

Media Release

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Three-year wait period added pressure for women experiencing family and domestic violence

WACOSS and the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services Western Australia are calling on the Federal Government to stop social security cuts to the most disadvantaged people in the community, following the increase of the waiting period for new migrants to access social security from two years, to three years.

The extended waiting period could force women and children trapped in family and domestic violence to stay with a perpetrator, or to leave the relationship without any income. As well as exacerbating family and domestic violence, it could push people into hardship, and create an underclass of new migrants to Australia.

"All refugees in WA are required under their State funding contracts to accommodate women and children regardless of their capacity to contribute to the cost of accommodation. This client group is dependent on the refugee's very limited funding to provide food, clothing, paying for medical and dental treatment, school costs, transport, and multitude of other daily necessities. The proposed change puts further pressure and undue stress on women, children, and refugees in cases of domestic and family violence, and needs to be immediately reviewed," said Angela Hartwig, CEO, Women's Council.

In cases of family and domestic violence, extending the waiting period for social security could force women into staying in an unsafe situation because they don't have access to appropriate social security.

Moving to a new country can be a stressful process without facing extra hardship while waiting for the eligibility period to be able to access social security.

"In cases where a woman experiencing family and domestic violence comes to Australia under their male partner's visa, they may be facing emotional and physical abuse, are quite possibly isolated due to cultural and language barriers, care for the family's children full time, and have no access to the household finances, even if they did have the confidence to leave," said Louise Giolitto, CEO, WACOSS.

"There may be cultural shame and stigma attached to leaving a relationship, and perpetrators can use their children as leverage to stop their partner from leaving.

"There are women currently caught in refugees with no income and nowhere else to go. This will only increase with a longer waiting period for social security," said Louise.

Ends.