

## **Mercy Foundation Australia**

### **Displacement of Persons Report for Conference Call**

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#### **1. Human Trafficking and Slavery**

##### **Domestic Servitude Research**

- We have received the first draft of research into the issue of domestic servitude in Australia. The research looks at 35 cases of individuals that were previously in domestic servitude, specifically how they came to be exploited and how they escaped.
- Three cohorts were identified, being women who migrated for domestic work and were exploited in domestic work; women who migrated for other types of work and were exploited in domestic work and finally women who migrated for legitimate marriage and were subsequently coerced or forced into and exploited in domestic work.
- Interesting findings include that more than half knew their employer before they migrated; of the first 2 cohorts, most lived in poverty and were counting on work to maintain their families' subsistence income; 60% had no or little English; most were not recruited by an independent migration agent; and most did not receive the appropriate follow up when they made contact for help.
- We are waiting on the final report that will inform our response to this issue in Australia.

##### **National Modern Slavery Act**

- The Australian Government has introduced legislation to enact a Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act, which will establish a modern slavery reporting requirement to further strengthen Australia's response to modern slavery. The bill does not include penalties for failure to report nor does it appoint an independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. These are two important factors that are missing from the bill that we have advocated for in our submission. The bill is due back in parliament in November and we will continue our advocacy for these inclusions in the Act.

#### **2. Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

##### **Child Detention**

- It is with great relief that we report that the Australian Government will be moving all children in offshore detention back to Australia by Christmas. Some have been in detention facilities for 5 years, (when the policy started) and many are suffering poor physical and mental health. The Mercy Foundation along with the Sisters of Mercy and many other advocates across the nation has been asking the government

to bring the children back to Australia for many years. It is a great relief that this is finally happening.

### **Projects funded**

- The Mercy Foundation has funded a number of projects this year to assist asylum seekers and refugees in the community. This includes a significant grant to provide 3 to 4 more houses for homeless asylum seekers in Melbourne.
- Our Social Justice Small Grants program has funded a driving program for asylum seekers in the community to help them obtain their licence, a refugee family reunification campaign and two projects to bring about greater inclusion in the community.

### **Government Cuts to Support for Asylum Seekers**

- The Australian government is cutting support to asylum seekers with work rights. Just less than 5,000 people will no longer receive a basic living allowance or casework support or access to trauma counselling. This is of great concern to many in the sector as many asylum seekers will be left destitute as result of these harsh changes.

### **3. Ending Homelessness**

- In conjunction with a number of organisations across Australia, we launched a report at Parliament House, Canberra in late August, around the issue of older women and homelessness. The latest Census shows an increase of 30% in the number of women > 55 counted as homeless. Research shows that many women have led conventional lives, and as a result of time out of the workforce, the gender pay gap, and lack of superannuation, women who do not own their own home and on low incomes are at risk of homelessness. The document can be accessed here:  
<https://www.mercyfoundation.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Retiring-into-Poverty-National-Plan-for-Change-Increasing-Housing-Security-for-Older-Women-23-August-2018.pdf>