

# LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

## OUR POSITION ON MODERN SLAVERY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Every person should be safe and free to choose how they live and work and do so in communities where they want to be. Life Without Barriers believes Australia can be a safe and welcoming place for all people, however modern slavery practices cause unbelievable harm worldwide, and Australia is still tackling modern slavery and associated significant breaches of human rights that occurs within its borders.

### Understanding Modern Slavery

Modern slavery describes situations where a person or group of people use coercion, threats or deception to exploit others and undermine their freedom. Modern slavery covers forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage and human trafficking. People in modern slavery arrangements typically experience ongoing abuse including physical and sexual violence and lack of freedom of movement. Around 50 million people are in modern slavery worldwide, with 28 million in forced labour and 22 million in forced marriage. One in eight people in forced labour are children, and young women and girls are significantly more likely to be victims of modern slavery. In Australia, the 2023 Global Slavery Index estimates that on any given day in 2021, there were 41,000 individuals living in modern slavery in Australia. This number does not include people outside Australia involved in Australia's global supply chain and does not reflect how Australian companies may be contributing to modern slavery in other jurisdictions through their purchasing and procurement processes.

### What informs our position

Australia has one of the strongest government responses to modern slavery and in Australia slavery and slavery-like arrangements are against the law. Despite this stance, modern slavery in Australia continues to be significantly underreported, with the Australian Federal Police assessing between 350 and 400 reports of modern slavery each year.

Around half of modern slavery reported in Australia occurs in domestic or private settings – in homes and in situations where arrangements are hidden<sup>1</sup>. Victims – and sometimes perpetrators – might not know the law is being broken. The complexity of modern slavery includes that some arrangements bring money or status to a victim's family and those facilitating modern slavery may themselves be in situations they feel unable to change. Commonly forced labour occurs when people come to Australia to work in industries

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, Findings from the Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery National Minimum Dataset pilot, July to December 2022

## LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

which rely on migrant workers and are misled by recruiters or coerced into work where they are not properly paid or are placed in unsafe conditions.

Addressing modern slavery means focusing on what is happening in and outside Australia, with an estimated A\$27 billion spent by Australians and Australian companies each year on commodities linked to modern slavery<sup>2</sup>, the majority of which are manufactured overseas. It requires the joint efforts of Government, non-Government organisations and communities to identify and dismantle modern slavery occurring in Australia.

### **Forced Marriage**

Forced marriage is where a person is married without freely and fully consenting. Forced marriage includes where a person is forced to marry through threats, deception or coercion, or physical or emotional abuse. It also includes where a person is unable to consent to marriage, either due to age or disability. Forced marriage does not occur in one cultural, religious or ethnic group however addressing forced marriage can be complicated by societal, familial and community contexts.

Forced marriage is recognised as a form of modern slavery and facilitating forced marriage is a federal criminal offence in Australia. Forced marriage is also considered a distinct form of domestic and family violence as defined by the laws of each Australian state. It has parallels with broader experiences of gendered violence, including coercive control. That those complicit in forced marriage situations can be guilty of offences under both federal and state laws compounds challenges to effectively supporting those impacted by forced marriage. Protection and recourse available to victims can depend on which system of law enforcement or victim support is responding to their situation. Measures such as apprehended domestic violence orders might not be available where a charge of modern slavery rather than domestic violence is laid, despite the offending behaviour constituting both. Further, people brought to Australia to participate in a forced marriage might fear the impact non-compliance might have on any visa allowing them to stay in Australia.

### **Our commitment**

In all activities Life Without Barriers recognises the fundamental human rights of people within Australia and internationally and the terrible impact modern slavery can have on these rights and human dignity. Life Without Barriers will continue to be transparent and conscientious in our procurement practices, and to support the communities we work with to understand, overcome and – where needed – escape modern slavery situations

---

<sup>2</sup> Walk Free 2023, *The Global Slavery Index*, Mindaroo Foundation, <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/>

## LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

There is a clear and critical need for all organisations to knowingly commit to practices that protect vulnerable people from the devastating impacts of modern slavery. As a national organisation, Life Without Barriers acknowledges that we are an active participant in global supply chains and have the capability and obligation to take comprehensive steps to safeguard the impact we have on people through our procurement. This commitment extends to our wholly owned subsidiaries.

As a partner to people living in communities across our nation, we embrace our responsibility to educate people on forced marriage, how to identify it and provide services to respond to people vulnerable to forced marriage. This commitment extends to working in genuine partnership with other service providers, community leaders and community groups so our joined efforts can have a great impact for individuals impacted by forced marriage.

### **Our actions**

- Participating responsibly and transparently in global supply chains and ensuring our procurement practices are consistent with our obligations as set out in our Modern Slavery Statement.
- Delivering programs aimed at preventing forced marriage and supporting people leaving forced marriage arrangements with empathy and courage.
- Educating communities, including those in which both modern slavery victims and perpetrators live, around what modern slavery looks like and why modern slavery practices cannot occur.
- Supporting our staff and carers to understand modern slavery and to know what steps to take if they become aware of a modern slavery concern.
- Working with other organisations to ensure holistic and effective support to people in modern slavery situations, and to increase community awareness around modern slavery and how it might be prevented.