

**Submission  
No 23**

**INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT FOR OLDER VICTORIANS FROM MIGRANT  
AND REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS**

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# Elder abuse and older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Submission to the Victorian  
Parliament Legal and Social Issues  
Standing Committee

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## **Elder abuse and older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds**

Submission to the Victorian Parliament Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

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# Elder abuse and older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

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Older migrants and refugees require accessible and culturally appropriate services to address elder abuse as a form of family violence.

Seniors Rights Victoria sees a range of elder abuse problems experienced by older people. Those from migrant and refugee backgrounds may experience any or all of these issues; there is no clear evidence to say any particular culture or community experiences elder abuse at higher or lower rates than any other. However, older migrants and refugees, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds; those who have recently arrived in Australia or live within newly established communities; and those who have experienced trauma, may experience particular challenges when recognising abuse; accessing information, services and support; and seeking redress and recovery.

This submission will highlight some of the issues observed in clients of the SRV helpline and advice service, while acknowledging that many older people do not access support for elder abuse, due to a multitude of barriers. The experiences of those who use our service are only indicative of the need within the wider community.

## Seniors Rights Victoria

Seniors Rights Victoria is a specialist community legal centre that works to prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older people. SRV operates under the principle of empowerment of older people, working with individuals to increase their degree of self-determination, enabling them to represent their own interests and claim their rights.

To older people (aged 60 and above or Indigenous Australians aged 45 and older), SRV provides a helpline service, including information and referrals; specialist legal services; and social work advocacy, including short-term individual support.

We also provide a helpline service, including information and referrals; community and professional education; and secondary consultations, to friends and family members of older people, service providers and professionals

SRV also has a role in policy and advocacy, capacity building, and working collaboratively with relevant sectors to better identify, address and prevent elder abuse.

Operating since 2008, SRV is funded by the Community Legal Service Program through Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. It is a program of the Council of the Ageing Victoria (COTA Vic) and governed by its board.

## Elder abuse

Elder abuse is any form of abuse, violence or mistreatment that causes harm to an older person, and occurs within a relationship of trust. Some older people may describe this type of behaviour as disrespect or mistreatment, rather than abuse or violence. Population-based surveys estimate that up to 14 per cent of older people experience elder abuse.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of abuse and neglect within residential aged care may be higher, as indicated by the recent Royal Commission into Aged Care.

Elder abuse comes in many forms. In many cases, the person responsible is a family member, friend, professional, or paid caregiver. Often older people do not realise that elder abuse is a form of family violence, or that there are services that can help address the problem.

Elder abuse does not include disputes over consumer rights or criminal acts by strangers.



Figure 1. Percentage of Seniors Rights Victoria advice service clients who experienced different types of abuse (2012–2019).

The elder abuse most commonly experienced by older people seeking assistance from Seniors Rights Victoria is in the form of controlling behaviours (psychological and social abuse) and financial abuse. Often a client will be experiencing more than one type of abuse, and subject to a pattern of behaviours and mistreatment over an extended period of time (rather than a one-off assault). An analysis of SRV service data showed that for over 90 per

cent of clients the perpetrator of abuse was a family member, and in 67 per cent of cases this was a son or daughter of the older person.

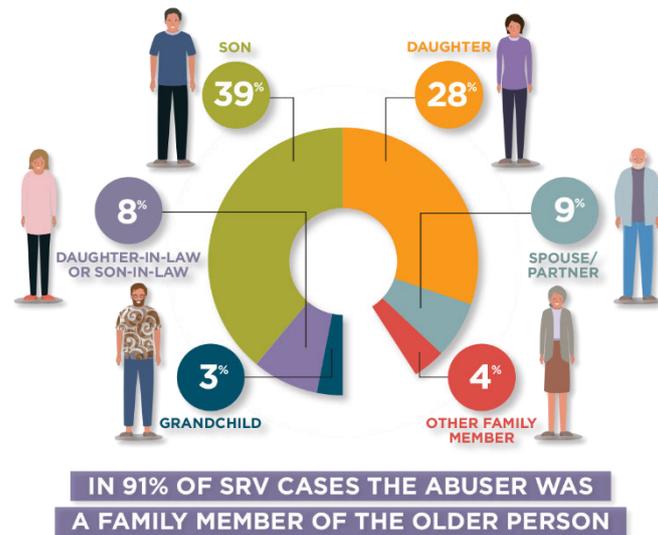


Figure 2. SRV advice calls 2012–2019

For many older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds, their adult children are a major connection to wider society. Adult children often provide interpreting and translating for their parents, as well as assisting their parents to navigate health, aged and community services. Considering this, when an adult child behaves abusively toward their parent, it can have wide-ranging consequences. It is not only that the behaviours are traumatic and distressing but also that the older person's connection and access to supports within their wider community may be affected.

