

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

## Australian workers deserve an extra week of annual leave

Australian Unions will today launch a major new bid to secure an extra week of annual leave for working Australians.

Unions will pursue an increase in annual leave entitlements from 4 to 5 weeks per year and from 5 to 6 weeks for regular shift workers, in what would be the first increase in the minimum standard since the mid-1970s.

Unions will argue that annual leave should be increased to counter rising work pressures and the long hours of unpaid work that Australians regularly perform.

Australian workers carry out an extra 4.5 weeks' work every year on average, for free as unpaid overtime. Younger workers aged 18-24 perform the most unpaid overtime at 6.4 weeks per year, on average, according to the Centre for Future Work.

By increasing annual leave by a week, Australians would get back at least one week of their unpaid work through annual leave to reclaim time away from work.

While Australians work longer hours, the gap between productivity and real wages has widened. Real wages would need to increase by an additional 10 per cent to catch up to increases in productivity since 2000 and close the gap that has opened up over the last two and a half decades, based on analysis by the Centre for Future Work. Allowing workers an extra week of leave would help with closing that gap.

Increasing annual leave by one week would add an extra 2 per cent to employment costs that would be offset by a reduction in employee turnover and time lost to injury and stress.

Most European countries now provide more annual leave for their citizens than Australia does, including Austria, Germany, France, Spain and Portugal, as well as Denmark, Iceland, Portugal, Norway and Sweden.

Unions will press for changes to the National Employment Standards (NES) to bring in the extra week's annual leave, as part of a House of Representatives Inquiry into the NES that is about to get underway.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus:

"Australia should increase annual leave to a minimum of five weeks for full-time workers. Australians work relatively long hours, which has only increased over time, yet the four-week annual leave standard was set 50 years ago.

"Extra leave will decrease stress and burnout. Australian workers already do an extra four and a half weeks of unpaid work on average every year. Getting back one of these weeks is fair and reasonable. It will mean a better rested and happier workforce.

“Younger workers – from 18 to 24 years old – most urgently need to see this burden start to lift. They are the ones doing the most unpaid work – an average of 6.4 weeks of free work for their employers each year.

“The majority of European countries have already moved beyond four weeks. Countries like Austria, France and Spain have already recognised the importance of rested, healthier employees and have higher rates of annual leave than Australia does. They are some of the most productive and competitive economies in the OECD.

“It’s time Australia caught up, our annual leave has been frozen at 4 weeks since the mid-1970s, half a century ago. Most workers weren’t alive when annual leave last went up in Australia.

“Extra leave will also start to address the productivity gap that workers face. The average Australian would need to see their real wage increase by 10 per cent to make up the difference between productivity improvements and real wage growth since 2000. An extra week of annual leave would help to reduce that gap.”

**ENDS**

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