

Submission
No 30

**INQUIRY INTO MODERN SLAVERY RISKS FACED BY
TEMPORARY MIGRANT WORKERS IN RURAL AND
REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Australian Red Cross

Date Received: 28 February 2025



**Australian Red Cross Submission to the
Modern Slavery Committee Inquiry into
modern slavery risks faced by temporary
migrant workers in rural and regional NSW**

February 2025

About us

Established in 1914 and by [Royal Charter](#) in 1941, Australian Red Cross is auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. We have a unique humanitarian mandate to respond to disasters and emergencies. This partnership means governments can benefit from a trusted, credible, independent and non-political partner with local to global networks, who will work to implement humanitarian goals in a way that maintains the trust of government and Australian society.

Australian Red Cross is one of 191 Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) – the world’s largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

The Movement is guided at all times and in all places by seven [Fundamental Principles](#): Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. These principles sum up our ethics and the way we work, and they are at the core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

We remain neutral, and don’t take sides, including in politics; enabling us to maintain the trust of all and to provide assistance in locations others are unable to go. Volunteering is in our DNA, and thousands of volunteers and members support us every day, helping solve social issues in their own communities. All our work is inspired and framed by the principle of Humanity: we seek always to act where there is humanitarian need.

Core areas of expertise for Australian Red Cross include Emergency Services, Migration, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Programs, Community Activities and Programs.

Highlights from our [2023-2024 Annual Report](#):



18,300+
members and volunteers
acting for humanity



213,000+
Australians supported during
70 emergency activations

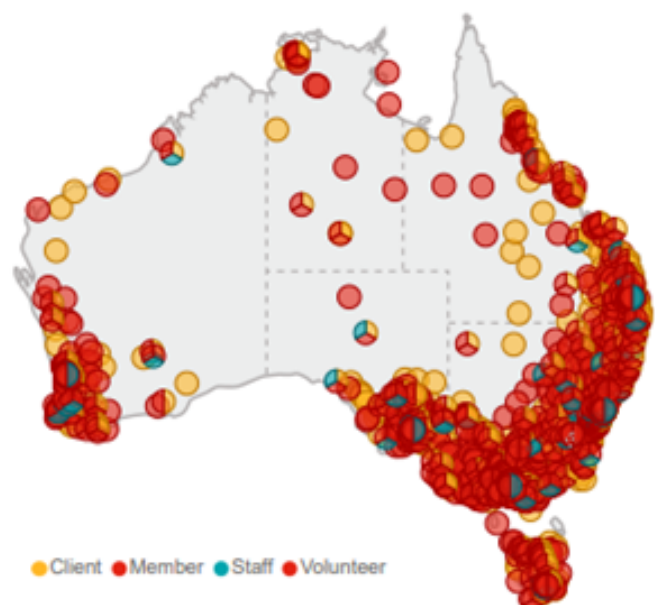


5.8 million+
people accessed information
from disaster preparedness
campaigns



23,600+
people from 129 countries
supported through migration
programs

Location of Red Cross people and clients



Purpose

The New South Wales (NSW) Parliament is seeking feedback on [modern slavery risks faced by temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales](#).

Australian Red Cross has 14 years' experience providing the Australian Government's Support for Trafficked People Program (Support Program) affording direct insight into the lived experiences and needs of people affected by modern slavery. Through the Support Program, Australian Red Cross provides individual casework support to people referred by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and through the Additional Referral Pathway. We work collaboratively with partner agencies, including the program funder (Department of Social Services), and national, state, territory and local agencies and the community service sector to deliver the Support Program, and build capacity and awareness about how to respond to modern slavery in a safe, person-centred and trauma-informed way. Australian Red Cross leads and participates in modern slavery sector forums, including the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery and the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner Advisory Panel, bringing insights from the Support Program and other protection-focused programs including the Work Right Hub¹ and Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Family and Domestic Violence Program.²

Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to provide our input to this inquiry. We have focused our response on areas where we have extensive expertise and that align with the unique humanitarian mandate of Australian Red Cross. This is informed by the lived experience and concerns of temporary migrant workers at risk, or who are victim-survivors of modern slavery, including those in regional and remote NSW.

