

A photograph showing two hands clasped together on a wooden table. The hand on the left is dark-skinned and has a tattoo on the forearm. The hand on the right is light-skinned and belongs to a person wearing a white shirt with red stripes. The background is blurred, showing an indoor setting with plants and furniture.

Insights brief
Building capacity of
the multicultural and
settlement sector to
improve responses to
migrant and refugee victim-
survivors of sexual violence

April 2026

Introduction

This Insights Brief discusses key opportunities for improving responses to migrant and refugee victim-survivors of sexual violence. Specifically, it reflects on the role of the multicultural and settlement sector in addressing the needs of migrant and refugee victim-survivors and the need for tailored capacity building to effectively support non-DFSV specialist practitioners working with people from multicultural communities with relevant knowledge, skills and resources.

Insights have been drawn from knowledge gained through the implementation of SafePath—a program that was delivered by Settlement Services International (SSI) with support from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) under the NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027 to build capacity of the multicultural and settlement sector to improve responses to migrant and refugee victim-survivors of sexual violence.

About SafePath

Between July 2023 and December 2025, SafePath provided interactive in-person and online capacity building to over 500 multicultural and settlement sector practitioners working with migrant and refugee communities across NSW. The training was co-designed with subject matter experts in the areas of domestic, family and sexual violence, gender-based violence, and working with people from migrant and refugee communities, and was further informed by SSI's Model of Culturally Responsive Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Practice.

SafePath focused on strengthening the multicultural and settlement sector practitioners' understanding of:

- sexual violence and its manifestations
- systemic and structural issues faced by migrant and refugee victim-survivors and
- community and cultural considerations.

It provided a strong focus on trauma-informed, culturally responsive and victim-survivor centred responses to disclosures and finding appropriate specialist support.

SafePath is an example of good practice in building capacity of the multicultural and settlement sector to support victim-survivors from migrant and refugee communities in their help-seeking. Ongoing, safe, trusted relationships with practitioners in 'soft entry' points who feel confident to respond to disclosures is critical in connecting victim-survivors with the specialist support.

Context

Sexual violence is a complex and confronting issue often shrouded in shame, stigma and silence. In non-DFSV specialist service settings, this often results in victim-survivors being met with unhelpful or even harmful responses.

SafePath addressed this by supporting the multicultural and settlement sector in strengthening its knowledge and understanding of sexual violence, and appropriate responses to disclosures by victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

While often linked in with domestic and family violence given the co-occurrence within a broader pattern of abuse, sexual violence requires targeted learning given its additional complexities and stigma.

The sector practitioners who participated in SafePath reported sound levels of learning on domestic and family violence, with 82% having had previously attended relevant training. However, only 53% of participants had previously attended training on sexual violence.

When it comes to working with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in particular, the levels of previous training were lower across the sector: 72% had attended training on working with migrant and refugee victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, and only 44% had attended training on working with migrant and refugee victim-survivors of sexual violence.

SafePath impact

SafePath laid a sound, evidence-based foundation for building the capacity of the multicultural and settlement sector in improving responses to sexual violence.

Participants reported the following improvements in confidence as a direct result of the SafePath training:

19%

improvement in confidence in recognising behaviours that might be sexual violence

20%

improvement in confidence in responding safely and appropriately to a disclosure of sexual violence

20%

improvement in confidence in supporting people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who may have experienced sexual violence.

Participants shared the following feedback on their experience with the training:

97%

of participants learnt something new from the training that they would be able to apply to their role

96%

of participants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the relevance of the training to their role

93%

participants rated the training 4-5 stars out of 5

100%

of participants would recommend the training to others.

Key considerations

The need for systematic sector capacity building

Investment in sector capacity building must be meaningful, consistent and sustained. It must be culturally responsive, co-designed with community and people with lived experience, and reflect complex intersectional issues experienced by victim-survivors from migrant and refugee communities.

The multicultural and settlement sector is often a trusted point of engagement and a ‘soft entry’ to systems and services, and sector practitioners must be equipped with knowledge, skills and resources to effectively identify and respond to sexual violence, as well as domestic and family violence, and safely support victim-survivors. Organisations in regional areas, in particular, have access to fewer capacity building opportunities and lower levels of confidence in identifying and responding to disclosures of sexual violence.

Importantly, while SafePath focused on NSW, multicultural and settlement sector capacity building to effectively support migrant and refugee victim-survivors should be addressed nationally. The critical role of multicultural communities and the services that support them, including settlement services, to address violence—along with the need to resource them to continue doing this work in a safe and sustainable manner—was strongly emphasised in the Multicultural Communities Roundtable convened by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission in August 2025.

Focus on culturally responsive and victim-survivor centred practice

The SafePath capacity building approach focused on three core practice principles when working with migrant and refugee victim-survivors of sexual violence: culturally responsive practice, trauma-informed practice, and victim-survivor centred practice.

Participants were most familiar with trauma-informed practice and its importance when working with victim-survivors, however, there were inconsistent levels of understanding of culturally responsive practice, what this means and how to apply it when working with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Participants were consistently least familiar with victim-survivor centred practice. It is critical to equip practitioners with knowledge, skills and resources to ensure safe and appropriate support for victim-survivors, particularly at the intersection with culturally responsive practice.

Further, multicultural and settlement sector practitioners with lived experience of migration may have experienced sexual violence overseas or throughout their migration journey. They may also be connected to family and community overseas who may be affected by conflict and sexual violence. These themes were reiterated consistently through the training and necessitate a culturally responsive and trauma-informed approach to addressing community awareness and understanding.

Focus on children

As part of SafePath, sexual violence was only explored within an adult context, however, participants in the training consistently raised questions about child sexual abuse, and young boys and teenage boys demonstrating problematic sexualised behaviours. There is a need for targeted culturally responsive capacity building on child sexual abuse, and sexual development in children and young people.

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