

Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Project

Community voices and local antiracism roadmap

A project by Victoria University and the City of Maribyrnong

Mario Peucker

Institute for Sustainable Industries and
Liveable Cities, Victoria University

August 2026

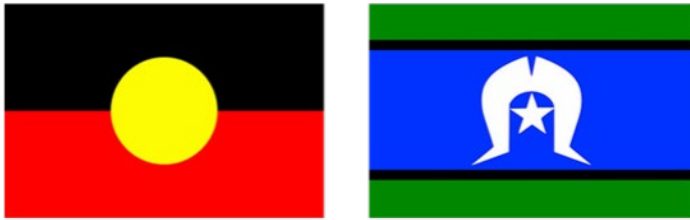
Content warning:

This report discusses sensitive issues related to racism. This includes personal accounts of racism shared by people from culturally and racially marginalised communities. These accounts refer to often very confronting experiences and include, in some cases, racial slurs.

© 2026 Victoria University, Melbourne

The publication is copyright. The work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). It may be used or reproduced without written permission from the publishers for non-commercial educational or research purposes. Other uses may occur in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968, including copies made for criticism, review and news reporting. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any manner or stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or any means without prior permission in writing of the publisher. The authors of this publication assert their rights under the Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Victoria University or of Maribyrnong City Council. Neither Victoria University nor Maribyrnong City Council are responsible or liable for any inaccurate or incorrect statements contained in the report.

Acknowledgement of Country



In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge and respects the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Bunurong/Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri/ Woiwurrung of the Kulin who are the traditional owners of University land in Victoria. We recognise their continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay our respect to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Acknowledgment and thanks

This project was undertaken by Victoria University in partnership with Maribyrnong City Council and in collaboration with many local organisations and community members. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to it, and we recognise that this project would not have been possible without them.

We would like to thank Maribyrnong City Council for taking the initiative and supporting this project. We also acknowledge the crucial contributions of the peer facilitators of the community focus group. We extend our gratitude to the various organisations, community groups and service providers who contributed to project; these include Africause, AMES, Asylum Seekers Resource Centre (ASRC), Justice Action Maribyrnong JAM!, Borderlands Cooperative, Volunteer West, Angliss Neighbourhood House, Victorian University Student Consultative Group and many others. Mostly importantly, we would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the many people from Maribyrnong's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, multicultural and multifaith communities who have put their trust in us and this project, sharing their experiences and knowledge.

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	6
1. Introduction	8
2. Community profile	9
3. Methodology: what we did	14
4. Insights: what we found	17
4.1 Experiences of racism	17
4.2 Reporting and non-reporting	25
4.3 How to strengthen anti-racism support and reporting	31
4.4 Awareness and assessment of local anti-racism	34
5. The way forward: Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap	36
5.1 Celebrating cultural diversity and recognition of First Nations peoples	37
5.2 Public messaging around racism and anti-racism campaigns	37
5.3 Anti-racism education and training	39
5.4 Local reporting and anti-racism support	40
5.5 Cross-sector partnerships and community engagement	41
5.6 Strengthening accountability for racism	42
Reference	43

Table of Illustrations

Figure 1: Country of birth (overseas born population), Maribyrnong, 2021	10
Figure 2: Year of arrival in Australia (overseas born population), Maribyrnong, 2021	11
Figure 3: Ancestry, Maribyrnong, 2021 and 2016	11
Figure 4: Main languages spoken at home, Maribyrnong, 2021 and 2016	12
Figure 5: Main religions, Maribyrnong, 2021 and 2016	13
Figure 6: Age profile of survey respondents	15
Figure 7: Experiences of racism	17
Figure 8: Area of racism	18
Figure 9: Types of racism	19
Figure 10: (Non)-reporting racism	25
Figure 11: Experiences with reporting racism	26
Figure 12: General views on main reasons for reporting racism	27
Figure 13: General reasons for not reporting racism	28
Figure 14: Assessment of racism reporting pathways	29
Figure 15: Assessment of anti-racism support services	32
Figure 16: Suggestions: how to improve reporting and support	33
Figure 17: Views on local #RACISMNOTWELCOME campaign	35
 Table 1: Focus group composition	 16

Executive Summary

The City of Maribyrnong is home to around 100,000 people. Almost 40 percent of them were born overseas, two-thirds have at least one overseas-born parent, and the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in Maribyrnong has been growing. Voices from these multicultural, multifaith and First Nations communities were at the centre of this project, and they are also at the centre of this report.

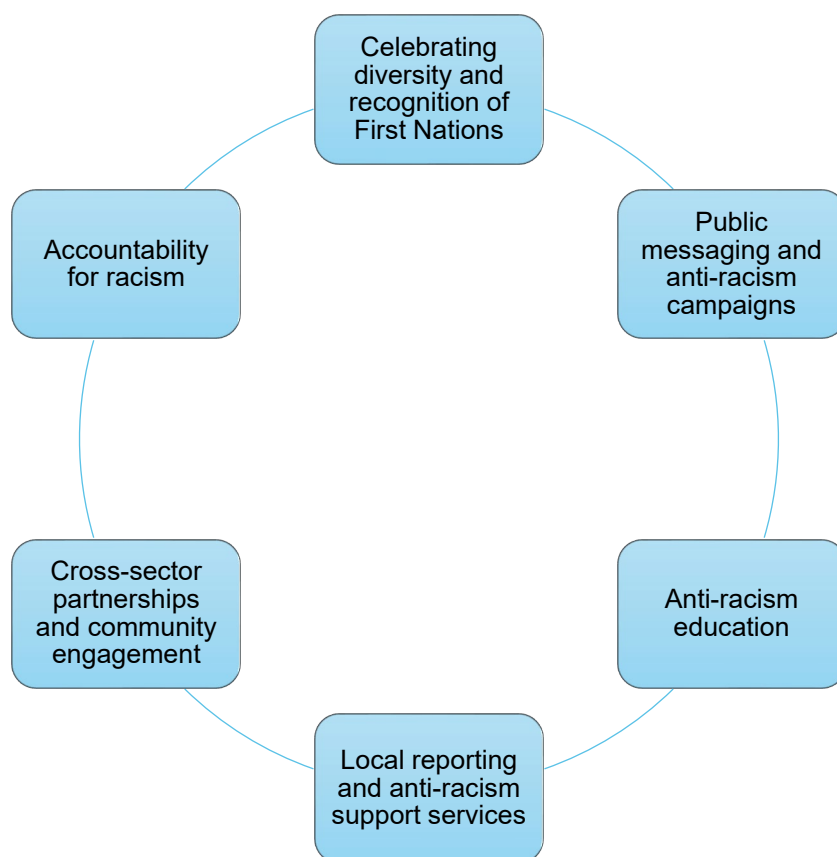
In 2025-2026, Victoria University, in partnership with Maribyrnong City Council, undertook the **Maribyrnong Anti-Racism project**. The goal was to gain a better understanding of how local communities experience racism, speak out and report it and access support. Committed to a change-oriented agenda beyond collecting empirical evidence, the project was set up to develop of a local anti-racism roadmap towards real-life change in Maribyrnong, guided by the knowledge and expertise of local communities with lived experience.

Selected key findings from the local community survey and community focus groups

- Racism remains a common experience for many in Maribyrnong as it does for communities across Australia; 81% of survey participants in Maribyrnong have **experienced racism**; over two-thirds of them also in the past 12 months, and 60% of them stated they had faced racism also in the City of Maribyrnong.
- Racism happens across all **areas of life**. The areas where racism were experienced the most are employment (57%), public transport (49%), shopping centres (44%), and in the streets (42%) as well as on social media (35%) and education (primary and secondary schools: 32%; university and TAFE: 27%).
- Only 15% of those who have faced racism have ever formally **reported** any incident of racism. The main reasons for **not reporting** often lie in an interplay between one's sense of hopelessness ('nothing would change'), insufficient awareness of where/how to report as well as concerns around the reporting process itself, such as worries about not being taken seriously and about negative consequences, or a lack of trust.
- Only around one quarter think that **reporting pathways** are appropriate, and only one fifth are of the view that anti-racism **support services** are adequate for Maribyrnong's communities.
- To make it easier and **more likely for people to speak out**, report and access support after experiencing racism, most participants called for services that are culturally safe and sensitive, trusted in the local communities, better qualified to respond to reports of racism, and take an advocacy-focussed approach; in addition, existing services should be promoted more widely.
- Participants also shared their awareness and perspectives on Maribyrnong's **#RACISMNOTWELCOME campaign**. One third knew about it and another quarter had heard about it but were not sure what it was. Overall, the campaign was regarded by most as a positive (although merely symbolic) step in the right direction and agreed that 'we need a lot more actions to reduce and tackle racism' (76%).

The Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap

The roadmap encompasses six central recommendations, capturing the main suggestions made by participants – all from communities affected by racism – on how to strengthen anti-racism locally.



1. Celebrating cultural diversity and recognition of First Nations peoples (e.g. community events, public information plaques telling local Aboriginal history)
2. Public messaging around racism and co-designed or community-designed anti-racism campaigns (e.g. social media, local schools, libraries etc.)
3. Anti-racism education and training (racial literacy, cultural competency, upstander, reporting and anti-racism support landscape)
4. Local reporting and anti-racism support (accessible, culturally appropriate and safe space by established local community organisations or a central anti-racism hub)
5. Cross-sector partnerships and community engagement (cross-sector collaboration with strong community leadership)
6. Strengthening accountability for racism (advocating for stronger legal framework, institutions as role models in addressing racism)

1. Introduction

The City of Maribyrnong in Melbourne's inner west is one of the most culturally diverse local government areas in Victoria. Multiculturalism has been a defining and celebrated feature of local community life for many decades. In late 2023, the council adopted its first **Intercultural Maribyrnong Strategy 2023-2026** to further 'bolster opportunities for inclusion, cross-cultural exchange, and social cohesion' and strengthen its 'commitment to foster and promote a sense of belonging amongst its diverse community'.

One of the key pillars and activity areas of the Intercultural Strategy focusses on actively combatting racism. The Council acknowledges the profoundly negative effects of racism and exclusion on individuals and their communities, intercommunity relations and society at large. To address racism, the Strategy highlights three approaches, (1) raising awareness of racism, (2) advancing programs to prevent and reduce racism, and (3) empowering communities to speak out against racism, seek help and take targeted actions to tackle it.

Maribyrnong City Council has taken active steps to implement this anti-racism agenda. In 2022, for example, it was the first Victorian local government to endorse the public campaign #RACISMNOTWELCOME (originally initiated in Sydney), installing public street signs to condemn racism and promote a sense of belonging. In 2025, it launched another major initiative to advance local anti-racism, the **Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Project**, in partnership with Victoria University. This report is a central output of that project.

The Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Project pursued several interconnected goals. The overarching objective was to break the silencing effect of racism by opening up safe spaces for conversations about racism, especially for those who face it themselves, who often feel silenced or not heard, but also for people without lived experience. Racism persists and thrives – with the risk of being (further) normalised – when it operates unchallenged and unexposed and where the sharing of lived experiences remains suppressed. To tackle discrimination, prejudice and systemic exclusion, we need to see racism in all its complexities, speak about it and jointly develop ways to confront it.

Creating opportunities to safely speak about racism was a central goal in itself, but it was also one of the project's mechanisms to systematically collect empirical insights into experiences of racism among local communities and their perspective on reporting racism and anti-racism support services. This was the central research-related objective of the Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Project, and this report will present the empirical evidence collected through the project's explorative survey and community focus groups (section 4).

Related to this empirical mapping of recent and current experiences was the third – and more future-oriented and change-oriented – goal of the project: to explore the perspectives of local communities with lived experience on what needs to happen in Maribyrnong to prevent and tackle racism more effectively. The community input and suggestions informed the development of the **Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap**, outlining six central recommendations on how different stakeholders – from council, schools and police to businesses and community organisations – can jointly advance anti-racism in Maribyrnong in the future. This roadmap is presented at the end of this report (section 5).

2. Community profile

At the time of writing in 2026, the local government area of Maribyrnong was home to almost 100,000 people. According to the latest estimates from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the resident population in 2024 was over 94,000 – a significant increase since the 2021 census, which counted 86,385 residents.

As a business hub in the inner west of Melbourne with several large employers, such as Victoria University, Western Health and Highpoint Shopping Centre, Maribyrnong attracts thousands of people who commute to its suburbs every day. Together with the residents and many others who frequently come to the area to use local services, do their shopping or spend time socially in the community, they all shape the vibrant and diverse life across Maribyrnong.

Maribyrnong is on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation. The area has a rich Aboriginal history going back countless generations prior to colonisation and until today. According to the latest 2021 census, around 0.7% of the local population are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (similar to the average across Greater Melbourne) – a significant increase from 0.5% in 2016.

The statistics on ancestry, country of birth, religion and language(s) spoken at home¹ show that Maribyrnong's resident population is culturally, religiously and linguistically highly diverse – and in some ways more diverse than many other LGAs in Victoria and than the statewide average. This longstanding diversity, which has shaped Maribyrnong for decades, is not static, as Maribyrnong continues to experience significant transformation processes that have affected local community life and demographics.