This submission focuses on four of the Terms of Reference: 1a, 1h, 1j, and 1k.

Summary of recommendations

Australian Red Cross recommends that:

Recommendation 1

The NSW Government and Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner strengthen coordination and engagement between frontline NSW and Commonwealth agencies and develop statutory operating protocols.

Recommendation 2

The NSW government expands eligibility to government services to include people on temporary visas who have experienced exploitation, modern slavery or other forms of complex violence, and

¹ The [Work Right Hub](#) is an online platform designed to empower migrant workers and frontline responders to access support if they, or someone they know, is being exploited at work in Australia. The Work Right Hub is funded by Modern Slavery Grants from the Australian Government and was co-designed in consultation with migrants and frontline responders. Over 16,810 people accessed the Work Right Hub during the 2023–2024 financial year.

² Australian Red Cross, [Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Family and Domestic Violence Pilot Report of key findings](#) (2024)

their dependants, and resources the community services sector to deliver specialist supports, and emphasises the importance of this inclusion to Federal Government departments with service responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

The NSW Government increase effort to equip frontline agencies to respond to modern slavery particularly in regional areas and with high-risk industries.

1. Resourcing a coordinated and collaborative cross-government multi-agency response

- 1.1. Temporary migrant workers affected by modern slavery are more likely to receive support and protection if a coordinated, multi-agency NSW government response is in place, working closely with civil society and federal government agencies.
- 1.2. It is estimated by the Australian Institute of Criminology that only one in five people impacted seek and receive help.³ Annex A provides Support Program data on the number of clients in NSW who have been able to receive support since 2009. We know that people seek help through a range of pathways, and they are supported by many distinct and sometimes disconnected services. People may present to, or be identified by, a range of government and non-government actors, and then be supported with their immediate and ongoing needs by other government or non-government agencies and support services.
- 1.3. If state and federal agencies work with local and specialist services, they can share information and act faster to provide people at risk of and who have experienced modern slavery with support (like legal help and housing) and stop employers from exploiting others:

Case Study

Imagine a temporary worker on a farm in regional NSW who is being forced to work excessive hours, paid well below minimum wage, is being escorted to and from work every day, and is unable to leave the farm without permission from the employer. The worker is afraid to seek help because the agent who brought them to Australia has threatened them with arrest and deportation if they leave or tell authorities.

The worker sought the help of a local multicultural non-government organisation to request winter clothing. The frontline worker had received training in identifying and responding to modern slavery and identified indicators in what the worker disclosed to them. Together, they contacted the Additional Referral Pathway who were able to arrange emergency accommodation and a referral to the Support Program.

Through the Support Program, the worker was able to access Medicare and was supported to receive treatment for their injuries through NSW health services. They were able to obtain legal and migration advice regarding their visa options, and receive support and counselling through NSW Victims Support Scheme. The worker decided to report their experience to the Australian Federal Police (AFP). AFP identified other victim-survivors working at the farm and hired by the same agent, and shared information with the Fair Work Ombudsman and SafeWork NSW to stop the employer and agent from exploiting others.

- 1.4. In Australian Red Cross' experience, people who have been exploited continue to experience multiple service gaps and barriers to accessing protection and support, including in regional and remote parts of the country. This is because of the eligibility and accessibility of services, which

³ Australian Institute of Criminology, *Statistical Bulletin 16: Estimating the dark figure of human trafficking and slavery victimisation in Australia* (2019).

is often limited for people on temporary visas, leaving civil society organisations, religious groups and community as primary responders to need. For example, people are often not eligible for Medicare, housing support, free education or access to legal aid.

