Refuge

- What kind of housing have women on temporary visas been exited from your service?
 - Transitional Housing
 - Community Housing
 - Affordable Housing
 - Private rental market
 - Subsidised private rental
 - Other (please specify)



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