

Australian Human Rights Institute

Societal impact report

2021-2024



UNSW
SYDNEY



UNSW
Australian
Human Rights
Institute

Foreword

I was privileged to take the helm of the Australian Human Rights Institute as Director in 2021, building on the work of founding Director, Scientia Professor Louise Chappell. In the first three years of the Institute's establishment, Louise and her team set the foundations for the impactful work that has followed. The establishment of key governance frameworks, partnerships and a strong interdisciplinary research base were the building blocks for the Institute's current successes.

The past few years have presented new and increasingly complex global human rights challenges. A global pandemic, worsening climate change impacts, multiple armed conflicts, global supply chain crises, the rapid development and application of AI, and a rise in multidimensional inequality have thrown human rights into the spotlight in a variety of arenas. During this time the Institute has also experienced significant growth as it has actively worked to address some of these issues.

The Institute is leading the way in illustrating how research can have impact by changing government and industry policies and practices; demonstrating that human rights advocacy is most powerful when accompanied by rigorous compilation of evidence.

We are an interdisciplinary human rights research institute, the only one in Australia, bringing together academics with broad and deep expertise to tackle human rights challenges collectively. Our expansive Associates program now includes more than 200 researchers across a range of disciplines from every UNSW faculty.

Since 2021 the Institute has provided more than \$250,000 in research funding and has supported 39 impactful research projects, partnering with over 50 organisations. Institute research outputs have grown exponentially with more than 1200 research publications since 2021. We work effectively across the entire university to foster and support a human rights research culture at UNSW. We are developing strategic collaborations with government, business, academia and civil society partners to scale our work and increase our impact.

Our media reach has grown from an audience of 13 million people in 2021 to more than 60 million in 2023 and continues to rise. We have held more than 70 public events provoking debate on human rights issues and

launched a monthly human rights e-newsletter that has offered us new ways to engage with our thousands of readers and supporters.

We are also investing in the next generation of human rights defenders. In 2021, we established our Global Student Fellowship to kickstart human rights careers. We are sending UNSW students into the world as human rights ambassadors supporting the critical work of NGOs regionally across the Indo-Pacific.

UNSW has a proud and youthful history as a trailblazer of social justice, pursuing its goal to carry out research 'to meet the needs of the community'. This dedication to social justice is enhanced by the critical work of the Institute advancing UNSW's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals globally, and ensuring that the work of our academics and students is driving effective and enduring change, brokering international engagement and implementing real-world impact.

It is an absolute privilege to work with the Institute's highly professional and committed team who ensure that our Associates and students are not only well supported, but that their work and voices are amplified. My thanks to the team and our community of Associates, the Institute's Advisory Committee, UNSW faculties and teams, our program and research partners and donors, without whom none of this work would be possible.

Working in human rights is an exercise in optimism. The challenges are endless and the solutions often opaque. But this report shows that we can take pride in what we have achieved, the community we have built and the potential we are harnessing to ensure human rights are promoted, protected and realised.



Professor Justine Nolan
Director of the Australian
Human Rights Institute

Building a legacy of human rights at UNSW

The Australian Human Rights Institute was established in 2018 by UNSW Sydney. Launched under the directorship of Scientia Professor Louise Chappell, the Institute builds on the outstanding legacy of one of the oldest centres in UNSW's Faculty of Law & Justice, the Australian Human Rights Centre, established in 1986 and led by influential human rights advocates including Emeriti Professors Garth Nettheim and Andrea Durbach.

Between 2018 and 2021, under the helm of Professor Chappell, the new Institute developed its interdisciplinary human rights research, knowledge and advocacy base. Professor Chappell's expertise and reputation as a global leader in women's rights, gender and politics drove a range of research projects, including addressing the International Criminal Court's poor conviction rates for sexual and gender-based crimes, sport and gender equality, and research on sex and gender policies in health and medical research, which has seen the establishment of the new Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine. Multiple programs showcased the power of collaboration and knowledge exchange in amplifying human rights, including the Visiting Defenders program.

The Institute's continuing success builds on this legacy.



