

MODERN SLAVERY RISK FACED BY TEMPORARY MIGRANT WORKERS IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES

Hearing: 11 December 2025

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Ms Biba Honnet, Migrant & Settlement Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

(1) Have you been made aware of any specific risks for partners and children in Australia as part of the PALM family accompaniment pilot? From a risk perspective, considering the existing challenges and barriers for PALM workers in exploitative conditions to access support services, do you have concerns for the addition of families during a PALM worker's stay in Australia?

Response:

I'm not currently aware of any partners and/or children in our region as part of this pilot.

As a SETS provider, our service may assist accompanying family members with settlement information and referrals and even receives additional top-up funding from the Department of Home Affairs to do so. However, given the high cost and low standard of accommodation available to workers locally, the difficulties in accessing and paying for healthcare, and risks of exploitation in the workplace with such quick turnaround to forced repatriation/disengagement and resulting uncertainties, yes, I would be concerned about the physical safety, health, and stability of accompanying family members.

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(2) In relation to tax and superannuation for PALM workers and other temporary migrant workers. How common are cases where workers do not receive proper superannuation payments (including once they have left the country) or tax refunds, or similar examples of payment issues? Are the workers you support aware of their entitlements regarding tax and superannuation? If you can, please provide any commentary on this specific (unpaid tax/superannuation) area.

Response:

Given what we know, I assume it is quite common for PALM and other temporary migrant workers to miss out on receiving proper superannuation payments or tax refunds, although we cannot confirm this. The workers we have worked with have had limited awareness of their entitlements regarding tax and superannuation and low capacity to apply for payments and refunds once they have left Australia.

Our service has assisted several PALM workers to apply for their superannuation payments, a process which must be started prior to their leaving Australia and finalised by them only once they have returned to their home country or – if still in Australia – after their visa has ended or been cancelled. Feedback we have received from workers is that the process is too complex, often beyond their own literacy and/or the digital environment and connectivity that they're likely to experience back in the village.

Tax refunds are more straightforward if a worker is still in Australia and has the correct documentation. But once returned, it is the same situation: accessing and using a MyGov and linked ATO account with limited English language, low literacy, poor internet connectivity, and no access to your Australian mobile phone to get login codes likely represents a significant challenge.

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(3) Do you have any suggestions for immediate changes to state government policy or funding for programs that would assist in providing support and improve the experience of temporary migrant workers?

Response:

- Make mandatory for staff in all DCJ-funded activities the Anti-Slavery Australia online training modules that have been made mandatory for all DCJ and Corrective Services staff across NSW. Open the training to the wider community and promote it widely in hotspot locations so that as many people as possible can upskill their identification of modern slavery signs and increase awareness of remediation and support pathways
- Fund the establishment of Regional Migrant Workers Centres/Hubs in hotspot areas like the Riverina and Mid North Coast, to provide rights education, outreach services and caseworker support,

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- **or**, establish state-funded Temporary Migrant Worker Liaison positions to sit within existing federally funded settlement services in hotspot areas.
- Amend the *Modern Slavery Act 2018* (NSW) to give the Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner formal powers to investigate claims of modern slavery or abusive practice experienced by temporary migrants and provide adequate funding to facilitate timely, well-resourced investigations.
- Fund existing community organisations, migrant settlement services, and specialist homelessness and domestic violence services to meet the actual demand for specific supports and crisis accommodations for temporary migrant workers and their families, particularly those that become disengaged from programs/employers that their visa is contingent on.
- Allow disengaged workers/WJV holders to access Homes NSW rental products.

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QUESTION ON NOTICE

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***Ms JENNY LEONG:** Can I just follow up, and I'm happy for you to take it on notice—it would be really great to know if Legal Aid or Vinnies have any data, or whether you get data, on where people are placed and migrant workers are placed. Because we've heard from councils that that—*

***BIBA HONNET:** I've asked. I'm trying.*

Response:

We have no such data. I have previously sought from DEWR a list of farms in our region which employ temporary migrant workers. This was named as a privacy issue that might negatively impact approved employers.

The health, welfare, legal and other service providers I work with all agree that if we could be provided with the names / locations of employers in our region who are participating in the PALM scheme, it would allow us to get ahead of many of the issues we're collectively currently dealing with.