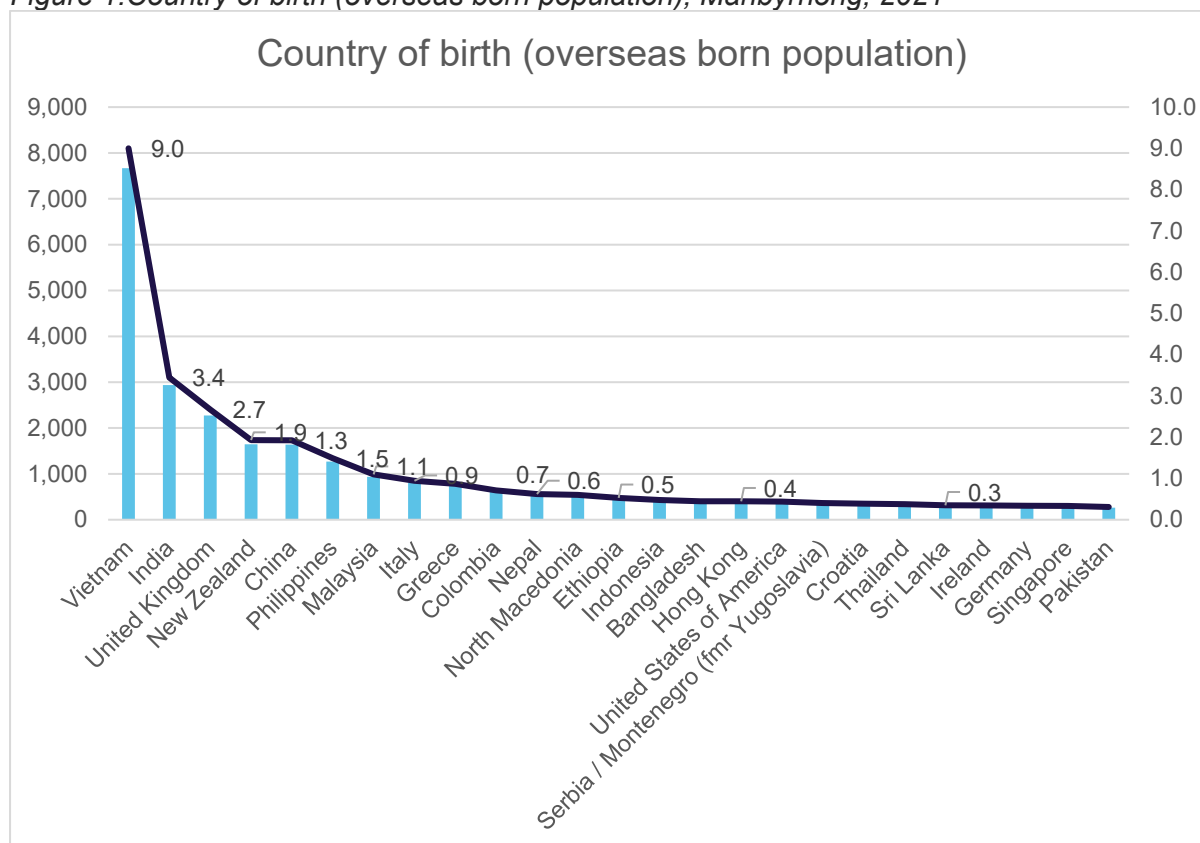
Overseas born population and ancestry

According to the latest official census data in 2021, 38% of Maribyrnong residents – around 32,400 people – were **born overseas**, which is above the Greater Melbourne average of 35.7%. Compared to the 2016 data, the proportion of overseas-born residents has declined slightly (2016: 40%).

The main **countries of birth**, apart from Australia, was Vietnam (9%), India (3.4%), United Kingdom (2.7%), New Zealand (1.9%) and China (1.9%), followed by Philippines, Malaysia, Italy, Greece, and Colombia. Figure 1 shows the top 25 countries of birth. Maribyrnong is home to a particular large Vietnamese community as well as smaller (and some of them growing) communities from Colombia and different parts of Africa, such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, (South) Sudan, Somalia and others, while the proportion of those born in India and China is substantial but significantly below the Greater Melbourne average.

¹ The demographic data presented in this section are based on official census data (2021 and 2016); key sources used are the ABS Quick Stats website (<https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA24330>) and the website .Id Informed Decisions (<https://profile.id.com.au/maribyrnong/>).

Figure 1: Country of birth (overseas born population), Maribyrnong, 2021



What further underscores Maribyrnong diverse demographics and long history of migrant settlement is that only 30.5% of all Maribyrnong residents have parents who were both born in Australia (Victorian average: 42.4%), and for 52.2% of Maribyrnong residents **both parents** were **born overseas**, which is significantly above the Victorian average (41.3%). Around 64% of Maribyrnong residents have at least one parent born overseas.

Of those who were born overseas themselves, 20.5% **arrived in Australia** between 2016 and 2021 (Figure 2). This is a slightly higher proportion of recent arrivals compared to the Greater Melbourne average, while the proportion of those who arrived in Australia between 2000 and 2016 is lower. This suggests that local settlement of recent arrivals has picked up pace recently. Simultaneously, the local **ancestry** profile points not only to high level of diversity but also to a slight recent increase in Anglo-Saxon ancestry (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Year of arrival in Australia (overseas born population), Maribyrnong, 2021

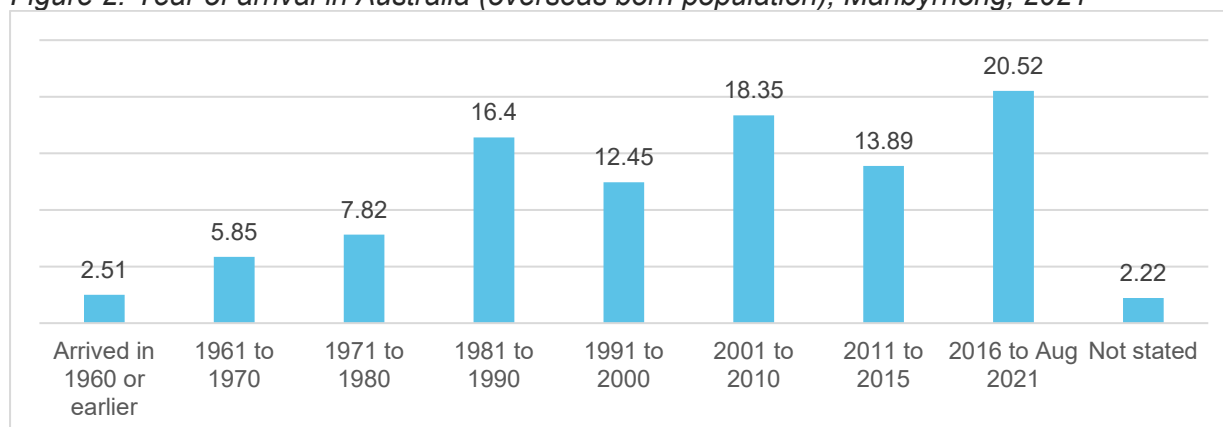
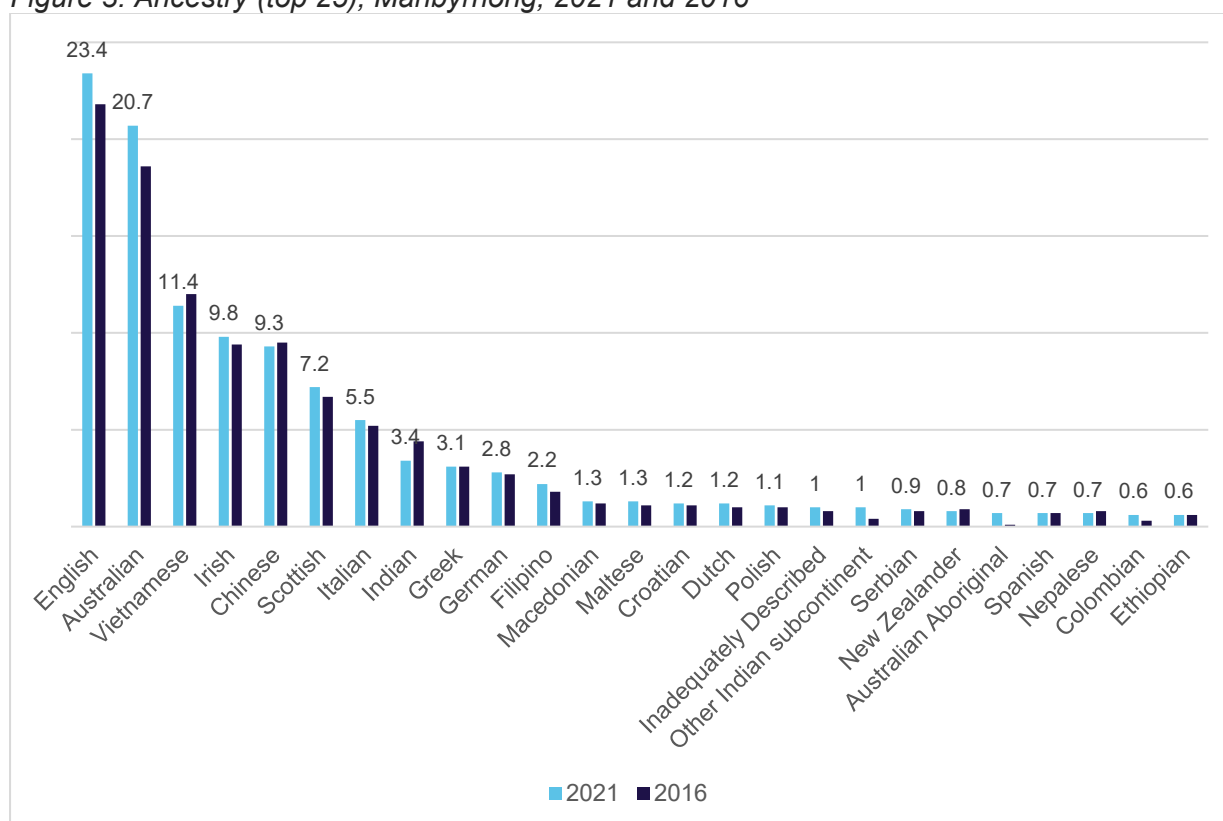


Figure 3: Ancestry (top 25), Maribyrnong, 2021 and 2016

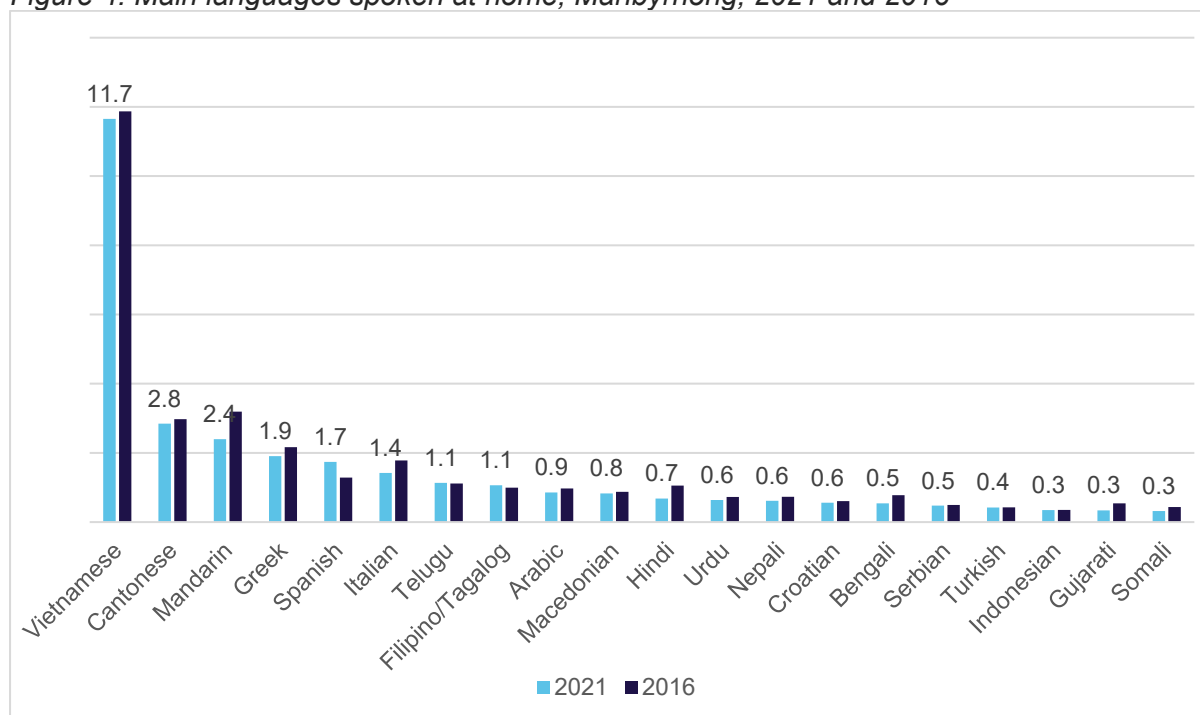


Data label refers to 2021 figures

Language and religious diversity

Based on the 2021 census data, 38.1% of Maribyrnong residents use a **language** other than English at home; this proportion has dropped from 41.7% in 2016 but remains above the Greater Melbourne average of 34.1% (2021). The by far most commonly spoken (non-English) language in Maribyrnong homes is Vietnamese, followed by Cantonese and Mandarin, Greek, Spanish (which is none of the few language that has become more frequently used), Italian, Telugu and Filipino/Tagalog (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Main languages spoken at home, Maribyrnong, 2021 and 2016

