

Submission to the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan and to bring greater attention to the intersection between **modern slavery**, including **forced marriage**, and family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV).

We make this submission as the Educating for Change consortium, which includes Flinders University, Adelaide University, and the NGO ACRATH. The consortium members are

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We are a group of researchers and service providers with longstanding expertise in modern slavery, human trafficking, forced marriage, coercive control and violence against women and children. Collectively, members of our team have researched these issues for many decades and have worked closely with governments, frontline services, victim-survivors and community organisations across Australia.

Our experience demonstrates that modern slavery should not be considered a separate policy issue from FDSV. Rather, many forms of modern slavery, including forced marriage, domestic servitude, sexual servitude, debt bondage, forced labour and exit trafficking, are deeply embedded within patterns of coercive control and family violence. Yet these issues remain largely absent from mainstream FDSV responses.

A recurring concern arising from our research and engagement with frontline practitioners is the widespread **lack of awareness of what constitutes modern slavery, how it manifests within family and domestic violence contexts, and the specialist pathways available to support victim-survivors** (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2026; Lyneham & Bricknell, 2018). Anecdotally, practitioners who have transitioned from domestic and family violence and migration services into specialist modern slavery services have consistently reported that many victim-survivors they previously supported had initially been identified solely as experiencing FDSV, when the indicators suggested they were in fact victims of modern slavery offences.

For this reason, we encourage the Second Action Plan to explicitly integrate modern slavery into prevention, early intervention, response and workforce development across the FDSV system.

We also strongly encourage to take an open stand regarding the DFV Paid Leave Entitlement [*Fair Work Amendment (Paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave) Act 2022 (Cth)*] in regard to its application to victims of forced marriage and/or modern slavery. Not many service providers specialised in modern slavery are aware that it is plausible for a victim-survivor of a forced marriage or modern slavery to access such entitlement.

Drawing on our evidence and experiences, we address them through the lens of the proposed five priority areas for consultation.

1. Victim-survivors of violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence

Victim-survivors experiencing modern slavery, which is in many cases a gendered-based crime, often encounter the same barriers faced by those experiencing family violence, compounded by migration vulnerabilities, visa insecurity, economic dependence, family and cultural pressure, and/or fear of authorities (Lyneham et al. 2019; Safe and Equal, 2021).

Our research has identified examples involving forced labour within family businesses, exit trafficking, forced marriage and domestic servitude that are frequently misunderstood as conventional family violence matters, resulting in delayed identification and missed opportunities for specialist intervention.

International students and temporary migrants are particularly vulnerable to modern slavery (Chazal & Raby, 2024). Many are unaware of their workplace rights, fear immigration consequences, distrust authorities or believe Australian laws do not protect them (Chazal & Raby, 2024; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2026). These barriers significantly reduce help-seeking and increase vulnerability to exploitation.

The Second Action Plan should explicitly recognise modern slavery as an overlapping form of gender-based violence requiring integrated responses between FDSV and specialist modern slavery services.

2. Prevention and early intervention

Effective prevention depends upon recognising modern slavery as part of the continuum of gender-based violence (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2025).

Awareness campaigns and early intervention strategies should include information about forced marriage, domestic servitude, forced labour, debt bondage and exit trafficking alongside other recognised forms of family and domestic violence.

Embedding modern slavery awareness within schools, workplaces, universities, community organisations and frontline services would strengthen early identification before exploitation escalates and improve referral pathways for victim-survivors (Australian Government, n.d.).

The Second Action Plan should explicitly recognise modern slavery training as mandatory for all frontline respondents across sectors (Health, Social Work, Law and Criminal Justice, Education at the very least).

3. Children and young people in their own right

In Australia girls and young women are the predominant victim-survivors of forced marriage (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2023). The relationship between arranged marriage and forced marriage continues to be understood and legislated as a binary distinction, when in practice it exists along a continuum of consent, coercion and exploitation.

Policy, legislation and practitioner training should better reflect this continuum, recognising the gradual escalation of coercive control that can transform an ostensibly arranged marriage into a forced marriage or other forms of modern slavery.

Improving understanding of this continuum is essential to strengthening early intervention, protecting children and young people, and ensuring appropriate responses before exploitation becomes entrenched.

4. People who use violence

Many forms of modern slavery involve perpetrators exercising prolonged coercive control within family or intimate relationships (Safe and Equal, 2021).

Responses should be aimed mostly at preventing violence by raising awareness across all multicultural communities – rather than solely on increasing perpetrator accountability. Research indicates that many, from community and religious leaders to general people in multicultural communities do not even know what forced marriage is and how it may present, including as a continuum from an arranged marriage (Marmo et al., 2026).

Responses therefore should recognise that coercive control may also underpin offences such as forced marriage, domestic servitude, sexual servitude, exit trafficking, among other forms of modern slavery. Recognising these overlapping dynamics would strengthen justice responses while improving victim-survivor safety and earlier intervention.

5. System integration and workforce

A significant gap remains in workforce capability across the FDSV sector regarding modern slavery.

Across legal, health, education, migration and social service sectors, many frontline practitioners remain unfamiliar with modern slavery offences, the indicators of exploitation and the specialist referral pathways available to victim-survivors.

As a consequence, cases involving forced marriage, domestic servitude, sexual servitude, debt bondage, forced labour and exit trafficking are frequently identified only as family violence matters, leaving important criminal offences and specialised support needs unrecognised.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Fund an ongoing, nationally coordinated community education and workforce capability strategy to improve understanding of modern slavery and its intersection with family, domestic and sexual violence. This strategy should support both specialist and universal services and include sustained public awareness initiatives rather than one-off projects.

Recommendation 2

Support the national uptake of free, evidence-based professional development programs, such as the free, on-demand, discipline-specific *Educating for Change* online modules (<https://acrath.org.au/resources/educating-for-change/>) or equivalent training, to equip frontline practitioners with the knowledge and skills to identify indicators of modern slavery, understand its relationship with family violence, and respond appropriately through specialist referral pathways.

Building workforce capability in this way would significantly strengthen Australia's ability to identify victim-survivors earlier, improve access to specialist support, and deliver more integrated responses across the FDSV and modern slavery sectors.

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