## Financial abuse

As people age they are often offered, or sometimes request, assistance from family members or friends to help with their finances. This may be through use of a power of attorney document, or more informally, with assistance for shopping, bills and banking. The person assisting sometimes uses this opportunity to behave unethically or criminally to steal money, make financial decisions on behalf of the older person that are beneficial to themselves, or pressure the older person to give them money.

Other forms of financial abuse Seniors Rights Victoria sees are where family members have requested a loan from the older person and not repaid it (often later claiming it was a gift), or the family member has taken out loans in the older person's name (or with the older person as guarantor) and then failed to repay the loan, with the financial institution seeking to recover from the older person.

Older migrants and refugees, particularly those who have experienced trauma, civil war and violence that has interrupted their access to education, may have lower levels of general literacy within their own languages, and of financial literacy. This can be particularly true of women who have not had the opportunity for extensive education due to their home duties, or coming from cultures where men take responsibility for financial decisions within the family. This can lead some older people to be more reliant on family members or others for financial advice and assistance, consequently making them more vulnerable to abuse. Lower levels of English, and of literacy in one's own language, also makes it difficult to access services, information and support that could help.

### **Property transfers**

Sometimes an adult child influences their parent to transfer their home into the name of the adult child as a gift, or as part of an agreement to support the child's future. This can also occur as a mistaken effort to avoid aged care fees or complications with inheritance when one parent has died. There are significant financial risks to the older person in gifting their home to the adult child while still alive, including potential homelessness if the relationship breaks down. It is always advised that people involved in any property transfer seek independent legal and financial advice, but this rarely happens in transfers within the family, particularly if the older person is not confident accessing such advice.

### **Children returning home**

An adult child or extended family member sometimes moves back into the family home with the older person on a temporary basis and then refuses to leave and/or refuses to contribute financially to the household. Often the person moving in is doing so at a time of stress or difficulty in their own life (such as a relationship breakdown, unemployment, substance abuse or gambling issues) and the older person is trying to help. Seniors Rights Victoria sees many clients where the adult child or family member has used abusive and aggressive behaviours and intimidation towards the older person, or refused to assist them with promised care.

Each person's personal experiences, along with their cultural and generational norms and expectations, will influence how they feel about parent-child relationships and responsibilities, as well as intergenerational households. The psychological impacts of elder abuse on the older person can be significant, particularly when the abuse occurs over a long period of time. As well as the stress, anxiety and depression caused by the abuse, many parents struggle with having to take action against their abusive adult child; with not being able to solve their problems and get them the help they need; and with feelings of parental shame and responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

## CASE STUDY

*Maria migrated from Italy to Australia in the 1960s, and has four children. Maria never had the opportunity to attend school and speaks an Italian dialect, reliant on her children when she needs to access services in Australia.*

*Five years ago, Maria's youngest son, Harry, returned to live in the family home after the breakdown of his marriage. After some time, Harry took Maria to her bank to apply for a personal loan. Harry sat in the meeting with the loan officer and interpreted for his mother. Maria signed the loan agreement but did not really understand that she had signed up to a personal loan for \$15,000.*

## Assets for care and family agreements

Sometimes an older person is encouraged to sell their home and gift the proceeds to an adult child in return for accommodation and care as they age. They usually move into the adult child's home, or a granny flat, in an arrangement that is referred to as a family agreement or assets for care agreement. If the arrangement breaks down (due to abuse, conflict or promises not being kept) further issues can arise if the adult child refuses to repay the older person when they have to move out. This can be a particular issue for recently arrived older people, who often have limited options in terms of independent accommodation.

## Guardianship and administration

Despite the obligations in legislation and under the common law, decisions made by appointed guardians and administrators are not always made in accordance with the will and preference or best interests of the older person in mind. This occurs both in instances where the person still has capacity to make decisions, and also for those who have lost capacity. Guardianship and administration abuse also includes the appointed person making unilateral decisions without consulting the older person.