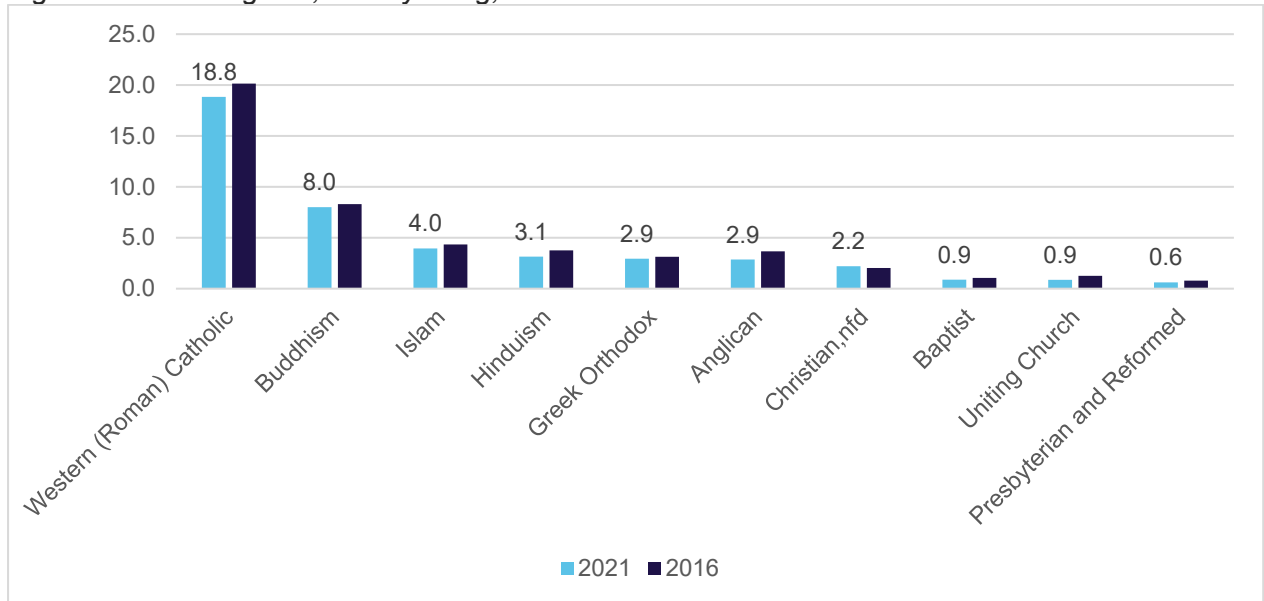


Data label refers to 2021 figures

Parallel to the overall decline in community language (other than English) spoken at home, **English proficiency** levels have increased. The proportion of those who speak English not well or not at all has also decreased to 7.8% in 2021, compared to 9.2% in 2016, while the proportion of those who speak only English has increased substantially to 56.6% (51.1% in 2016) and those speak English well or very well has dropped slightly to 30.4% (32.6% in 2016).

The **religious profile** in Maribyrnong is characterised, on the one hand, by high levels of secularism and, on the other hand, the various religious faiths of its residents who migrated to Australia. In 2021, 45% did not identify as religious – a significant increase from 36.8% in 2016, and significantly above the Greater Melbourne average (37.2% in 2021). While Christians, the largest religious group, make up over 32% of the local population, a breakdown of denominations show that 18.8% identify as Western (Roman) Catholics, 8.0% subscribe to Buddhism, 4.0% to Islam and 3.1% to Hinduism (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Main religions, Maribyrnong, 2021 and 2016



Data label refers to 2021 figures

3. Methodology: what we did

The Maribyrnong Anti-Racism project sought to apply core principles of ethical anti-racism research. It seeks to be change-oriented and to centre the perspectives of those with lived experience without putting the onus on them to tackle racism. This requires a reflective, collaborative multi-stakeholder approach, which was pursued within a place-based setting.

Acknowledging the problem and risks of exploitative research, the project was designed and conducted as both a community engagement initiative *and* a research study. While this report presents primarily the findings from the research component, the project also included many engagement-focussed activities. These ranged from formal training workshops to community stakeholder meetings and informal group discussions on various issues related to (anti-)racism. Some were primarily aimed to provide safe spaces for community members to share their lived experiences in a supporting environment and discuss existing reporting pathways and support options. Other workshops were more focussed on strengthening racial literacy among people with and without lived experiences and enhance their awareness of the legal protection framework and current support landscape in Victoria.

The research component of the project encompassed quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis: a community survey and peer-led focus groups. Both were designed for participants to share their experiences and views on the following key themes:

- **Experiences of racism:** types, frequency and social area and geographic location
- **(Non-) Reporting:** Barriers, motives and experiences of reporting racism
- **Anti-racism support:** expectations and experiences
- **Ways forward:** how to improve reporting and support services and to tackle racism locally
- **Local anti-racism:** awareness of existing initiatives and how to strengthen anti-racism in Maribyrnong

Acknowledging the expertise of those with lived experience and centring their perspectives in this place-based project, both the survey and the focus groups were only open to people who (1) live, work, study or otherwise spend a lot of time in Maribyrnong and (2) identify with a community affected by racism; this wording was chosen with the aim to include voices from all racialised and culturally marginalised communities (multicultural, multifaith communities and First Nations peoples), regardless of whether or not participants had experienced racism themselves. The minimum age for participants in the survey was 16 years and 18 years for the focus groups.

The project received Ethics approval from Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VU-HRE25-053)

Community survey

For the community survey we used a slightly modified and locally adjusted version of a tried-and-tested questionnaire, initially developed in 2019 for a similar place-based project in Wyndham and subsequently deployed in several other local projects (Whittlesea, Casey, Greater Dandenong) and one statewide studies (Peucker et al. 2024; Peucker et al. 2025).

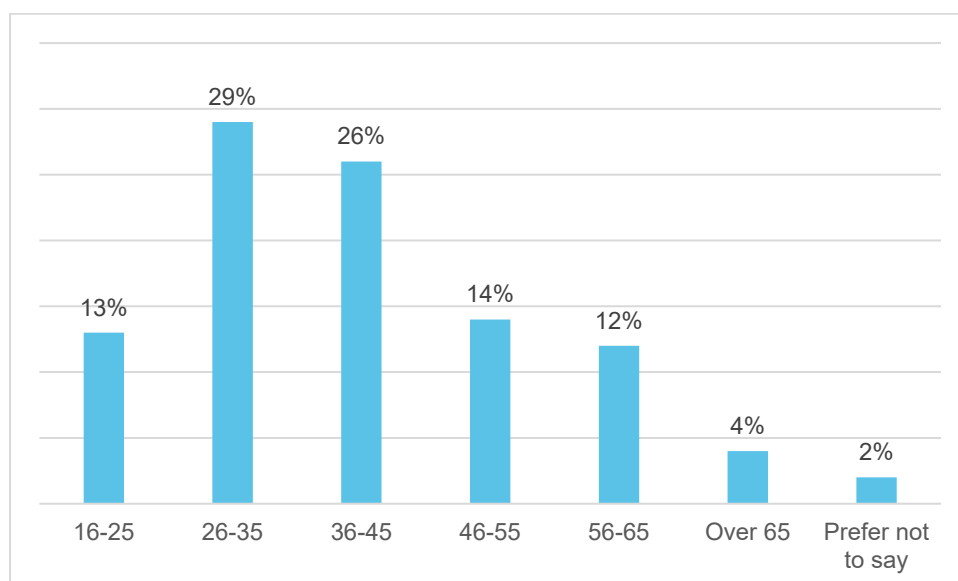
Covering the five themes, outlined above, the anonymous survey encompassed, after a short demographic section, a series of mostly multiple-choice questions as well as several open text questions. The survey, which took most respondents around 10-20 minutes to complete, provided an efficient platform for community members to share their experiences perspectives and suggestions.

The survey was promoted through various channels, including the researcher's and council's existing community networks and connections with various locally based organisations such as Africause, AMES, JAM!, the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre (ASRC), Volunteer West, Angliss Neighbourhood House, several groups at Victorian University.

Given the project's scale and sampling approach, the quantitative survey results cannot be considered statistically representative for all racialised communities across Maribyrnong, but it offers explorative, evidence-based insights into the views of the 102 people who participated.

Sixty-one percent of respondents were female and 34% were male, two people identified as non-binary and three preferred not to answer the gender question. The age profile was mixed (Figure 6), with the largest age cohort being those between 26 to 35 years (29%), followed by the 36–45-year cohort (26%).

Figure 6: Age profile of survey respondents



Around one quarter of respondents were born in Australia (24%); the other main countries of birth were India (n=11), (South) Sudan (N=7), Vietnam, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka (N=6), Eritrea, Kenya (N=4) and Somalia (N=3). According to the analysis of the optional open-text question about respondents' personal ethnic, cultural or religious self-identification (which was not answered by all respondents), four noted an Indigenous background.

Most of those respondents who stated they were born overseas have lived in Australia for a relatively long time, having arrived before 2010 (58%), including 22 respondents who had arrived before 2001, while 15 respondents had arrived after 2020.

Only people with a connection to Maribyrnong were eligible to take part in the study. Respondents described their local links in different, often overlapping ways (multiple survey responses were possible). Most of them work or volunteer and/or live locally; one quarter

(also) study in Maribyrnong, and a minority of 15 respondents stated they did not live, work or study here but spent a lot of time in Maribyrnong.

Peer-led focus groups

The survey was complemented by four peer-led community focus groups. Covering the same five thematic areas as the survey (see above), these moderated group discussions provided opportunity for participants to share their views in greater detail and jointly explore issues related to racism, reporting and support needs in a culturally safe and trusting environment.

Four community focus groups with a total 19 adult participants were conducted. All of the focus groups were organised and led by people with lived experiences of racism. They all received a one-on-one training by the project lead on how to run the focus groups in line with ethical requirements. While project lead also provided practical and operational assistance and was always available for additional support, each peer facilitator arranged their own focus group in a way they considered culturally most appropriate and safe. They were also responsible for choosing the composition of each of the five focus groups (see Table 1).

Table 1: Focus group composition

Focus group	Number of participants	Description
FG 1	5	Culturally and gender mixed Mostly younger people, mostly from African background
FG 2	5	Culturally and gender mixed Mostly younger people, mostly from African background
FG 3	4	First Nations, gender-mixed
FG 4	5	Female university students; culturally mixed but mostly from Asian background

All focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed. The facilitators were remunerated and received a Certificate of Appreciation; the 19 participants received thank-you gift cards and a Certificate of Participation.

4. Insights: what we found

The following section presents the findings from both the survey and the focus group analysis.

4.1 Experiences of racism

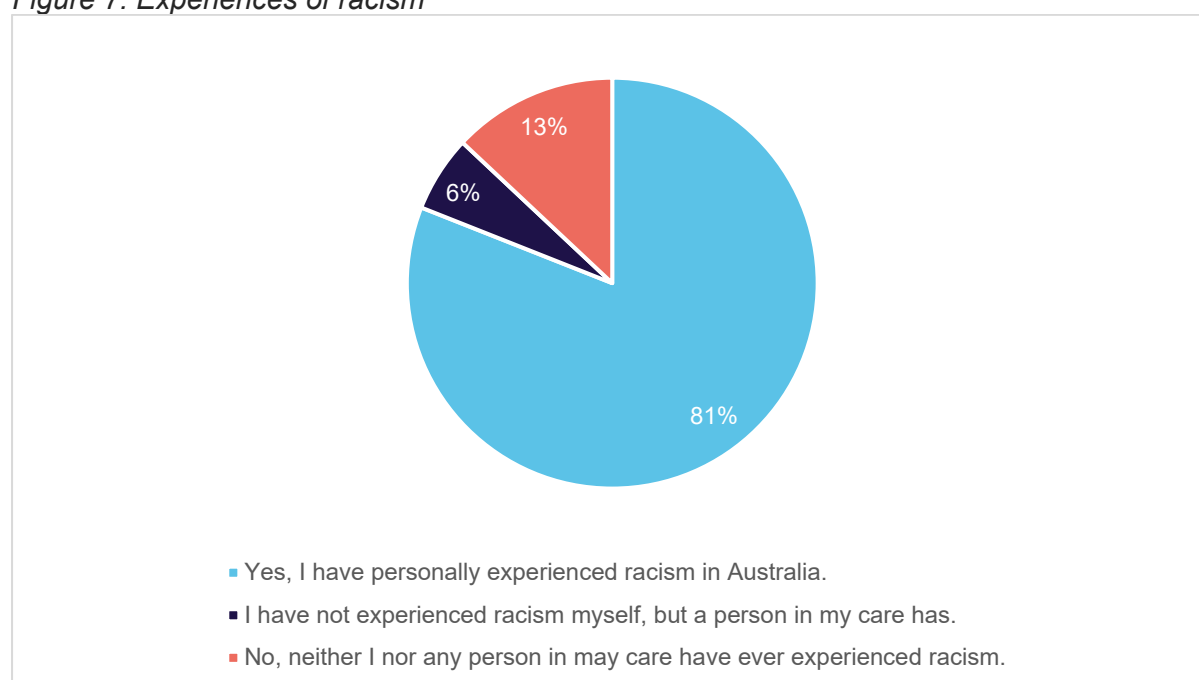
'It doesn't matter where I would go in Australia, racism seems to follow' (FG1). This is how a young African-Australian woman described her view on the persistence of racism during one of the focus group discussions. Most study participants, both in the focus groups and the survey, expressed they had faced racism in various contexts of their lives, often in the form of subtle comments and actions but sometimes also in more blatant and direct ways.

"...the type of racism where it's like under the surface. It's not blatant like, "go back to your country", but it's those little things that, those barriers that we have to face every day" (FG1).

Prevalence of racism

More than eight out of ten survey respondents stated that they had experienced racism in Australia (81 %). An additional 6% said that, while they themselves hadn't, someone in their care (usually a family member) had been targeted (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Experiences of racism



For over two-thirds of those who had faced racism (68%) these experiences with racism were also recent, having occurred in the past 12 months, and another 19% noted that someone in their care faced racism recently.

