



Embed Migrant and Refugee Voices and Experiences into the National Response to Family Violence

Policy Paper – March 2022

Introduction

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds who have experienced family violence face a multitude of obstacles to accessing support and safety, from language barriers and culturally safe services to receiving financial support to move on from the violence. Men from these same communities who have used violence, also don't engage effectively with the justice and service systems. This is because currently our systems are not tailored inclusively and effectively enough for migrant and refugee communities.

Over the past few years, Federal and State Governments have responded to the far-reaching impacts of family violence in our community and confirmed their ongoing commitment to response and prevention. In Victoria, this has included a ten-year reform process that commenced with the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. This year, the Federal Government will release the Second National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, as well as the first action plan.

For this to be effective it must be inclusive of all communities within Australia. The unique experiences of migrant and refugee women – including those on temporary visas - and their communities must be explicitly included, including the provision of dedicated funding.

Based on our extensive experience as the leading family violence response service for migrant and refugee women, inTouch has identified eleven key areas of concern that must be addressed to reduce barriers and improve outcomes for migrant and refugee women across the continuum of family violence, as well as the perpetrators of this violence.

About inTouch

inTouch brings to the table four decades of experience. We provide culturally informed early intervention, case management, perpetrator programs, legal advice and support, crisis recovery and enhanced capacity-building across the sector and community. We are proud to provide high-level leadership and guidance to all levels of government with our evidence-based, victim-survivor informed advocacy and policy work. We draw upon the specialist expertise of our workforce as well as NOOR, our group of former clients of our service.

We are a unique and vital service, with specialist expertise working with people of migrant and refugee backgrounds. This is reflected in our workforce, which is comprised primarily of people who are migrants and refugees themselves – the inTouch team is from over 20 different countries and communities globally.

Our Recommendations

Learn from those who have suffered and survived

- Establish a national consultative body to include the lived experience and views of victim-survivors from migrant, refugee, and temporary visa holder backgrounds in the development of family violence prevention and response policies and plans.

The voices and opinions of migrant and refugee women in Australia must be included in the consultative process to ensure that their unique experiences, structural barriers and how they navigate the system are included within policy and program design. While family violence affects one in five women in Australia, the way that it can manifest when the layers of culture, language and settlement are taken into account can be different. Being a migrant, refugee or temporary visa holder will impact the way in which they experience family violence, how they receive support, and how they move on from that experience.

It is crucial that the policy and programmatic responses to family violence are led and guided by a diverse, broad range of those with lived experience.

Give temporary visa holders the chance to live freely, safely and the opportunity to contribute to Australian society

- Establish a new visa for those who have experienced family violence in Australia. This temporary visa will allow women who are in legitimate relationships and experiencing family violence access to Medicare, social security and housing services in Australia while they engage in crisis recovery.

Women on temporary visas who experience family violence in Australia have limited access to support services and therefore safety.

inTouch believes that the establishment of a three-year visa that includes working rights will allow these women economic independence and an opportunity to give back to Australia. The visa would provide access to Medicare, social services, school education for children would enable women to receive the support they need to make safe and secure long-term arrangements for themselves and their children – including a pathway to permanent visas.

Engage with and confront men who use violence, with their peers in their own languages

- Establish and sustainably fund culturally responsive case management and group work models, such as the Motivation for Change program, to perpetrator interventions nationally.

Working with men who use violence is a crucial part of stopping violence where it starts. We must speak directly with men who use violence and speak to them in a language that they understand. They have to be engaged with people they respect, with similar backgrounds and experiences. Tailored programming that acknowledges a person's culture and uses their language as the basis for challenging attitudes and behaviour has proven to be extremely successful.

inTouch's Motivation for Change embeds these key elements within its program. Based on our successful inLanguage, inCulture model for victim-survivors, it is the first of its kind- specifically tailored to men who use violence and are from culturally and linguistically communities.

Motivation for Change has a minimum 90 percent completion rate, which can be attributed to the program's nuanced unpacking of cultural beliefs and practices. In addition, the behaviours and attitudes of participants are directly challenged and informed by men from their own cultures and communities.

Engage the goodwill and knowledge of community leaders

- Develop and fund a national education, prevention, and early intervention pilot program to be led by culturally diverse women in collaboration with community, cultural and faith leaders. Then, using the evidence base, expand the program, to communities across Australia.

Community and faith leaders play a powerful role in the prevention, early intervention and response to family violence in their communities. Enabling ethnic and multicultural community groups and leaders the responsibility to shape education on how to best recognise and respond to family violence in their communities is a critical missing piece in prevention and early intervention responses.

Programs to engage cultural and faith leaders in prevention activities should be funded. Such a program must be bespoke and led by culturally diverse women in collaboration with community, cultural and faith leaders. These must also be supported by agencies that have expertise in the prevention, early intervention and response of family violence.