## Grandparenting

When people contact SRV the challenges they might be facing regarding their grandparenting role are often only disclosed as a part of larger issues of abuse; they're not usually the main issue that people seek help for. However, any issues regarding grandparenting can be traumatic for the individual, particularly when there is a risk of estrangement. The most common issues to do with grandparenting are around a family member withholding access to grandchildren, concerns for the safety and wellbeing of grandchildren, and issues related to informal and casual care of the grandchildren.

## Contributory parent visas

Occasionally, elder abuse can occur in the context of older people migrating to Australia on contributory parent visas. Sometimes, older migrants come to Australia to assist with bringing up their grandchildren and providing domestic support, while their adult children work. Often the older person contributes all the expenses for this arrangement (such as visa costs and assurance of support), as well as contributing to property and household costs, having sold their property and assets in their home country. Should abuse occur, and the older person need to leave the family household, they can sometimes find themselves homeless and reliant on charity. Often no government financial support is available, and people on visas are very reluctant to bring their situation to the attention of services.

## Adequacy of services for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds

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An analysis of Seniors Rights Victoria service data gives an indication of who is accessing our service, but not whether this is adequate to the need in the community.

Seniors Rights Victoria is able to give timely, supportive services to older Victorians from all backgrounds, and we use a whole-of-person, intersectional approach to ensure that each individual's needs are considered. However, our services are only available to those who reach out to (or are put in touch with) us; we are concerned that this may be more difficult for recently arrived migrants, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and older people reliant on their family members for assistance. We are also concerned that due to the small size of our service and resourcing, we are unable to offer truly culturally appropriate services and community education support to the diversity of communities in Victoria.

In general, migrant and refugee older people are at greater risk of elder abuse because of generally lower levels of financial, health, legal and language literacy, and a higher reliance on extended family for information and supports. Migrant and refugee communities often live in outer, remote and rural local government areas of lower socio-economic wealth, compounding their vulnerabilities and capacity to access services when they experience elder abuse.

Seniors Rights Victoria has long collected demographic information related to a person's country of birth, their need of an interpreter and their proficiency in English. The service has only recently begun collecting information about their year of arrival in Australia, and

languages spoken at home. This data, while useful, only paints a picture of those people who call our service – and this is likely to be only a small proportion of people who actually experience elder abuse.

It is recommended that the work done through the Family Violence Data Collection Framework, particularly in relation to culturally and linguistically diverse cohorts, be implemented across the Victorian community services sector (and not only for those organisations working under the MARAM framework). This would ensure consistent data collection related to the diversity of service users, and result in better targeting of resources.

We recently analysed seven years of our client data related to the advice call service (where an older person can receive free personal advice, over the phone or in person, from a lawyer and advocate).<sup>3</sup> Over the seven-year period, a small majority of clients (52%) were born in Australia, compared with an estimated 59% of the Victorian population of the same age.<sup>4</sup> While 41% of the Victorian population aged 60 years and over was born overseas<sup>5</sup>, they comprised 48% of those requiring advice calls after experiencing abuse.

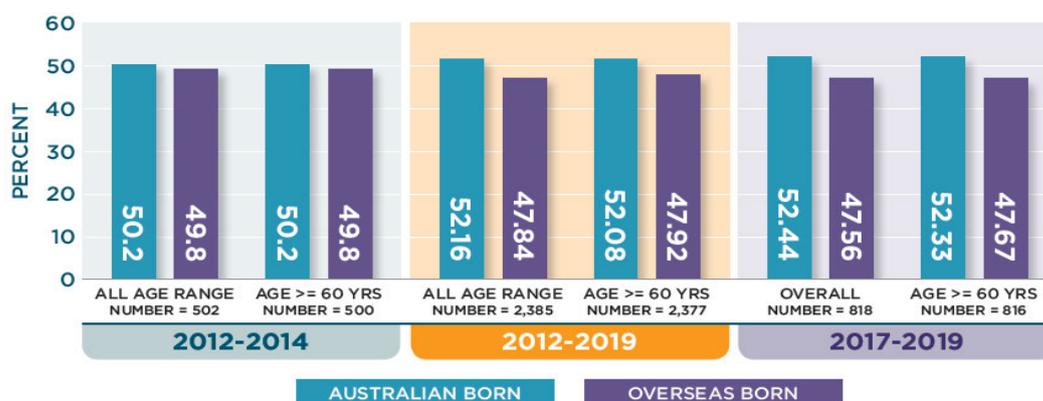


Figure 3. Country of origin of SRV advice call clients

We are cautious to make any interpretation of this data as anything other than descriptive. It could indicate that overseas-born older people are more in need of our services (i.e. experiencing higher rates of abuse), that they are aware of the service because of targeted community education, or Australian-born people are more likely to engage and be able to afford private support (rather than the need a government-funded service).