Impact at a glance

The Australian Human Rights Institute is where knowledge meets action. We are generating research-based solutions to protect human rights, dismantle inequality and foster a culture of accountability in which human rights abuses are challenged and rectified.

The Institute has built a team of more than 200 research Associates, created a pathway for students to develop human rights careers, and undertaken leading research which is transforming the way policymakers, industry, community and scholars advance and advocate for human rights.

In just a short time our research on modern slavery, gender and LGBTQIA+ equality, health, and climate is driving significant change, bolstering the Institute's reputation as a distinctive leader in cultivating research-backed societal impact.

200+

Attracted more than 200 **researchers** representing every UNSW faculty

1200

Supported 1200 human rights **academic publications**

\$250K+

Provided more than \$250,000 in **research support** through seed and small funding

39

Supported 39 Institute **research projects**

30+

Developed more than 30 community and civil society **partnerships**

10+

Built more than 10 industry **partnerships and collaborations**

10

Established 10 **government partnerships**

181M+

Expanded our media **audience reach** to more than 181 million

35

Published 35 issues of the **Human Rights Defender** newsletter

70+

Delivered more than 70 **events**

51

Hosted 51 **student interns**

16

Provided paid human rights **work experience** to 16 students through the Global Student Fellowship

\$500K+

Received more than \$500,000 in pro bono **legal support**

Advancing human rights through innovative research

To achieve enduring and effective change, the work of the Institute seeks to shape policies, laws, and practices that secure the protection and realisation of human rights. Priority is given to conducting applied interdisciplinary research with real-world impact.

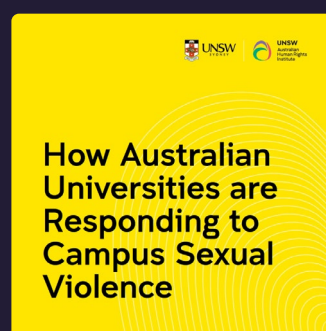
Transforming the way companies do business

More than 50 million people around the world are trapped in modern slavery and half of those are working in global supply chains to produce the food we eat and the clothes we wear. Led by **Professor Justine Nolan** the Institute's research on modern slavery is influencing business and government, and impacting the development of human rights policies and practices in Australia and overseas. Working collaboratively with civil society and other universities, in 2021-2023 the Institute conducted an extensive review of the first two years of modern slavery reporting in Australia and recommended reforms to strengthen Australia's Modern Slavery Act. The project generated significant impact, with the independent review of Australia's Modern Slavery Act, released in 2023, recommending almost all of our suggested reforms. Our advocacy has supported the establishment of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner in Australia and broadened understanding of corporate human rights due diligence practices. We are committed to transforming the way business operates and we are now conducting a major research project that is building a global evidence base to inform responsible business practices and effective policy responses by government to address human rights abuses in global supply chains.



Tackling campus sexual violence

National and global statistics indicate a crisis in sexual assault and harassment across the broader community, but it is only in recent years that data regarding the extent of campus-based sexual abuse in Australia has emerged. The Institute (and its predecessor the Australian Human Rights Centre) has been at the forefront of efforts to address sexual violence in Australian universities. Working closely with The Hunting Ground Australia Project, and with the Australian Human Rights Commission to ascertain the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities, we have supported a national conversation on campus sexual violence that has informed student advocacy campaigns and contributed to policy proposals adopted by Australian governments. Our 2024 follow up work, led by Institute Research Fellow **Dr Allison Henry**, assessed how Australian universities are responding to campus sexual violence and was welcomed by student leaders and parliamentarians. Our advocacy and strategic research collaborations have fed into the Australian Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education and the proposed reforms are a potential game-changer for Australia's university sector, dramatically increasing the support for student survivors and enhancing institutional accountability and transparency.



