

Invisible Victims: Quantifying the Impact of Crime on International Students in Australia

*Examining Systemic Data Exclusions, Visa Precarity, and
the Dark Figure of Crime in Australia*

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Executive Summary

Problem in one sentence

Australia cannot accurately count crimes against international students because the national Crime Victimization Survey excludes overseas residents and most student housing. This creates a data blind spot that hides thousands of victims and prevents evidence-based policy responses.

Why it matters

International students contribute billions to Australia's economy and enrich its cultural and social fabric. Yet their experiences of exploitation and crime remain statistically invisible, allowing harm to persist without accountability.

Headline findings

- International students are currently not counted in national crime data.
- Applying national victimisation rates to the 2025 student cohort (720,720 visa holders) suggests approximately **28,000 victims** of personal crime each year are missing from official records.
- Including them would increase Australia's national personal-crime total by approximately 3.4 percent.
- The largest hidden harms are threatened assault, physical assault, and sexual assault.
- **77 percent** of international students are paid below minimum wage, demonstrating a broader pattern of systemic exploitation beyond personal crime.
- Exploitation also includes housing abuse and financial scam recruitment, forming a cycle of vulnerability and silence.

Drivers of invisibility

- Structural data exclusion: international students are omitted from crime surveys and many live in excluded accommodation types.
- Visa-based fear: students often avoid reporting crime or exploitation due to concerns it may affect their visa status.

Urgent reforms (12–18 months)

- Require national crime surveys to include international students and publish data disaggregated by visa category.
- Legislate an absolute reporting firewall so victims can safely report harm without immigration consequences.
- Strengthen university duty of care, including regulated housing oversight and arrival-stage rights and scam education.

What success looks like

- International students counted in official crime statistics.
- Victims able to report crime without fear of deportation.
- Policy and funding based on complete evidence, not partial data.

Bottom line

Visibility is the first act of justice. Australia must count, protect, and support international students so that every victim is recognised and every student is safe.

Abstract

This paper quantifies the “**Dark Figure of Crime**” affecting **international students** in Australia, a large and economically vital cohort systematically exposed to exploitation yet rendered **statistically invisible**. The core problem involves a two-fold structural failure: the Australian Bureau of Statistics Crime Victimization Survey (CVS) excludes “**overseas residents**” and individuals in “**non-private dwellings**”, while perpetrators exploit **visa precarity** to deter reporting. Using **conservative illustrative estimates** that apply ABS 2023–24 victimisation rates to the 2025 student-visa cohort (720,720 holders as of April 2025), the analysis indicates that including this group would increase Australia’s total for personal crimes by approximately **3.4 percent**.

Evidence highlights widespread exploitation across domains, including **wage theft** (77 percent paid below minimum wage, 26 percent at half or less), **housing precarity** in unregulated rental markets (38 percent of legal-centre cases), and elevated vulnerability to **financial scams and criminal recruitment**. To fulfil Australia’s duty of care, this paper recommends two immediate systemic reforms: expanding the ABS CVS to include international students and their accommodation contexts, and legislating an **absolute reporting firewall** preventing regulators and law-enforcement agencies from sharing a victim’s identifying information with the Department of Home Affairs, except with consent or for genuine public-safety reasons.

These conservative estimates follow established criminological methods used to approximate under-reported crime and are intended to **guide policy**, not replace official statistical processes.

Figure 1. *From invisibility to inclusion a national vision of safety, visibility, and justice for every international student.*



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Founder & Director, We Are Australia® Foundation Limited
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Master of Social Work Intern, Excelsia University College
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- This publication stands as a testament to what can be achieved when advocacy, research, and lived experience come together to demand better outcomes, not just for international students, but for the future of Australia as a compassionate and just society.
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I. Introduction: The Paradox of Presence and Invisibility

Australia's international education sector stands as one of the nation's most valuable social and economic pillars, generating over \$40 billion annually and shaping Australia's global identity. Yet behind the image of diversity and opportunity lies a hidden reality of **invisibility: thousands** of international students whose experiences of exploitation, abuse, and victimisation remain statistically and socially obscured. While these students are highly visible in classrooms, workplaces, and communities, their suffering is largely absent from the national crime narrative. This paradox of presence and invisibility forms the central premise of this report.



Figure 2. *International students contribute to Australia's social and economic fabric, yet remain statistically invisible within national victimisation data.*

The following section establishes the conceptual framework required to interpret these dynamics, grounding the analysis in criminological theory and migration scholarship. The section outlines the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin this research, defining the concept of the **dark figure of crime** and illustrating how systemic data exclusions have left international students uncaptured within Australia's national victimisation surveys.

The Invisibility Loop: A Cyclical Model of Systemic Silencing

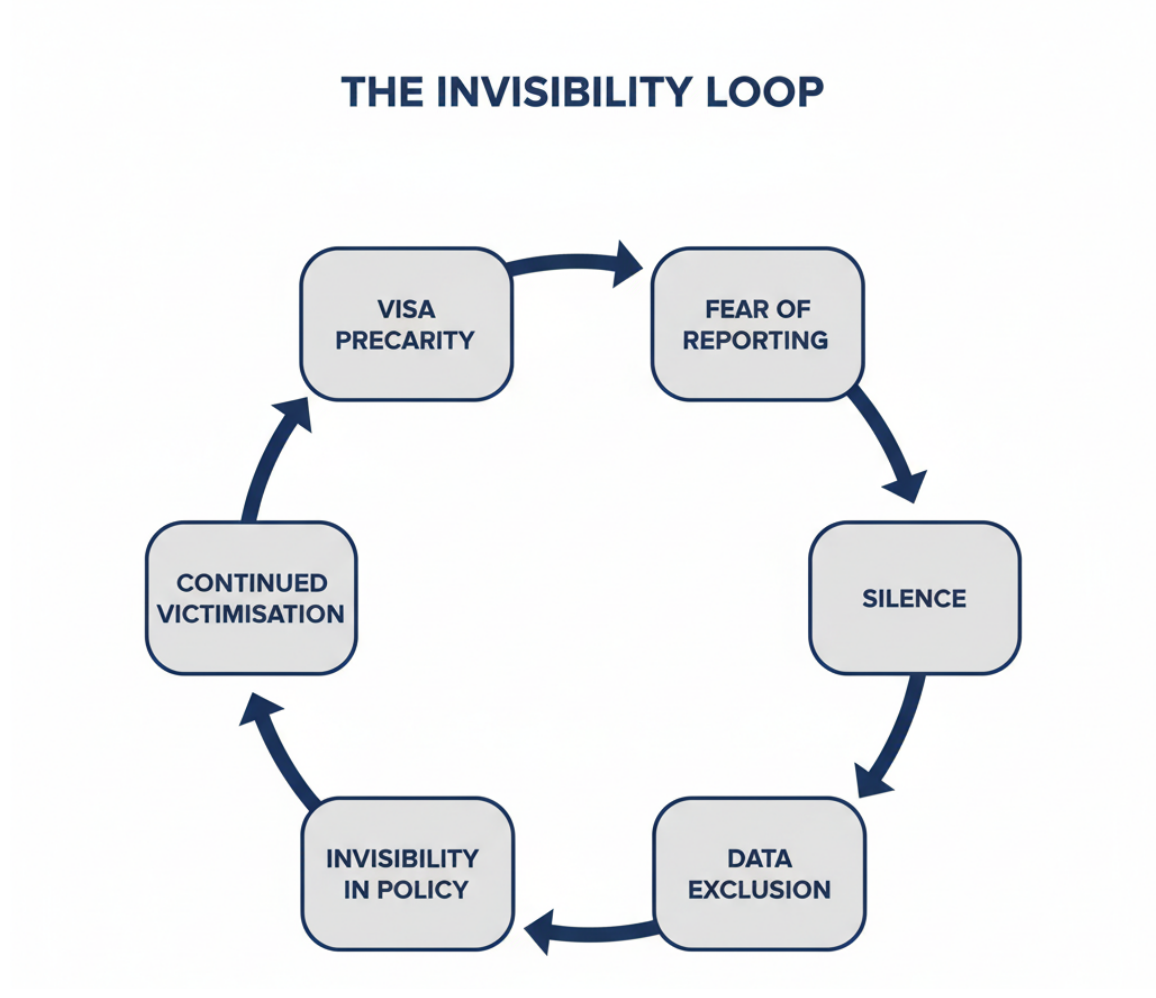


Figure 3. The Invisibility Loop illustrates the cyclical relationship between visa precarious, fear of reporting, systemic data exclusion, and the continued invisibility of international student victims of crime.