- 1.5. Many temporary migrant workers in regional NSW, including people with dependent children and pregnant women, have presented to, or been referred to, Australian Red Cross for humanitarian support. For example, last year our office in the Riverina region saw an increase in migrant farm workers seeking information and support. People who present to Australian Red Cross report having been taken advantage of, or exploited by, employers and labour hire companies and now have limited or no income, no independent or secure accommodation, no access to healthcare, and are at risk of or experiencing destitution.
- 1.6. An approach that engages and involves actors both across jurisdictions and within NSW, based on common principles and objectives, is needed. The NSW and Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioners should lead this coordination effort in their legislated roles to promote actions to combat modern slavery and to advocate to the Commonwealth Government on matters relating to modern slavery, including for continuous improvement in policy and practice.
- 1.7. Strengthening connectedness and collaboration between responders will improve the response. It will contribute to prevention efforts and, importantly, better meet the protection, safety and wellbeing needs of people who have experienced, or are at risk of, modern slavery.
- 1.8. The NSW Government can strengthen collaboration and engagement within and across sectors and between the NSW and federal government by implementing statutory operational protocols, such as through a strong protection framework that:
 - recognises, respects, and therefore involves people with lived experience and affected communities to inform and influence the policies, programs and services that address it
 - centres the humanitarian needs and voices of people affected by modern slavery, and prioritises their safety, dignity and recovery
 - recognises and protects the specific needs of children and young people
 - is cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral – with protocols that clearly articulate roles and responsibilities, communication and referral pathways
 - has appropriately resourced and equipped support services that are accessible, culturally appropriate, suitable, sustainable and meet the needs of people at risk of and who have experienced modern slavery
 - ensures trained and skilled first responders and frontline services
 - includes a community awareness campaign – given the vital role the public plays in connecting people who have experienced exploitation with services, safety and prevention
 - supports further research that enhances knowledge of the nature and extent of modern slavery in NSW and how to effectively meet the needs of people at risk.
- 1.9. The Australian Disaster Recovery Framework (2011) has demonstrated how statutory operational protocols can support collaboration between local, state and federal governments and non-

government actors. The recovery framework helps by providing a common language, giving structure, adding accountability and bringing clarity to complexity.

- 1.10. Such a framework is important in ensuring support services that are appropriate for each victim-survivor, and so that organisations, frontline staff and first responders understand how to work safely and ethically with people affected by modern slavery.
- 1.11. A robust framework will include measures to reduce vulnerability to modern slavery, and ensure appropriate identification, support, recovery, redress, social inclusion and empowerment of people with lived experience. It will also guide government and non-government organisations to invest in community initiatives to steer culturally valued communication and collaboration and co-design to identify and address needs and build welcoming and inclusive communities that support migrants to share and foster awareness in the broader community of migrants' experiences.

Recommendation 1

The NSW Government and Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner strengthen coordination and engagement between frontline NSW and Commonwealth agencies and develop statutory operating protocols.

2. Improving availability, eligibility and suitability of support and protection services to people at risk and who have experienced modern slavery

- 2.1. Visa status and consequent restrictions systemically prevent temporary migrants from accessing critical support services, including health, housing, education and legal services. Migrants also tell us that even where services exist they are not accessible or appropriate, particularly in regional and rural areas, and they lack access to essential services, appropriate accommodation, and healthcare.⁴ In NSW, 35% of clients that reported an unstable accommodation situation at the point of entry into the Support Program did not have a valid visa or had a visa with no work rights, and therefore had limited ability to pay rent.⁵ An absence of a safety net increases people's vulnerability to exploitation and modern slavery, and leaves

⁴ There are a number of reports highlighting these issues of humanitarian concern, for example: Australian Red Cross, *Exploring challenges and opportunities to improve identification of and support for people subject to trafficking in regional Australia: Report for the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery* (2018); Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner, *Be Our Guests: Addressing urgent modern slavery risks for temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales* (2024); Immigration Advice and Rights Centre, *Preventing Migrant Worker Exploitation in Australia* (2024); Unions NSW, *Disrespected, Disregarded and Discarded: Workplace exploitation, sexual harassment, and the experience of migrant women living in Australia on temporary visas* (2024); Lindy Kanan and Judy Putt, *Safety and wellbeing in Australia's Pacific labour mobility scheme Research report* (2023), ANU Department of Pacific Affairs.