Of those with recent experiences of racism, 56% said they had faced racism 'sometimes' in the past 12 months and 22% stated that this had happened 'frequently'; around one fifth noted they experienced racism 'once or twice'. Some survey respondents used the open text box to share, for example, that subtle forms of racism are very common and that racism in general has become more frequent recently. One survey respondent noted that racism is often 'subtle in everyday life', or in the words of another respondent, 'from the frequent unwelcoming glares

in most public spaces to common micro-aggressions of being spoken down in a condescending manner’.

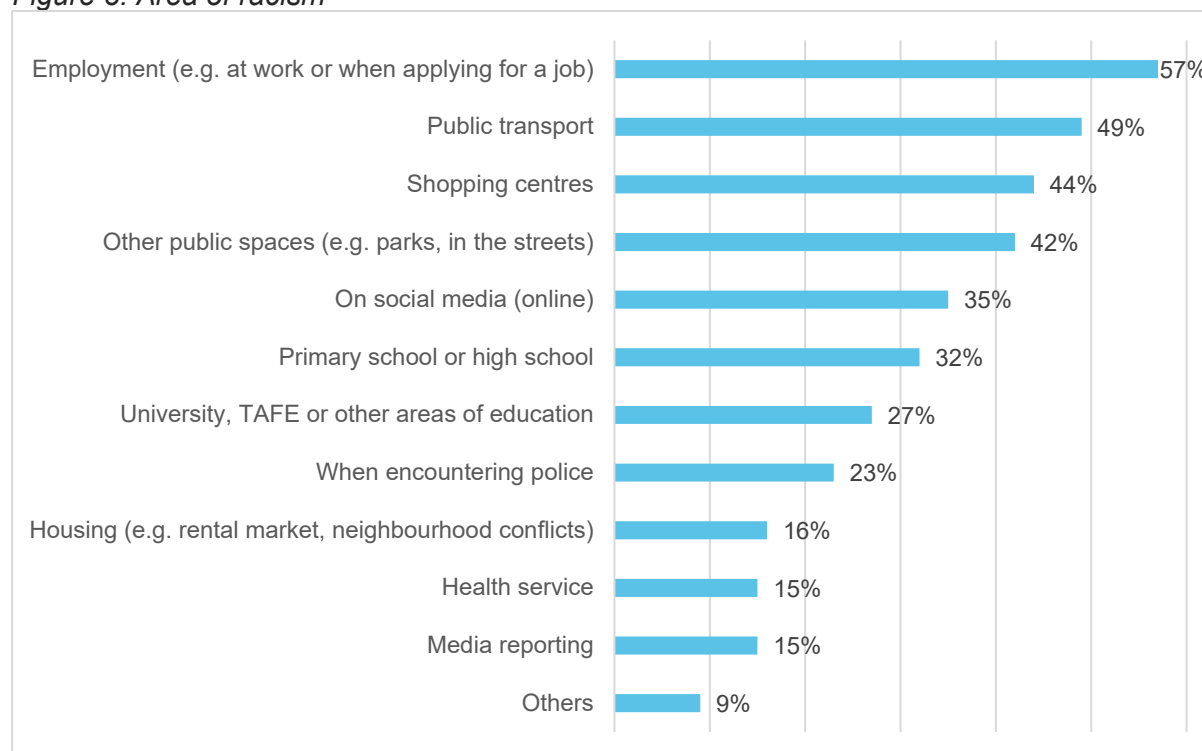
Similar perspectives were shared by many focus group participants. Some of them, for example, mentioned being followed around in shopping centres or their bags being checked, ‘like assuming we’re gonna take something’ (FG2). In the First Nations focus group (FG3), participants argued, while ‘positive allyship’ and awareness have grown, they continue to face ‘old school racism’, including being asked ‘what percentage Aboriginal’ they were, or false claims that First Nations people would ‘get all these fun benefits because they are mob’ (FG3).

Several focus group participants and 60% of the survey respondents who had ever experienced racism in Australia stated that at least some of these incidents happened locally in Maribyrnong (an additional 20% weren’t sure about the exact location). The Maribyrnong suburbs mentioned most commonly were Footscray (n= 44), followed by Maribyrnong (21) and Yarraville (17) as well as West Footscray (14) and Braybrook (13).

Types and social areas of racism

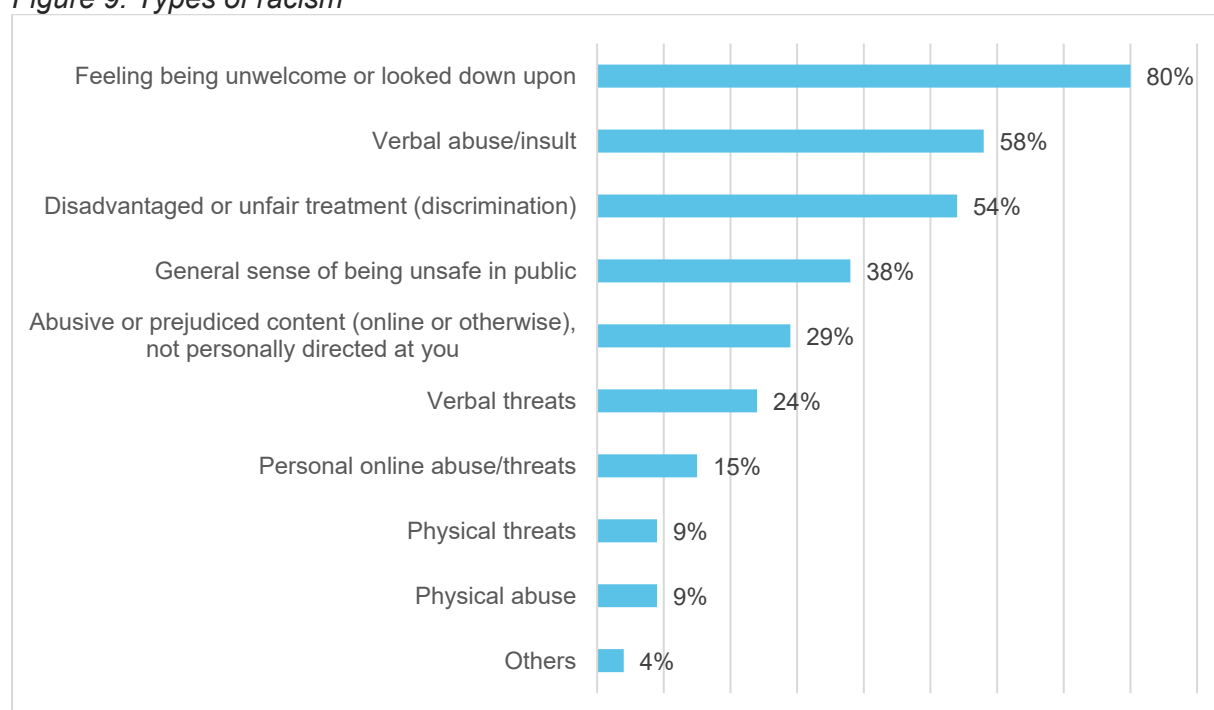
Racism targets people across various social areas and all aspects of their everyday life. Confirming the findings of other local and statewide studies (Peucker et al. 2025), survey respondents in this Maribyrnong study experience racism particularly frequently in employment (57% of those who had ever experienced racism) and in public spaces, especially on public transport (49%), in shopping centres (44%) or in other public spaces such as in parks or in the street (42%). Another significant racism hotspot are education institutions, including primary school and high schools (32%) and tertiary education such as universities or TAFE (27%). More than one third also experienced racism on social media online (35%), and almost one quarter (23%) stated they faced racism when encountering police (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Area of racism



Eight out of ten survey respondents with personal experiences of racism stated that the incident made them feel unwelcome, excluded and looked down upon. These kinds of experiences resonate with what is often referred to as ‘casual’ or ‘everyday’ racism (Essed 1991) or as racist ‘microaggressions’ (Williams et al. 2021), which are both a result and a manifestation of persistent racial hierarchies and claims of racialised norms and cultural superiority. In addition, 58% described their racist experiences as verbal abuse and insults, and 54% experienced disadvantaged and unfair treatment (discrimination), often in the context of employment. Other forms of racism include a general sense of being unsafe in public (38%), verbal threats (24%) and abusive content, for example, online (29%), sometimes targeting them personally (16%). Almost one in ten had also faced physical threats and/or physical abuse (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Types of racism



Personal stories of racism

Focus groups participants shared many experiences of racism. Their stories illustrate how racism has manifested in their lives across a range of social areas, including employment, schools and universities, to public spaces such as on public transport, in shopping centres or in the streets.

Employment, the area where survey respondents face racism most frequently, was also often mentioned by focus group participants as a site of racism. Some spoke about their negative experiences when looking for a job, others described discriminatory treatment at the workplace, including workplace exploitation and payment or promotion decisions.

One female participant shared how she was discriminated because of her Indian background when looking for a hospitality job:

I was looking for jobs in the Footscray area, and I was going to restaurants, from door to door, and I remember at one place they were like, 'Oh, where are you from?' I was like, 'well, I'm from India.' [And he replied,] 'Okay, go to the Indian restaurants. That's where you'll get your employment.' I'm like, 'Why? Why not here?' He said, 'that's where you guys will be employed'. It's just very off-putting because employment is about your skills. And he didn't ask me if I had any experience, he just asked me where I'm from and then said, just go there. (FG4)

A focus group participant from African background shared how he has been unfairly overlooked in promotion decisions:

You know, like most of my boys, like us Africans, we have a hard work ethic. You know what I mean. It's like, "head down, bum up", right? And then some top bottom shit worker who's just moving like a snail, he somehow gets a pay rise. (FG 1)

Another participant highlighted how international students are particularly vulnerable to workplace exploitation due to their weaker legal (temporary residence) status. She stated:

I think temporary residents face more racism. And it's also racism how the owners of the businesses try to see who's an international student and try to exploit them in a sense. They say, 'are you an international student?' And they try to offer you cash, and they try to underpay you... We are used to getting underpaid, they're just basically exploiting [people on a temporary visa] because they're seen as an easier target. (FG4)

Several focus group participants shared experiences of interpersonal and institutional racism in different **education settings**, perpetrated not only by their peers but often also by teachers or lecturers.

A young African-Australian man recalled how he had been racially harassed by another student at high school and how the teacher did not consider it problematic or racist:

This kid once said to me, 'you look like shit'. And he just kept comparing me to different things that were black. You know what I mean...like chocolate, these things... And so I told my teacher that 'he just said I look like shit, that's racist', but the teacher just said, 'that's not racism'. (FG2)

Adding to this, another participant in the same focus group highlighted how teachers model racist behaviour to other students:

Yeah, teachers are the worse perpetrators of that, as their being not culturally competent ... is going to instil bad values and morals into the children. (FG2)

A young mother of African background shared this about her son:

At school, my son gets accused of being a ringleader or whatever, just for being who he is, and the school tried their best, you know, to pin stuff on him and, you know, try and kick him out and all that kind of stuff, you know what I mean. (FG 1)

Problems of institutional racism at schools were also raised. One participant shared how his primary school sought to place him in a 'disability school' after Year 6, 'because of my skin colour and because my family did not speak English':

Imagine finishing Year 6, and you're about to go to Year 7, but instead of going to a normal high school ... the school did not have any rights to put me into disability school. They didn't even do an assessment. They were like, 'no, you're gonna go to disability school'. And I think being in Year 6 and going into that environment kind of traumatizes you. My parents had to fight for me and said, 'he's not disabled. You just [do that] because he's black'. (FG 1)

Several university students who participated in the focus groups shared experiences of racism at university. A young woman of African background recalled:

We – there were four black women and a white lady – were doing a group assessment. And the teacher turns to the [white] person and says, 'what's it like working with these people, you know, they are such a tribe'. (FG2)

A similar incident was mentioned by an international student from Indian background who also worked part-time at the university, sharing how she had been subjected to 'condescending humiliating remarks from a colleague that included the words "people like you"' (FG 4):

It just felt kind of racist in a sense that I never told her what my ethnicity or my nationality was. She just assumed, and ... I don't know if it's relevant, but she was white. And she mentioned it so casually in front of other students... Does she think that she can humiliate me in front of all of the students while both of us are working? (FG4)

Another student spoke about one lecturer who would consistently treat students of colour in a rude and less favourable way in class.

There was a lot of prejudice from one of my lecturers. All of us noticed it. If it was a person of colour, he would be really rude. He would snap at us, and he would even swear at us... And he would mock us harshly. If you were more outspoken in the classroom, he would tell us 'oh, let other people have chances', but in a really rude manner. But he didn't have the same demeanour with other white students, because even right now I'm in my third year. I had him in my first year. I was talking to other people. If they were people of colour, students of colour, they would go like, 'that teacher is horrible'. And if it's somebody who had definitely a white skin tone, they will go, 'that teacher is amazing'. So, there was like a difference, and the pattern was really recognizable. (FG4)

Confirming the survey insights that racism often happens in **public spaces**, focus group participants discussed various experiences of racism in shopping centres, in the streets and on public transport. These ranged from subtle forms such as being starred at to racially prejudiced comments, verbal abuse, threats and forms of racial profiling.