1.1 Context and Significance of the International Student Sector

The international education sector is a vital component of Australia's economy and soft power diplomacy. Australia's reputation as a safe, high-quality destination for study is foundational to the sector's success. However, a paradox exists: a massive, economically critical population of temporary residents is systematically excluded from official data collection regarding victimisation. This failure not only undermines student safety and the economy but also threatens Australia's international reputation and soft power diplomacy with key source countries.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Exploitation targeting international students is widely documented by legal aid centres and parliamentary inquiries (Australia. Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019; Senate Education and Employment References Committee, 2016). The core difficulty lies in a two-fold failure: first, the **systemic** exclusion of international students from national statistical baselines (creating a **data deficit**); and second, the pervasive **fear of visa repercussions**, which functions as a barrier to reporting. As of April 2025, there are approximately **720,720 student visa holders** (Subclass 500) in Australia (Department of Home Affairs, 2025). This statistical invisibility ensures that policy responses remain reactive and anecdotal rather than grounded in systematic evidence, data, and prevention.

1.3 Thesis Statement

Systemic exclusions within Australian data collection mechanisms, specifically the **Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS)**, combined with the instrumental use of visa precarity by perpetrators, generate a profound **dark figure of crime** against international students. This statistical invisibility compromises evidence-based policy responses, thereby fundamentally failing the duty of care owed to this vulnerable population.

1.4 Roadmap

This paper proceeds by first establishing the theoretical framework of the **dark figure of crime** and analyzing how visa status serves as a mechanism of control. It then critiques the methodological failures of Australia's primary victimisation measurement instrument, the **ABS CVS**, in comparison to international counterparts. Following this, the report provides a comprehensive empirical analysis of three key domains of exploitation: wage theft, housing precarity, and financial scam recruitment. Finally, it evaluates current policy responses, critiques the limitations of existing protections, and proposes **institutional** recommendations for enhancing legal protection.

1.5 Researcher Positionality and Ethical Considerations

This research was undertaken through a community-led and survivor-centred lens. The lead author is both a practitioner working directly with international student victims of crime and an advocate for student safety, visibility, and justice. This dual role offers unique insight into systemic barriers while also requiring careful reflection on power, positionality, and responsibility.

Lived experience and community expertise informed the direction and framing of this work. Although individual stories and themes shaped the analysis, the privacy, dignity, and psychological safety of affected students were prioritised. All case reflections are anonymised, and no identifying information has been included.

A trauma-aware and culturally responsive approach guided engagement with student narratives. The intention of this report is not to sensationalise harm, but to expose structural invisibility and highlight the systemic changes required to ensure safety, fairness, and justice for all international students in Australia. The ethical foundation of this research aligns with the principle that those most affected by a problem should be centred in defining and informing the solution.

1.6 Intersectionality and Diverse Student Experiences

While this report refers to international students as a collective group, their experiences are not uniform. Vulnerability to exploitation and crime varies across gender, race, age, visa stream, financial background, language ability, and social support networks. Women, LGBTQIA+ students, students of colour, and newly arrived migrants may face heightened risks, particularly relating to harassment, sexual harm, and coercive threats. VET and ELICOS students, often with lower institutional support and limited established networks, can experience unique exposure to workplace and housing exploitation. Recognising these intersecting identities is essential to understanding how risk is concentrated and why a single, undifferentiated approach cannot ensure safety and justice for all temporary student migrants.



Figure 4. Conceptual roadmap illustrating the progression from invisibility toward protection and policy reform.

This framework establishes the conceptual foundation for Section II.

We first **define the dark figure of crime** and its relevance to temporary migrants (2.1), then **outline visa status as a mechanism of control** (2.2), before **critiquing the ABS Crime Victimization Survey’s scope and exclusions** (2.3).

This will set up the comparative table and visuals that show how design choices translate into statistical invisibility.

II. Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks: Defining the Dark Figure

Understanding the **dark figure of crime** is essential to interpreting how systemic exclusions distort Australia's national victimisation data. The term describes the gap between crimes that occur and those captured by official statistics, a disparity shaped by fear, stigma, and structural barriers to reporting. For international students, this figure expands dramatically when visa conditions, institutional dependency, and limited access to justice combine to render many experiences invisible. This section outlines the theoretical foundations that define the dark figure of crime and applies them to the methodological context of the **Australian Bureau of Statistics Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS)**, revealing how design choices perpetuate invisibility.



Figure 5. The Dark Figure of Crime represents the unreported and unrecorded dimensions of victimisation that remain hidden within official statistics.

2.1 The Criminological Concept of the Dark Figure of Crime

The criminological concept of the **dark figure of crime** refers to the unmeasured gap between the actual volume of crime committed and the fraction of crime that is reported to authorities and subsequently recorded. For international students, this gap is driven by structural factors and statistical design. We refer to the lack of official statistical measurement for this demographic as the **data deficit**. The research demonstrates a high likelihood that Australia's true rates of crime, particularly those affecting migrant populations, are significantly higher than official records indicate (Australian Institute of Criminology, n.d.; Li & Miller, 2015).

2.2 Visa Status as a Mechanism of Control

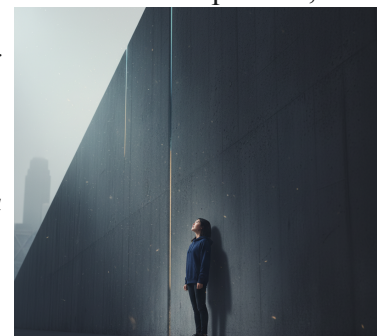
A defining feature of victimisation experienced by temporary migrants is the leverage afforded to perpetrators by the victim's precarious migration status. Visa precarity acts as a powerful tool of control, ensuring the silence of victims and the functional impunity of perpetrators. International analysis confirms that precarious residency status leads directly to reluctance in approaching law enforcement. Jurisdictions aiming to overcome this barrier often introduce remedies, such as offering residence permits or specialised temporary status (e.g., the U visa in the **United States**), contingent on the victim's cooperation with investigators (PICUM, 2020; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.; U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

In Australia, this **institutional** mechanism is quantified by the high proportion of students who explicitly cite fear of migration consequences as the reason they avoid seeking help for problems at work (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017). This deep-seated distrust demonstrates that the power imbalance inherent in the visa system is the primary functional driver of the **dark figure of crime** (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017; Insider Guides, n.d.).

Beyond visa precarity, international students also face additional barriers that deter reporting, including cultural sensitivities, mistrust of police, language difficulties, and fear of family shame. These intersecting factors compound the deterrent effect of visa-related fears, reinforcing silence and ensuring many crimes remain unreported.

The cumulative effect of these intersecting barriers is a self-perpetuating cycle of silence. When fear of visa repercussions suppresses reporting, perpetrators remain unaccountable, and systemic undercounting becomes inevitable. Each unreported incident reinforces the perception that seeking justice carries greater personal risk than enduring harm. This silence is not accidental but structurally built into systems that prize compliance over compassion, leaving thousands of invisible victims without recognition or remedy.

Figure 6. Visa precarity and intersecting barriers sustain a cycle of silence that obscures true rates of victimisation.



2.3 Critique of Official Victimisation Data in Australia (ABS CVS)

The methodological design of the **ABS Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS)** critically undermines any attempt to measure the true extent of victimisation among international students. The **CVS** restricts inclusion to individuals who are **usual residents of private dwellings** (ABS, 2025b).

Systemic Exclusion 1: Overseas Residents

The methodology explicitly lists 'overseas residents in Australia' as excluded from the survey scope (ABS, 2025b). This procedural choice systematically removes the vast majority of the **720,720 cohort** (April 2025 snapshot) from the national victimisation baseline. Consequently, academic bodies have acknowledged that analysis of **ABS** data regarding this population is profoundly limited because the necessary disaggregated data "do not exist" (Australian Institute of Criminology, n.d.).

Systemic Exclusion 2: Non-Private Dwellings (NPDs)

A second critical exclusion relates to accommodation type. The **CVS** explicitly excludes "persons living in **non-private dwellings**" (NPDs) (ABS, 2025b). **NPDs** are establishments providing communal accommodation, including 'university residences,' and 'halls of residence' (ABS, n.d.a). This exclusion further obscures the specific, location-based exploitation endemic to this cohort, particularly in the unregulated housing sector (UNSW Sydney's Human Rights Clinic, 2019). The methodological design functions as a **systemic** impediment to accountability, resulting in a persistent lack of reliable statistical evidence to hold perpetrators in these non-private housing sectors accountable.

TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION CLASSIFICATION

For Population Data Collection

Figure 7. *Non-private dwellings such as university residences are excluded from the ABS Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS), removing a key segment of international students.*



2.4 Methodological Approach (Short Form)

This study applies a simple, transparent estimation method to illustrate the scale of crime likely affecting international students in Australia but currently absent from official statistics. The analysis uses national victimisation rates from the most recent Crime Victimization Survey and applies them to the total number of student visa holders recorded in April 2025. This method does not claim to represent precise counts. Instead, it demonstrates the likely magnitude of under-recognised victimisation resulting from survey exclusions. The logic is straightforward: if a group equivalent to a medium-sized Australian city experiences crime at similar rates to the general population, its absence materially alters national totals.

