



URGENT POST-BUDGET BRIEFING

ENCOURAGING SELF-SUFFICIENCY FOR NEWLY ARRIVED MIGRANTS –EXTENSION

In the 2018 Budget, the Government announced “savings of \$202.5 million over five years from 2017-18 by increasing the waiting period for newly arrived migrants to access certain welfare benefits from three years to four years from 1 July 2018.”

It is important to note that presently the waiting period is two years, not three, though legislation is currently before parliament to increase the existing waiting period to three years. The Budget Announcement therefore represents a doubling of the existing waiting period.

In addition, both the current Bill and the Budget seek to **increase the scope of the waiting period to include a range of payments previously excluded from these measures.**

Migrants should be supported, not excluded

The grant of permanent residency represents the conclusion of a complex visa application process. It symbolizes the **acceptance** of a migrant and their family into the Australian community and commences the two-way process of settlement. Most migrants coming to Australia are **well-resourced** to settle productively in a short timeframe, however there are circumstances in which unforeseen need may arise, requiring access to government support. In these instances, Australia should be ready and willing to **support** migrants to ensure they are able to achieve independence as quickly as possible, through early intervention and, where necessary, the provision of welfare support. **Australia stands to gain** the most through greater long-term economic and social contributions from better-settled migrants and their families.

Disproportionate effect on migrant women and children

Allowances intended for times of crisis, such as the widow allowance, bereavement allowance and carer allowance, are more likely to be accessed by **women**, who provide a disproportionate amount of care to family members and are more frequently reliant on a partner’s income. Waiting periods for paid parental leave, parenting payments and family tax benefits threaten women’s **reproductive rights** as well as **developmental outcomes of children**. Women who fall pregnant unexpectedly may feel financial pressure to terminate as a result of these new waiting periods. Children of permanent resident parents are Australian Citizens and are indirectly discriminated against through the application of the waiting period to their parents.

Existing “Significant Hardship” exemptions are insufficient

Migrants suffering instances of significant hardship may apply for the Special Benefit Payment, however the current criteria are restrictive and many migrants do not understand their rights or the process of applying. Furthermore, the payments covered by the waiting period are themselves “crisis payments” and a person’s need for any of the included payments should be sufficient in itself to earn the support of the Government.

This measure will not have the result of “encouraging self-sufficiency” but rather, has the potential to condemn Australia’s newest residents to economic hardship and thereby deny Australia the contributions of migrants who otherwise have so much to offer. This Budget savings measure should therefore be opposed.

As one of six national women’s alliances funded by the Australian Government, the **Harmony Alliance’s** purpose is to provide a national inclusive and informed voice on the multiplicity of issues impacting on experiences and outcomes of migrant and refugee women, while the **Settlement Council of Australia** represents over 90 agencies in the settlement sector, which comprise the vast majority of organisations across Australia providing settlement support to recently arrived migrants, including those from a refugee background.