

COVID-19 ORANA REGION MIGRANT SURVEY REPORT



1 April 2019

Recommendation

That the Federal Government include temporary migrants living (and working in Australia on a 489, 457, 417 visas) as at 1 March 2020 in financial support measures.

Introduction

With the growing spread and concern of COVID-19, the government has taken steps to support businesses and households to address the significant economic effects of COVID-19. The full economic effects are uncertain, but the ever-evolving changes are indicating a need for the government to come up with more extensive and inclusive strategies for all people living and working in Australia.

Experiencing extreme low unemployment in many industries, the Orana region has relied heavily on migrant workforce (489 Skilled Regional (Provisional) visa holders as well as 457 Temporary Work (Skilled) visa, 417 Working Holiday visa holders) to address labour shortages. It should be noted that a small number of our 489 visa holders have also established and operate businesses in the region.

Many of the migrants in the Orana region have established a life here, with families and friends and have become a part of the community. They form a big portion of the workforce, filling the labour needs in some of our key industries and sectors including manufacturing, healthcare, mining, agriculture among others. A majority of the migrants in the Orana region are skilled migrants and make a significant contribution to the community.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal and State governments have mandated stand downs in a number of businesses, which has left many of our migrant workers with economic uncertainty.

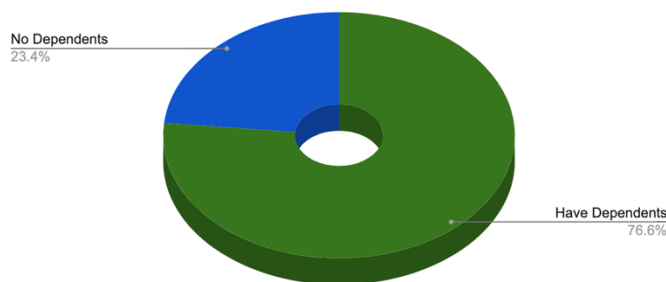
As result of numerous calls from migrants expressing concern about support for them (as temporary residents), on the 24th of March, RDA Orana sent out a regional migrant survey aimed at collecting information on the impact of COVID-19 on migrants in the region, to better understand and qualify the impacts being experienced by our migrant community. As of the 31st of March, the survey has 173 responses.

Summary of results

Demographic Factors

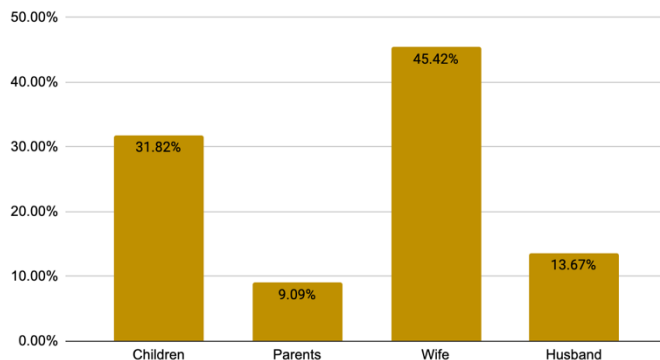
On the 24th of March, RDA Orana sent out a regional migrant survey aimed at collecting information on the impact of COVID-19 on migrants in the region. As of the 31st of March, the survey has 173 responses. 87.28% of the respondents live in the Orana region, whereas 12.72% reside outside of the Orana region. 77.65% of the respondents were from the Dubbo region, 5.29% from Mudgee and the rest from the other parts of the region.

Migrants with Dependents



With a majority of the migrants forming strong ties within the community, they have made the Orana region their home. 76.58% of the respondents indicated that they have dependents in their households, while 23.42% of the respondents reported being by themselves.

Type of Dependent



The survey showed 31.82% of respondents having at least one child as a dependent. Over 59.09% of the respondents with dependents reported having spouses that depend on them financially while 9.09% reported having parents as dependents. 23.42% of the respondents reported being by themselves.

Most of the respondents reported being on provisional or temporary visas, with a majority being on the 489 Skilled Regional (Provisional) visa. Others reported being on the 457 Temporary Work (Skilled) visa, 417 Working Holiday visa, 500 Student Visa and 485 Temporary Graduate visa.

COVID-19 Impacts

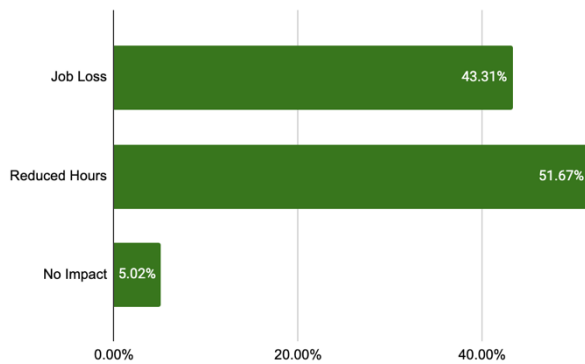
Majority of the respondents reported being in the workforce before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic or looking for work. However, due to the coronavirus, they have either lost their jobs, had their working hours reduced, or have been forced to take unpaid leave as businesses are forced to shut down.

Those who were looking for jobs are also having a hard time as businesses are not hiring amidst the crisis. Many of the respondents reported having their income reduced by 50-80%. They reported a growing

concern about their financial situations as businesses are standing down, with some already being notified by their employers of possible shutdowns.

94.98% of the respondents reported having their income and livelihood affected by COVID-19.

Impact on migrant employment in the region



43.31% of the respondents reported losing their jobs as a result of the Coronavirus, while 51.67% reported having their hours reduced drastically (50-80% reduction). Many are finding it very difficult to find alternative work as businesses are not hiring due to the threat of Coronavirus. 5.02% of the respondents reported not having been impacted by the pandemic but indicated a great concern and uncertainty about the future and security of their jobs.

From our survey, it was evident that government restrictions are having a great impact on visa holders.

Some respondents reported facing the threat of breaching their visa conditions due to the existing travel bans that prevent them from leaving or returning to the country. Some reported being stuck overseas as a result of the same and not able to travel back, which makes them uncertain about their jobs, rent, bills, school and other responsibilities.

As the pandemic intensifies and the government continues to impose stricter measures, many migrants are concerned that they will not be able to sustain themselves during this crisis. Temporary migrants do not meet the residency requirement for government services, hence have little to no access to government support. Majority indicated being unable to get any government assistance during this time despite having lost their income and jobs, and meeting other requirements except for residency. Our respondents reported not having access to welfare or medicare, which is causing great concern. A number reported having private health insurance, but are at risk of not affording the monthly contributions due to job loss or reduced income.

75.47% of the respondents reported increased housing stress due to the loss of jobs. They indicated that they are finding it difficult to keep up with their usual responsibilities including rent and bills as they either have no income or have had their income significantly reduced. Some have been forced to dig into their savings but they are unsure how long they will be able to sustain their lives on it. Most indicated serious concerns and uncertainties around how they would be able to sustain themselves amidst the threat of Coronavirus with no help from the government.

It is clear that migrants in the region are facing just as many challenges as Australians as a result of COVID-19. However, their inability to access any form of government support puts them at a great economic risk. The uncertainties surrounding their future are a source of great concern.