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NSW SOCIAL JUSTICE
NETWORK



NSW SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

IMPROVED ACCESS FOR PEOPLE ON TEMPORARY VISAS

OUR VISION

All people who call Australia home, whether that be from birth or in more recent years, should be treated with dignity, afforded the same human rights, and granted access to help when needed. For those on their journey to making Australia their permanent home, they too should be able to receive support if they find themselves in unpredictable and precarious situations such as homelessness, fleeing domestic and family violence, or other dangers.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW fundamentally believes in this through the social principles of dignity of the human person and solidarity. This means enabling life and human flourishing and prioritising the well-being of people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in all our actions.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Society NSW calls on the NSW Government to better support temporary visa holders at-risk or experiencing homelessness, including women and children fleeing domestic and family violence, to get the services they need by:

- Removing permanent residency and citizenship requirements to access social housing and other housing and homelessness services and supports.
- Increasing funding for integrated case management to support the delivery of services to people seeking asylum and other women on temporary visas at-risk or experiencing homelessness.

See our Social Justice Statements on housing and homelessness for other related recommendations.

THE CHALLENGE

In an already unaffordable and limited housing market, people on temporary visas face a greater challenge accessing secure, affordable private market housing due to uncertainty surrounding their visa status, complex health issues, and employment and income constraints. Yet they are also denied access to essential social safety nets, such as homelessness services and social housing, that are available to the general population.

Thousands of people seeking asylum and other vulnerable immigrants on temporary visas in New South Wales are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.¹ Up to 55% of people seeking asylum have experienced some form of homelessness since arriving in Australia.² Approximately one-fifth of inner Sydney's rough-sleeping population are people

OUR CONTRIBUTION

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is a leading provider of frontline services, with 100 services state-wide. Our North Coast Settlement Service provides settlement services to humanitarian entrants and other vulnerable migrants, including culturally appropriate case work, advocacy, referrals, and group sessions.

Our 4,000 members support people seeking asylum, international students, and vulnerable immigrants through companionship and by providing direct assistance in the form of food, electricity vouchers, clothing, and furniture.

In recognition of the service barriers faced by vulnerable immigrants, the Society NSW allocates 10% of our crisis accommodation and case management support to people on temporary visas, regardless of residency or visa type.

THE FACTS

- 55% of people seeking asylum have experienced homelessness in Australia.
- People on temporary visas are ineligible for housing programs and assistance.
- Society NSW allocates 10% of crisis accommodation and case management support to people on temporary visas.

seeking asylum, temporary visa holders, people who are undocumented or New Zealand citizens who arrived after 2001.³

Yet people experiencing homelessness who are on temporary visas do not meet residency or citizenship eligibility requirements for most homelessness services and are not eligible for social housing.

Women and children seeking asylum or on temporary visas who are fleeing domestic violence are also particularly at risk as they often have limited social supports, are financially dependent on the perpetrator of violence, and fear of deportation.

While Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) support people who are experiencing, or at-risk of, homelessness through the provision of accommodation and case management support,

SHS providers face challenges providing long-term housing pathways for temporary visa holders because they lack access to income support, may not have Medicare, and are not eligible for NSW social housing or other services.

The NSW Government must reevaluate residency and citizenship requirements for social housing and homelessness services so everyone, including people on temporary visas have access to a safe and affordable place to live.

THE IMPACT

The lack of access to housing and homelessness services is entrenching deep poverty and disadvantage for temporary visa holders in NSW. A survey of temporary visa holders found more than one-third (34%) were experiencing homelessness, 39% did not have enough money to cover their basic living expenses, and just under half (43%) said they had regularly skipped meals to make ends meet.⁴ International students are increasingly seeking support from charities and homelessness services as they struggle with the rising cost of living and are unable to cover their rent, transport, and other living expenses.

For women and children on temporary visas who are residing in the Society's domestic violence refuges, it is not uncommon for them to stay for up to two years or more due to a lack of exit options. Without access to long-term housing options and wrap-around support, women on temporary visas are more likely to stay with or return to a partner using violence, placing them and their children at greater risk.⁵

A lack of exit pathways into long-term housing for people on temporary visas not only further clogs a strained housing and homelessness sector, but also greatly limits opportunities for temporary visa holders to work on achieving their housing, financial, educational, employment, health, and broader personal goals.

Australia is a vibrant nation thanks to its diverse cultures, skills and values. If people seeking asylum, international students, skilled migrants and other temporary visa holders are able to access the support they need during periods of crisis, they can make significant contributions to our communities over the coming years.

MARY'S STORY

Mary came to Australia in 2019 on a temporary Partner (Provisional) Visa (subclass 309) but separated with her partner shortly after due to domestic and family violence. Mary later re-married but her visa was no longer valid because she was not in a relationship with her previous abusive partner. At this stage, Mary was pregnant and living with her sister and their family of 11 in a 3-bedroom home.

Mary was unable to work and was not eligible to receive Centrelink assistance, so her brother-in-law called St Vincent de Paul Society NSW for help. Our North Coast Settlement Services (NCSS) organised pre-natal care for Mary as she did not have access to Medicare or funds to pay privately. NCSS also organised an emergency relief payment from Red Cross after Mary unsuccessfully applied for the government Special Benefit payments.

Following the birth of her child, Mary found herself homeless with a newborn baby as she no-longer had support from her extended family. NCSS worked with local services to secure a room for Mary and her child in a domestic and family violence service and to obtain a cot, pram, and nappies. Since then, NCSS has worked closely with Mary to address her legal concerns, enrol her in English classes and secure more ongoing and regular financial assistance. After securing a permanent visa for Mary, NCSS along with two other non-government organisations, got Mary and her child into a social home where she is now thriving.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [Society NSW's reports and submissions](#)
- [National Council's position on people seeking asylum in Australia](#)

¹ Refugee Council of Australia (2022) *Thousands of people seeking asylum living in poverty*.

² Roberts, A; Rego, N & Conroy, E (2021) *'A Place to Call Home: A Report on the Experiences of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion among People Seeking Asylum in Greater Sydney'* (Sydney: Jesuit Refugee Service and Western Sydney University, 10 December 2021).

³ Homelessness NSW (2021) *The Experiences of People without Australian Permanent Residency Accessing Emergency Accommodation in Inner City Sydney*

⁴ Unions NSW (2020) *No Worker Left Behind: Support equal access to welfare for temporary migrants*, Survey Results,

⁵ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (2018) *Path to Nowhere: Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and Their Children*, p. 22

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of this land, with deep respect. May Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is a lay-Catholic member and volunteer-based organisation that has been assisting people experiencing disadvantage and hardship in NSW for over 140 years. Our aspiration is an Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice.



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