

## **Submission to the Consultation on the Second Action Plan under Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032**

### **Introduction**

Settlement Services International (SSI) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

SSI is a national not-for-profit organisation whose purpose is to help create a more inclusive society in which everyone can meaningfully contribute to social, cultural, civic and economic life. SSI has a dedicated Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Prevention and Response Group delivering specialist work across prevention, intervention, response, recovery and healing. Through specialist DFSV practice support, sector capacity building, community engagement, policy, advocacy and research, SSI works at the intersection of migration, settlement, culture and DFSV to improve safety outcomes for women, children and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

This submission draws on SSI's expertise and practice-based evidence gathered through specialist DFSV practice, community engagement, workforce capacity-building initiatives, policy and advocacy activities, lived experience consultations, and evidence outputs undertaken between 2023 and 2026. Collectively, this evidence highlights both the challenges and opportunities associated with preventing and responding to DFSV in multicultural communities.

Across our consultations, practice insights and sector engagement, a consistent theme emerged regarding the importance of culturally responsive, community-informed and place-based approaches that recognise the intersection of migration, settlement and DFSV. While significant progress has been made, migrant and refugee women, children and families continue to experience barriers to safety, support and healing that require targeted and systemic responses.

### **Barriers and System Gaps**

A consistent theme emerged regarding inequities in access, service experience and safety outcomes for migrant and refugee victim-survivors. These barriers often arise where systems are not designed to respond to the complexity of migration experiences, pre- and post-settlement journeys and structural disadvantage. Visa insecurity, language barriers, housing instability, financial abuse and limited access to culturally responsive services consistently emerged as barriers to safety, support and healing. These factors frequently intersect and compound one another, limiting pathways to safety and increasing vulnerability.

This was particularly evident through SSI's *Scoping the Gap project*<sup>1</sup> which developed evidence demonstrating significant unmet needs relating to migration support, legal assistance, counselling, housing and recovery supports. The findings also highlighted the extent to which multicultural and settlement organisations continue to provide substantial DFSV support beyond funded program parameters.

To inform this submission, we also undertook a dedicated consultation with members of the DFSV Lived Experience Advisory Group. Themes raised through this consultation strongly aligned with findings emerging from SSI's broader evidence base. Participants highlighted the burden of navigating siloed systems, repeatedly recounting experiences of violence and coordinating support across multiple services. Members emphasised the importance of strengthening integrated responses and operationalising a genuine "no wrong door" approach.

Members of the Lived Experience Advisory Group also highlighted the significant impact of financial abuse, legal abuse and systems abuse. They described situations in which housing, welfare, legal and migration systems were weaponised by perpetrators as part of broader patterns of coercive control, reinforcing the importance of strengthening recognition of these forms of abuse across all service systems.

### **Considerations for the Second Action Plan**

- Address structural barriers affecting migrant and refugee victim-survivors, including visa insecurity, ineligibility to access services, housing instability and access to culturally responsive support.
- Strengthen integrated service responses that reduce repeated storytelling and improve coordination across systems.
- Improve recognition and responses to financial abuse, legal abuse and systems abuse.
- Recognise and support the role of multicultural and settlement organisations as critical access points to safety and support.

### **Prevention and Early Intervention**

Evidence from our prevention and early intervention initiatives highlight the importance of trusted relationships in preventing violence and supporting early intervention. This was particularly evident through SSI's *Train, Engage, Connect and Support (TECS)* program<sup>2</sup>, which builds the capability of faith and community leaders to identify and respond to family,

---

<sup>1</sup> [Scoping the Gap: Research Report \(2026\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Train, Engage, Connect and Support \(TECS\) Program](#)

domestic and sexual violence (FDSV). National consultations with faith and community leaders undertaken through TECS highlighted the critical role leaders play as trusted points of disclosure and support within migrant and refugee communities. Participants consistently identified faith and community leaders as trusted individuals who are often approached before specialist services. Practice evidence also highlighted the importance of strengthening community capability and social responses to violence. Findings suggest there is significant opportunity to support community members, leaders and social responders with the knowledge, skills and referral pathways required to provide safe and informed responses and connect victim-survivors with specialist services. The success of SSI's social responder program, *Supporting U*<sup>3</sup>, further demonstrates the value of building community capability to recognise and respond to DFSV, support victim-survivors to access appropriate services, and increase awareness of the impacts of violence on women, children, families and communities.

Insights from our ongoing prevention project in Coffs Harbour, titled *Conversations for Prevention*<sup>4</sup>, with migrant and refugee communities in regional NSW, highlighted that prevention approaches cannot simply be translated and applied uniformly. Effective prevention requires meaningful engagement with communities and tailoring approaches to specific cultural, linguistic and settlement contexts. Service literacy also emerged as an important prevention and early intervention issue where participants frequently reported limited awareness of available supports, help-seeking pathways and opportunities for intervention. Findings suggest there are opportunities to strengthen prevention efforts by improving awareness of services and increasing confidence in help-seeking.

This was reinforced through SSI's consultation with our Lived Experience Advisory Group. Participants highlighted the importance of culturally responsive community education regarding coercive control, healthy relationships and the impacts of violence on children. Members emphasised that prevention initiatives should be tailored to specific communities and language groups and developed in partnership with communities themselves.

### **Considerations for the Second Action Plan**

- Invest in community-led and co-designed prevention initiatives.
- Support faith leaders, community leaders and social responders as part of the prevention and early intervention ecosystem.
- Improve service literacy and awareness of help-seeking pathways.

### **Children and Young People**

---

<sup>3</sup> [Supporting U Program](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Conversations for Prevention](#)

Prevention and early intervention efforts must also recognise the distinct experiences and support needs of children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds affected by DFSV. Members of SSI's Lived Experience Advisory Group highlighted the long-term impacts of violence on children's emotional wellbeing, identity, trust, relationships and sense of safety. Members consistently emphasised that children are often profoundly affected by violence but remain invisible within adult-focused service responses. Participants also identified significant gaps in responses for neurodiverse children experiencing DFSV and highlighted the need for trauma-informed counselling, individually tailored support and coordinated responses that recognise the complexity of children's experiences. Schools were identified as important places of stability, safety and early intervention for children experiencing violence at home.

### **Considerations for the Second Action Plan**

- Resource tailored programs focused on supporting children and young people experiencing DFSV, including therapeutic early interventions.
- Strengthen responses for neurodiverse children and young people affected by DFSV.

### **Systems Integration**

Practice evidence consistently demonstrates that culturally responsive practice requires organisational commitment, workforce investment and systems-level commitment. These findings informed the development of SSI's *Model of Culturally Responsive DFSV Practice*<sup>5</sup>, which recognises intersectionality, cultural humility, lived experience expertise, migration experiences and community partnership as central to effective DFSV responses.

Across SSI's DFSV capacity-building work, communities of practice have emerged as a valuable mechanism for strengthening collaboration and capability. They provide a structured forum for organisations to share knowledge, build relationships, identify emerging trends and collectively respond to complex challenges affecting migrant and refugee communities. This is demonstrated through the Safety in Settlement Community of Practice (SISCoP), which brings together 25 multicultural and settlement organisations across NSW to share practice insights, strengthen DFSV prevention and response capabilities and identify emerging issues. SISCoP members, particularly those in regional areas, have consistently highlighted the value of having a dedicated space for networking, peer learning, service awareness and building confidence and knowledge in responding to DFSV. Members also played a crucial role in contributing to the Scoping the Gap project, demonstrating the potential of communities of practice to generate evidence and inform system reform.

---

<sup>5</sup> [Model of Culturally Responsive DFSV Practice](#)

Through regional engagement, further challenges and opportunities have been identified in strengthening DFSV prevention and response efforts, particularly in relation to place-based responses and community-led prevention and early intervention approaches. This was particularly evident through SSI-convened *Ipswich Multicultural DFV Roundtable*<sup>6</sup>, convened by SSI in partnership with key services across the Ipswich region in Queensland. The roundtable highlighted service fragmentation, workforce shortages, interpreter access barriers, housing pressures and limited culturally responsive service pathways. The findings reinforced the importance of integrated, place-based approaches that strengthen collaboration between specialist DFSV services, multicultural organisations and other frontline sectors to deliver more coordinated and culturally responsive support for migrant and refugee communities.

### **Considerations for the Second Action Plan**

- Embed culturally responsive practice as a core capability of quality DFSV service delivery.
- Support integrated, place-based responses in regional and key settlement areas.
- Strengthen collaboration between specialist DFSV services, multicultural organisations and other frontline sectors.

