

## Media Release

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### **Criminalising wage theft won't make the problem go away for migrant workers**

Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) has welcomed the government's proposal to criminalise wage theft, but says more needs to be done to address endemic levels of workplace exploitation affecting migrant workers.

In a submission made to the Attorney-General's Department released today on [www.rlc.org.au](http://www.rlc.org.au), RLC makes 20 recommendations to tackle the underlying workplace culture which is exploiting migrant workers.

"Wage theft has become big business. When employees are subject to work restrictions on their visa or reliant on their employer to help them get permanent residency, it's a recipe for exploitation," solicitor and head of RLC's employment law service, Sharmilla Bargon said.

"There are many barriers for a person on a temporary visa to start legal action and we are worried that criminal penalties for wage theft won't help those that most need it to recover their entitlements.

"It's hard for citizens to bring a wage claim in court, but it is so much harder for migrants with limited English who don't know their way around the Australian legal system. Many employees know they have a legal claim, but are scared to report any wrongdoings in fear of losing their visa and employers know this," Ms Bargon said.

RLC is also part of the Migrant Employment Legal Service (MELS), a joint initiative with Marrickville Legal Centre, Inner City Legal Centre and Kingsford Legal Centre, newly created to address the culture of exploitation facing migrant workers across NSW.

MELS solicitor at RLC, Regina Featherstone said, "The MELS project aims to break down some of the access to justice barriers that affect migrant workers across NSW. Our service provides an important new avenue to address the exploitation of migrant workers. The time is up for employers stealing the wages of their employees to make profit."

RLC's submissions on the criminalisation of wage theft has been submitted to the Attorney-General's Department. You can read the full submission here: <http://bit.ly/2CfJzt8>

RLC is available for free and confidential employment law advice on 02 9698 7277.

Migrant workers in NSW can also contact the Migrant Employment Legal Service (MELS) on 02 8002 1203.

#### **FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:**

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