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Exploitation of migrant workers is systemic according to new report

Today's release of the Wage Theft in Australia survey of temporary visa workers clearly demonstrates the systemic exploitation of migrant workers in many Australian industries.

The national survey of 4,322 temporary migrants from 107 countries confirms what the ACTU has been arguing. The visa system creates a pool of easily exploited labour, which allows employers to engage in wage theft and only makes local unemployment worse.

The survey shows:

- Some 15 per cent of workers in the agriculture industry were paid as low as \$5 per hour and another 31 per cent received \$10 dollars an hour
- A quarter of all international students and a third of backpackers earn half the wage they are entitled to
- Two out of five workers surveyed had their lowest paid job in the hospitality industry.
- A quarter of all international students earn \$12 per hour or less
- Almost half of all backpackers earn \$15 per hour or less

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

"Stealing workers' wages is a crime, and it's rife. Our broken laws are inadequate to deter employers. When workers' wages are stolen, there's very often no penalty, or a penalty so weak, employers just wear it as a cost of doing business.

"Our broken laws not only facilitate the theft of wages, they have facilitated big businesses importing what amounts to a slave labour class of workers on temporary visas.

"Employers are flaunting our laws with alarming regularity and exploiting migrant workers.

"It's disgraceful that workers are being forced to pay thousands for their visas, having their passports taken away, being forced to pay back some of their wages and being paid cash in hand.

"Wage theft has to stop. Workers must have quick and easy access to justice and unions which can protect their rights.

"These workers know they are being underpaid but are either too scared to say anything, or are simply accepting that their legal rights will be denied. They need more power.

"We have to change the rules and end this pattern of wage theft and abuse of labour rights.

"Academics Laurie Berg and Bassina Farbenblum have illuminated the experiences of temporary visa workers and we hope that the Turnbull Government will act swiftly to address these alarming revelations."

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