Exposing the nature and extent of online child abuse and exploitation

Child sexual abuse is a public health emergency, with almost one-third of Australian adults sexually abused as children. Led by Institute Associate **Professor Michael Salter** the Institute supported ground-breaking nationally representative research into the prevalence of child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian, UK and US men. Working with advisors from government, law enforcement, industry and civil society, this research is the largest study of its kind ever undertaken globally, uncovering alarming new child sex abuse data. The research provides a new approach for measuring and tracking this issue and is informing the work of Australian and overseas law enforcement agencies, government, child safety organisations and business coalitions and influencing the development of primary and secondary prevention efforts. This data has fed into ChildLight's *Into the Light Index* (the global index measuring and monitoring child sexual abuse) and research continues through the newly established ChildLight UNSW, led by Professor Salter.

Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men



November 2022



Equalising sex and gender in health and medicine

Every year, millions of Australians miss out on quality healthcare due to a lack of research considering sex and gender in health and medicine. Led by **Scientia Professor Louise Chappell** in partnership with The George Institute for Global Health, the Institute is changing the way medical researchers, practitioners and governments understand and think about sex and gender. With ongoing advocacy and input from the project team, Australia's largest medical research funder, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), has developed a new national sex and gender policy statement calling on medical researchers to consider sex and gender. Ongoing strategic advice and recommendations are supporting government action, including project researchers' appointments to the National Women's Health Advisory Council to reduce gender bias in healthcare. In partnership with the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI), project researchers led the co-design of a pioneering Australian framework for sex and gender inclusive health and medicine research which can be used as a blueprint for organisations to develop their own policies. Together with The George Institute for Global Health and Deakin University, the Institute has co-founded a national Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine. With support from the Victorian Department of Health and AAMRI, this new Centre will drive research, policy change, education and advocacy to advance health equity in Australia.



Institute seed funding for innovative research

Since 2021, Institute funding for interdisciplinary research has supported the development of 21 projects, including efforts to transition Mongolian communities to renewable energy sources; developing disability-inclusive disaster responses in the Philippines; and measuring the impact of family separation on mental health and resettlement outcomes of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. Seed-funded projects have gone on to receive Australian Research Council funding under DECRA and Discovery project schemes. Working with UNSW's Disability Innovation Institute and the Faculty of Engineering this program has provided valuable support to academics and is fostering a human rights research culture at UNSW.

Identifying and supporting women experiencing economic abuse

Despite appearing gender-neutral, Australia's tax system and welfare/social security/transfer system (the 'tax and transfer system') give rise to de facto discrimination and gender inequality. Institute seed funding supported research led by **Associate Professor Ann Kayis-Kumar** to address the knowledge gap around the unmet need for independent tax advice among those experiencing domestic and family violence, as well as supporting UNSW's Tax and Business Advisory Clinic to better assist financially vulnerable women.

From 'blackbirding' to the Seasonal Worker Programme

Many Australians are unaware that our country has a history tainted by slavery. For Australian South Sea Islanders, 60,000 of whose ancestors were brought to the country through 'blackbirding' to work in sugar production, and for those who have continued to arrive to do seasonal work, the linkages are real. This project, led by **Associate Professor Emma Christopher** created the first prototype for an online, searchable Pacific Voyages database to harness archival, historical, genealogical and anthropological research and make it accessible and usable for academics, human rights specialists, Pacific Islanders and their descendants abroad.

The right to clean air in Pacific low- and middle-income countries

An increasingly populated and industrialised world has led to a decrease in air quality in Pacific communities, leading to a rise in respiratory illnesses with women and children from lower income households most significantly impacted. Technology deployed through an Institute seed funding grant was used to monitor air quality in the Pacific, allowing air particles to be captured for laboratory analysis and ultimately be used to improve the health outcomes of Pacific communities. Led by **Dr Andrew Dansie**, this project is providing the first-ever inter-country comparison of air quality in the Pacific.



Where our researchers come from

The Institute is distinct in its ability to bring together human rights researchers from a wide range of disciplines across all faculties and campuses at UNSW. This collaborative approach is key to UNSW's commitment to research excellence, driving interdisciplinary research that has meaningful impact. The Institute's flagship Associates network includes more than 200 UNSW researchers with a range of expertise that informs and shapes human rights scholarship and implementation.

