

The Freedom Partnership **End Modern Slavery**

MEDIA RELEASE
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Salvos Welcome Senate Inquiry into Temporary Work Visa Programs

The Salvation Army Freedom Partnership to End Modern Slavery welcomes the announcement of a Senate Inquiry into the exploitation of temporary work visas including temporary skilled migrant (457), working holiday (417) and student visas. According to National Manager, Jenny Stanger, “The Freedom Partnership is concerned about this issue because we regularly respond to exploited migrants across a range of our Salvation Army services. In the most extreme cases, our Trafficking and Slavery Safe House is responding to forced labour, servitude, trafficking in persons and other slavery-like conditions.”

The Senate Inquiry will investigate a wide range of issues, including:

- The extent of exploitation and mistreatment of temporary work visa holders
- The adequacy of monitoring and enforcement of the programs
- The potential impact of designated area migration agreements, enterprise migration agreements, and labour agreements on the integrity of the 457 program
- The role and effect of English language requirements in work visa programs

The inquiry is timely as the Fair Work Ombudsman recently noted a significant increase in complaints from overseas workers and is currently reviewing wages and conditions into the 417 programme. It is also timely as it stands to inform the current review by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection of the Skilled Migration and Temporary Activity (subclass 400) Programme, which seeks to increase flexibility, reduce unnecessary red tape and impost on Australian business and maintain integrity in a new, simplified visa framework. “Any increase in flexibility must account for current gaps in the system that lead to worker exploitation and be coupled with increased protections, including appropriately resourced monitoring and formal mechanisms to connect workers to supportive networks outside the workplace,” says Stanger.

In December 2014, the Commonwealth announced a five year National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery that aims to reduce vulnerabilities of at-risk groups, including temporary workers. “Australia’s plan to combat slavery needs to be synchronised with labour and migration policy. Otherwise, there is a real risk of the National Action Plan being undermined. We need to address the disconnect between policies on migrant workers and slavery because they actually sit on the same spectrum of worker rights and conditions.”

“The Salvos are working hard to help disadvantaged Aussies find jobs, many of whom are young people. We hope the Inquiry will develop some key recommendations where government, industry and community can make employment accessible to locals before tapping into foreign labour markets. Where skills or labour shortages can be demonstrated, we support robust measures to provide opportunities to migrants to fill these shortages and attain a higher standard of living for themselves and their families.”

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See Freedom Partnership Submission to Department of Immigration and Border Protection Skilled Migration Review: <http://endslavery.salvos.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/SalvationArmySub-SkilledMigReview.pdf>

To make a pledge against modern slavery, or for more information about the Freedom Partnership initiative, please go to endslavery.salvos.org.au.

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- Because modern slavery is a hidden crime, it is difficult to know exactly how many victims there are. Fear, self-blame, and mistrust of authorities are all among key barriers to help seeking.
- Walk Free Foundation estimates there are 3000 people enslaved in Australia today.
- Reports of labour trafficking have increased 65% in the last three years.
- There is evidence that when resources are implemented to raise awareness about and intervene in a particular form of slavery, reporting and victim identification goes up.
- Temporary workers are particularly vulnerable to slavery as they are often lured with promises of opportunities and permanent migration, and are thus willing to tolerate exploitation.

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