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Steady unemployment rate masks job losses and likely rise in insecure work

More than 100,000 full-time jobs were lost, part-time work grew, and fewer people were looking for work in December, according to today's labour force figures.

While the unemployment rate held steady at 3.9%, this masks a number of concerning trends.

Employment declined by 0.5 percent in December, with around 107,000 fewer people employed full-time in December. This was partially offset by an increase of around 41,000 more people employed part-time in December than in November. Most part-time jobs are typically casual ones, suggesting that employers are again choosing casual work over permanent jobs.

These figures come as the Parliament is set to debate the remaining elements of the Closing Loopholes Bill in early February which would end a Morrison-era law that allows an employer to label any worker a casual.

According to the latest figures, more than 2.73 million workers are engaged in casual work arrangements, the highest number ever.

Today's figures also saw around 80,000 fewer women employed full-time than in November alongside an increase of around 42,000 women employed part-time. The underemployment rate for women increased to 8.0 percent in December, up from 7.6 percent in November.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

"The cost-of-living crisis means we need to urgently address the rise of casual work. It robs workers of sick and holiday pay, as well as control over budgeting and finances. Whilst some workers may prefer casual work, it's important that employers can't game the system and workers get a choice.

"We know that at least half of all part-time workers are casuals, the switch in numbers from full-time to part-time work for women suggests more women are moving into insecure casual work.

"Scott Morrison introduced a loophole that allows an employer to call any worker a casual. The remainder of the Closing Loopholes Bill will close this casual work loophole and needs to be urgently passed.

"If we are to tackle this cost-of-living crisis, Australian workers need reliable jobs so they can have reliable incomes."

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