A particularly threatening incident of racism was shared by a young woman of African background. She was driving her car in a north Melbourne suburb when another car started to follow her, trying to block her, and when she tried to get away, they sped next to her. She recalled:

I put down my window, and I was like 'what the fuck do you want'. And they were like 'die, you black bitch' ... And I was like, oh my gosh. Obviously, I didn't know how to react. I just drove home because I felt like there was nothing I could do with the situation. Obviously, I told my family, I told my partner, and then that was that. (FG2)

Several participants highlighted that racism in public spaces were common and manifested in different ways, as the following statement illustrates:

I've had my fair share of experiences in all different types of overt, covert racism. Overt, being that it's kind of in your face, you know what I mean? 'Go back to your country, blackie' or something like that. And then covert, like for example, an experience that I had where I was locking up the shop one night where I work, and somebody comes up to me and says to me, 'You know there's cameras around', as if I'm like trying to break into that shop, that I'm closing up, you know? (FG2)

One female participant of African background spoke about an incident at the local train station:

Usually it's fine, except that one time at the train station. There are four girls basically, me and my three friends, and two girls are laughing. Not very loud, they're just laughing, and this white man came up and said, 'Oh, you black bitches, always be

laughing'. Like he screamed it out. ... My friends obviously and I kind of like yelled back at him. (FG2)

Others highlighted how frequently people of colour were being racially targeted, especially young people from African background:

Things are not safe for any of our young people, really. They could just be at the bus stop, they get picked up. They go to a shopping center, they get followed around. We are adults now, but our younger generation are facing this a lot more, ... they get bullied. Even now, like with the media, PSO, the police, the shopkeepers, the security, ...Like everything's just on their back. The kids get so mad because of this stuff. They're not doing anything, but they still get picked on, just like that. (FG1)

Several participants spoke about their experiences of being targeted and followed in shopping centres, including a local supermarket and the large shopping mall Highpoint. One female participant, for example, said:

I do see a lot of the shop workers following us around, checking cameras, sometimes they even go up to you and ask you, 'Can I check your bag?' Also at Highpoint, I do shop a lot there, it's been a few times in certain shops that I've experienced that. (FG2)

Racial profiling by police, Protective Service Officers (PSO) and others (e.g. public transport staff) has been raised several times, sometimes in conjunction with claims of heightened police presence in the Footscray area. As one focus group participant noted:

We we're getting stopped by PSOs, we're getting asked all these questions, and it's like, damn, okay, so this is what mom was talking about: 'You're gonna experience certain things when you leave the house, regardless of acting in a good manner or not'. Especially in Footscray, there's a lot of police presence and if they see somebody of colour, a couple of them hanging out together, automatically they assume that they're part of a gang, they're up to no good, they're drinking and whatever. (FG1)

Similarly, a participant in another focus group stated:

I do notice like a lot of policing around the area. And myki inspectors, I've noticed they tend to target people of colour... If you touched on [your myki] but you didn't touch off, they will be aggressive towards you physically. (FG2)

A woman in the First Nations focus group shared how she had witnessed local police misconduct towards mob and other people of colour:

In terms of things I've witnessed, you know, I've seen all sorts of atrocities by the police in this area, you know, seeing how mob, I've seen mob being arrested, brutalised, just, it was like, God, only a year ago I saw an African fellow being slammed to the ground at the train station. (FG 3)

Another focus group participant recalled an incident where 'the police was called on [him] on the train' for no apparent reason. He said it was only thanks to his dad 'who has a very Anglo white accent and was able to speak to the police' on the phone that he was not arrested:

It was humiliating, I was like probably 19 or 20 at the time. Nobody in the train said anything. And I was wondering what I am being arrested for... I've never even had a detention in school. So, until this day it's so traumatizing if I see PSOs or those kind of officers on the train, it's very anxiety-inducing because you just don't know how they're gonna respond or react. (FG1)

Employment, education and public spaces were commonly mentioned sites of racism, but negative experiences occurred also across various other social areas, such as **banks** and health care. One focus group participant, for example, shared how her mother – a 'visibly hijabi Black woman' – had trouble with an ATM in Footscray and asked at the bank:

Not all the money came out, and she got the receipt from the ATM and went to the bank to ask for help. Her English is very broken. She was trying to let them know, like, 'hey, not all the money got taken out'. And the person at the bank just flippantly disregarded her concerns. And I think a big part of it is she can't articulate herself well. (FG 1)

A survey respondent used an open text in the questionnaire to share their experiences with racism in the **health care** sector; they wrote:

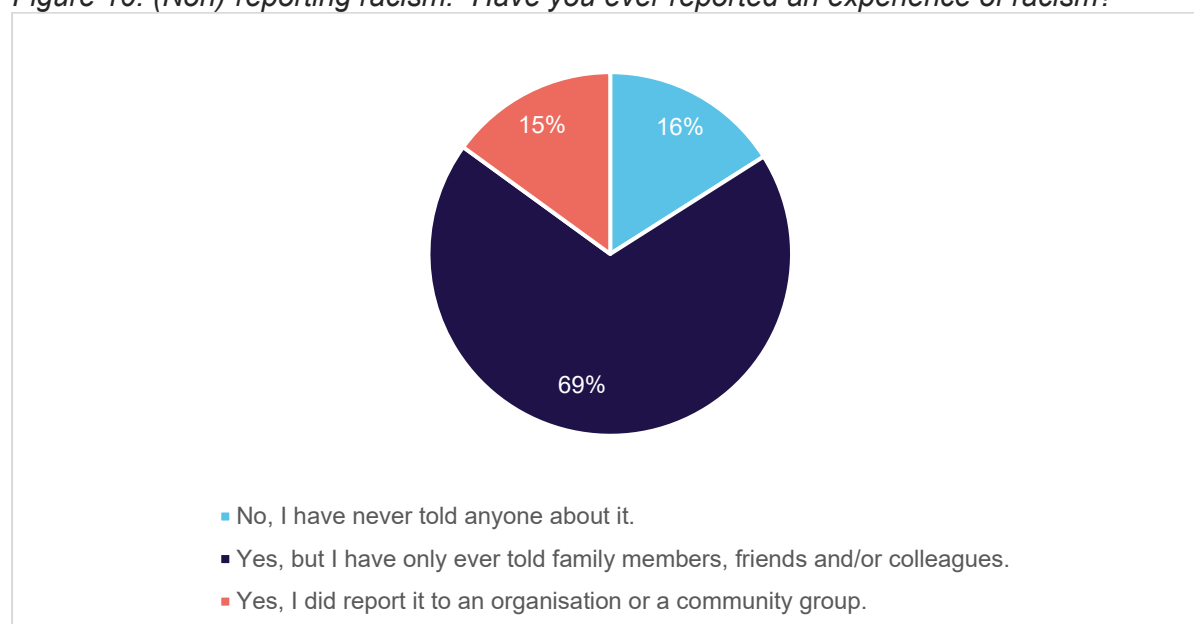
Discriminatory treatment by nursing staff more than once when admitted in a public hospital. Unusual discharge from hospital, dismissive of care needs, openly speaking to another patient within ear's reach about migrants being a problem in Australia. (survey respondent)

Biased listening from doctors, not taking medical concerns seriously. Treated as if I have no understanding of basic medical needs. (survey respondent)

4.2 Reporting and non-reporting

Consistent with what previous research in Victoria found (Peucker et al. 2024, 2025), only a small minority of 15% of those Maribyrnong survey respondents who had faced racism in Australia (either themselves or someone in their care) have ever formally reported any such incident to an organisation or community group. Sixty-nine percent said they shared their experience only with family, friends or colleagues, and 16% have never told anyone about any of these incidents (Figure 10). Similarly, only very few participants in the focus groups shared that they have formally reported an experience of racism.

Figure 10: (Non)-reporting racism: “Have you ever reported an experience of racism?”



Reporting experiences

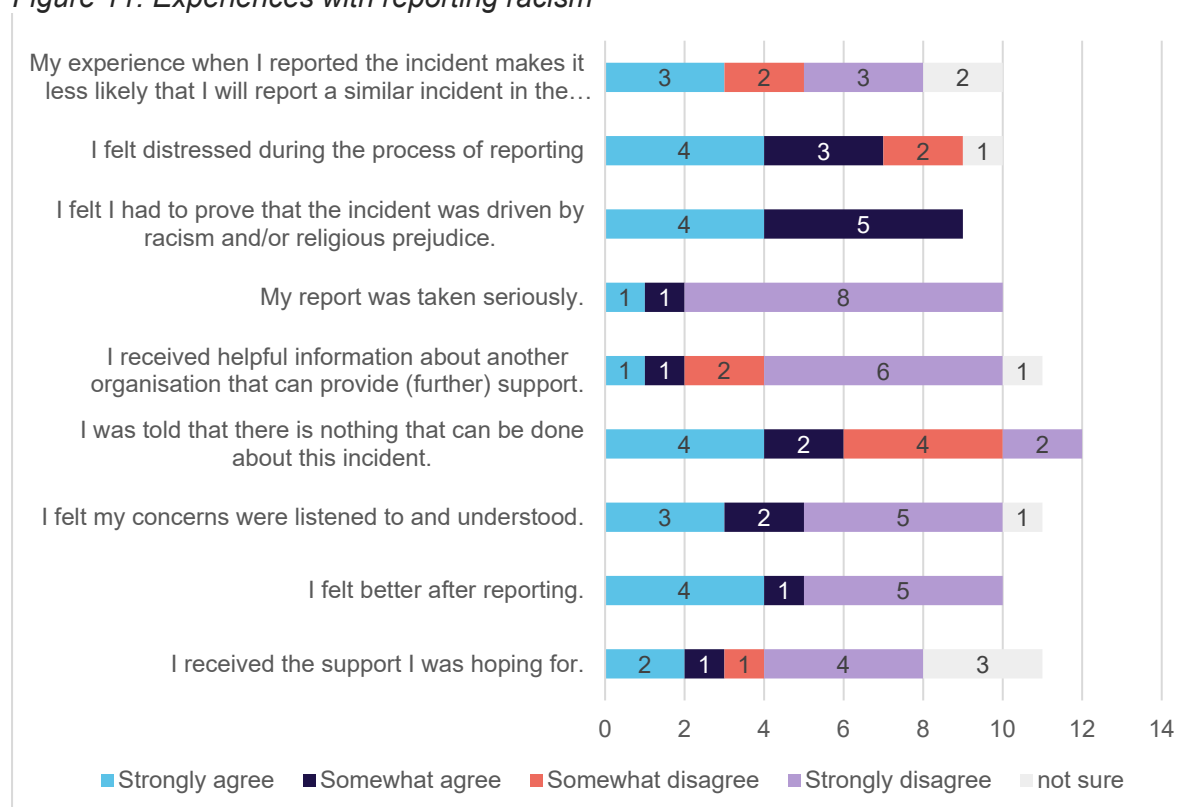
Those few survey respondents who did reach out to an organisation either reported to a community organisation (n=5), to the school/university (n=4) or the workplace (N=2) where the incident occurred, to Victoria Police or the local council (n=2). Specialised statutory agencies at state and federal level – such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and the eSafety Commissioner – as well as the Islamic Council of Victoria’s Islamophobia Support Service, the Islamophobia Register and the Jewish Community Security Group were each mentioned once.

Among the focus group participants, three people shared their formal reporting experiences, all of them tried to resolve the issue internally at the organisation where the incident happened. One of them reported their experience of racism at the university through the internal complaints mechanism but ‘never heard back from them’; she then decided to *not* take it further to the ‘Commission or the Victorian Ombudsman’, stating ‘I couldn’t be bothered’ (FG 4). The other participant made a complaint about a racist incident at his child’s school; he initially contacted the Department of Education but then raised it with the school directly, which was relatively successful. He said, ‘I came well prepared... I was going to war with them ... and I think after that they started to be more cautious dealing with my son in that sense.’ (FG1).

The third focus group participant who had reported racism was less satisfied with the outcome. She made an anonymous internal report at work about a colleague who had repeatedly expressed negative ‘things about women and women of colour, me included and other staff’. She recalled how she ‘had to actually go through the whole process’, but in the end the person was not held accountable ‘because other people were saying he wasn’t like that, and then he actually got promoted’ (FG1).

Noting that the survey findings about reporting experiences do not necessarily paint a generalisable picture due to the very small numbers, most of the survey respondents who did formally report an incident of racism expressed dissatisfaction with the process (Figure 11). They felt the onus of proving the racist nature of the incident was on them, most of them strongly felt their report was not taken seriously (although half felt their concerns were listened to and understood) and a majority felt distressed during the reporting process. Half of them also agreed that their reporting experience has made it less likely for them to report a similar incident in the future. Despite the overall rather negative experiences, half of those who reported agreed that they felt better afterwards. This resonates with what previous studies in Victoria have found, arguing that despite dissatisfaction with the process, reporting can have ‘positive emotional effects’ (Peucker et al. 2024, p. 484) as individuals may feel empowered by breaking the silencing effect of racism, which can ‘help strengthen a sense of agency’ (Peucker et al. 2025, p. 15).

Figure 11: Experiences with reporting racism



Reporting motives

If the goal is to encourage more people to speak out and report racism, it is important to better understand their motives and reasons for reporting. The survey explored this with two questions: one asked only those who have actually reported an incident about their personal

reasons; the second question invited *all* respondent to share what they think, in general terms, the main reasons for reporting would be.

The most common reason for those few respondents who had reported racism in the past revolved around, on the one hand, their desire to help raise awareness (e.g. making sure the incident did not go unrecorded, the sentiment that nothing would change if no one reported), and on the other hand, the desire to hold the perpetrator accountable for their actions. These insights resonate with the survey respondents' general view on people's main motivations or reasons for reporting racism. A majority believed that reporting is commonly motivated by the desire to hold the perpetrator to account (75%) and to raise awareness of scope of the problem of racism (70%). Related to the latter motive, 54% also considered an important reason to make sure the incident is recorded, and also 54% believe that getting emotional and/or psychological support is one of the main reason why people report. Getting legal support was regarded as a main motive by 46% and only 21% believed that people reported in order to seek mediation.