Institute Associates by faculty

● ADA ● Law & Justice ● Medicine & Health ● Business ● Engineering ● Science ● Division EDI

Academics



PhDs

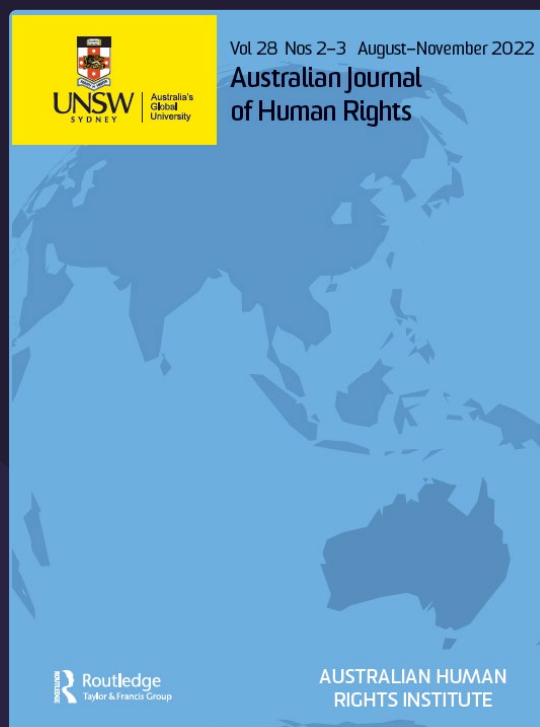


Australian Journal of Human Rights

Established in 1994 (under the auspices of the Australian Human Rights Centre), the Australian Journal of Human Rights (AJHR) remains Australia's first peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal devoted exclusively to human rights. It raises awareness of human rights issues by providing a forum for scholarship and discussion in the form of original academic articles and topical Current Perspectives pieces and book reviews.

Managed by an Institute editorial team and board, and published by Taylor & Francis, the AJHR examines legal aspects of human rights, along with associated philosophical, historical, economic and political considerations across a range of issues, including Aboriginal ownership of land, racial discrimination and vilification, human rights in the criminal justice system, children's rights, homelessness, immigration, asylum and detention, corporate accountability, disability standards and free speech.

The journal's growth is a testament to the public's growing interest in human rights and the Institute's leadership and support for human rights scholarship.



2021-2023 Journal snapshot

64%

download
increase

47%

increase in
submissions

8

issues

66

original
articles

22

current
perspectives

16

book reviews

Strengthening human rights through meaningful engagement and partnerships

Building strategic partnerships is key to the Institute's successful approach in progressing human rights. We engage with government, industry, civil society and academia in Australia and internationally to inform public debate, influence policy development and support the next generation of human rights defenders.

Our engagement with partners is informed by our evidence-based research and co-designed approaches, including partnerships with climate science communicators to co-develop tools that demonstrate the human rights impacts of climate change and collaborating with patient advocacy groups to enhance services to reduce gender bias in healthcare.



A weekend for every worker

Construction workers have higher rates of physical injury, serious mental health disorders and suicide compared to other occupations and the general public. Findings from the Institute's Project 5 study in 2022, led by **Dr Natalie Galea**, highlighted the success of providing a weekend for workers in construction and the positive social benefits of innovating as a sector to improve their work/life balance, while ensuring economic viability in delivering projects. Following collaboration with builder Roberts Co and NSW Health Infrastructure on a two-year research project at the Concord Hospital redevelopment, a five-day working week was rolled out across some of Health Infrastructure's major projects, including the \$619 million Stage 2 redevelopment at The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

Demanding accountability for enforced disappearances in Rwanda

The practice of enforced disappearances in Rwanda has been identified as a human rights violation by the United Nations and leading international human rights organisations, with targeting of dissidents reported since the Rwandan Patriotic Front came to power in 1994. Working closely with law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth and leading human rights barrister Jennifer Robinson, the Institute filed a complaint to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances in relation to the disappearance in Rwanda of two brothers of Australian citizen Noël Zihabamwe.