### **Workforce capability development**

Workforce capability initiatives repeatedly identified demand for practical training that supports practitioners to respond to the intersection of migration, settlement and DFSV. This was particularly evident through SSI's *SafePath: Recognising the Responding to Sexual Violence*<sup>7</sup> and *Recognising and Responding to Coercive Control*<sup>8</sup> capacity building projects, delivered to practitioners across NSW since 2025. Findings highlighted both increasing practitioner confidence and ongoing demand for culturally responsive training, resources and specialist support.

A recurring theme across workforce engagement activities concerned the contribution of bilingual and bicultural practitioners. Practice evidence highlights that these practitioners bring specialist linguistic, cultural and contextual knowledge, lived and living experience of migration and settlement, and in many cases significant professional expertise gained internationally. This expertise is crucial to building trust, supporting culturally responsive practice and effectively engaging with victim-survivors from diverse cultural communities.

---

<sup>6</sup> [Ipswich Multicultural DFV Roundtable Outcomes Report](#)

<sup>7</sup> [SafePath: Recognising the Responding to Sexual Violence](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Recognising and Responding to Coercive Control](#)

Further insights highlighted the complexity of culturally proximate work. Bilingual and bicultural practitioners frequently navigate additional responsibilities associated with language and cultural support, community expectations and representation. These realities reinforce the need for appropriate remuneration, culturally responsive supervision, workforce wellbeing supports and career progression pathways that recognise cultural expertise and lived experience.

### Considerations for the Second Action Plan

- Invest in sustained workforce capability building in providing culturally responsive DFSV practice.
- Recognise, remunerate and support bilingual and bicultural expertise.
- Remove barriers to career progression for migrant, refugee, bilingual and bicultural practitioners by improving recognition of prior experience and cultural expertise.
- Strengthen supervision, wellbeing and leadership pathways for multicultural practitioners.

### Working with Men and Boys

Our work with communities highlighted how acculturation challenges, changing gender roles, settlement pressures, social isolation and shifting family dynamics are important considerations when engaging men from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Findings identified opportunities to strengthen healthy masculinities, respectful relationships, shared caregiving and help-seeking behaviours. This was reinforced through SSI's *Good Dads initiative*<sup>9</sup>, which demonstrates the value of engaging fathers in conversations about parenting, relationships and family wellbeing.

Practice evidence suggests strengths-based approaches that build on men's roles as fathers, carers and community members can contribute to prevention and early intervention efforts. Practice evidence also highlights the value of culturally responsive early interventions for men who use violence. This is reflected through SSI's *Safe, Healthy and Empowered Relationships (SHER) initiative*<sup>10</sup>. The initiative demonstrates the importance of tailoring men's behaviour change programs to meet the needs and experiences of diverse communities, while

---

<sup>9</sup> [Good Dads initiative](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Safe, Healthy and Empowered Relationships \(SHER\) initiative](#)

promoting accountability and maintaining a strong focus on the safety and wellbeing of women, children and families.

Participants in our lived experience consultation highlighted the importance of earlier engagement with men and greater community education regarding coercive control, healthy relationships and accountability. Members noted the value of increasing awareness and early intervention opportunities before violence escalates or formal behaviour change early interventions become necessary.

### **Considerations for the Second Action Plan**

- Resource and strengthen culturally responsive prevention initiatives with men and boys.
- Invest in community-based approaches promoting healthy masculinities.
- Expand and improve access to culturally tailored behaviour change early interventions.

### **Conclusion**

The evidence presented throughout this submission demonstrates that improving safety outcomes for migrant and refugee communities requires more than targeted inclusion initiatives. It requires investment in community capability, culturally responsive workforce development, lived experience expertise, integrated service responses and stronger partnerships between specialist DFSV services, other related services, multicultural organisations and communities.

The Second Action Plan presents a significant opportunity to strengthen prevention, intervention, response, recovery and healing in ways that recognise the realities of migration and settlement and ensure that all victim-survivors can have equitable access to safety, support and justice regardless of cultural background, migration experience or visa status.

To discuss this submission further, please contact:

[REDACTED]

Settlement Services International Limited

[REDACTED]