Key steps:

1. Identify ABS personal-crime victimisation rates for the Australian population aged 15 and above.
2. Apply these rates to the 2025 student-visa population (720,720 individuals).
3. Compare the resulting estimates to official victim numbers to show the scale of exclusion.

Assumptions:

- International students experience crime at rates at least comparable to the general population.
- The April 2025 cohort is used as a stable point-in-time measure.
- No adjustments were made for demographic or geographic factors, meaning the figure is likely conservative. Research indicates that temporary migrants often face higher victimisation risks due to work conditions, precarious housing, financial strain, and fear of reporting.

Purpose:

The aim is not to produce a definitive statistic but to demonstrate how current survey design structurally erases a vulnerable cohort. More precise measurement requires legislative change to include international students in national victimisation surveys and to publish results disaggregated by visa category.

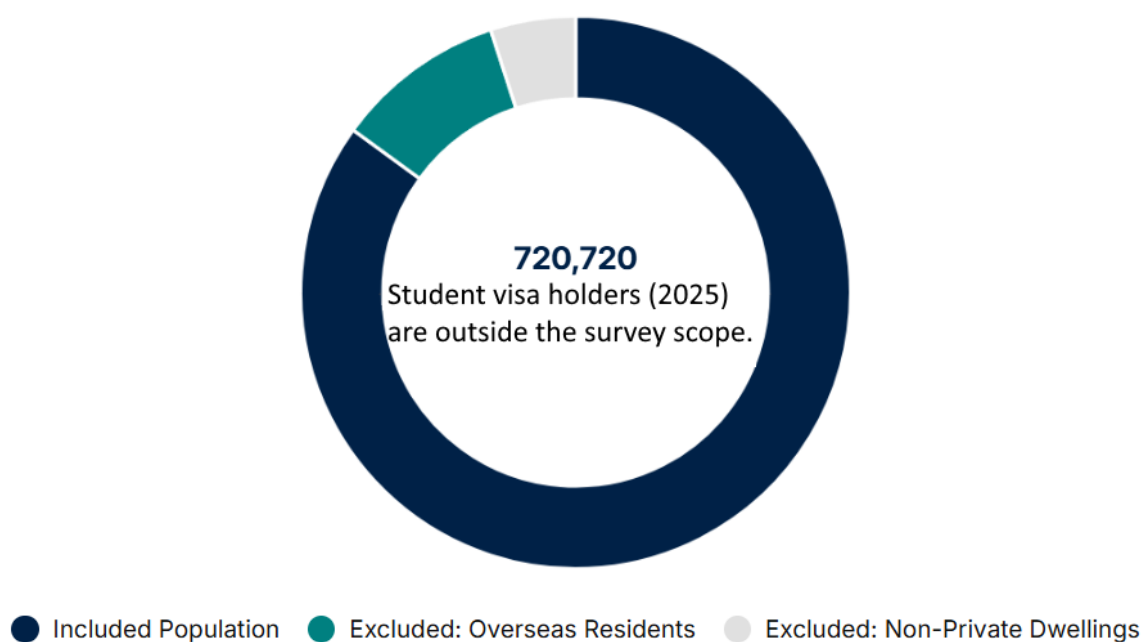
Table 1. Comparative Scope of National Crime Victimisation Surveys

Survey/Country	Population Scope Limitation	Inclusion/Exclusion of Institutional Housing	Ability to Capture Temporary Migrant Victimisation
Australia (ABS CVS)	Explicitly excludes "overseas residents" (ABS, 2025b)	Explicitly excludes "non-private dwellings" (e.g., University residences)	Systematically low/zero capture, creating documented data deficit
United States (NCVS)	Persons 12+ from U.S. households (BJS, n.d.b)	Explicitly includes 'group quarters (e.g., dormitories, rooming houses)'	Higher potential capture, though "foreign visitors" are excluded; it depends on "usual residence" status
UK (CSEW)	Restricted to 'adults aged 16 and over living in private households' (ONS, n.d.)	Explicitly excludes 'group residences (e.g., student halls of residence)'	Low capture, prioritising established residents in traditional household settings
Canada (GSS)	Excludes 'full-time residents of institutions' (Statistics Canada, n.d.b)	Excludes institutional accommodation; ambiguity on dormitories	Low capture, prioritising permanent resident population aged 15 and over

Note. Data synthesised from various national statistical agency documentation, including the *Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)*, *Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)*, *Office for National Statistics (ONS)*, and *Statistics Canada*.

The exclusion of student visa holders from the national dataset represents more than a technical oversight; it is a structural blind spot embedded within Australia's system of official crime measurement. By omitting this large and economically vital population, the national framework erases a significant dimension of lived experience from the statistical record. The resulting gap distorts our understanding of crime patterns, undercuts the evidence base for policy reform, and perpetuates a false sense of inclusivity. Without the explicit inclusion of international students, Australia's official statistics will continue to misrepresent the scale and nature of victimisation affecting one of its largest migrant communities, leaving a growing number of invisible victims uncounted and unsupported.

What the Data Misses: ABS CVS Exclusions



These exclusions create a significant 'Dark Figure of Crime'.

Figure 8. *What the Data Misses – Exclusion of student visa holders from the ABS Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS), illustrating the scope of the Dark Figure of Crime.*

2.5 Hypothetical Impact on National Statistics

Note. All figures in this section are **hypothetical estimations** drawn from **illustrative calculations** that apply **ABS Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS) 2023–24** rates to the **2025 student visa cohort**. These are **not** official ABS counts.

Table 2. Hypothetical Estimated Victims of Personal Crime

Crime Type (Personal)	General Population Victimisation Rate (2023–24)	Estimated Number of International Student Victims
One or more selected personal crimes	3.9%	28,108
Physical assault	1.7%	12,252
Face-to-face threatened assault	2.1%	15,135
Non-face-to-face threatened assault	0.8%	5,766
Robbery	0.2%	1,441
Sexual assault (18+ only)	0.6%	4,324

*Note. **Illustrative calculations** applying ABS 2023–24 Crime Victimisation Survey rates to the 2025 student visa holder cohort (snapshot as at April 2025 = 720,720).*

Furthermore, combining these estimates with the general Australian population (aged 15+) surveyed by the **ABS** provides a tangible measure of the total distortion caused by the exclusion.

Table 3. Hypothetical Total Personal Crime Victims (Combined Populations)

Crime Type (Personal)	General Population Victims (2023–24) (ABS, 2025c)	Estimated International Student Victims (2025 snapshot)	Hypothetical Combined Total Victims
One or more selected personal crimes	836,700	28,108	864,808
Physical assault	362,800	12,252	375,052
Face-to-face threatened assault	446,100	15,135	461,235
Non-face-to-face threatened assault	163,500	5,766	169,266
Robbery	50,700	1,441	52,141
Sexual assault (18+ only)	103,800	4,324	108,124

*Note. **Illustrative calculations** applying ABS 2023–24 Crime Victimisation Survey rates to the 2025 student visa holder cohort (snapshot as at April 2025 = 720,720).*

! Assumptions and Limitations

- These calculations assume international students experience crime at the same rate as the general population.
- No adjustments were made for age, gender, location, or socioeconomic status.
- Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.
- These are illustrative extrapolations, not official statistics.

This projection demonstrates that the current reported national victim numbers are incomplete. Including the estimated **28,108 student victims of personal crimes** would increase the national total for “one or more personal crimes” by approximately **3.4%**. While this figure may appear modest in percentage terms, it represents a substantial population whose experiences are entirely absent from the evidence base informing national crime policy. The omission of these cases creates a statistical blind spot with real-world implications: policy responses, resource allocations, and victim support frameworks are all designed using data that systematically excludes those most at risk. Restoring these missing numbers is therefore not merely a methodological correction, but an ethical imperative to ensure that every victim, regardless of visa status, is counted and acknowledged.