Clear pathways to make help more accessible

- Develop formal and consistent referral and information pathways between settlement services, ethno-specific agencies, and family violence services

Settlement services and ethno-specific organisations play critical roles in how migrants and refugees experience and settle into Australia and navigate the services. They tend to be the first service many women turn to for help, they are an important part of the service system and can support women learn what family violence is and how to seek help.

Formalising the role and referral pathways between settlement and ethno-specific agencies with the specialist family violence sector would ensure more timely support for migrant and refugee communities.

Working with family violence services to ensure culturally safe practice

- Expand how specialist family violence services deliver culturally safe services, including embedding a deep and complex understanding of client's culture, language and faith by:
 - Funding more dedicated services, like inTouch, across the country;
 - Employing more bi-lingual, bi-cultural case managers within services; and
 - Educating and training generalist family violence services to deliver culturally responsive services.

We need to engage and learn from migrant and refugee communities as to how best to work with them. Culturally responsive service provision, such as bilingual family violence service practitioners, can be an excellent tool to support women who have experienced family violence and forms of sexual abuse and violence. Having workers that can understand the impacts of migration and nuances of culture, gender norms, dowry, or the relationships between extended family members, can empower clients to be better understood and supported.

Culturally responsive practice is also incredibly effective when working with men who use violence.

Embedding culturally responsive practice into the specialist family violence sector, and resourcing and expanding existing culturally responsive services such as inTouch, will help to support more victim-survivors of family violence and engage more men who use violence from migrant and refugee communities.

Additional funding for interpreters

- Increase the resourcing of qualified and appropriate interpreters to ensure that all victim-survivors of family violence can access interpreters that are trauma-informed, confidential and non-judgemental, for free, at every point in their family violence recovery journey. Also, provide training to workers within the justice and family violence service systems to effectively work with interpreters.

It is crucial that the family violence and justice systems are demystified for migrant and refugee communities by ensuring that accurate and effective information is available in their language, and that there are trained, skilled and appropriate interpreters available for them at every point in which they engage with the system.

Without this, women are reluctant to discuss aspects of the violence or their situation with services. The impact of this can be long term and detrimental – impacting on legal cases, child protection, identification of the primary aggressor and natural justice.

Improved data collection and monitoring

- Develop and implement nationally consistent risk assessment and data collection tools that includes visa status, language, culture, identity and community markers of those experiencing family violence.

To be able to develop strategic and effective responses to family violence across communities, it is critical that we understand how the service system is being utilised. For this we need nationally consistent data collection tools that collect information on visa status, language, culture, identity and community markers. These tools will also ensure that our understandings of risk and safety are consistent. Furthermore, data is a tool for evaluation and continuous improvement of programs and policies.

More legal support for victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds

- Significantly increase funding to community legal services to provide free expert advice to victim-survivors on complex intersecting legal issues of family violence, family law and migration law.
- Provide training for police, judges, and court staff to understand the various manifestations of family violence in diverse communities and families.

Many clients from migrant and refugee backgrounds who experience family violence experience multiple legal issues simultaneously. Free or affordable legal assistance is often very difficult to obtain, and the justice system can be incredibly daunting, particularly for those who have only recently arrived in Australia, who may not have social networks and supports, and who may be unsure of the systems and laws in Australia. This can make clients more vulnerable to victimisation from systems abuse, misidentification, and other adverse outcomes through the justice system, that have far-reaching consequences.

More resources and funding need to be allocated to community legal centres, to build the expertise on family violence, family law and migration law. The intersection of these legal issues can be extremely complicated to navigate for many victim-survivors of family violence.

Remembering the bush - including the experiences of people who live outside metropolitan cities

- Build the capacity of specialist family violence services in regional and rural areas to work with culturally responsive service providers to better engage and support clients from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Women who live in regional and rural areas are more likely to experience family violence than women in urban areas. Despite this, they face greater barriers to accessing support than those in urban areas. Policing, crisis response, refuges, housing and legal support are often limited.

These challenges are further exacerbated for women from migrant and refugee when they experience family violence. Lack of culturally appropriate and responsive services, social and geographic isolation, visa status, and language and systemic barriers can worsen the structural inequities that many women from migrant and refugee communities face when they seek assistance in regional and rural communities.

Fund recovery programs to support economic independence of victim-survivors of family violence

- Fund and expand recovery programs, such as inTouch's inSpire program, that enable victim-survivors to rebuild their lives and establish social and economic independence through networking and professional development opportunities.

For many migrant and refugee women who are trying to move on from their experiences of family violence, the post-crisis period is becoming one of the most difficult to navigate. They are no longer engaged with services and have no support to navigate employment, social connection and parenting. This is a significant gap in the services sector.

inTouch's inSpire program seeks to fill this gap. The aim of inSpire is to support ex-clients of inTouch to rebuild their lives by connecting with others and establishing social and economic independence. The inSpire program links participants with employment agencies to increase their skills and job-readiness, provides opportunities for training and professional development, as well as opportunities to connect with other women who have been through a similar experience.

inTouch sees profound potential in the expansion of such recovery programs, to help women to rebuild connections with community as well as social and professional networks- boosting confidence, resilience and independence.

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