

Monday 11th December 2023

Fixing broken migration system will go a long way to stopping exploitation of migrant workers

The ACTU welcomes the government's new Migration Strategy which will be instrumental to repairing the Coalition Government's legacy of damage and neglect, which has seen rampant migrant worker exploitation, and employers gaming the system to use temporary migration as a source of cheap labour, rather than training up and giving opportunities to local workers.

This strategy is a win for all workers as:

- It will go a long way to engineering-out exploitation from our migration system, by removing visa conditions that effectively bond workers to their employers. The new *Skills in Demand* visa will enable temporary skilled migrant workers mobility in the labour market – meaning they are free to leave exploitative situations or find a new job with better pay and conditions.
- It will rebalance our migration system to a focus on permanent migration and reducing “permanent temporariness”.
- It will introduce for the first time an evidence-based approach to skilled migration, based on advice from Jobs and Skills Australia and tripartite mechanisms, meaning that temporary skilled migration will be used to fill genuine shortages, and works in coordination with the education and training system, and supports fair wages, conditions, and job security for all workers.

This Strategy builds on the Government's previous announcements to tackle migrant worker exploitation, including raising the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT), and we welcome the commitment to index the TSMIT annually to ensure it is not eroded again, as it was under the Coalition Government.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

“Australian Unions support a rebalancing of our migration system to one based on permanent migration. Previous generations of migrant workers were able to build lives here in Australia with their families and become permanent members of our workplaces and our communities. But over the past decade we've seen our migration system shift to one based on temporary, employer-sponsored migration, where workers are on insecure short-term visas, and reliant on their employer for their ability to stay in the country.

“Migrant worker exploitation is rampant in this country, one of the key causes being visa conditions that effectively bond temporary migrant workers to their employer sponsor – meaning the employer controls your pay cheque and your passport. We commend the Albanese Government for putting a stop to this exploitative model by giving temporary skilled migrant workers the ability to change employers, so they can leave exploitative situations or seek a better job – just as any worker can.”

“For too long employers have been able to claim a ‘skills shortage’ in order to use temporary migration as a cheap source of labour and avoid their responsibility to skill up and offer opportunities to local workers. We welcome the Migration Strategy’s plan for an evidence-based approach to assessing skills shortages based on data and qualitative evidence from employers and unions, and analysing whether migration is an appropriate and sustainable way to address shortages – in conjunction with other solutions such as skilling up local workers.”

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