⁵ Australian Red Cross, [Barriers in accommodating survivors of modern slavery: Working towards safe, suitable, and sustainable housing](#) (2021)

many at risk of or experiencing destitution. Sometimes people report physical limitations placed on their freedom:

'After working hours sometimes I'd like to visit my relatives who work at an abattoir, but they are not allowed to have visitors. Sometimes they are not even allowed to go out of their premises during their day off ... if they have to go out, they have to sign and give a very reasonable reason why they want to go out.' – Support Program client

- 2.2. Nationally, most people referred to the Support Program since 2009 who have experienced a human trafficking, slavery or a slavery-like practice other than forced marriage, held temporary visas or were undocumented when they were referred to the program (73% (n=434)). In NSW, this percentage was slightly lower at 61% (n=99) of referrals.
- 2.3. People at risk or who have experienced modern slavery related harm should be able to access safe, culturally appropriate, suitable and sustainable services to meet their support and recovery needs. The *National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery* contains a national strategic priority to provide 'holistic, gender-sensitive, culturally responsive, trauma-informed victim-centred protection and support to all victims and survivors of modern slavery.'⁶
- 2.4. Right now, temporary migrant workers who have experienced modern slavery might be able to access some NSW government services – like housing, healthcare and education – but it's not guaranteed. Access is discretionary, meaning it's decided case by case rather than being a right. This lack of certainty can leave many migrants without the help they need.
- 2.5. To remove further barriers of access to support, the NSW state government can expand eligibility criteria for and fund access to other state services (for example, oral health, ambulance fees, Temporary Residents Program school fees; childcare, and access to EnableNSW resources) and advocate to the federal government to extend eligibility to federal-based supports such as emergency relief. The South Australian Government introduced a range of supports to people escaping the conflict in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in 2024.⁷ Similarly, the establishment of the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Family and Domestic Violence Pilot by the Department of Social Services enabled people experiencing violence to receive cash assistance and referrals to support agencies safely and with dignity.⁸
- 2.6. Further, in regional and remote communities, it would be beneficial to understand from temporary migrant workers and the local communities what specific supports and resources are needed to prevent modern slavery. For example, during consultations and co-design for the

⁶ Australian Government, [National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-25](#)

⁷ South Australian Government, [A helping hand for new arrivals fleeing international conflict](#), Media release (2024)

⁸ Australian Red Cross, [Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Family and Domestic Violence Pilot Report of key findings](#) (2024)

Work Right Hub⁹, migrant workers told us that information needs to be in plain English and disseminated through media or networks that are readily accessed by the relevant cohort or local community. Horticultural workers from Pacific cultures said they preferred audio options because they have strong oral traditions. It would also be helpful to survey whether existing legal, employment, community and support services and programs targeted to other migrant communities could be extended to all temporary migrant workers.

'I think it's quite meaningful to be asked for your contributions. ... I have a lot of suggestions towards prevention of trafficking and modern slavery.' – Support Program client

2.7. The NSW Government is establishing a Migrant Resource Centre to provide advice, education and training to prevent exploitation of migrant workers in NSW.¹⁰ Ensuring the Centre has a regional reach will improve accessibility to temporary migrant workers in remote and regional areas. The NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner has suggested 'regional migrant hubs that serve as central points for all migrant workers'¹¹ are set up.

Recommendation 2

The NSW government expands eligibility to government services to include people on temporary visas who have experienced exploitation, modern slavery or other forms of complex violence and their dependants and resources the community services sector to deliver specialist supports, and emphasises the importance of this inclusion to Federal Government departments with service responsibilities.

