

Thursday 18 August 2016

ABS figures show workers suffer double blow

Today's dual ABS releases on Average Weekly Earnings and the snapshot Labour Force data show that Australian workers continue to be affected by a two-pronged dampener on their living standards.

Labour force data reveals:

- While the headline unemployment figure fell 0.1% to 5.7% in July, this masks the continuing disturbing slide in full time employment - since January 2016, part time employment has increased by 101,200, while full time employment decreased 19,900.
- Underemployment continues to be a significant problem, with more than one million Australians looking to pick up more work. It emerges from these figures that a large proportion of those exiting unemployment have not been able to find full time jobs. It is clear there are many Australians that want to work more hours and are in various casual and precarious work arrangements.

Average Weekly Earnings data shows:

- Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings (AWOTE) continued to grow very slowly at 2.2% over the year to May 2016, to \$1516 per week seasonally adjusted - a bare 1% real increase after inflation. This continues the long term trend that has begun to influence the RBA's approach to interest rates.
- Despite being the focus of increasing public attention, the wage gap between men and women continues to be stubbornly high - currently women's AWOTE is 16.1% less than men. This equates to \$260 a week.
- AWOTE is lowest in the retail and food sectors (Retail is 26.5% less than the total AWOTE, Accommodation and Food Services 29.4% less), demonstrating yet again the critical importance of penalty rates for workers in these industries, many of whom are women.

Australian Unions, the Reserve Bank of Australia and business have identified that providing additional support for growth, through long-term investment in public infrastructure, will lead to an increase in growth and wages - it's time for the Federal Government to start consulting with unions and business.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver:

"The bottom line from today's ABS data is that workers continue to do it tough, while penalty rates remain of critical importance to workers in the accommodation and food services sectors."

"Not only are Australians being slowly shunted out of full time work into part-time, casual or contractual arrangements, they are seeing their standard of living being eaten away by anaemic wage growth."

"Results like these, month after month, are creating a damning body of evidence that proves the Federal Government's lack of plan for jobs is causing significant damage to many people's way of life."

"With Parliament set to return at the end of the month, it's critical that the Prime Minister finally shows some leadership in dealing with the mounting pressure faced by so many Australians every day."

ENDS

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