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## **MEDIA RELEASE: LIVES IN LIMBO - AUSTRALIA'S BROKEN TEMPORARY MIGRATION SYSTEM.**

A Migrant Workers Centre survey of over 700 temporary visa holders shows the urgent need for more pathways to permanent residency.

The findings, which also draw upon over 50 in depth interviews, are presented in the new report *Lives in Limbo: The Experiences of Migrant Workers Navigating Australia's Unsettling Migration System* and reveal a broken migration system that sets workers up for exploitation and perpetual uncertainty.

Key findings show:

- 65% of temporary visa holders have experienced wage theft and 1-in-4 have additionally experienced other forms of labour exploitation
- Extremely high levels of stress, the highest being amongst those on employer sponsored visas
- A link between workplace exploitation and temporary visa status whereby 91% of workers who experienced wage theft arrived on a visa with no pathway to permanent residency
- On average, it takes workers 5.1 years to acquire PR with the longest wait time being 13 years
- Loopholes in visa programs such as employer sponsored visas which leave workers vulnerable to exploitative bosses and visa scams, and often tens of thousands of dollars out of pocket.

The Government constantly changes the rules of the game to create a perpetually temporary class of workers who are keeping our economy going, but with limited workplace protections and social safety nets.

The Migrant Workers Centre urgently calls on the Australian Government to increase the proportion of permanent visas issued, introduce maximum wait times to visa processing, replace employer sponsorship with a State/Territory-sponsorship system for permanent residency, and protect migrant worker whistle-blowers.

### **QUOTES ATTRIBUTABLE TO MATT KUNKEL, CEO - MIGRANT WORKERS CENTRE**

"The nation's migration program has structurally brewed a population of precarious workers. Strengthening pathways to permanent residency will provide social and economic benefits to all workers in Australia.

"The Government expects migrants – often highly educated and highly dedicated to creating a life in Australia – to give up the prime working years of their life to this country, all the while shifting the goal posts to keep permanent residency just out of reach.

"Temporary is a misnomer - we're talking about workers who've given up years, sometimes over a decade, of their lives in Australia with the hope of settling down and securing a life with their communities and family.

"We need an overhaul of the visa system so workers' lives don't rest solely in the hands of a single employer, and all long-term migrants have an opportunity for permanent residency.

"Workers on temporary visas experience workplace exploitation because the system creates barriers to reporting industrial wrongdoing. Visas expire before lengthy court processes can be completed, or the loss of employment can lead to the disruption of many years of settlement."

*For media enquiries, please contact Ella Shi, Digital and Communications Organiser, on 0439 449 210 or [eshi@migrantworkers.org.au](mailto:eshi@migrantworkers.org.au)*