## Country of birth of Seniors Rights Victoria clients

Over a seven-year period, 47.84% of Seniors Rights Victoria advice clients were born overseas. Of total, 7.46% were born in the United Kingdom, followed by 5.20% in Greece, and 4.65% in Italy. These figures are strongly driven by post-war migration patterns and are

consistent with the wider Victorian population, which has large Greek and Italian communities.

It is important to note the influence of changing migration patterns which can be seen in the demographics of the older population: while overseas-born Victorians aged 75+ are predominately from European countries including Italy, England, Greece, Germany and the Netherlands, the younger cohort aged 60 to 64 are predominately from England, China, Italy, Vietnam and New Zealand.<sup>6</sup> We would therefore expect SRV service usage data to reflect these changes in coming years, necessitating increased focus on resources and culturally appropriate support for older people from Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds.

COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Frequency	%
Australia	1,244	52.16
United Kingdom	178	7.46
Greece	124	5.20
Italy	111	4.65
Germany	51	2.14
Macedonia	51	2.14
Malta	47	1.97
China	44	1.84
Croatia	43	1.80
Egypt	33	1.38
India	33	1.38
Netherlands	29	1.22
Poland	29	1.22
Serbia	23	0.96
New Zealand	22	0.92
Philippines	21	0.88
Hungary	19	0.80
Lebanon	18	0.75
<b>Total number</b>	<b>2,385</b>	

**Figure 4. Top 18 countries of birth of SRV advice call clients 2012-2019**

It is important to emphasise that this data reflects the people accessing the Seniors Rights Victoria service, rather than the community need. That people from a certain cultural group do not seek assistance for elder abuse does not mean that they are not experiencing abuse. It may indicate that this cohort need more support and culturally appropriate community awareness activities to ensure people are aware of and able to access the service if they require it.

While demographic data is a useful indicator of need, resources and service provision should not be focused only on the larger populations of culturally and linguistically diverse older people. The smaller cultural groups (particularly cohorts who are newly arrived) are arguably more in need of dedicated accessible and culturally appropriate resources. Due to the smaller total number of people, older Victorians from these populations may be more likely to be socially and geographically isolated from the wider population and from their own communities, which may be less established. For example, women who have migrated to Australia for marriage may live in a diversity of metropolitan and regional areas, and may socialise primarily with their Australian-born husband's local community, rather than community members from their own cultural group. Extra consideration needs to be given as to how to best communicate with these women and others who do not maintain a strong connection to their home ethnic community.

The high degree of shame and stigma experienced by older people around elder abuse, particularly within communities where filial responsibility and care is expected, may result in some older people's reticence, and this must be considered when delivering community awareness activities or expecting older people to actively engage with the topic. Services need to ensure they are not solely reliant on community leaders, or ethnic-specific social groups, but be able to communicate with people using an intersectional lens that considers the multiple elements of a person's identity and the communities to which they belong.

## Barriers to access

Seniors Rights Victoria has a long history of community awareness outreach to culturally and linguistically diverse groups, as well as partnerships to and the provision of services to all older members of the community.

In collaboration with SRV, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) conducts Elder Abuse Bicultural Community Educator training sessions for people working with CALD seniors, support services or community organisations. Once they have completed their training, ECCV also supports bicultural community educators to deliver culturally and linguistically appropriate information sessions to raise awareness of elder abuse in their communities and direct them to the appropriate support services available in Victoria. The training was adapted in response to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 and now also runs online.<sup>7</sup> It is important that these activities continue to be funded and resourced.

Due to our limited resources we are not able to deliver our services direct to clients in languages other than English, relying instead on the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS) when a client requires assistance in their own language. While our website uses an

automatic language translation tool, this is tempered by the general lower digital literacy among older adults, particularly those above the age of 80 years.

Analysis of service data showed that the majority of Seniors Rights Victoria advice call clients (86.29%) reported speaking English very well and this trend increased slightly between 2012–2014 (84.86%) and 2017–2019 (86.92%). About 1 in 50 clients did not speak English at all. Over time, the trend of requiring an interpreter to make calls remained fairly consistent: 14.74% in 2012–2014, 13.57% in 2017–2019, and averaging 13.75% for the seven years 2012–2019.

Unfortunately, this data does not show whether the community need is being met in this area, and we anticipate it is not. Some of the barriers to service provision are similar to other community service organisations: it is likely that older people who do not speak English will be reluctant to call a helpline about such a sensitive issue, and hesitant about their ability to interpret legal advice. It may also be the case that people from non-English speaking backgrounds are less aware of the service, and may not be familiar with terms such as ‘seniors rights’ or ‘elder abuse’, or the terminology used for the situations we often deal with (such as power of attorney abuse, assets for care arrangements, coercive control, etc).

Some barriers to access apply across populations, including not recognising behaviours as abusive; not wanting to speak publicly of a ‘family’ issue; being ashamed or feeling responsible for the abusive treatment; and not wanting negative consequences for the perpetrator.<sup>8</sup> A significant barrier to access for older migrants and refugees is that many may be reliant on their family members to provide language interpretation for a range of services, from doctor’s appointments to discussions with banks and utilities. If the family member who provides this assistance, is also the one who is perpetrating abuse, there is little chance the older person will be able to access support.

Access patterns to the SRV service changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019 (pre-pandemic), 15% of clients required an interpreter. There were 205 clients (43.9%) born overseas, and of these 82% were from countries where English is not an official language. In 2020, the following year, when public health restrictions resulted in two lockdown periods, 11% of clients required an interpreter. There were 143 SRV clients (38.1%) born overseas, and of those 81% were from countries where English is not an official language. This indicates that the pandemic and lockdowns may have disproportionately affected the help-seeking behaviours of overseas-born clients. This cohort were less likely to book an advice call in 2020 (decrease of 30.2%), particularly those who required an interpreter (decrease of 38.2%), and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Most SRV clients who rely on interpreters have someone to facilitate the call for them – they rely on someone identifying the appropriate service for them and the number to call

(as they cannot read English). In the absence of that assistance because of lockdowns limiting visitors and in-person support services to the home, they would not know how or who to call. They may also have been inhibited by the proximity of the perpetrator.

The effect of the pandemic lockdowns on the habits of overseas-born clients, and those requiring an interpreter, were more significant than for Australian-born and English-speaking clients. This indicates that this cohort may be more sensitive to barriers of access and need more specific resources and support to address this challenge.

We know from several successful projects, including the uptake of the vaccine during COVID in 2021, that funding for bilingual workers is crucial in health promotion. SRV supports the increase of bilingual workers located in key housing and health prevention sites across Victoria to support older people who experience family violence and elder abuse as a key prevention strategy of elder abuse within vulnerable migrant and refugee communities.

## Elder Abuse Prevalence Study

The Elder Abuse Prevalence Study, funded by the Australian Government, is intended to give a better indication of the prevalence of elder abuse in the community. Unfortunately, while this study has been completed, the findings have not been released. We are therefore unable to match prevalence against service access to measure adequacy of the response. The survey was designed to include specific data about culturally and linguistically diverse cohorts, and how these experiences may differ from the general population. The Australian Government should be urged to release this data so that elder abuse services have an indication of community need.

Seniors Rights Victoria recommends that the Australian Government releases the results of the Elder Abuse Prevalence Study.

## Recognition of elder abuse

Older people who are reliant on family members for knowledge about, or communication with, local services and supports are unlikely to seek help if it is family members who are the cause of their problems or perpetrators of abuse. Abuse or violence by family members can go unreported in many families, particularly in marriages where these behaviours might have been longstanding and not considered to be something that can be changed or spoken of outside of the family. In some cultural groups, the death of a husband may mean a son or son-in-law becomes the primary decision-maker for the widow, and where this is an

accepted practice a person may not feel comfortable to speak up even when the situation is abusive.

To ensure that elder abuse is identified and addressed throughout the community, there is a need for professionals from all services (including health, aged and community services) to be able to recognise it, in all its forms, and know where to direct the older person to seek support.

