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MEDIA RELEASE

Migrant and refugee women face intersecting sexual harassment, racism and exploitation in Australian workplaces

A new report from Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) sheds light on the intersection of sexual harassment, exploitative work conditions, and racial discrimination experienced by migrant and refugee women in workplaces across the country. This is the first comprehensive global study to examine these intersecting problems and highlights the severe challenges women face in maintaining safety and dignity at work.

Led by Professor Marie Segrave from the University of Melbourne, in partnership with Harmony Alliance, this report gathers quantitative and qualitative insights from over 850 migrant and refugee women in Australia, expanding on earlier findings that 46% of these women reported experiencing workplace sexual harassment within the past five years.

The study revealed that migrant and refugee women consistently reported experiences of sexual harassment alongside racial discrimination and exploitation, including unequal pay and unsafe work environments – both physically and psychologically. Many reported their experiences were not recognised, as systems addressed these instances of abuse separately, rather than as interconnected problems.

One participant shared, *"8 years ago I arrived here on a student visa, my first workplace was in... hospitality... a fast food Mexican restaurant in Melbourne. This manager would say hi or goodbye to you and give you this hug where you could just feel like he was feeling you all over, and you know, at some point it got normalised. Whenever he felt like [it], he would give you a slap in the bottom and making sexual jokes in the work environment all the time. I look back now, and I just felt so tiny."*

Dr. Tessa Boyd-Caine, CEO of ANROWS, highlighted the critical need for change, "It is a fundamental right to feel safe at work. Yet many migrant and refugee women in Australia are deprived of this basic security. The evidence shows that addressing sexual harassment, racism, and exploitative conditions in isolation is inadequate. We must understand that these issues are interconnected if we are to improve conditions and safety of migrant and refugee women in Australian workplaces."

Migrant and refugee women also lacked confidence that reporting abuse would benefit them. Many participants expressed concern that speaking out would lead to negative professional, financial, cultural or social consequences, with little hope of a positive outcome.

Professor Marie Segrave, University of Melbourne, emphasised, "A critical finding of this research is that structural inequalities—such as racism, visa status, and employment conditions—intensify the impact of workplace sexual harassment and other forms of abuse and exploitation."

Our research is based on the generosity of migrant and refugee women across Australia who have shared their stories and experiences. This research lays the ground for rethinking siloed response systems and how best to prioritise women's safety in the workplace holistically."

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

Nyadol Nyuon OAM, Chair Harmony Alliance, said, "By highlighting the voices of over 850 migrant and refugee women, this report sheds light on the urgent need to rethink how we address workplace safety. It's not just about identifying harassment but ensuring meaningful, systemic change."

This report is part of the 2021-2024 ANROWS Sexual Harassment Research Program and calls for immediate action to ensure that all women, regardless of their background, can work in environments free from harassment, discrimination, and exploitation.

Read the [summary](#) or [download the report](#).

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About ANROWS

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation.

ANROWS is an initiative of Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia.