

Thursday, 30 April 2015

Senate inquiry must begin fixing broken visa system

Australia should return to a predominantly permanent migration model and curb the unsustainable growth of the overseas temporary work program.

If Australia's reliance on temporary visa workers (over traditional permanent migration) is allowed to continue increasing at its current rate numbers will swell to around two million by 2020.

A union submission to the Senate Inquiry into Temporary Work Visas calls for a shift away from temporary workers to permanent migration, a re-evaluation of the currently largely uncapped temporary visa system and a tightening of laws around Labour Market Testing for 457 visas.

The working holiday visa should be capped to allow more opportunity for young Australians to enter the workforce.

When comparing employment of temporary visa workers against unemployment in Australia we found:

- Last year 40,000 more Australians found themselves unemployed bringing the unemployment rate to 6.1. At the same time the number of temporary visa holders in Australia grew by an extra 45,000.
- Over 160 000 young international workers are currently here on working holiday (417) visas while there are over 290,000 unemployed 15-24 year olds.
- There are 800,000 Australians out of work. At the same we have over 1.2 million temporary visa workers in Australia.

The relationship between the number of unemployed and the use of temporary visas in Australia should be a key area of concern for the Senate Inquiry.

The Federal Government's priority for the Australian workforce must be to deliver a plan for job creation and a reversal of the one billion dollars in cuts to skills and training it made in the previous budget.

A permanent migration system will assist in stamping out unacceptable levels of abuse and exploitation of temporary visa workers, many of whom feel they can't speak up when they are mistreated and ripped off.

The ACTU will lodge its submission to the Senate Inquiry into Temporary Work Visas on Friday 1 May.

Facts:

- There are over 1.2 million temporary visa holders working in Australia and they make up 10 per cent of the workforce;
- Unlike the permanent migration program, this is largely uncapped;
- Allowed to continue at current growth rate numbers will reach two million by 2020;
- Over a period of seven years from 2007-14, the number of temporary visa holders rose by around 600 000 – an almost 50 per cent increase;

- Last year over 128,000 permanent skilled migrants moved here.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney

“Australia has a proud history of permanent migration which has contributed significantly to the great multicultural nation we are today.

“There is no benefit to the current trend where we rely on international workers to fill alleged gaps in skills. We must create opportunities through investment and training to combat unemployment.

“We need to focus on creating job opportunities for Australians, we must ensure our permanent migration system is robust and we must limit the use of temporary visas to reflect genuine skills shortages.

“We are creating a two-tier system with many temporary international workers having fewer rights than the rest of the workforce and this is unacceptable.

“We welcome the Senate Inquiry into this troubled area.”

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