Hypothetical Victims of Selected Personal Crimes

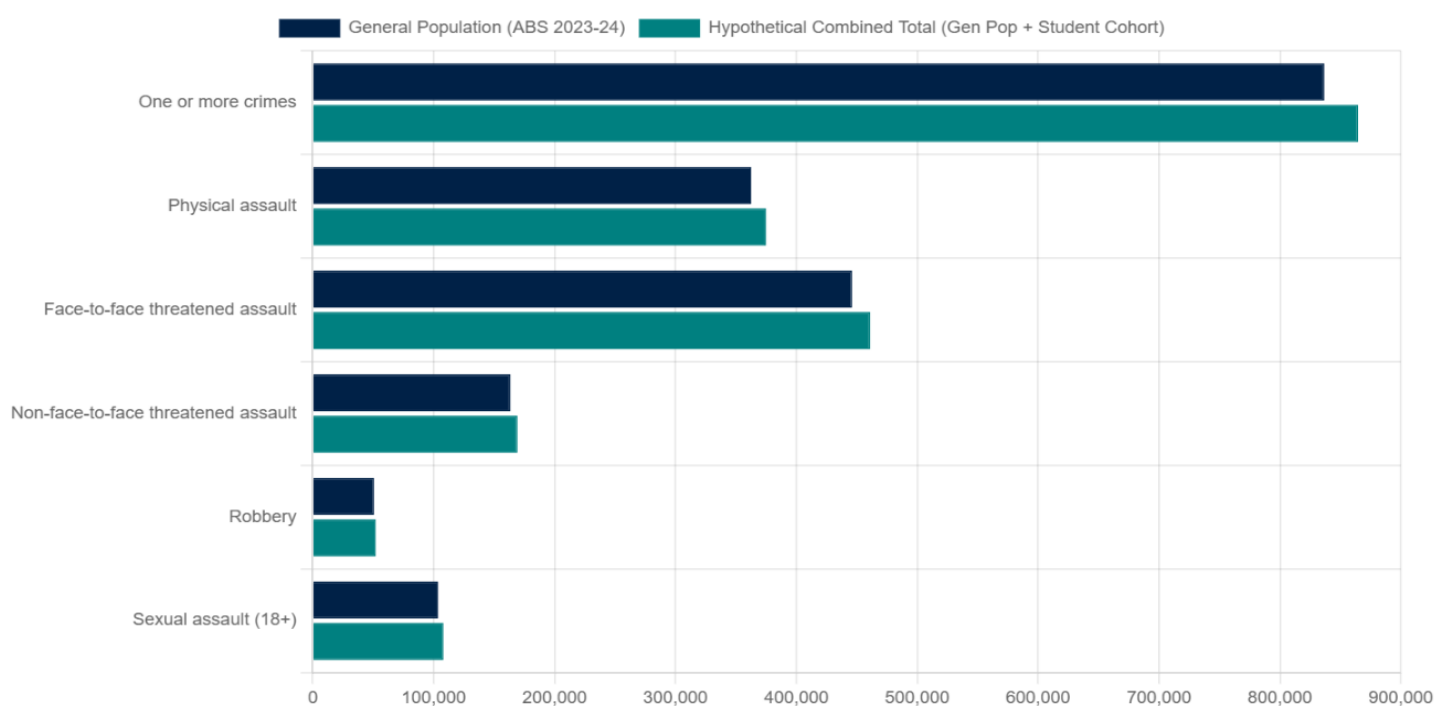


Figure 9. Comparison of general-population victims and hypothetical combined totals applying ABS 2023–24 rates to the 2025 student cohort

This projection shows that excluding international students from national surveys hides a significant share of victims. The increase across every major crime category confirms that these omissions are structural, not incidental, and sets the stage for the analysis that follows.

The disaggregation of personal-crime categories reveals that invisibility is not distributed evenly across offence types. The largest numerical gap appears in **threatened assault, both face-to-face and non-face-to-face, where the inclusion of international-student victims would add just over 20,000 uncounted cases** to national totals. These forms of intimidation and coercion commonly occur in workplaces, share houses, and other semi-private environments excluded from the ABS CVS sampling frame. Likewise, **around 12,000 additional physical assaults and more than 4,000 sexual assaults** would emerge if this cohort were counted. Together, these figures demonstrate that the dark figure of crime is not confined to isolated incidents but systematically concentrated in under-reported, high-risk environments where international students live, work, and study. These patterns become even clearer in the following analysis of exploitation domains.

2.6 A Conservative Floor: Personal Crime vs Systemic Exploitation

The illustrative estimates in this report represent a conservative floor rather than a comprehensive measurement of harm. The ABS Crime Victimization Survey (CVS) primarily measures *personal crimes* such as assault, robbery, and threats. It does not capture widespread economic exploitation, wage theft, coercive work practices, or fraudulent recruitment scams, all of which disproportionately affect international students.

Research cited in this report shows that **77 percent of international students are paid below minimum wage, and 26 percent receive half or less**, indicating systemic labour exploitation occurring at a scale far beyond personal crime victimisation rates. As a result, the “dark figure of crime” quantified here reflects only the missing personal-crime victims. The true scale of harm, including economic exploitation, is significantly larger and remains uncounted in national datasets.

This model therefore identifies the visibility gap in personal-safety crime reporting, while acknowledging that the broader spectrum of harm is far greater and requires systemic policy attention.

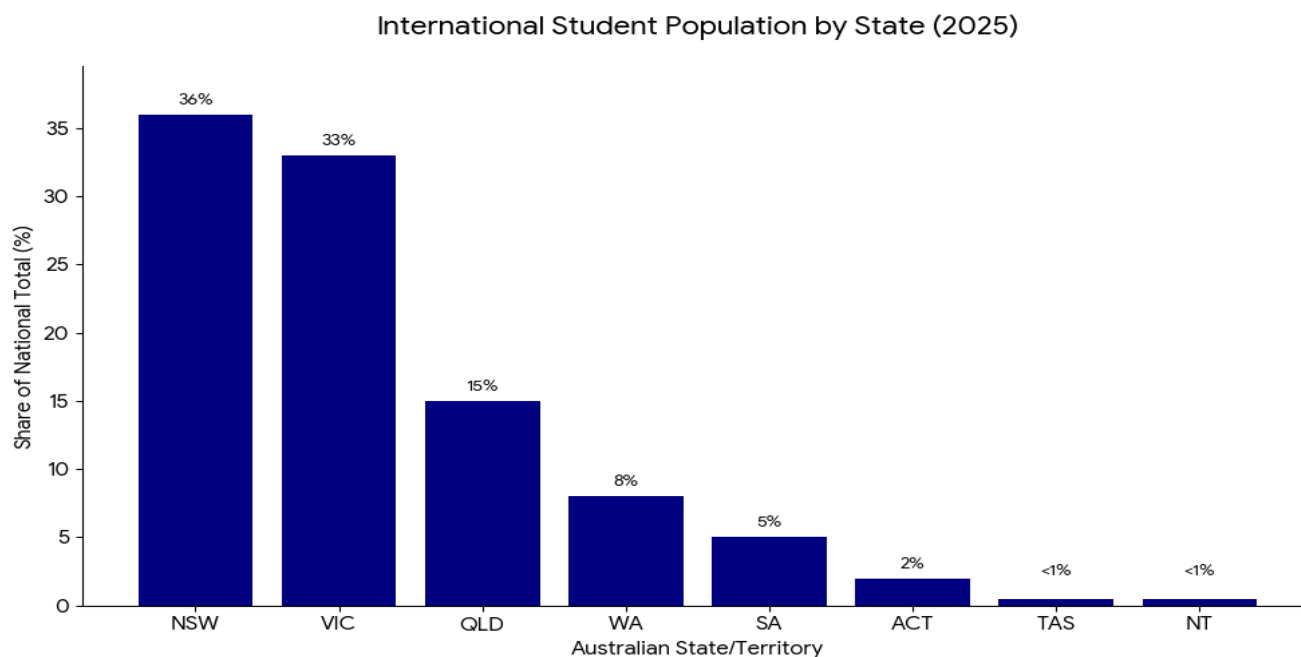


Figure 10. International student population by state and territory, 2025. Data source: Department of Home Affairs, International Student Data (April 2025).

Before examining specific domains of exploitation, it is important to **contextualise the scale and geographical distribution of international students across Australia**. As illustrated in **Figure 10**, the majority of international students are concentrated in **New South Wales** and **Victoria**, which together account for **nearly 70 percent of all enrolments**. This concentration reflects the clustering of major universities, private colleges, and metropolitan employment opportunities within Sydney and Melbourne. It also mirrors the structure of the temporary migration economy, where students often balance study with part-time work in hospitality, retail, and service sectors concentrated in urban centres.

The uneven geographic distribution has **direct implications for service demand, regulatory oversight, and regional policy coordination**. States with high enrolments face a disproportionate responsibility for addressing cases of exploitation, housing precarity, and financial scams, while regional areas, though smaller in population, often lack accessible reporting mechanisms or culturally competent support services. Understanding this distribution is therefore critical to designing responsive, region-specific interventions that reflect where vulnerability is most concentrated and where oversight must be most robust.

Economic and Social Impact of Invisibility

The exclusion of international students from national crime data is not merely a statistical gap; it generates substantial social and economic consequences. Wage theft alone has been estimated to cost temporary migrant workers billions in lost earnings and foregone taxation revenue across Australia's labour market. When victimisation remains unreported, perpetrators act with impunity, distorting labour competition, enabling rogue employers, and eroding confidence in regulatory systems.

Hidden crime also drives hidden public costs. Students who do not seek help early are more likely to experience escalation into homelessness, serious financial harm, coercion, and mental-health distress, placing avoidable pressure on health, legal, and emergency services. The cycle extends internationally: reputational harm to Australia's education sector impacts future enrolments, soft power, and trade relationships. The absence of accurate data therefore creates economic inefficiency, social harm, and strategic risk, reinforcing the necessity of measuring what matters in order to protect Australia's global standing and its education economy.

