

7 AUGUST 2025



Multicultural Communities Roundtable

On 7 August 2025, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission convened a national roundtable on preventing and responding to domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSV) in multicultural communities.

The roundtable was co-hosted with InTouch, Safe and Equal, Settlement Services International (SSI), and the Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council. Over 70 participants attended, including representatives from multicultural and settlement organisations, faith communities, frontline health and education services, specialist DFSV providers, academics, government agencies, and lived experience advocates.

The Honourable Tanya Plibersek MP, Minister for Social Services, and the Honourable Ged Kearney MP, Assistant Minister for Social Services and the Prevention of Family Violence, attended a session in the afternoon to hear directly from participants.

This work supports the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan) and responds to the clear message from the roundtable: **"We know what the answers are – it is now about action."**

What we heard



Priority areas for action

Roundtable discussions identified these interconnected areas for urgent government action:

1. Cultural Capability and Anti-racism:

Embed anti-racism and cultural safety.

2. Diversity, Intersectionality and Lived-experience:

Invest in lived experience mechanisms to ensure service design and delivery is appropriate and responsive to local needs.

3. Community-led Solutions:

Resource multicultural communities to lead prevention and response efforts.

4. Migration System Settings:

Update visa and residency systems to improve access to services.

5. Workforce Development and Leadership:

Build sustainable, supported pathways for bicultural and multicultural staff.

6. Funding, Investment and Collaboration:

Longer term funding that focuses on collaboration and is based on service outcomes, not just numbers and outputs.

Priorities for the Sector

Representatives from the multicultural communities' sector identified the following areas as priority actions for the sector.

• Representation and Leadership:

Ensuring pathways for bicultural staff into senior roles, with a focus on retention.

• Cultural capability:

Increased collaboration between mainstream, settlement, and multicultural services.

• Equitable Partnerships:

Pursuing equitable collaboration between mainstream DFSV and multicultural and settlement services, learning from each other's expertise.

• Embedding Lived Experience:

Support ongoing involvement of lived experience advocates throughout the service delivery system.

The actions and findings below are an attempt to reflect, as accurately as possible, the discussion that took place within the roundtable.

1. Cultural Capability and Anti-racism



We are asking [multicultural] workers to work in a system that feels like it doesn't want them there.



Attendees suggested that the structural racism within many institutions, policy frameworks and services acts as a significant barrier to safety, service access and the development of a sustainable workforce.

- Despite Australia having a significant number of people born overseas, multicultural communities reported being excluded from 'mainstream' service design.
- Bicultural staff spoke about the racism they experience, limited career pathways, and isolation within 'mainstream' organisations.
- The importance of cultural representation being embedded across all levels of organisations, not just frontline services.
- Men from migrant and refugee backgrounds are often stereotyped as violent, while women are too often seen as passive victims.

How this can be addressed

Embedding anti-racism and cultural responsiveness as system-wide quality and safety standards, backed by a funded national cultural capability framework aligned with the National Anti-Racism Framework.

2. Diversity, Intersectionality and Lived-experience



We are not single-issue advocates because we are not single-issue people.



Attendees emphasised the importance of recognising that migrant and refugee communities are not homogenous.

- Multicultural communities lived experience, expertise and intersectionality should be central to the design, implementation and evaluation of solutions to prevent and address violence but are often sidelined.
- There are compounding risks faced by women with disability, older women, LGBTQIA+ people, and young people.
- Sexual violence is often silenced due to stigma and lack of culturally safe services, linked to systemic barriers and structural oppression.
- Many responses fail to recognise the diversity within multicultural communities.



People with disability are not vulnerable – we are systemically disadvantaged.



How this can be addressed

Embed intersectional approaches in policy and service design and resource lived experience advocates to shape reform. Focusing on factors such as gender, disability, sexuality, age and visa status, all of which compound risk, is critical.

3. Community-led Solutions



There must be an acknowledgement and recognition of the extraordinary power that communities have.