Figure 12: General views on main reasons for reporting racism

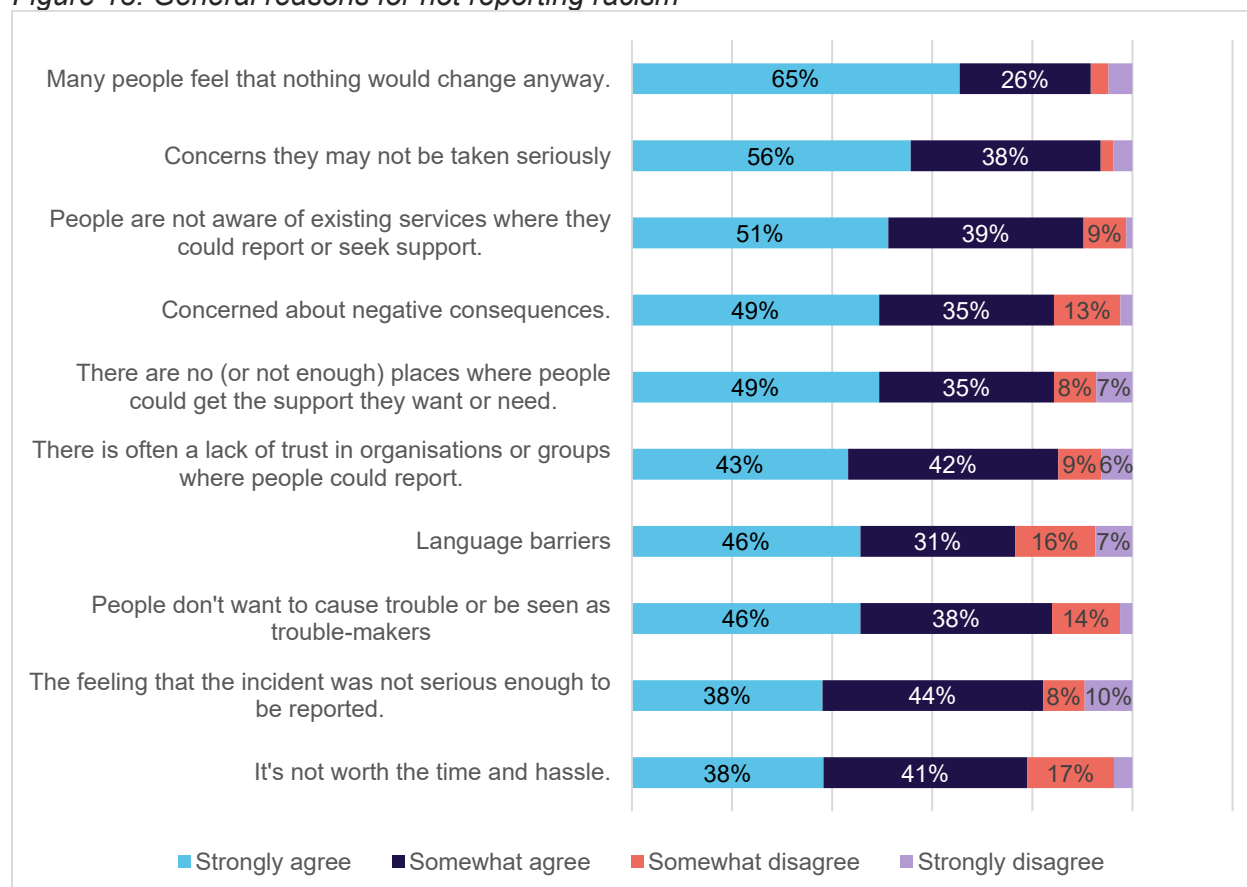


Reasons for not reporting

The Maribyrnong survey results as well as the analysis of the focus groups confirm what several previous studies have found: Most Victorians who have experienced racism have never reported any such incident due to a combination of different deterring factors and barriers (Peucker et al. 2025). The most significant factor appears to be people's sense of hopelessness and resignation, reflected in the high proportion of respondents who agreed that people don't report racism because 'nothing would change anyway' (91% agreed somewhat or strongly). This reporting barriers related to the expected *outcome* of reporting is further reinforced by, one the one hand, insufficient awareness of existing reporting and support options and, on the other hand, a series of often interconnected concerns related to the reporting *process* itself.

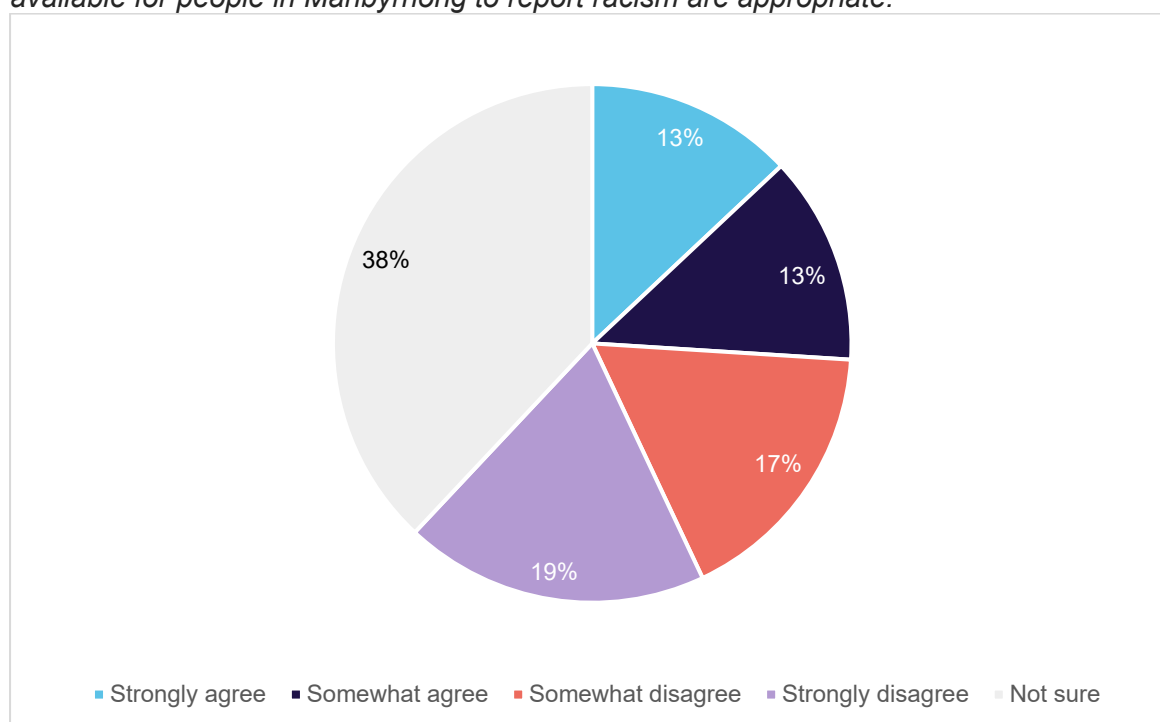
Ninety percent of survey respondents believe that people don't report (also) because they 'are not aware of existing services where they could report or seek support' and, related to that, 84% agreed that there are no – or not enough – places where people could get the support they want or need (Figure 13).

Figure 13: General reasons for not reporting racism



The reporting barriers of insufficient reporting pathways or lack of awareness of such pathways are also reflected in the responses to the question about people's views on existing reporting options. Just over a quarter of survey respondents agreed that the services and organisations available for people in Maribyrnong to report racism are appropriate; 36% disagreed – and the remaining 38% stated they were not sure, which may suggest they are not sufficiently aware of the reporting options and/or don't feel confident to make an assessment about their appropriateness (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Assessment of racism reporting pathways: “The services and organisations available for people in Maribyrnong to report racism are appropriate.”



Most other barriers are in some ways related to the way respondents view the processes of reporting. The most commonly raised concerns among these factors are, first, that people are worried they may not be taken seriously, as expressed by almost all survey respondents (94%), and second, their concerns that reporting racism can have negative consequences – a view shared by 84 of respondents (Figure 13). This may include being seen as ‘troublemakers’, which is considered a main reporting deterrent by 84%. These barriers are

“I experienced victimization for reporting discriminatory behaviour from work colleagues, I have become the problem.” (survey respondent)

further linked to the lack of trust in those organisations one could report racism to, which three quarters of respondents consider an important reason why people don’t report. Other factors include language barriers (which points to the perceived or actual incapacity of organisations to provide support in community languages) and the feeling that the incident was not ‘serious enough’.

Some survey respondents shared their personal views on reporting barriers in the open text section of the survey; their views resonate with several of the factors outlined above, in particular related to fears of negative repercussion and risks of (secondary) victimisation as a result of making a complaint. One respondent explained that they reported racism but soon regretted it after the – predominantly white – leadership of the organisations did not take it seriously and would come up with excuses and ‘empathise with the person who is racist’.

I’ve had the experience of being made to feel safe about speaking up [against racism], but the aftermath did not go well for me. I was seen as trouble, caused drama, myself and other colleagues of colour were seen as contributing to team incohesion.

Basically, we should have said nothing because we created more work. (survey respondent)

Another survey respondent shared a very similar perspective:

Formally reporting my experience would (and did) cause more harm to me. I was encouraged to report officially, I decided not to because the many microaggressions and belittling would have sounded petty as a complaint. Further, all the people I would be formally reporting to were white senior leaders who have made questionable remarks themselves, and I know they would side with the person being racist. I would have looked like I was causing trouble/ being precious/ dramatic etc. (survey respondent)

Focus group participants also discussed their personal perspectives on what discourages people from speaking out and formally reporting racism. While many of them did not seem to be aware of existing reporting options and processes – dedicated racism reporting pathways such as through VEOHRC were hardly mentioned – the main reporting barriers discussed in the focus groups revolved around concerns of not being taken seriously, lack of accountability, problematic burden of proof and worries about various risks and negative repercussions, especially due to inherent power imbalances. Often these various barriers interplayed to deter people from reporting.

People don't report because it may not be taken seriously, especially when you have no evidence. Evidence is often hard to provide, so it gets dismissed. (FG4)

Reporting requires extensive evidence to take it seriously. If it happened verbally, and they're no CCTVs or the people who witnessed it are just casual workers like me. So I don't know if you will feel comfortable speaking up against senior staff who's definitely a full-timer. (FG4)

We don't have enough evidence to present it and no one's going to take your word for it, ... and it will be dismissed... I feel like the problem is that the burden of proof and burden of evidence is more on the victim side. (FG4)

Fears that reporting could result in further trouble were articulated by several participants, from being unfairly treated at work or university to effects on their legal visa status.

I get too scared to speak up because if I speak up at work, I'll get fired and I'll be unemployed and I'll be blacklisted. (FG1)

I didn't report it at all, at the workplace, because I knew that if I did report it, it would get back to, even if it's kept private, I knew it was going to go back around because all

the managers and supervisors are like this tight... So I'm the one who's going to look bad and I'm going to get in trouble, ...so I just kept it quiet. (FG1)

What if I reported, what if I get troubled, or I'm not from this country, you know, like, so it might affect my visas or something like that. (FG4)

If complaining against them puts me in further trouble, brings me to the legal system, which I don't want to be involved as a temporary resident or a person of colour, because there's already an over-representation there, I'd rather not be involved there, because it's going to take my time and the money I already don't have, and it's going to... And I don't have money for the lawyer fees. (FG4)

Others expressed doubts about the cultural appropriateness or level of racial literacy within the reporting processes and their efficacy or outcomes.

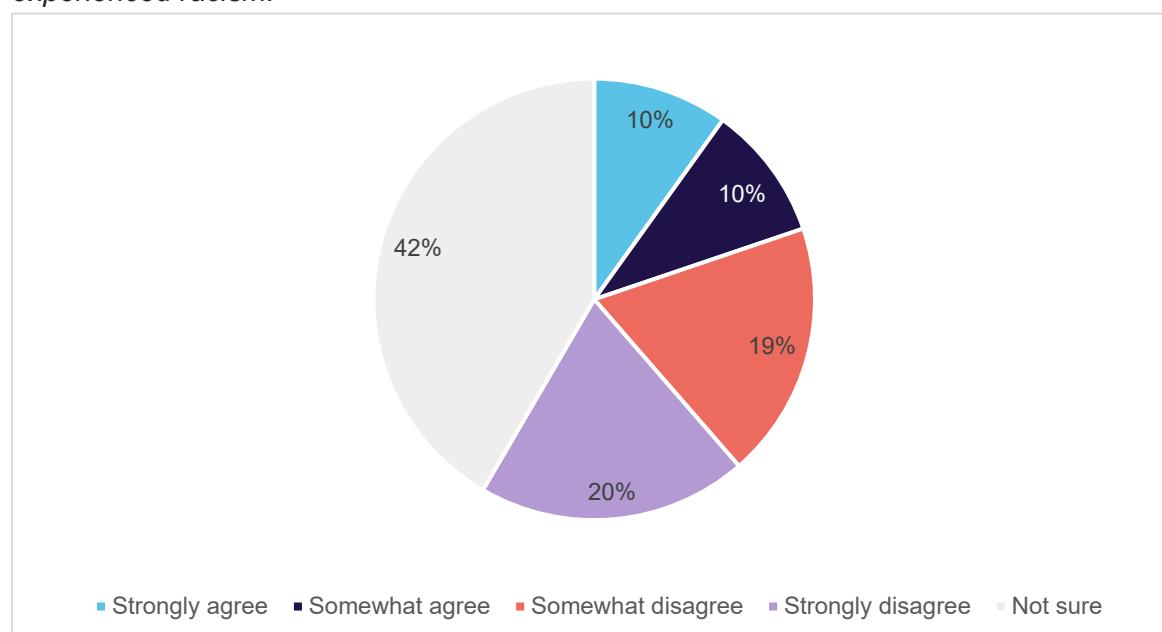
If they report it, the person might not understand how it's racist because ...they've never experienced it, they're not from that culture, they're maybe not even a person of colour. So having to re-explain a traumatic situation and then being met with all these questions... you know, that's very discouraging. (FG2)

I feel that there won't be any action on them. You're mostly just wasting your time. Unless it's really like crossing the line of assault, then it's when it needs to be reported. But these kinds of 'little things' are most likely going to lead to either a slap on the wrist or nothing is done at all. Nothing's ever done to them. So why bother? I will say like, off the back, nothing ever gets done. That's just reality, like what can they do? (FG2)

4.3 How to strengthen anti-racism support and reporting

As discussed in section 4.2, some of the reasons for reporting racism – in addition to seeking accountability and raising awareness – are related to the desire to access support services, in particular emotional or psychological support and, slightly less commonly mentioned, legal support. However, most study participants, both in the survey and the focus groups, seem to be either dissatisfied with or unaware of the current anti-racism support services. Only one in five survey respondents expressed the view that there are currently 'enough services and organisations that offer appropriate support for people from Maribyrnong who have experienced racism'. Four out of ten respondents disagree, and 42% aren't sure – a position that seem to suggest a lack of awareness of such support structures (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Assessment of anti-racism support services: “There are enough services and organisations that offer appropriate support for people from Maribyrnong who have experienced racism.”



