

MEDIA RELEASE

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Migrant wage theft worsened during crisis

Illegal exploitation of migrants worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the largest ever audit of foreign job ads revealing almost nine-in-ten (88%) offered wage rates below the award minimum.

[*Wage Theft: The shadow market*](#) is the third audit of foreign job ads by Unions NSW and reveals the prevalence of advertising wages below the legal minimum is up from 77% in 2017 and 70% in 2018.

The 2020 audit analysed 3000 job ads in Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Nepalese, Spanish and Portuguese. Of those, 2,189 (72%) indicated a rate of pay, of which 88% were below the national legal minimum award rates.

The report also found:

- Construction was the worst industry for migrant wage theft with 97.3% jobs advertised below the minimum wage. This was followed by cleaning at 91.8%, hair and beauty at 87.9%, fast food at 87.5%, retail at 87.1%, hospitality at 87%, clerical at 84.3% and transport at 66.7%
- Advertisements in Vietnamese were most often below the minimum wage at 90.7%. This was followed by 88.3% of Korean ads, 87.9% of Chinese, 86.3% of Nepalese, 83.9% of Portuguese and 76.4% of Spanish ads.

“There are more than one million temporary migrants in Australia who can’t fully enforce their workplace rights due to their visa status,” said Mark Morey, Secretary of Unions NSW. “So many migrants were already exploited, and without JobKeeper or JobSeeker it got much worse during the crisis.

“Without income support, tens of thousands of migrants were made more vulnerable. Clearly, some unscrupulous bosses seized on the opportunity of the COVI pandemic to rip off vulnerable migrants even further.

“This is a problem that can be fixed. Australia is among the world’s wealthiest nations yet we have allowed an apartheid to emerge in our workplaces. If you are a permanent resident you have workplace rights, but if you are temporary you are vulnerable to wage theft.

“The 20 hour a week restriction on work for international students must be abolished as a matter of urgency. It’s almost as if this rule has been deliberately crafted to push international students into exploitation in a cash economy.



“The Fair Work Ombudman is also a shambles. It doesn’t understand its brief and doesn’t have the resources to stamp out exploitation. Instead, resources should be directed to peak union and business groups to conduct legal wage compliance.

“It should also become a legal requirement to advertise the minimum rate of pay in every job advertisement. This would create a powerful baseline expectation for wages.”

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