Restoring integrity and transparency to public appointments

Following condemnation of the opaque selection of senior Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) Commissioners and a consequent threat to downgrade the Commission's A-status and participation rights at the UN Human Rights Council, the Institute worked with Amnesty International Australia and the Human Rights Law Centre to campaign for merit-based, transparent selection processes in public appointments. In October 2022, the Albanese Government introduced a legislated appointment process for all senior leadership roles at the AHRC as part of a commitment to restoring its international credibility and independence. It was one of the first pieces of legislation introduced by Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus.



Business and human rights training

In partnership with the United Nations Development Programme the Institute developed a curriculum and delivered training to National Human Rights Institutions across Asia on business and human rights. Led by **Professor Justine Nolan**, the training increased capacity and understanding of business and human rights, promoted participatory knowledge exchange, and built networks and linkages for those working in business and human rights in the region.

Driving public debate about critical human rights issues

The Institute plays an important role in driving human rights discourse in Australia through its extensive events programme, offering an opportunity for the broader public to engage with contemporary human rights concerns.

Since 2021 the Institute has held two **major conference events** attracting more than 1300 registered participants, raising awareness and deepening connections between academia, activists and policymakers on key human rights issues.

In 2021 the Institute partnered with The George Institute for Global Health and the USC Institute on Inequalities in Global Health to deliver a major online conference, 'Health and Human Rights in the Climate Crisis'. The conference featured speakers from around the globe, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health Tlaleng Mofokeng and former Prime Minister of New Zealand and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark. The conference focused on the interconnections between health, climate science and human rights to address the challenges arising from the threat of climate change on human health. In 2023 the Institute hosted a sold-out conference event at the Art Gallery of NSW titled, 'Accountability in Crisis'. The conference brought together academics, journalists, activists and business leaders to explore the erosion of human rights and declining trust in democratic institutions and sparked a lively public discussion on the role of human rights in Australia.

The Institute has hosted more than **70 events** since 2021 including significant conversations on business and human rights, sport and human rights, and women's rights. Key to the Institute's successful approach is building strategic partnerships to elevate and inform public discussion and we have benefitted from multiple collaborations, including with UNSW's Centre for Ideas, the Australian Red Cross, Human Rights Watch and the Human Rights Law Centre among many others.



Investing in the next generation of human rights defenders

Global Student Fellowship program

Participation in human rights work is often on a voluntary or unpaid basis due to limited resources. This in turn creates significant barriers to access and limits long-term engagement for those wishing to work in human rights.

A key goal of the Institute is to support UNSW's mission to deliver transformative educational experiences to our students. In 2021 we established the Global Student Fellowship program, which provides students with a paid opportunity to gain work experience and build a career pathway in human rights. Fellows are hosted by leading international development or human rights-based organisations in Australia and overseas. The Institute's commitment to invest in these programmes has facilitated young people to pursue human rights careers.

“ The fellowship was a lifeline for me. It provided a safety net and kept my initial optimism that I brought into university about working in human rights alive. The best thing I did in my university career.

Samuel Pryde, 2021 Global Student Fellow, Jubilee Australia



Institute Fellows have gone on to work in policy, advocacy and research in areas across refugee rights, environmental justice, law reform and business and human rights.

In creating paid pathways into human rights for students, the pioneering program also strengthens and builds new partnerships, providing much needed resources to leading human rights and development organisations, boosting UNSW's societal impact.



“ I’m starting as a Judicial Affairs Officer at the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. The fellowship helped prepare me for the role by opening my mind to new areas of human rights law and learning from others in the field.

Madeline Whittaker, 2023 Global Student Fellow, Jubilee Australia

“ It’s fantastic that a program like this exists – it provides much-needed support to our work and a genuine opportunity for the fellows to do real work and become part of a team for their time with us. We’ve also been immensely impressed with the skills and knowledge of the Fellows that have worked with us.