III. Findings and Comprehensive Analysis of Exploitation Domains

International students face a constellation of harms that extend beyond isolated incidents and into structural patterns of exploitation. These harms are linked by three intersecting forces: economic vulnerability, visa-based power imbalance, and limited access to secure housing and trusted support channels. The following section synthesises the most documented exploitation domains affecting international students: labour abuse, housing insecurity, and financial scams and criminal recruitment, to illustrate how systemic vulnerability compounds risk. Together, these domains demonstrate that invisibility in data does not mean absence of harm. Instead, it means harm persists unmeasured, unreported, and unaddressed.

Lived Experience Snapshots

Lived Example: Ravi (India) — Wage Exploitation and Silence

“Ravi,” a hospitality student from India, worked 46 hours per week in a restaurant, paid only 20. When he questioned his payslip, his employer reminded him of “visa rules” and threatened to report him. Afraid of being sent home, Ravi stayed silent, working long hours in unsafe conditions and eventually dropping units due to exhaustion.

Lived Example: Mei (China) — Housing Abuse and Threats

“Mei,” a student from China, rented a shared room in a private home recommended through a student Facebook group. After paying a bond and two months' rent in advance, the landlord demanded extra “cleaning fees” and threatened eviction when she refused. When she asked about her rights, the landlord warned: “If you complain, immigration will hear.” Mei moved out suddenly, losing all payments.

Lived Example: Ana (Colombia) — Scam Recruitment and Criminalisation Fear

“Ana,” from Colombia, responded to what seemed a legitimate remote admin job. She later learned it was a money-muling scheme when her bank froze her account. Terrified she would be charged and deported, she avoided police contact and lived months without banking access, relying on friends for basic expenses.

3.1 Labour Exploitation and Wage Theft: The Persistence of Underpayment

Wage theft is the most quantifiable and pervasive form of exploitation against international students. Key scholarly reports confirmed that the overwhelming majority of temporary migrants, including international students, experience endemic underpayment (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017). Data from comprehensive surveys found that **77% of surveyed international students were paid below the statutory minimum casual hourly wage**, with **26% earning half the minimum or less** (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017). This systemic underpayment is intrinsically linked to the student visa's work restriction, which transforms the regulatory measure into a source of vulnerability exploited by employers.

Stakeholder Insight: The Culture of Compliance

The **National Union of Students (NUS)** highlighted how this exploitation is perpetuated not just by employers, but by a culture of perceived compliance among students. The **NUS** noted that many students are reluctant to pursue unpaid wages as they feel they lack the **"moral or ethical right to complain"** since they agreed to the wage rate at the outset (National Union of Students, as cited in Senate Select Committee on Temporary Migration, 2021). This mindset, prone to exploitation, creates a non-compliant labour market and reinforces the dark figure of crime.

Exploitation at a Glance



Figure 11. Key indicators of exploitation among international students – wage theft, housing precarity, and financial scams.

3.2 Housing Precarity and Landlord Exploitation: Risks in the Unregulated Sector

The crisis in secure and affordable housing funnels international students into vulnerable, unregulated housing arrangements (UNSW Sydney's Human Rights Clinic, 2019). This segment of the market thrives outside robust tenancy protections and becomes a significant domain of victimisation.

Case Examples and Disproportionate Impact

Research from **UNSW Sydney's Human Rights Clinic** found that international students face multiple barriers to secure housing, leaving them vulnerable to unscrupulous landlords (UNSW Sydney's Human Rights Clinic, 2019). Specific forms of exploitation include: demanding excessive bonds or advance rent beyond legal limits, imposing sudden, exorbitant charges for basic utilities, and subjection to overcrowding or illegal eviction.

The exploitation is concentrated in the unregulated housing sector. Analysis of legal advice file data revealed that 38% of cases brought by international students concerned scams or deceptive conduct by landlords, while 25% related specifically to problems recovering rental bonds (UNSW Sydney's Human Rights Clinic, 2019). Students in these situations often lack the tenancy rights afforded to typical renters, facing obstacles in recovering funds or contesting eviction through state tribunals.

3.3 Financial Scams and Criminal Recruitment (Money Muling)

The financial precarity and isolation imposed by housing exploitation and wage theft establish a clear economic vulnerability that is actively targeted by criminal syndicates.

A growing area of victimisation involves financial scams, often leading to the involuntary involvement of students in serious criminal activities, such as money laundering (**money muling**). Recent warnings from the **Australian Federal Police (AFP)** highlight a surge in scams, often disguised as flexible remote work opportunities (AFP, 2024; The PIE News, 2024).

The Causal Loop of Vulnerability

Scammers exploit international students' financial needs, often targeting those experiencing strain caused by wage theft (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017). New migrants, including international students, are statistically **2.5 times more likely to fall victim to financial scams**, according to an analysis reported by *The PIE News* (2024) referencing Australian Federal Police data. The **AFP-led Joint Policing Cybercrime Coordination Centre (JPC3)** identified that criminal networks were offering international students an average 'salary' of about **\$1,000 per month plus commission** for these illicit activities (AFP, 2024).

The implications are severe: victims are often unknowingly compelled to commit serious financial crimes. Participation in **money muling** is a serious criminal offence, exposing victims to severe criminal penalties, including lengthy imprisonment and potential migration consequences (AFP, 2024). This demonstrates a clear causal loop: pervasive labour exploitation creates the economic desperation that makes high-risk schemes attractive, establishing a direct link where **systemic** harm enables subsequent criminal victimisation.

This loop of vulnerability reveals how exploitation and criminalisation operate as two sides of the same systemic failure. When students are forced into desperation by wage theft, inadequate protections, and economic isolation, they become susceptible to criminal recruitment, then are punished for the very conditions that trapped them. Addressing this cycle requires recognising that prevention is not only a matter of enforcement but of equity, ensuring fair work, secure housing, and financial literacy as fundamental safeguards against victimisation.

Figure 12. *The Causal Loop of Vulnerability illustrating how wage theft, job insecurity, and economic pressure leads to financial strain, criminal recruitment, and systemic inaction reinforcing a continuous cycle of victimisation among international students in Australia.*

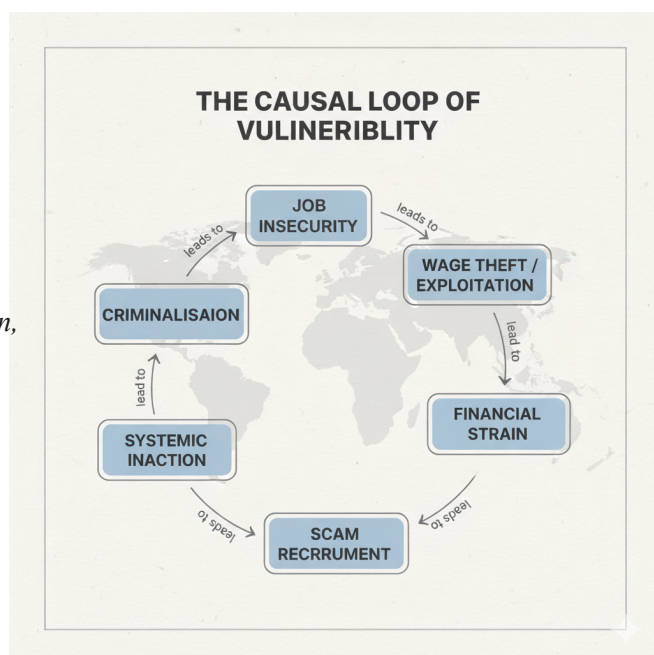


Table 4. Summary of Exploitation Metrics: Wage, Housing, and Financial Scams

Form of Victimisation	Reported Prevalence Metric	Primary Barrier to Reporting/Seeking Assistance	Source(s)
Wage Theft/Labour Exploitation	77% paid below minimum wage; 26% earned half minimum or less	Fear of migration consequences (38%); perceived lack of moral right to complain	(Berg & Farbenblum, 2017)
Housing/Landlord Exploitation	38% of legal centre cases involved scams or deceptive conduct	Lack of formal tenancy rights; inability to recover bonds; fear of homelessness	(UNSW Sydney's Human Rights Clinic, 2019)
Financial Scams/Muling	New migrants are 2.5 times more likely to fall victim; criminal recruitment offers avg. \$1,000/month	Isolation, economic strain, and fear of criminal prosecution/visa cancellation	(AFP, 2024; The PIE News, 2024)
General Non-Reporting	38% did not seek help for a problem at work due to visa fears	Belief that reporting a crime or complaint could negatively affect visa status	(Berg & Farbenblum, 2017; Insider Guides, n.d.)

Note. Prevalence metrics are drawn from the most comprehensive national and state-level surveys available for the temporary migrant population.