Attendees were clear that multicultural communities and the services that support them, including settlement services, are best placed to address the violence experienced.

- Many women will only ever speak to their community-led service or organisation about their experiences of violence.
- There is a significant opportunity to train community and faith leaders as trusted 'social responders', who can support the more formal support system.
- There must be better integration between the mainstream DFSV providers and multicultural services to ensure all people receive the support they need.
- Mainstream DFSV services must continue to improve their cultural capability and capacity to better respond to all communities.

How this can be addressed

A better recognition of the role many multicultural services are already playing in addressing DFSV and resource them to continue this work in a safe and sustainable manner.

4. Migration System Settings



We don't fully grasp how the migration system facilitates coercive control.



Government systems that are not designed to enable safety can deepen harm for people experiencing violence.

- Visa status can be weaponised by perpetrators as a form of coercive control, with deportation being a very real fear and risk for refugee and migrant women experiencing violence.
- Attendees described how visa insecurity was utilised as a form of structural coercion.
- Women on temporary visas are excluded from housing, Medicare, and income supports because of their visa status.
- The complexity of and costs associated with navigating the migration system prevent women from leaving violence.
- Labour mobility schemes expose women to exploitation, trafficking, and modern slavery without support.



I know how I see myself, but how does the system see me?



How this can be addressed

Review residency/visa barriers to essential supports, including housing, expanding family violence provisions to more visa subclasses, creating bridging visa pathways for victim-survivors, and broadening definitions of trafficking and exploitation.

5. Workforce Development and Leadership



It is the responsibility of the entire mainstream sector to respond appropriately ... it's not just about access and equity – it's about quality and safety.



'Mainstream' services often lack embedded, systematic cultural responsiveness and competence, while multicultural organisations are often overstretched and can lack expertise in DFSV.

- It often falls on multicultural and settlement services to educate 'mainstream' providers on how to support people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their communities.
- Quality frameworks (like the Rainbow Tick) were cited as models that can drive system-level change.
- There is a lack of recognition of the specialist knowledge, skills and approaches of services that work at the intersection of DFSV response and support for refugee and migrant communities.
- Interpreters play critical roles when responding to people from migrant and refugee backgrounds but are undertrained in DFSV and undervalued in current funding arrangements.

- Men's behaviour programs need to be culturally tailored, addressing the contexts and drivers of violence for men from migrant and refugee backgrounds.



We cannot have culturally appropriate support without a supported workforce.



How this can be addressed

Shift from short-term pilots to sustained investment in multicultural and bicultural workforces. Equitable partnerships between multicultural/settlement organisations and DFSV specialist services is essential. This would be enabled by sustained cultural capability building across DFSV services, including remuneration, and building national communities of practice focused on workforce and service capability.

6. Funding, Investment and Collaboration



Investment is about enabling positive and definite change.



Participants distinguished short-term funding from sustainable investment. Current government funding structures and data systems should focus on addressing community need and achieving positive outcomes.

- Funding mechanisms should focus on collaboration and workforce stability.
- Reporting focuses on outputs (such as hours and service contacts) rather than outcomes (such as safety, equity, and healing), and it should be the other way around.
- Settlement services should be viewed as part of the prevention infrastructure and their innovative, targeted and creative solutions have impact and outcomes that should be captured in the data.

- Current reporting does not capture who is turned away (including based on visa status), or how many women are misidentified as perpetrators.
- Data collected and analysed by funding bodies is rarely shared back with organisations.



If we do not measure exclusion, we cannot address it.



How this can be addressed

Establish accountability mechanisms that measure exclusion, misidentification, and systemic racism, and ensuring data is shared back with providers to drive practice improvement.

The Commission will:



- Reflect what we have heard in our 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament
- Provide strategic advice to governments on embedding these recommendations into future National Plan Action Plans
- Continue working with multicultural organisations, settlement services, specialist DFSV services and lived experience advocates to amplify their perspectives and advance systemic reform.