As well as recognising potential elder abuse and intimate partner violence, professionals working with older people need to be confident in supporting the older person in a culturally appropriate manner to introduce opportunities for change and empowerment.

## Financial counselling for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Recently arrived older migrants and refugees, particularly those who have experienced trauma, civil war and violence, may have lower levels of general literacy, including financial literacy. This may have occurred because of disruption to formal education (particularly for women) and a lack of opportunity to pursue education because of home duties.

Any person with low financial literacy is more vulnerable to financial abuse, and this is particularly true of older migrants and refugees who are reliant on family members or others for advice and assistance.

The Money Talks for Better Ageing project aimed to strengthen the financial wellbeing of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Funded by Ecstra Foundation it was run by Australian Multicultural Community Services, in partnership with Seniors Rights Victoria, Financial Counselling Victoria and local financial counsellors. The program included two co-designed workshops with over 100 older people. It was found that many CALD older people face challenges including not having the confidence to ask for help; inexperience with technology; difficulty in accessing information due to language barriers; and a lack of knowledge of multilingual resources and service providers.

While there are some general financial counselling and financial literacy resources available, it is not enough for these to just be provided in multiple languages. There is a need for culturally appropriate financial counselling adapted to the individual's experience and literacy level.

## Importance of face-to-face meetings

Seniors Rights Victoria has assisted clients who have presented with issues related to financial abuse during the pandemic lockdowns and because of the necessity for teleconference meetings it has been harder to assist these clients. SRV staff have reported that an in-person interview (rather than online) is really required to fully assess the client's needs, examine documentation in their possession, and to be cognisant of any issues of decision-making capacity and financial literacy. Sometimes this can be addressed if there are other support services in place that can fill the gap with communication and help with the gathering of documentation, but this is not always possible. The clients themselves often request face-to-face appointments due to the difficulties they face in communicating over the phone and understanding the advice they are being provided with.

While the pandemic has increased the availability of telephone and online services, these are not always suitable for older clients when complex information needs to be relayed, documentation needs to be considered, and decision-making capacity assessed.

It is recommended that services for older people continue to be resourced adequately to ensure face-to-face meeting options, and there should not be an increased reliance on online/teleconference assistance for this cohort.

## Responsibilities of banks and financial institutions

In some situations the financial abuse has occurred because a bank has not properly considered the rights and needs of the older person. There should be a greater onus on banks to ensure they use accredited interpreters (rather than relying on family members) and that they speak to the older person privately without the presence of the family member to try and minimise the risk of undue influence and coercion. It should also be required that banks show the older person has received independent legal and financial advice when involved in loans and transfers that are potentially detrimental.

### Case study

*Alina, in her late 70's, migrated from Macedonia to Australia thirty-five years ago. Having never had the opportunity to go to school, Alina was illiterate, speaking Macedonian and no English. Having worked hard throughout her life, Alina managed to own her own home with her husband.*

*Alina's son Michael had never left home and although he worked he often pressured Alina for money. After the death of his father, Michael suggested that Alina mortgage her home so Michael could build units on the back of the property. Alina was reluctant to mortgage the*

*property, but Michael became very aggressive, and Alina was frightened that if she did not agree Michael's abuse would escalate.*

*Alina and Michael attended the bank together. There was no interpreter and Michael did all the talking, despite Alina being the only property owner. The bank provided Alina with a \$400,000 loan, which Michael directed to himself. He commenced building the units but after three years there was little more than a shed in the backyard.*

*Alina was unsure what Michael had done with the money but was concerned that he may have used the money to buy drugs. Whenever she questioned Michael he became increasingly aggressive towards her. Eventually she had to call the police, who removed Michael and obtained an intervention order to protect Alina. The police directed Alina to Seniors Rights Victoria for assistance as she could not afford to continue to make the repayments from her pension and was concerned she would have to sell her home.*

## Older migrants and Contributory Parent Visas

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It is difficult for people who are not of working age to migrate to Australia, with the most common pathway being a parent visa.

A Parent visa (Subclass 103), is the most affordable option, with a fee of \$6490, however, the waiting period of up to 30 years renders it impracticable.<sup>9</sup> Most older migrants therefore turn to the Contributory Parent Visa (Subclass 143), where the family member that the parent is migrating to join is required to provide an Assurance of Support bond of \$10,000, ensuring that any social security benefits accessed by the older person within ten years of arrival are repaid. This visa costs \$47,825 (plus the bond) and has a waiting period of approximately five years.