3. Ensuring trained and skilled first responders and frontline services

3.1. In Australian Red Cross' experience, people are afraid of seeking assistance, or do not have opportunity to report abuse.¹² Temporary migrant workers in regional Australia can be kept intentionally isolated in homes or workplaces and many have their passports and other identification documents removed. They may be socially isolated, and many have limited access to funds. The remote nature of workplaces in the domestic, horticulture and agriculture sectors in particular, makes it difficult to leave exploitative situations due to lack of accessible services. In some cases, migrant workers are completely dependent on employers or labour hire

⁹ The [Work Right Hub](#) is funded by Modern Slavery Grants from the Australian Government and was co-designed in consultation with migrants and frontline responders. Over 16,810 people accessed the Work Right Hub during the 2023–2024 financial year.

¹⁰ A. Ritenis, '[NSW Government to deliver state's first Migrant Workers Centre](#)' (2024), Sydney Times.

¹¹ Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner, *Be Our Guests: Addressing urgent modern slavery risks for temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales* (2024), p. 30.

¹² See references at note 1. See also: Berg, L and Farbenblum, B, *Wage Theft in Australia: Findings of the National Temporary Migrant Worker Survey* (2017) Migrant Worker Justice Initiative; Senate Education and Employment References Committee, *A National Disgrace: The Exploitation of Temporary Work Visa Holder* (2016).

companies for essential livelihood necessities such as transport, visa compliance, accommodation and food. This severely restricts people's ability to seek help.

"We were 15 miles from [regional town], somewhere in the inland ... We never saw no car, no town, no shop, no money. We got no bank account, just cash. We just go to the shop every Friday ... the man pick us up, drop us at the shop, pick up again and drop us at home. ... We were not allowed to talk to someone. I wasn't allowed. I fear from this, from our agent."

- Support Program client

- 3.2. First responders, in particular frontline services, play a critical role in identifying people who are at risk of or have experienced modern slavery, ensuring their protection from further harm, providing them with information on their options and linking them with appropriate assistance. Limited understanding of human trafficking and slavery indicators or Australia's response framework can result in deportation, non-identification of cases, and inadequate support for people who have experienced serious harm.
- 3.3. First responders must therefore have the training and skills to identify people who are at risk of or who may have experienced, modern slavery and articulate appropriate support services. It is also imperative first responders understand why someone might not report or disclose their situation to authorities and have the cultural responsiveness and awareness to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds in a language that they understand. Frontline staff may be that person's only opportunity to leave their situation. In the words of a Support Program client:

[Training and guidelines] "should include information about working with interpreters and people from different cultures. Not all of us we speak English fluently ... and we're all from different backgrounds." - Support Program client

- 3.4. Section 19(3)(a) of the *Modern Slavery Act 2018* (NSW) aims to ensure relevant NSW Government frontline agencies mandate training in modern slavery. In our experience, equipping frontline responders to be able to effectively respond to modern slavery, particularly in regional areas and with high-risk industry prevalence, requires ongoing investment in training and capacity building, with annual refresher training, mentoring, peer support or debriefings. Insufficient or infrequent training among service providers and frontline officials, alongside staff turnover, leads to inconsistent awareness about the risk indicators, complexity of needs, and pathways for accessing help. Frontline responders have told us they would not be able to identify indicators of trafficking, coercion or exploitation as they had either never received training, or the training was not refreshed: "[We identified a] potential trafficking case, where prior to the Red Cross training session [we] wouldn't be looking for that indicator - we needed to be educated". Based on Australian Red Cross and sector experience this needs to include training, in both urban and regional areas, for: NSW Police; Child Protection authorities (FACS); Safe Work NSW; Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development; local council

workers and labour inspectors; family violence services; NSW Health and hospital staff, including social workers; asylum seeker and migrant resource centres; and Community Legal Centres.