Fyfe Strachan, Jubilee Australia

Partnering with civil society for the Global Student Fellowship

- › [Amnesty International](#) (Sydney, Australia)
- › [Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility](#) (Sydney, Australia)
- › [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) (Sydney, Australia)
- › [Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation](#) (Hanoi, Vietnam)
- › [Citizens’ Constitutional Forum](#) (Suva, Fiji)
- › [Engineers Without Borders](#) (Dili, Timor-Leste; Melbourne, Australia; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Port Vila, Vanuatu)
- › [Human Rights Watch](#) (Sydney, Australia)
- › [Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative](#) (Jakarta, Indonesia)
- › [International Organization for Migration/IOM, UN Migration](#) (Bangkok, Thailand)
- › [Jubilee Australia](#) (Sydney, Australia)
- › [Justice and Equity Centre](#) (formerly PIAC) (Sydney, Australia)
- › [Walk Free](#) (Perth, Australia)

Interns

Internships with the Australian Human Rights Institute provide students with the opportunity to work across a broad range of human rights research projects and priorities, equipping them with invaluable skills, knowledge, and insights, empowering them to make meaningful contributions to the global human rights movement.

Since 2021 the Institute has supported more than 50 student for-credit internships. Students have worked alongside academics on a range of issues including modern slavery, the Uluru Statement, the United Nations Rights of Persons with Disabilities charter, and climate change.

“ Interning at the Australian Human Rights Institute was a fantastic experience. The passion and drive of the staff was inspiring, and I was given so many opportunities to participate directly in the work of the Institute, both supporting the larger projects and engaging in individual projects, such as writing articles for the website.

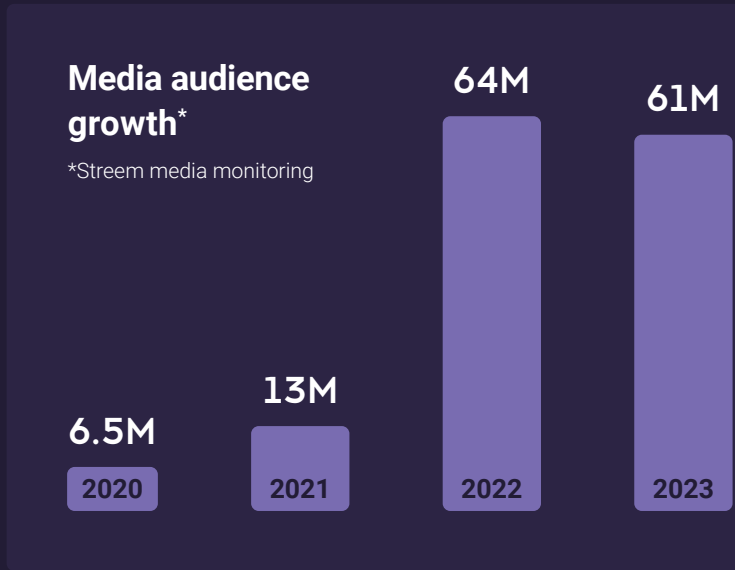
Annabelle Spence, Institute Intern



Media highlights

The Australian Human Rights Institute provides thought leadership on a broad array of human rights issues and is recognised as a trusted source of human rights knowledge and expertise.

Institute research attracts significant media coverage and Institute researchers are regularly featured in national and international media informing critical debate on human rights issues.

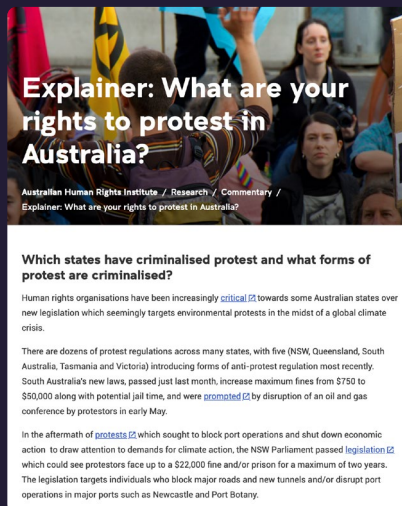


181M+ media audience reach 2021-2024 (*Stream media monitoring) with international coverage in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and The Independent (UK)