Seniors Rights Victoria, and other community legal centres, are aware of some older Victorians who have arrived on a Contributory Parent Visa, and then been subject to elder abuse. Because of the migrant's dependence on their adult child (formally through the Assurance of Support bond, and informally through living arrangements and daily supports) they rarely seek help to address the abuse they are experiencing.

In 2020, Carmela Quimbo, a social work student on placement at SRV, completed a scoping report on this issue. While the report was restricted to desktop research and interviews with service providers (rather than interviews with older visa holders), it highlighted some of the issues faced by this cohort.

The project found that while the conditions of the visa do not seem to make abuse more likely, they may exacerbate existing family conflict and increase financial pressures within the family. In addition, the complex visa conditions and assurance of support that render the older person financially dependent on the child who has sponsored the visa, can inhibit an older person from seeking support for any abuse they experience.

A number of factors that can affect newly arrived older migrants and impact on their help-seeking behaviours were identified, including:

- unfamiliarity or misunderstandings about Australian services and the social security system
- cultural and generational understandings of what behaviours are perceived as abusive
- language barriers and a lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate resources leading to a further reliance on family members for communication
- lack of access to funds other than from the perpetrator.

These are coupled with factors affecting the wider population who experience elder abuse, including:

- feelings of parental or familial responsibility for the perpetrator and their behaviours
- shame and stigma associated with family breakdown
- a desire not to further damage family relationships or get the perpetrator in trouble by seeking help.

It was also noted that there is a lack of clear and accessible information from the Government and Centrelink regarding what support is available to people on Contributory Parent visas who are experiencing elder abuse, particularly in circumstances that makes continued cohabitation with their sponsor family untenable.

The report (available on request) made a number of recommendations:

- to conduct further research with older people who have recently migrated and their families
- to develop resources that help older people and families plan for migration, including troubleshooting for unexpected consequences such as family conflict
- to provide better information to older migrants about social, health and legal services and where to seek help if experiencing family conflict or elder abuse
- to provide information sessions for service providers regarding Centrelink supports available to older migrants and how to access them.

## Conclusion

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Elder abuse as a form of family violence can be a very difficult subject matter for families to grapple with. The combination of abusive and distressing behaviours, along with the often catastrophic financial consequences for someone dealing with age-related challenges, can be overwhelming for even the most well-resourced and supported older person.

These difficulties can be enhanced for older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who face additional barriers when identifying and accessing services, and when taking action to address the abuse.

It is imperative that older people from migrant and refugee communities are supported with culturally appropriate resources delivered in an accessible way. This can only be done by organisations that are properly resourced to deliver and expand their services working hand-in-hand with the communities they are there to support.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Pillemer, David Burnes, Catherine Riffin and Mark S. Lachs (2016) Elder Abuse: Global Situation, Risk Factors, and Prevention Strategies, *Gerontologist*, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 194–205.

<sup>2</sup> Freda Vrantsidis, Briony Dow, Melanie Joosten (NARI) and Mandy Walmsley and Jenny Blakey (SRV) (2016) The Older Person's Experience: Outcomes of Interventions into Elder Abuse, National Ageing Research Institute and Seniors Rights Victoria, May 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Melanie Joosten, Pragya Gartoulla, Peter Feldman, Bianca Brijnath & Briony Dow, Seven years of elder abuse data in Victoria (2012–2019), National Ageing Research Institute in partnership with Seniors Rights Victoria, August 2020, Melbourne, Australia. Available at <https://seniorsrights.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2020August26PolicySevenYearsEADDataVictoria.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> ABS.Stat, Estimated resident population, Country of birth, State/territory, Age and sex – 2016. Accessed at <http://stat.data.abs.ov.au/>

<sup>5</sup> ABS.Stat op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> ABS.Stat op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> See ECCV Elder Abuse Prevention. Accessed at <https://eccv.org.au/elder-abuse-prevention/>

<sup>8</sup> Joosten, M., Vrantsidis, F. and Dow, B. (2017) Understanding Elder Abuse: A Scoping Study, Melbourne: University of Melbourne and the National Ageing Research Institute

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government visa information: Parents visas queue release dates. Accessed at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-processing-times/family-visa-processing-priorities/parent-visas-queue-release-dates>