IV. Policy Responses and the Challenge of the Firewall

4.1 The Failure of Partial Protections

Australia currently provides fragmented and conditional protections that are insufficient to overcome the fear of visa consequences among international students. While agencies such as the Fair Work Ombudsman offer limited reporting protections for wage theft, these arrangements are narrowly scoped and often do not extend to students who may have breached other visa conditions, including work-hour restrictions. In addition, state law-enforcement agencies and victim-support services do not have the legal authority to guarantee protection from immigration action.

This creates a structural barrier that forces many students to choose between reporting harm and protecting their visa status. As a result, exploitation often remains unreported and offenders operate with near-certainty of victim silence. The only mechanism capable of breaking this cycle is a legislated **absolute reporting firewall** that fully separates victim support and crime reporting from immigration compliance processes, regardless of visa compliance history and without discretionary limitations.

4.2 The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) Response and Firewalls

The Australian Government, through the **Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO)**, asserts that all migrant workers are entitled to the same minimum pay and protections under the *Fair Work Act*, regardless of their visa status (FWO, 2024; FWO, n.d.a). Only the **Department of Home Affairs (DHA)** can cancel a visa (FWO, n.d.a).

In response to concerns about visa-related non-reporting (Australia, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019), the **FWO** introduced a Visa Protections Pilot Program in August 2024, aiming to address the fear that reporting exploitation will lead to deportation (FWO, 2024).

4.3 Limitations of Partial Protection Mechanisms

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of the current policy structure is compromised by a profound deficit of trust (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017). Legal experts argue that genuine commitment requires an **absolute firewall** (Legal and Policy Advocacy Groups, n.d.) between the **FWO** and the **DHA**. A **firewall** is defined as a mechanism, ideally enshrined in law, that prevents regulatory bodies (e.g., FWO, police for non-serious crimes) from sharing identifying information of a temporary migrant victim with the **DHA**, unless the worker consents or the information concerns a threat to public safety (Legal and Policy Advocacy Groups, n.d.). Current protection mechanisms, often reliant on policy rather than law, fail to provide this necessary legal certainty, thus perpetuating the **dark figure of crime**.

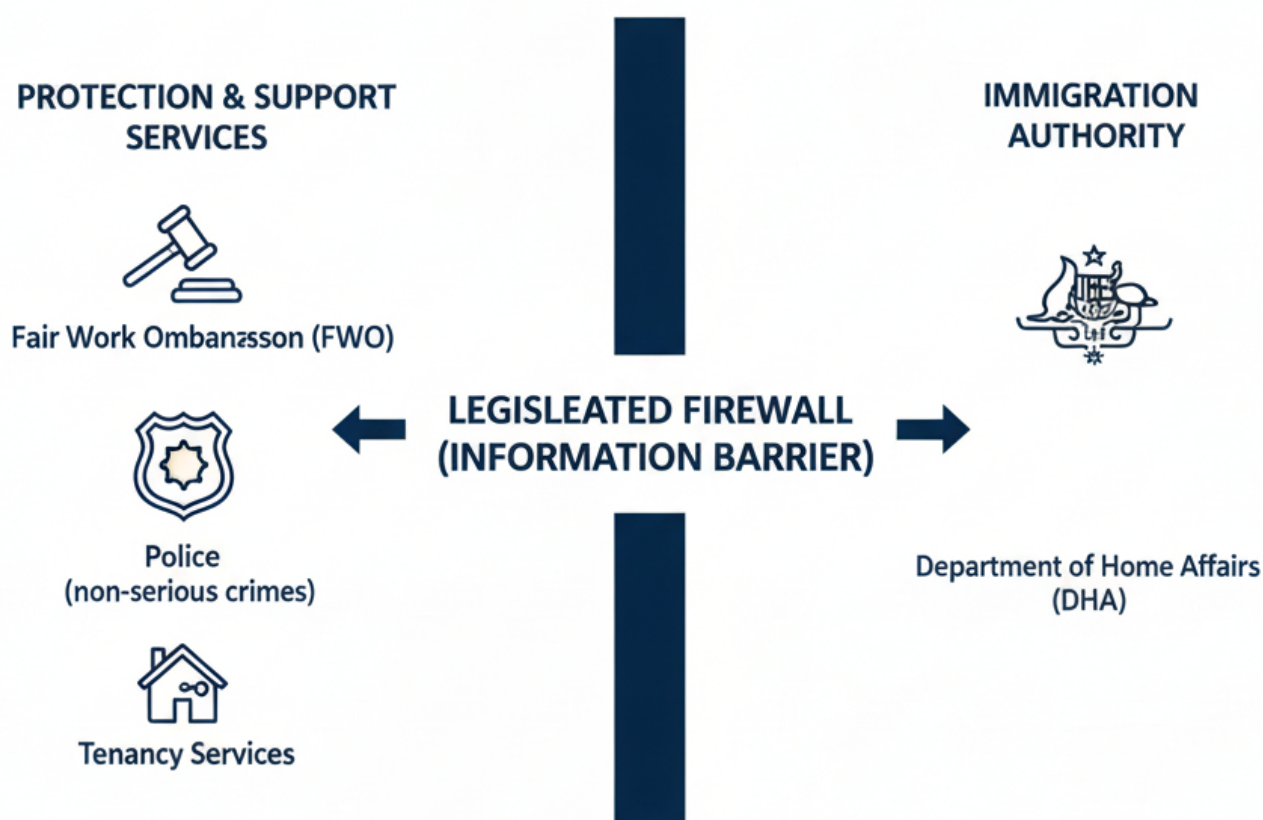


Figure 13. *The Absolute Firewall a legislated information barrier preventing the sharing of temporary migrant victims' personal data between regulatory agencies and the Department of Home Affairs*

4.4 International Precedents for Victim Protection and Residency Pathways

International jurisdictions actively leverage migration policy to mitigate the risks associated with reporting:

- **United States (US):** Offers the **U nonimmigrant status** (U visa) for victims of severe criminal activities and the **T nonimmigrant status** (T visa) for victims of human trafficking, both of which grant temporary residency conditional upon cooperation (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.; U.S. Department of State, n.d.). This explicitly links victim protection to migration status (PICUM, 2020).
- **Canada:** Offers a **Temporary Resident Permit (TRP)** for victims of human trafficking, which provides at least 12 months of temporary status. Crucially, victims are not required to testify against their trafficker to gain status, and fees for permits and health benefits are waived (Government of Canada, n.d.a; Government of Canada, n.d.b).
- **United Kingdom (UK):** The **UK's Immigration Rules** allow victims of domestic violence to seek "indefinite leave to remain" (permanent residency) if their relationship breaks down due to the violence (UKCISA, 2023).

Australia currently lacks a comprehensive, migration-based protection mechanism (like the T/U visas or Canada's **TRP**) for victims of general exploitation (wage theft, landlord abuse) that is independent of cooperation or testimony.

How Other Countries Protect Victims

Country	Mechanism	Key Feature
United States	U and T visas	Temporary status linked to cooperation for serious crimes and trafficking.
Canada	Temporary Resident Permit (TRP)	12+ months, fee waivers, no testimony required for victims of abuse.
United Kingdom	Domestic violence route	Indefinite leave to remain if a relationship ends due to violence.
European Union	Temporary Protection	Access to services and support after traumatic experiences.
⚠ Australia	Current Gap	No specific migration-based protection for victims of wage theft or landlord abuse.

Figure 14. Victim-protection comparison showing Australia's missing migration safeguard.

Table 5. Timeline of Australian Policy Recognition and Response

Year/Period	Key Policy/Report	Significance to International Students	Source(s)
2017	Berg & Farbenblum Report: <i>Wage Theft in Australia</i>	Quantified the endemic nature of wage theft among temporary migrants, providing the empirical foundation for policy reform	(Berg & Farbenblum, 2017)
2019 (March)	Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce	Official whole-of-government recognition of exploitation as a threat to national values and reputation	(Australia. Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019)
Post-2019	FWO Focus Strategy & Visa Protections Pilot Program (Commenced Aug 2024)	Direct response to the identified fear of visa cancellation, aiming to establish a functional firewall for those reporting exploitation	(FWO, 2024; FWO, n.d.a)

Note. Policy responses reflect increasing government acknowledgement of systemic exploitation among temporary migrant workers.

V. Recommendations for Visibility and Protection

The systemic invisibility and legal precarity experienced by international students demand comprehensive reform across three domains: **statistical methodology**, **legal protection**, and **institutional duty of care**. Each represents a pillar of visibility, ensuring that those who have been unseen in data, unheard in law, and unsupported in institutions are finally recognised within Australia's justice framework. Effective reform requires structural change, not symbolic gestures: data must be inclusive, legislation must guarantee safety without fear, and institutions must demonstrate proactive accountability. The following recommendations outline practical pathways to achieve these goals.