- 3.5. Australian Red Cross acknowledges and supports the steps that have so far been taken by NSW and Federal agencies to train and build the capacity of frontline staff and first responders. More effort is needed for frontline workers to know and be confident in identifying the risks to modern slavery, the indicators of severe exploitation, and where to refer people for support, including the referral pathways for the Support for Trafficked People Program.

Recommendation 3

The NSW Government increase effort to equip frontline agencies to respond to modern slavery particularly in regional areas and with high-risk industries.

Conclusion

This Inquiry into modern slavery risks faced by temporary migrant workers in rural and regional NSW provides an important opportunity to ensure that prevention efforts reach and are embedded in rural and regional NSW and provide migrant workers who are at risk of modern slavery with adequate protection and support to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and destitution. The response should centre lived experience voice, experience and expertise; and ensure all people who have experienced any form of modern slavery can receive the protection and support they need and are empowered in their recovery.

Australian Red Cross, auxiliary to the public authority in the humanitarian field, and as the Support Program provider, stands ready to support the Committee in strengthening the NSW government response to modern slavery and welcomes the opportunity to discuss any of the issues of humanitarian need raised in this submission.

Attachment 1: Incidence, causes and extent of forced labour, deceptive recruiting, gender-based violence, sexual servitude and labour trafficking (Term of Reference 1.b)

Data from the Support Program is provided below. Please consider the following when reflecting on the data:

- Referrals to the Support Program require a person to be formally assessed as: having left a situation of modern slavery, rather than being at risk (except in the case of forced marriage); and meeting the eligibility criteria, including having access to a valid visa (people referred by the AFP may be eligible for a visa under the Human Trafficking Visa Framework). The person must also consent to be referred to the Support Program and have unmet needs for which they seek the supports available within the Support Program.
- The type of modern slavery a person has experienced is determined by the referring agency or organisation and may not reflect secondary or tertiary forms of harm, or the crimes ultimately investigated by law enforcement. The categories referred to in this inquiry – forced labour, deceptive recruiting, gender-based violence, sexual servitude and labour trafficking, do not align with the categories used by the Support Program.
- People referred to the Support Program may have been referred for a form of harm that may also be characterised as gender-based violence, such as forced marriage and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Or, as borne out by Australian Red Cross experience, they may also have experienced, or experience while on the Support Program, other forms of gender-based violence such as dowry abuse and domestic, family and sexual violence.

Considering these factors and that according to the Australian Institute of Criminology only an estimated one in five victim-survivors of modern slavery in Australia are identified,¹³ this data likely excludes most temporary migrant workers in rural and regional NSW facing modern slavery risks for which this inquiry is focused.

Between March 2009 and January 2025, Australian Red Cross has supported 823 victim-survivors of modern slavery referred to the Support Program. Although Australian Red Cross has supported people affected by modern slavery in all states and territories, most people have been residing in NSW (39%; n=318). In NSW at least 24 people experienced exploitation in regional and rural areas, with most being referred for having experienced forced labour (n=9).

The establishment of the *Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery National Minimum Dataset*¹⁴ is a significant move towards standardised national data collection for evidence-based reporting and response to incidents and the extent of modern slavery in Australia. This initiative does not collect or provide disaggregated data regarding regional and remote areas, or information regarding the location of where exploitation occurred and in what industry. If the NSW government is seeking more nuanced data to better understand the extent of exploitation of temporary migrant workers in regional and remote NSW to develop evidence informed responses, it could consider requesting the Australian government strengthen the National Minimum Dataset by collecting and including data related specifically to regional and remote areas of each state and territory.

¹³ Australian Institute of Criminology, *Statistical Bulletin 16: Estimating the dark figure of human trafficking and slavery victimisation in Australia* (2019).

¹⁴ Australian Institute of Criminology, [Findings from the Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery National Minimum Dataset pilot, July to December 2022](#) (2024).

Contact Details

Brendan Pearce

Senior Adviser – External Engagement (Government)

Australian Red Cross