Participants shared their views on how anti-racism support service landscape can be enhanced to make reporting racism more likely. Their input is briefly presented in the following paragraphs, noting that it also shaped the recommendation outlined in section 5.

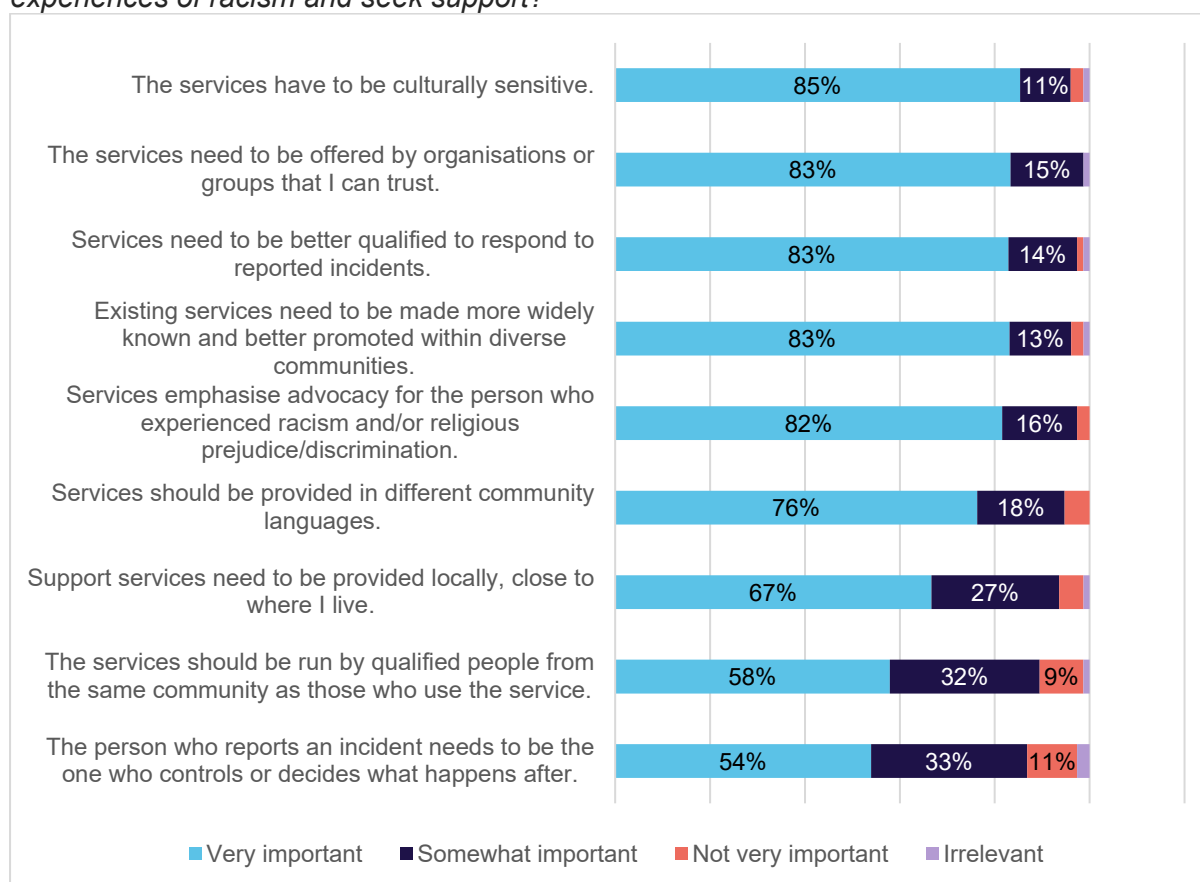
Almost every survey respondent called for better and more targeted promotion of existing services among affected communities. Most other suggestions referred to certain ways in which the support services can be improved, expanded or newly set up. Many of these demands can be regarded as constructive ways to address existing reporting barriers and inadequate response and reporting systems, including lack of lived experience and empathy, the perception of victim’s burden of proof, and concerns around victimisation as a result of reporting (see Figure 13 above).

The following factors were considered particularly important by almost all participants to strengthen reporting (in brackets is the proportion who considered these ‘very important’; Figure 16).

- Ensure cultural sensitivity of support services (85%)
- Services need to be offered by trusted organisation (83%)
- Services need to be better qualified to respond to reports of racism (83%)
- Support needs to emphasise advocacy for the person experiencing racism (82%)

In addition, most survey respondents proposed that more reporting would be encouraged by providing services in different community languages (76%) and locally, close to where they live (67%).

Figure 16: 'What would make it more likely for you (and others in your community) to report experiences of racism and seek support?'



The question of how to encourage more reporting and strengthen anti-racism support was also discussed in the focus groups. One key suggestion was to invest more in raising awareness of existing support mechanisms by running innovative and targeted information campaigns, on different platforms and in partnership with various stakeholders, including but not limited to schools. One participant said:

You can advertise, using social media because nowadays young people use, like TikTok and stuff...We're talking about support services and saying that, you know, we need to integrate the awareness into ads, not just on social media, but also on TV. It could also be in schools. It could be your GPs, your hospitals. It could be even in shops, government-funded spaces, community centers. (FG1)

Several focus group participants also highlighted the importance of having culturally **safe spaces**, where people who face racism can go and 'be able to speak freely without being judged' (FG1), feel heard and understood – a 'place of refuge, a safe haven', as one woman in First Nations focus group said (FG3). Similarly, another participant argued that 'having an organisation or community group nearby where everyone can share their experiences, that would be great' (FG4).

Some suggested that services of existing organisational structures could be expanded and strengthened to build their capacity to provide such culturally safe spaces of trust, empathy

and support; as an example, one focus group (FG1) discussed the current system of School Community Liaison Officers, who were seen as currently ill-equipped to deal with the issue of racism or to receive and handle reports due to a 'lack of empathy and lived experience' among most SCLOs. One participant critically added that 'there are services, but they don't help, they actually don't listen' and expressed the need for 'having people or having a hotline with people who have lived experience, that are culturally appropriate and responsive' (FG1).

Related to that, several participants reiterated their concern of not being taken seriously, being dismissed and no actions being taken. They argued that more people would come forward and report if services could address these shortcomings:

If we saw action being taken [people would report]. Because now I feel like everyone's just so hesitant [to speak out] ... So if action was taken, and they took it seriously what we're telling them, like, 'oh, we're going through this, we're going through that', then yeah, definitely. (FG2)

Another suggestion was to provide more robust anonymous reporting options, as a way to 'provide immunity and protection from victimisation for those who make a complaint'.

It's like, if I'm afraid of facing negative consequences. Why would I want my name to be there? That's why I'm doing the anonymous report. And if it's not being taken seriously, why would I even do it? I was going to go through this process and the website implied that anonymous reporting means there is less chance of it being taken seriously, so why would I? (FG4)

4.4 Awareness and assessment of local anti-racism

The survey and the focus group was also captured the participants' views of Maribyrnong City Council's local anti-racism street sign campaign #RACISMTOTWELCOME (Image 1) and the Council's *Intercultural Maribyrnong Strategy 2023-2026*, which, among others aims, 'seeks to address and eliminate inequity, discrimination, and racism.'

Around eight out of ten didn't know about the *Intercultural Maribyrnong Strategy*, only 8% were familiar with it and 11% were aware of it but were not familiar with its content. The local anti-racism campaign was significantly more widely known. One third of survey respondents stated they were aware of the #RACISMTOTWELCOME campaign, and an additional 26% said they had heard about it but were not entirely sure what it was. The remaining 42% had not heard about the campaign.

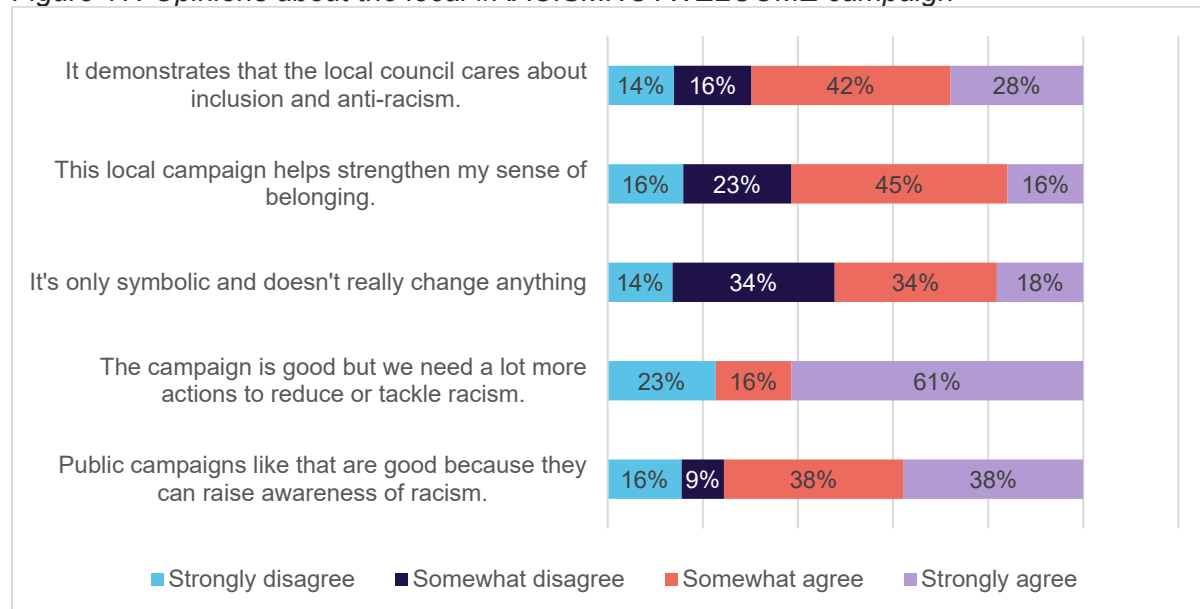


Image 1: #RACISMTOTWELCOME street sign

A majority of those who had at least heard about the local anti-racism campaign had an overall positive opinion and regarded the campaign as an important symbolic message against racism. Seventy percent agreed it demonstrated that the local council cared about inclusion and anti-racism; three quarters thought that public campaign like this can raise awareness of

racism, and a smaller majority of 61% said the campaign helped strengthen their sense of belonging. There was, however, also a broad and more critical recognition that, while the campaign was good, 'we need a lot more actions to reduce and tackle racism' (76%), and 52% agreed that 'it's only symbolic and doesn't really change anything' (although only 18% agreed strongly with this statement). Only around one in six survey respondents held overall more sceptical views.

Figure 17: Opinions about the local #RACISMNOTWELCOME campaign



The analysis of the focus groups revealed a similar picture. Some were aware of the campaign and recalled having seen one of the street signs in the local area, while others were not familiar with it. Some stressed that anti-racism needs to go beyond symbolic messages ('putting signs up is not enough') and a more critical participant said: "I guess it kind of falls under 'tokenism...you just have these like signs' (FG2). However, overall, the campaign was acknowledged and welcomed.

5. The way forward: Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap

The Maribyrnong Anti-Racism project pursued three interconnected goals. It was set up to encourage conversations about racism by providing safe spaces for local communities affected by racism to talk about their experiences. While breaking the silencing effect of racism was a goal in itself, it also offered opportunities to systematically collect evidence on participants' experiences of racism, and their views on reporting pathways, barriers and anti-racism support needs. This empirical research component was the second goal of the project.

Related to that was the third future-oriented objective as the project sought to explore the perspectives of people with lived experience on how to address racism more effectively and provide better support to those who face it in Maribyrnong and beyond. The community responses to this question informed the development of the **Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap**, which synthesises the input from culturally marginalised and racialised community members who participated in the project.

While not every single suggestion raised during the project could be included, the Roadmap (Figure 18) captures the central points and calls to action articulated by the participants, presented in a structured way under six interconnected **key areas of actions** for a range of (local) stakeholders, from schools and police to council and community organisations.

