

Union Action Plan

Secure Work



ACTU
CONGRESS 21



ACTU Congress briefing: Secure work

Why it matters:

We all benefit when everyone has access to secure work. Workers can spend and plan ahead with confidence, creating more jobs in their local communities.

Too many workers in Australia today don't have enough paid work, have no job security, or don't have a job at all.

They can't plan their lives because they don't know from one day to the next what hours they will be working.

They can't take a day off work sick out of fear of losing their job.

Having a reliable job you can count on is the very foundation of the Australian way of life, but it's already out of reach for too many of us.

This has not happened naturally. Inequality is a feature of government policy. Big business has been allowed to structure its workforce to deliberately shift risk onto working people through the casualisation of permanent work, the use of outsourcing and labour hire, on-demand gig work, or precarious employment in supply chains.

Government policies have deliberately shifted the pendulum towards business and away from workers through broadening the definition of casual employment, limiting workers' rights to act collectively and facilitating widespread wage theft.

The economic recovery is not shared. The consequences of the pandemic and the recession have been shared very unevenly. Big business profits actually went up during the crisis – the first time in history that business profits grew during a recession. By comparison more workers than ever before are in multiple jobs, real wages are in decline, casual work is growing faster than at any time in our history.

But investments in jobs, wages, services, and physical and social infrastructure could drive stable, inclusive growth, and a more robust recovery from the pandemic.

Other countries have policies and laws that limit insecure work and promote secure well paid job creation.

Australia needs workers with reliable jobs and fair pay.

Key Facts

- Australia has one of the highest rates of precarious employment in the OECD
- In 2019, for the first time permanent full-time workers made up less than 50% of the workforce
- Women comprise the majority of workers in industries with high levels of precarious work and low wages
- Casual workers are 3 times more likely to have their pay set at minimum award rates than permanent full-time employees
- 60% of all new jobs since May 2020 have been designated casual - the fastest growth of casual jobs in our history
- In March 2021, the Morrison Government made it even easier for employers to casualise permanent work
- Insecure work is a direct contributor to Australia's low wage growth crisis
- Insecure work is unsafe work with high rates of injury, illness, and sexual harassment prevalent in industries with high numbers of insecure workers
- Insecure work with inadequate hours and training was a significant contributor to the spread of COVID in aged care across Australia in 2020
- Economic recovery from COVID-19 is fragile and uneven, with key sectors of the economy and workers in insecure jobs continuing to face job losses

Australian Unions Believe

- Australians expect their government to build an economy that works for everyone, and we all benefit from working people having secure, reliable jobs.
- But inequality is at a 70 year high. Millions of people cannot find enough work if they can find a job at all. Wage growth is at record lows and the gender-based pay gap is still stubbornly high. Wage theft is rampant, and employers are increasingly undermining working conditions. This is made worse in many industries by a systematic exploitation of temporary visa workers.
- The problems we are facing are a direct result of government policies that have attacked unions, eroded the rights of working people, and allowed employers to exploit inadequate industrial laws. Many workers have watched as good, secure jobs left their communities, only to be replaced with low wage, precarious work, if they were replaced at all.
- Young Australians face particularly acute employment challenges. In any recession, they are the first fired and the last rehired. And the COVID recession has been brutally unfair in this regard. Employment for people under 35 is still well below pre-pandemic levels.
- We need powerful, targeted measures to get young people working again, and prevent lifelong scarring of their careers and incomes.
- A National Economic Reconstruction Plan is needed which will support and create secure jobs for women and men, in the public and private sector, in cities and country towns, for young people as well as older workers.

Action Plan 2021-25

Solutions require legislative change and a new policy approach. The union movement is committed to campaigning for reform that will create reliable jobs including:

Policy initiatives

- Government must ramp up its own economic activity in the real economy: including a permanent expansion in vital public and community services, and a genuine and sustained program to improve public social and physical infrastructure,
- A sustainable manufacturing strategy and increased local content in government procurement contracts,
- A renewed emphasis on public capital projects including affordable public and community housing,
- An ambitious strategy to support investment, both public and private, in the strategic industries of tomorrow and rebuild Australia's advanced economic capacities,
- Investing in the energy transition as a vital component of national reconstruction and response to climate change,
- Expanded vital public services including high quality aged care and the introduction of free, universal quality Early Childhood Education and Care,
- An expanded 52 week Paid Parental Leave scheme available to be shared between parents,
- Increased support for education and training including a revitalised public TAFE and higher education system.

Legislative reform

- Reform the statutory definition of casual employment,
- Give on-demand workers stronger rights and protection,
- Extend collective bargaining beyond the enterprise to include sectors, industries, supply chains and other groups of workers who have a community of interest,
- Provide quick and accessible solutions that will stop wage theft,
- Same job / same pay in labour hire to end the business model based on cutting workers' pay and conditions,
- Provide a pathway to permanency for workers on consecutive fixed term contracts,
- Introduce labour market testing and a pathway to permanent residency for skilled work visa programs,
- Make gender equity a primary objective of the Fair Work Act,
- Provide stronger dispute settlement powers to a truly independent Fair Work Commission,
- If the Government won't change the policies and laws that make work less secure, we are committed to working with the Australian people to change the Government.