

The logo for inTouch, featuring the word 'inTouch' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. The 'i' and 'n' are connected, and the 'o' is a solid circle. The background is a teal color with a graphic of colorful, flowing fabric in shades of red, orange, and blue on the right side.

Multicultural Centre
Against Family Violence

Reflecting on the Fourth National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children - Michal Morris, inTouch CEO

The Fourth National Action Plan (the 4NAP) was released by the Commonwealth Government in August 2019. This is the final part of the **National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022**. As recently reported in a range of mainstream news sources, despite the government nearing the end of its national plan, the rates of family violence continue to remain high in Australia.

There has been tremendous progress in our service response to family violence, particularly in Victoria since the Royal Commission in 2016. Change is happening but we still have a long way to go. Migrant and refugee women are still highly disadvantaged even though almost 30% of the Australian population was born overseas, and almost half of the Victorian population or has at least one parent born overseas. We need to ensure we are inclusive and include a diversity of accents and experiences into our policy responses and service systems.

At inTouch we understand the complexities and barriers women from refugee and migrant backgrounds face when experiencing family violence. We listen to their stories and use this knowledge to develop policy, write submissions to government, create curriculum for training for other services and work with communities on prevention and education activities. This is the way forward.

The **4NAP** outlines a range of objectives and whilst I commend the government's commitment there are a number of critical areas that policy makers must take into account.

1. Government policy needs to be intersectional. That is, adopting an intersectional framework will not only help us to better understand the systemic barriers experienced by women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, but it will also equip the service sector with better skills and ability to identify and deal with varying client needs.

Our governments needs to acknowledge the systemic barriers that many of these women in our community face. For example, visa status determines eligibility and access to work and to services including housing support, the public health system, and welfare. Migration laws and systems can be difficult to navigate with even some of the eligibility requirements to access the family violence provisions, such as proof of a genuine relationship, being additionally difficult to fulfil for women who have experienced family violence. Similarly, the family law and courts processes can be daunting and difficult to navigate for most community members, let alone people with less knowledge and exposure to Australia's legal systems.

2. Better language services need to be offered to migrant and refugee women and children who are experiencing family violence. Increasing access to interpreters, building the capacity of interpreters who work in family violence services, and building the resources and capacity of the services sector to become more culturally sensitive and responsive, are strategies that would reduce barriers.
3. The voices of victim-survivors from migrant and refugee communities need to be actively engaged by the government to address the issues that are most pertinent to their communities. Understanding the issues victim-survivors face must be led by victim-survivors themselves as they will contribute a unique understanding of how we, as a service system, develop and adapt programs and services.
4. There are a number of organisations across Australia that must be part of the creation of family violence responses – from prevention, to crisis management and recovery. These services, along with national advocacy groups and networks, spend time with diverse communities and through collaboration will ensure our services are the most responsive and inclusive as possible.

Whilst the 4NAP outlines a number of positive objectives, there is still a lot of work required to implement its intent into government policy, practice and funding programs. If this is done collaboratively and an effort is made to bring in the voices and experiences of women from refugee and migrant communities, there is the capacity for truly effective change to be made.

You can read a more detailed account of inTouch's response to the 4NAP [here](#).