Figure 18: Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap



5.1 Celebrating cultural diversity and recognition of First Nations peoples

As a general preventative element of local anti-racism, the roadmap reflects many participants' calls to further strengthen inclusivity and promote and celebrate cultural diversity in Maribyrnong. Representation and leadership of those with lived experience are regarded as central for the success of such promotion activities.

Celebrating cultural diversity through events, storytelling and visible leadership from people of different backgrounds can shift the focus from “problems” to pride, connection, and belonging. (survey respondent)

This should include a strong emphasis on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities. The First Nations focus group called for more awareness raising efforts to highlight First Nations peoples' resilience and their local history as a way to counter persistent stereotypes. This can be implemented by the council in close collaboration with local Indigenous communities, for example, by holding or facilitating community events (e.g. cultural arts and music festivals) and installing information plaques at public sites of significance across Maribyrnong to tell the local history of First Nations communities.

That kind of thing is really important to have because I think it's like a lack of visibility of our resilience, of our [First Nations] culture, of our history, particularly in Footscray ... Those things get overshadowed, and people just see the stereotypes, but ... it's like actually rewriting our narrative and showing the beauty and sharing that as well. (FG3)

While celebrating cultural diversity and promoting recognition as such are not sufficient for tackling racism, these actions are part of a broader approach to strengthen local inclusion and anti-racism.

Footscray is known for its rich cultural diversity — it is one of its greatest strengths. By embracing this diversity, we can foster greater understanding of the roles we each play in maintaining a harmonious, welcoming and vibrant place to live. (survey respondent)

5.2 Public messaging around racism and anti-racism campaigns

The current campaign #RACISMNOTWELCOME in Maribyrnong was generally received positively, but many participants called for more public messaging/communication and campaigns to raise awareness of racism, promote anti-racism work as everyone's responsibility and make reporting pathways and anti-racism support services more widely known.

There needs to be information in diverse languages to help people in the community to understand what racism is and where to report it. (survey respondent)

At a local level, they need to implement more awareness on how to respond in that type of situation. What resources are available. I think a campaign that includes voices of the community and work with them for solutions can build trust. (survey respondent)

In addition to street signs, suggestions include developing and running anti-racism campaigns on social media (e.g. TikTok) and local flyer and poster campaigns in collaboration with, among others, local community centres and libraries, schools and universities, shops, hospitals and other health care services.

Two features of anti-racism campaigns were highlighted as particularly important. First, they should convey strong leadership support for anti-racism, for example, from council and other public figures and institutions, highlighting that racism is taken seriously and not tolerated.

I would say if the council or the government can put out anti-racism ads, similar to the video ads about drink driving. So, the message would be that you'll be caught – anytime, anywhere, and anyone. (FG 2)

Second, young people and people with lived experiences should play an active role in designing and developing local anti-racism campaigns, implemented, for example, through a local grants program.

If you're going to do some sort of advertising around anti-racism, let the young people do it. You can use social media, because nowadays young people use TikTok and stuff, use that as a platform..., because that's how young people are learning nowadays – through social media. And if you're gonna get young people to understand what racism is, start off with small things, like organize a program or activity within the council. (FG1)

Anti-racism messaging and campaign can also be a vehicle to convey positive stories about people who reported a racist incident and how they successfully took action to hold the perpetrator to account. Such success stories demonstrate the potential for efficacy and agency can encourage more people others to speak out.

No one ever comes back and says, oh, person x was charged... Never ever. So why would you report if you don't even have any evidence that this thing would work? I mean, it's like having precedent cases of how someone spoke up against racism... I think would be good to show an example how you can fight those... Like, show me someone who fought that before and won. (FG1)

5.3 Anti-racism education and training

Related to these calls for more awareness raising (recommendation 2), another central area of action refers to greater investment in and sustained commitment to education and training measures across various sites and stakeholders.

Schools, universities, and community organisations should embed anti-racism awareness and training so that respect for diversity becomes part of everyday life, not just a one-off campaign. (survey respondent)

At least four interconnected education-related actions were suggested:

Strengthening racial literacy

Building people's understanding of what racism is, how it manifests and how it impacts individuals and communities is a crucial component of anti-racism education for communities affected by racism as well as, and especially, for those without lived experience. The specific content and modes of delivery of such trainings need to be tailored to the respective target group and context. Schools but also workplaces (e.g. 'interactive, unskippable workplace training') and other organisational settings can be important sites for such racial literacy education.

If we are serious about tackling racism as a community, we must focus on building a deeper understanding of what racism truly is. Racism needs to be clearly defined and addressed through education. (survey respondent)

When people hear the word racism, they kind of think it's like what you see. Whereas in reality, it's much more than that. And I feel like people need to be educated on that ...and how it impacts people. (FG2)

Cultural competencies and (anti-)racism awareness

Overlapping with the need for more racial literacy training, another education-related action many participants called for revolves around the need to strengthen cultural competencies and (anti-)racism awareness among those who regularly engage with diverse communities, especially in their professional capacity. This includes, for example, schools (e.g. School Community Liaison Officer), local business and the local council (especially customer facing staff), police as well as community service providers, such as mental health workers and therapists. Cultural competencies training should enhance their understanding of racism (racial literacy), strengthen their empathy and commitment to anti-racism and build their capacity to respond appropriately and offer culturally safe spaces of support to those who report an experience of racism.

We need white and POC [People of Colour] services and business owners in the area to build their cultural competency around being anti-black and doing anti-racism work. (survey respondent)

Anti-racism upstander trainings

Acknowledging that tackling racism cannot only be the responsibility of those who face it, the wider community should be enabled and encouraged to stand up and intervene when they witness racism. Dedicated anti-racism upstander or active bystander trainings can help build the capacity and preparedness of broader segments in the community to intervene safely and in a way that demonstrates solidarity and empathy and increases the chances of accountability.

Awareness of report pathways and anti-racism support services

Another central element of anti-racism trainings for those with lived experiences as well as those who frequently engage with communities (e.g. schools, settlement or community service providers, public facing council staff) is to strengthen their understanding of existing reporting pathways and anti-racism support services. Complementing public information and awareness raising campaigns (see recommendation 2), such education measures can build knowledge in the community that enable them to make an informed decision as to whether and where to report racism and how to access adequate support after an experience of racism.

These types of anti-racism session may be delivered as stand-alone trainings, as part of broader racial literacy education measures or as part of standard mandatory induction courses for staff or university students. They should be offered across various contexts, in particular in schools and universities, at workplaces and community organisations, and tailored to the specific target audience.

5.4 Local reporting and anti-racism support

Existing reporting pathways and support services for people facing racism were not only little known in the community, but these services were also commonly regarded as inadequate or insufficient. To address these shortcomings and to empower and encourage more people to speak out and seek support after experiencing racism alternative support structures should be established locally. These local services should offer accessible, culturally appropriate and safe space where community members can share their experiences freely in an empathetic environment, where they feel listened to without being judged and where they can access emotional support and, where relevant, get advice on what next steps they can take. Many highlighted that this anti-racism support should be provided locally and by people with lived experiences from multicultural and multifaith as well as First Nations communities.

Providing culturally safe support services and creating inclusive spaces where diverse communities feel seen and valued. (survey respondents)

At the local level, creating safe spaces where people can openly share their experiences of racism is important — not just to be heard, but to guide change. (survey respondents)

Create space for people to share, heal, and connect. (survey respondents)

Establish local reporting and support systems that are trusted and accessible, so people can report racism without feeling abandoned or punished. (survey respondents)

On a local level, councils can take concrete steps such as creating safe reporting channels where people can raise concerns about racism and know they will be taken seriously. (survey respondents)

Such anti-racism support services can be integrated within existing community spaces at established and trusted community organisations in Maribyrnong; setting up and sustaining such community-led services is expected to require additional resourcing and external funding. Alternatively, or possibly complementing such community-based support structures, the local council could establish an anti-racism hub with a physical presence in Maribyrnong, possibly led by a dedicated anti-racism officer. In the words of a First Nations focus group participant, such an anti-racism hub should be a ‘place of refuge’ and serve not only as a ‘complaint centre’ but as a site of ‘cross-community learning and connections’ that acts proactively to tackle racism.

Community-led or council-run anti-racism support spaces should also explore the possibility of setting up a phone hotline or online platform to report racism. Developing a racism reporting app could also be considered as part of a state-wide or Australian-wide longer-term strategy to facilitate reporting.

5.5 Cross-sector partnerships and community engagement

Anti-racism work can only be effective if it is undertaken as a continuous and concerted, multi-stakeholder and whole-of-community effort where everyone has a role to play – from councils, schools and universities, business, and police, health care and public service providers and grassroots community organisations to every individual citizen. To implement such a whole-of-community approach, it is crucial to strengthen existing and build new cross-sector partnerships and collaborations with the explicit goal to prevent and tackle racism and support those who face it. While this requires the commitment of many (local) actors, the council seems particularly well placed to initiate and facilitate multi-stakeholder collaborations.

These partnerships need to ensure strong representation and inclusion of those with lived experiences through extensive collaboration and genuine engagement with local multicultural and First Nations grassroots communities and organisations.

Local governments should actively collaborate with communities, engage, and build partnerships to ensure community needs related to racism are met. (survey respondents)

Partnering with multicultural organisations to codesign policies and programs, ensuring the voices of those with lived experience guide the work. Ultimately, tackling racism locally means building a community culture of respect, belonging, and accountability where everyone feels safe and valued. (survey respondents)

Build partnerships across communities—not only to address racism when it happens, but to prevent it through inclusive decision-making, equitable access, and cultural respect. (survey respondents)

Building cross-sector collaborations between schools, police, health, and community organisations to prevent discriminatory practices and ensure accountability. (survey respondents)

A collaborative partnership approach with strong community representation and engagement should form the foundation also for the implementation of other aspects of the Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap, including the design of anti-racism campaign, education-related activities, and the development of local anti-racism support structures (see recommendations above). There are many ways to strengthen community collaboration and engagement, for example, through community grants programs, community forums and alternative modes of consultation. To ensure a more sustained and institutionalised process of community engagement and input, the council could also establish dedicated advisory structures, for example an Indigenous and multicultural advisory committee (as suggested in the First Nations focus group) and a youth advisory committee.

Young people must not only be consulted but meaningfully engaged in shaping policies, programs, and services that affect them... Youth advisory structures are examples of local actions that can empower young people to share their experiences safely and influence community responses. (survey respondents)

5.6 Strengthening accountability for racism

Enhancing accountability for racism, both on the individual and the organisational and societal level, is a crucial but also a particularly challenging aspect of effective anti-racism work, especially on the local level. The widely shared perception among racialised communities that ‘nothing would change’ is one of the most significant barriers to reporting racism and reflects an often deeply entrenched sense of hopelessness and resignation. This reinforces the silencing effect of racism, undermines broader recognition of racism as a persistent issue and hampers progress towards racial equality and justice.

Many participants in this project highlighted the need for greater accountability for interpersonal and institutional racism calling on different stakeholder, in particular those with institutional power and influence, to show more commitment and take tangible actions. While these actions are related to other recommendation of the Maribyrnong Anti-Racism Roadmap (e.g. investing in community leadership, anti-racism campaigns, education programs and local support structures), accountability for racism also relies on a strong – and strengthened – legal anti-discrimination and anti-vilification framework on state (and/or Commonwealth) level.² This can help holding perpetrators accountable for racist conduct, especially if statutory agencies such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Fair Work Commission, the Victorian Ombudsman or the eSafety Commissioner are given a stronger mandate and investigative powers.

² We note that new and enhanced anti-vilification legislation came into effect in April 2026 in Victoria.

We need relevant and comprehensive laws that reprimand perpetrators and actually protect victims. (survey respondent)

Institutions have an important role to play in ensuring accountability, also within the already existing legal framework. Several study participants stressed that institutions, including schools, employers, police and many other organisations, should be anti-racism ‘role models’ and do more to address racism perpetrated by individuals within their sphere of influence. This should also include a commitment to identify and remedy their own institutional policies and practices that may have discriminatory effects and strengthen internal anti-racism policies and actions.

Institutional organisations such as schools, police, sports clubs etc should be especially held to account and be role models. (survey respondent)

Institutional accountability is crucial; institutions need to review policies and practices to address racism and power imbalances. (survey respondent)

Institutions need to lead by example and be held accountable. (survey respondent)

Victoria’s *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* provides a useful legal basis for such institutional anti-racism work through its ‘positive duty’ provision. The Act legally obliges employers, education providers (including schools), sporting organisations and other providers of public goods and services (so-called ‘duty holders’ according to the law) to take ‘reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate... discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation as far as possible’. While the nature and scope of these measures vary depending on the size of the organisation, this creates a legal responsibility to commit to tangible anti-racism efforts, including adequate responses to complaints of racism, and highlights institutional accountability.

Reference

Essed, P. (1991) *Understanding everyday racism: An interdisciplinary theory*. Sage Publications.

Peucker, M., Clark, T., and Claridge, H. (2024) Mapping the Journey of (non-) Reporting in Response to Racism: A Change-oriented Approach to Reporting Barriers, Motives and Support Needs. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 45(3): 473-493.

Peucker, M., Vaughan, F., Doley, J., & Clark, T. (2025) Speaking out against racism? Silence, agency and unheard voices among racialised communities in Australia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2025.2508393>

Williams, M.T., Skinta, M.D, and Martin-Willett, R. (2021) After Pierce and Sue: A Revised Racial Microaggressions Taxonomy. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(5): 991 – 1007.