

Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston
Minister for Families and Social Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: senator.ruston@aph.gov.au

CC Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Via email: senator.fierravanti-wells@aph.gov.au

31 March 2020

Dear Minister

AVAILABILITY OF ASSISTANCE TO TEMPORARY VISA HOLDERS

As representatives of the Italian community in Australia*, we are writing to express our community's deep and widespread concerns about the livelihood of Italian temporary visa holders whose employment has been interrupted or terminated because of the coronavirus emergency. Such visa holders, irrespective of citizenship, do not qualify for the financial assistance approved by the Federal Parliament on 23 March 2020 and in additional subsequent measures.

Italian community social and welfare organisations throughout Australia have been flooded by thousands of enquiries requests for support by temporary visa holders who have lost their jobs because of recent business closures. Most of the enquiries are individuals who have lost their jobs because of recent closures of restaurants, cafes, tourism and hospitality establishments and now have no alternative means of support. While most of them are single individuals, a significant proportion also have a family to support.

From recent media coverage of this issue, we understand you are considering measures to provide some form of financial support to temporary visa holders that were excluded from the recently announced assistance measures. We would strongly support such measures and urge you to use your ministerial discretion to assist temporary visa holders, irrespective of their nationality, whose wellbeing has been imperilled by circumstances beyond their control.

These visa holders are a critical component of the workforce, particularly in activities such as seasonal agricultural harvests, restaurants, cafes and catering services, and tourist services. For many years, their employment has been making a substantial and growing contribution to the economy and to the wellbeing of all Australians and will continue to do so in years to come. Quite apart from compassionate and other deserving grounds, it is vital that these workers be assisted to endure the hardship of the current crisis and be available to contribute fully to the post-hibernation economic recovery.

Non-provision of at least basic assistance to casual workers with temporary visas guaranteeing would condemn them and their dependents to a state of destitution and desperation as the meagre savings they may have will quickly run out. As Australians, it would be deeply unfair of us to use the labour of these individuals to increase national economic wellbeing in good times and ignore their plight when times are tough.

Dear Minister, we thank you for your consideration, and hope you will be able to act urgently to provide some appropriate relief to ease the plight of workers with temporary visas who have been caught up in unfortunate circumstances not of their making.

Yours sincerely

Franco Papandrea, General Council of Italians Abroad member for Australia and New Zealand
Vittorio Petriconi, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of Western Australian
Francesco Pascalis, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of Victoria & Tasmania
Maurizio Aloisi, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of New South Wales
Mariangela Stagnitti, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of Queensland & Northern Territory
Christian Verdicchio, President, Committee of Italians Abroad of South Australia
Francesco Barilaro, President, Committee of Italians Abroad, Australian Capital Territory

**We are elected volunteers who represent the Italian community in Australia on consultative bodies established by Italian laws.*

The General Council of Italians Abroad (Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all'Estero – CGIE) is a consultative and advisory body to the Italian Parliament and Government on all matters concerning Italians abroad. The members of the Council are elected by an electoral college comprising all members of Committees of Italians Abroad and delegates of Italian community associations in a country.

Committee of Italians Abroad (Comitato degli Italiani all'Estero – Com.It.Es.) are consultative and advisory bodies established in Italian Consular districts abroad. Each Comites in Australia has 12 members who are elected by universal suffrage of Italians residing in the district. The elected membership is augmented with co-opted members designated by Italian community associations operating in the district.