Policy Blueprint: Recommendations for Visibility and Protection



1. Legislate ABS CVS Re-scoping

Mandate the inclusion of international students in national crime surveys to provide accurate data.



2. Mandate Disaggregated Data

Require institutions to report victimisation data by visa status to identify specific risks.



3. Legislate a 'Migration Firewall'

Separate crime reporting from immigration enforcement to encourage victims to come forward without fear.



4. Review Student Work Limits

Assess work hour restrictions to reduce financial precarity that leads to exploitation.



5. Increase Secure Housing

Expand affordable, university-linked housing options to protect against rental exploitation.



6. Multilingual Scam Education

Provide targeted, culturally appropriate scam awareness campaigns from the point of arrival.

Evidence-based reforms will reduce the Dark Figure of Crime and rebuild trust.

Figure 15. Conceptual blueprint for systemic reform to achieve visibility, protection, and trust.

Policy Action Roadmap

Reform Priority	Action Required	Lead Agency / Actors	Mechanism	Timeframe	Expected Outcome
Count international students in crime data	Amend ABS Crime Victimization Survey scope to include overseas residents and student housing	Australian Government; ABS	Legislative direction to ABS Act / survey scope reform	12 months	International students included in national crime data; foundational visibility established
Disaggregate crime data by visa category	Publish victimisation data specific to temporary visa holders	ABS; Attorney-General's Department	Mandated disaggregated reporting	12–18 months	Ability to identify cohort-specific risk and allocate resources
Create a legislated reporting firewall	Prohibit sharing of victim information with immigration unless consent or public-safety exception	Parliament; DHA; AGD	Legislation	12 months	Safe reporting; reduction in non-reporting driven by visa fear
Strengthen student housing protections	Expand regulated housing pathways and oversight of private rental markets connected to providers	Education providers; TEQSA; State tenancy bodies	Regulatory framework & provider standards	18–24 months	Reduced exposure to rental scams, overcrowding, and unlawful eviction
Deliver mandatory rights & scam education	Provide arrival-stage education on employment rights, tenancy, banking, scams, and reporting safety	Universities; State Study Bodies; AFP; Fair Work Ombudsman	Orientation & compliance requirement	Immediate rollout; full implementation 6–12 months	Increased early help-seeking and prevention of exploitation
Review work-hour rules and enforcement behaviours	Align work limits with flexible compliance and fair enforcement safeguards	DHA; Jobs & Skills Australia	Policy review and guidance	12 months	Reduced employer coercion and economic vulnerability

5.1 Reforming Statistical Methodology: The ABS Mandate

Recommendation 1: Legislate the Re-scoping of the CVS

The Australian government should legislate a directive requiring the **ABS** to fundamentally alter the scope of the **CVS** to explicitly include international students. This necessitates removing the exclusion of 'overseas residents' and strategically re-sampling **non-private dwellings (NPDs)** to capture student housing (ABS, 2025b). This **systemic** change is the prerequisite for generating the national baseline data needed for effective policy intervention.

Recommendation 2: Mandate Disaggregated Data Requirement

Legislation should mandate the routine collection and publication of victimisation data specifically disaggregated by visa status (student, working holiday maker, etc.) (Australian Institute of Criminology, n.d.). This shift would move policy from reacting to anecdotal crises to preventative, targeted intervention based on empirical measurement of risk profiles across different temporary migrant groups.

These statistical reforms form the foundation for every other protective measure proposed in this report. Without inclusive and disaggregated data, international students remain invisible in the evidence that drives policy and funding decisions. Only through comprehensive measurement can Australia begin to address the full extent of victimisation and design interventions that are proportionate to reality rather than assumption.

Visibility through Data Reform

Empowering Policy through Comprehensive Data Collection



Excluded/Unseen Populations ⊗

Included/Visible Data ✓

Figure 16. Data inclusion as the foundation for evidence-based protection.

5.2 Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Protections: The Absolute Firewall

Recommendation 3: Legislate an Absolute Firewall

The government should legislate an absolute, independent firewall (Legal and Policy Advocacy Groups, n.d.). This mechanism must prevent regulatory bodies, including the **FWO**, tenancy dispute services, and police (in cases of non-serious crime), from sharing the identifying information of a temporary migrant victim with the **DHA** unless the worker consents, or the matter involves a threat to public safety. This legal certainty is the only mechanism capable of restoring the necessary trust deficit (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017).

Recommendation 4: Review and Reform the 48-Hour Fortnightly Work Limitation

The Australian Government should review the **48-hour fortnightly work limitation** on student visas (Department of Home Affairs, 2025). Although intended to prioritise study and protect against exploitation, evidence shows that rigid work-hour restrictions can themselves act as **drivers of exploitation** (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017). Employers often weaponise minor breaches to threaten termination or immigration reporting, creating a coercive power imbalance.

International comparisons reveal that similar restrictions exist in **Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand**, typically **20 to 25 hours per week** during academic terms, but those jurisdictions supplement these limits with stronger labour protections and clearer reporting firewalls (Government of Canada, n.d.c; Immigration New Zealand, n.d.; UKCISA, 2023).

The issue is therefore not the limit itself but its **punitive application**. Policy alternatives should include **graduated flexibility**, such as relaxing hour caps after a defined period of study or linking permissible work hours to verified academic progress or financial stability. These adjustments would reduce the dependency that fuels exploitation while maintaining the integrity of student visa objectives.

Together, the **Firewall** and **Work-Limit Reforms** form the twin pillars of structural protection, one **legal**, one **economic**. A legislated firewall restores the **right to report without fear**, while fair and flexible work conditions restore the **right to work without coercion**. Both reforms target distinct forms of control, information and income, yet are equally essential to dismantling the broader ecosystem of vulnerability that sustains the dark figure of crime. Without these dual reforms, systemic under-reporting and exploitation will continue to define Australia's migration landscape.

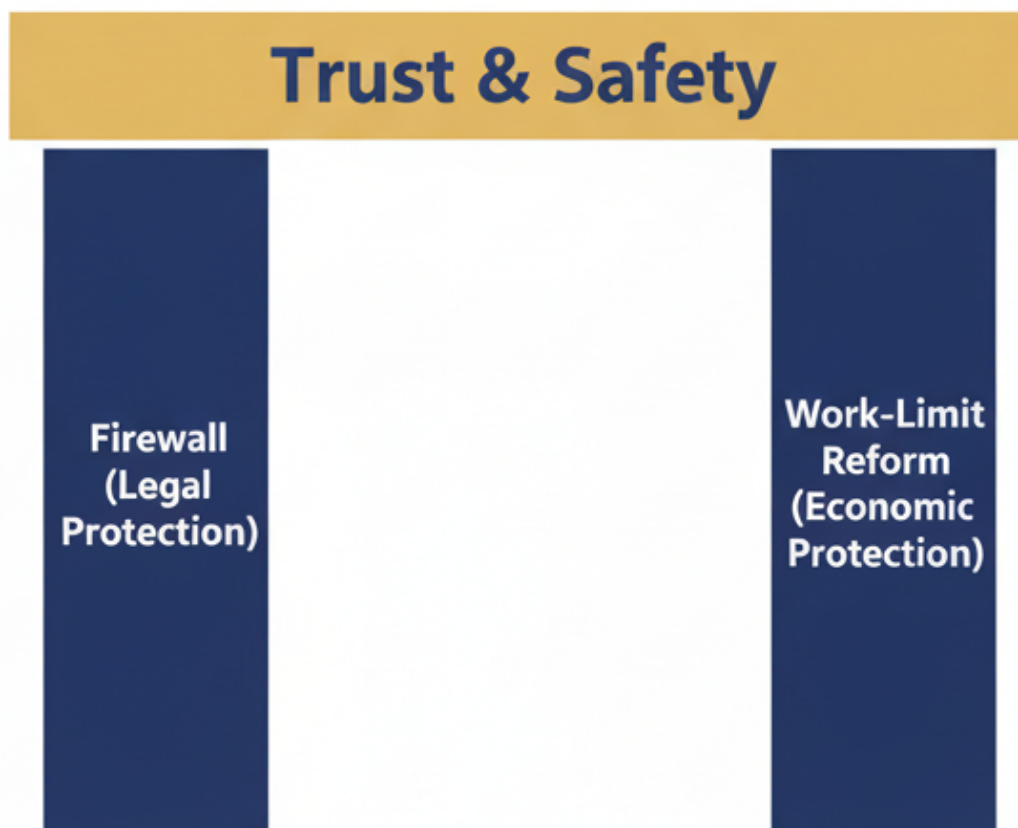


Figure 17. Dual structural reforms, legal and economic, support the foundation of trust and safety for international students.

5.3 Enhancing Institutional Duty of Care and Support

Recommendation 5: Increase Integrated Housing Support

Universities must significantly increase the provision of secure, affordable, and regulated **institutional** or affiliated housing options. Where external market reliance is necessary, institutions should mandate robust oversight and consumer protection guidance for all recommended **non-private dwellings** to mitigate the documented risks of landlord exploitation and scams (UNSW Sydney's Human Rights Clinic, 2019).