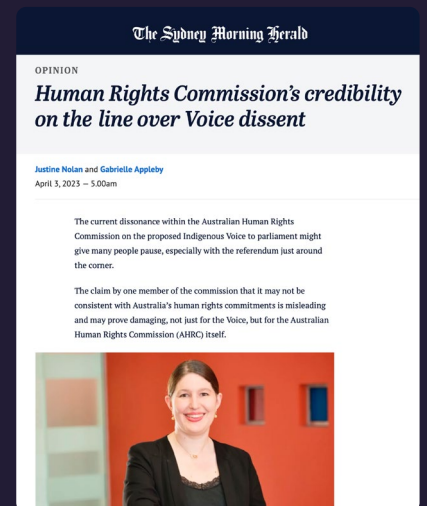
5000+ subscribers to the Human Rights Defender digital newsletter and **35 issues published**



15 human rights explainers published



73 pieces of commentary published



Tackling campus sexual violence

Coverage: ABC News (online), ABC News Radio, ABC News 24, Campus Review, The Guardian Australia, The Sydney Morning Herald, Women's Agenda. Media releases: Education Minister Jason Clare, Federal Greens.

Exposing the nature and extent of online child abuse and exploitation

Estimated media audience of more than 40 million people globally. Coverage: ABC RN Breakfast, The Daily Aus, The Daily Mail, The Age, The Conversation, The Guardian Australia, The Independent (UK), 7News, Mamamia, News.com.au, Nine News, The Sydney Morning Herald, The West Australian, Women's Agenda. Report has been viewed more than 25,000 times on our website.

Launch of the Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine

Estimated media audience of more than 7 million people. Coverage: Australian Women's Weekly, Ten News First, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Guardian, ABC Sydney Drive, ABC RN Breakfast, FBI Radio, The West Australian, The New Daily, Townsville Bulletin.



Institute Team

- › **Allison Henry**, Research Fellow
- › **Drew Sheldrick**, Communications Manager
- › **Justine Nolan**, Director
- › **Kylie Smith**, Events Coordinator
- › **Lily Halliday**, Programs and Partnerships Lead
- › **Oras Khalaf**, Business Manager
- › **Samuel Pryde**, Research Associate and AJHR Managing Editor
- › **Susie Shaw**, Administrator

Advisory Committee

- › **Andrea Durbach**, UNSW Sydney
- › **Daniela Gavshon**, Human Rights Watch
- › **David Robb**, Macquarie Group
- › **Ed Coper**, Populares
- › **Fiona Reynolds**, UN Global Compact Network Australia
- › **Jennifer Robinson**, Doughty St Chambers
- › **Kate Harrison**, Gilbert+Tobin
- › **Lyndell Droga**, Advisor to Allegra Spender MP
- › **Nathan Kennedy**, Hall and Wilcox Lawyers
- › **Phoebe Wynn-Pope**, Corrs-Chambers Westgarth
- › **Rebecca Gilsenan**, Maurice Blackburn
- › **Sam Koslowski**, The Daily Aus
- › **Simone Abel**, Human rights lawyer

Emeriti Advisory Group

- › **Chris Lamb**, NSW Public Service Commission
- › **Craig Foster**, Human rights advocate
- › **Dani Larkin**, University of Queensland
- › **David Cooke**, ESG Advisory
- › **Elaine Pearson**, Human Rights Watch
- › **Fran Kelly**, ABC
- › **George Williams**, Western Sydney University
- › **Kieren Fitzpatrick**, Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
- › **Lisa Singh**, Australia India Institute, University of Melbourne
- › **Louise Chappell**, UNSW Sydney
- › **Magda Szubanski**, Actor, writer and activist
- › **Megan Davis**, UNSW Sydney
- › **Noel Zihabamwe**, African Australian Advocacy Centre
- › **Pablo Berrutti**, Altioem
- › **Robyn Norton**, Imperial College London and UNSW Sydney

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Acknowledgement of Country:

UNSW is located on the unceded territory of the Bedegal (Kensington campus), Gadigal (City and Paddington Campuses) and Ngunnawal peoples (UNSW Canberra) who are the Traditional Owners of the lands where each campus of UNSW is situated.

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