Recommendation 6: Implement Proactive Scam Education

Compulsory, culturally sensitive, and multi-lingual education programs on financial exploitation, modern scams (such as money muling), and employment rights must be implemented at the point of arrival (AFP, 2024). These programs should proactively and **explicitly link financial precarity to vulnerability to crime**, emphasising that economic desperation created by exploitation can lead directly to involvement in serious criminal schemes.

Collectively, these measures redefine the role of educational institutions from passive service providers to active guarantors of student well-being. Duty of care must extend beyond academic success to encompass safety, stability, and informed autonomy. When universities integrate housing oversight, financial education, and pastoral support as core responsibilities rather than optional welfare initiatives, they transform the international education sector from a revenue model into a genuine ecosystem of protection. Such reform is not merely administrative; it represents a moral obligation to those who contribute so deeply to Australia's cultural and economic fabric.

INSTITUTIONS AS GUARDIANS Fostering Trust & Safety for Students

Figure 18. *Institutions as guardians
a duty of care that transforms international
education into a genuine ecosystem
of protection.*



5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This report provides an indicative estimate of crime affecting international students rather than a definitive statistical account. The hypothetical modelling used here assumes victimisation rates at least comparable to the general Australian population. Given research identifying heightened vulnerability among temporary migrants, the real incidence is likely higher. The absence of disaggregated national data remains the primary barrier to precision. In addition, the study does not differentiate experiences by student type, gender, income level, or field of study, and future research should incorporate these important variables.

Further investigation is needed to quantify economic impacts, analyse reporting pathways across states and territories, and examine lived experiences in both metropolitan and regional settings. Establishing dedicated longitudinal data collection that includes international students, combined with qualitative research into help-seeking behaviours and systemic barriers, will be essential to understanding and addressing the true scale of harm. Continued collaboration between universities, government, legal services, and student communities will be vital in building a comprehensive national evidence base and guiding policy reform.

Conservative baseline considerations

While this illustrative model successfully quantifies the current national data gap, there are limitations inherent in applying a single national average victimisation rate. International students are highly concentrated in metropolitan centres such as Sydney and Melbourne, where housing pressure, precarious work conditions, and dense social environments may elevate exposure to both personal crime and harmful exploitation. Applying a national rate therefore likely underestimates the real risk profile for this cohort.

In addition, the use of a uniform rate does not account for the intersectionality of vulnerability. Future research should disaggregate the student population to examine how multiple factors, including gender, country or region of origin, financial pressure, and education sector type, shape distinct and heightened risks of victimisation. The estimate presented here should therefore be viewed as a conservative lower bound for personal crime exposure, with further work needed to capture the broader spectrum of harm, including economic and institutional exploitation.

VI. Conclusion

It is currently impossible to provide a precise annual number of international students who are victims of crime in Australia. This limitation is primarily due to the methodological design of the **ABS CVS**, which explicitly excludes "overseas residents" and individuals residing in **non-private dwellings**. This exclusion systematically generates a profound **dark figure of crime**.

The costs of this statistical neglect are substantial. The **institutional** failures, from endemic wage theft and housing fraud to vulnerability to sophisticated criminal recruitment create a continuous cycle of precarity. The persistent threat of visa repercussions empowers perpetrators and maintains the Dark Figure. **The risk of continued inaction constitutes a failure of social and economic policy, fundamentally threatening Australia's international reputation and soft power diplomacy.**

To secure the integrity and future of this sector, Australia must move beyond policy reassurance to comprehensive, **systemic** reform. As of 2025 and into 2026, this requires immediate legislative changes in data collection to achieve measurable visibility and in migration enforcement to establish an **absolute legal firewall**. Only by delivering both statistical and legal protection can the nation fulfil its fundamental duty of care and ensure that its commitment to international students is underpinned by transparent evidence and equitable justice.

Visibility is the first act of justice. For too long, international students have existed in policy shadows, valued economically yet unseen statistically. The reforms proposed in this report are more than administrative corrections; they are an ethical recalibration of how Australia defines fairness, protection, and accountability. To count every victim is to affirm every life that contributes to this nation's story.

The absence of data is not an accident, but a design choice; reform is therefore a moral and statistical imperative.

*Figure 19. From invisibility to inclusion
for every international student.*



Appendix

Appendix A: Methodology for Hypothetical Victimisation Estimates

This appendix outlines the methodology used to generate the hypothetical victimisation estimates presented in Section II of the report. These figures are intended to illustrate the potential scale of underreported crime affecting international students in Australia and should not be interpreted as official statistics.

Purpose

The purpose of these estimates is to demonstrate the statistical impact of excluding international students from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS). By applying existing victimisation rates to the student visa cohort, the analysis highlights the "dark figure of crime", the gap between actual and recorded victimisation.

Data Sources

- ABS Crime Victimisation Survey (CVS) 2023–24: Provides national victimisation rates for selected personal crimes.
- Department of Home Affairs (April 2025): Reports a total of 720,720 student visa holders (Subclass 500).

Calculation Method

1. Victimization Rates: Extracted from the ABS CVS 2023–24 for the general population aged 15 and over.
2. Application to Student Cohort: Each crime category rate was multiplied by the total number of student visa holders to estimate the number of potential victims.

Example:

- Physical Assault Rate (2023–24): 1.7%
- Student Visa Holders: 720,720
- Estimated Victims: $720,720 \times 0.017 = 12,252$

This method was repeated across all selected personal crime categories, including physical assault, threatened assault (face-to-face and non-face-to-face), robbery, and sexual assault.

Limitations

- These figures are hypothetical extrapolations and do not reflect actual survey data.
- The estimates assume that international students experience victimisation at the same rate as the general population, which may understate or overstate actual risk.
- No adjustments were made for demographic, geographic, or socioeconomic differences.

Disclaimer

These estimates are illustrative only. They are designed to highlight the consequences of systemic exclusion from national data collection and should be interpreted as indicative of potential scale, not as definitive counts.

Note for Readers: All tables and figures derived from these calculations should be clearly labelled as "hypothetical" to prevent misinterpretation.

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

This glossary defines key terms used throughout the report to support clarity and accessibility for diverse audiences.

- **Dark Figure of Crime:** The gap between crimes that occur and those that are reported or recorded in official statistics.
- **Visa Precarity:** A condition where temporary visa holders fear losing legal status, often used by perpetrators to deter reporting.
- **Non-Private Dwellings (NPDs):** Communal living arrangements such as university residences, excluded from ABS CVS sampling.
- **Absolute Firewall:** A proposed legal barrier preventing regulatory bodies from sharing victim data with immigration authorities without consent.
- **Student Visa (Subclass 500):** A temporary visa allowing international students to study in Australia.

Appendix C: Comparative Policy Models

This appendix summarises international approaches to protecting temporary migrants who are victims of crime.

Country	Protection Mechanism	Description	Conditions for Access
United States	U Visa / T Visa	Temporary status for victims of crime or trafficking	Cooperation with law enforcement
Canada	Temporary Resident Permit	12-month status for trafficking victims; no requirement to testify	Victim identification; waived fees
United Kingdom	Indefinite Leave to Remain	Residency for victims of domestic violence	Proof of abuse; relationship breakdown
Australia	Visa Protections Pilot	Policy-based protection for exploited workers	No legislated firewall; limited trust

Appendix D: Stakeholder Quotes and Case Vignettes

The following anonymised quotes and vignettes illustrate lived experiences of international students navigating exploitation and fear.

"I didn't report the wage theft because my boss said he'd tell immigration I worked too many hours. I couldn't risk being sent home."

"Our landlord kept our bond and threatened to call the police when we asked for it back. We didn't know our rights."

"I was offered a remote job that paid well, but it turned out to be a scam. Now I'm scared I'll be charged for something I didn't understand."

These stories reflect the systemic barriers to justice and underscore the urgency of reform.

Appendix E: Survey Instrument and Data Sources

This appendix outlines the sources and instruments used to inform the report's analysis.

Key Data Sources:

- ABS Crime Victimization Survey (CVS) 2023–24
- Department of Home Affairs: Student Visa Data (April 2025)
- Berg & Farbenblum (2017): National Temporary Migrant Work Survey
- UNSW Human Rights Clinic (2019): Housing Exploitation Reports
- AFP (2024): Scam and Money Muling Warnings

Survey Instrument (Adapted from Berg & Farbenblum):

Sample questions used to assess exploitation:

- Have you ever been paid below minimum wage in Australia?
- Have you experienced issues recovering your rental bond?
- Have you been approached with suspicious job offers?
- Did fear of visa consequences prevent you from reporting a crime or workplace issue?

These instruments were used to triangulate findings and support the hypothetical extrapolations presented in the report.

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