

# *Working From Home, or Living at Work?*

*Hours of Work, Unpaid Overtime, and Working Arrangements Through COVID-19*

**By Dan Nahum**  
**Economist**  
**The Centre for Future Work**

**November 2021**

## About The Australia Institute

The Australia Institute is an independent public policy think tank based in Canberra. It is funded by donations from philanthropic trusts and individuals and commissioned research. We barrack for ideas, not political parties or candidates. Since its launch in 1994, the Institute has carried out highly influential research on a broad range of economic, social and environmental issues.

## Our Philosophy

As we begin the 21st century, new dilemmas confront our society and our planet. Unprecedented levels of consumption coexist with extreme poverty. Through new technology we are more connected than we have ever been, yet civic engagement is declining. Environmental neglect continues despite heightened ecological awareness. A better balance is urgently needed.

The Australia Institute's directors, staff and supporters represent a broad range of views and priorities. What unites us is a belief that through a combination of research and creativity we can promote new solutions and ways of thinking.

## Our Purpose—'Research That Matters'

The Institute publishes research that contributes to a more just, sustainable and peaceful society. Our goal is to gather, interpret and communicate evidence in order to both diagnose the problems we face and propose new solutions to tackle them.

The Institute is wholly independent and not affiliated with any other organisation. Donations to its Research Fund are tax deductible for the donor. Anyone wishing to donate can do so via the website at <https://www.australiainstitute.org.au> or by calling the Institute on 02 6130 0530. Our secure and user-friendly website allows donors to make either one-off or regular monthly donations and we encourage everyone who can to donate in this way as it assists our research in the most significant manner.

Level 1, Endeavour House, 1 Franklin St  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Tel: (02) 6130 0530  
Email: [mail@australiainstitute.org.au](mailto:mail@australiainstitute.org.au)  
Website: [www.australiainstitute.org.au](http://www.australiainstitute.org.au)

## About the Centre for Future Work

The Centre for Future Work is a research centre, housed within The Australia Institute, to conduct and publish progressive economic research on work, employment and labour markets.

It serves as a unique centre of excellence on the economic issues facing working people: including the future of jobs, wages and income distribution, skills and training, sector and industry policies, globalisation, the role of government, public services and more. The Centre also develops timely and practical policy proposals to help make the world of work better for working people and their families.

[www.futurework.org.au](http://www.futurework.org.au)

## About the Author

Dan Nahum is Economist at the Centre for Future Work, with a research focus on industrial transformation, labour markets in low-carbon economies, and inequality in Australia and globally. He holds a Master of Political Economy from the University of Sydney and a Bachelor of Science (Psychology) with Honours from Macquarie University.

The author thanks without implication Dr Jim Stanford, Eliza Littleton, Liam Carter, Bill Browne, and Ebony Bennett for helpful input.

---

The **Australia**  
**Institute** | Centre for  
Research that matters. **FutureWork**

# Table of Contents

Introduction and Summary .....	4
Hours of Work .....	8
Polarisation of Working Hours .....	15
Unpaid Overtime .....	21
The Costs of Time Theft.....	26
Working From Home: What’s Happening Now, and What Happens Next .....	34
Workplace Surveillance .....	44
Conclusion .....	47
Appendix A – Survey Questions.....	49
Appendix B – Sample Distribution.....	54
References .....	56

# Introduction and Summary

2021 marks the thirteenth annual *Go Home on Time Day* (GHOTD), an initiative of the Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute that shines a spotlight on overwork among Australians, including excessive overtime that is often unpaid.

Last year's report emphasised that 2020 had been extraordinary and difficult, and 2021 has brought little reprieve. Australia remains caught in ongoing and interacting twin crises: a public health crisis and an economic crisis. Each influences and reinforces the other.

Around a third of employed Australians continue to perform at least some of their work from home. As a result, the standard scenario of workers 'staying late at the workplace', which largely framed our analysis of excessive work time before the pandemic, is now supplemented by a different dimension of excessive work and unpaid overtime. Now we must consider whether home work will become the "new normal" for many workers even after the acute phase of the pandemic finally passes – and what new pressures on working hours, work-life balance, and unpaid overtime are unleashed by the work-from-home phenomenon.

Whether working from home or at a formal workplace, the problem of unpaid overtime (whereby workers are not paid for a significant portion of their work) continues to be severe. In fact, the estimated incidence of this 'time theft' has increased substantially compared with 2020. In many cases, people's responsibilities in their home lives have increased in response to the health and social crisis, accentuating a double burden of unpaid work – one that is experienced disproportionately by women.

Since 2009, the Centre for Future Work and the Australia Institute have commissioned an annual survey to investigate overwork and unpaid overtime in Australia. This year's poll of 1604 Australians was conducted between 24 and 27 August, with a sample that was nationally representative according to gender, age and state or territory. Of the 1604 respondents, 1048 (or 65%) were currently in paid work.

Our survey asked respondents about unpaid hours of work, preferences for more or fewer hours, family and caring responsibilities, and the balance between work and non-work life during COVID-19. This year's survey also asked about electronic surveillance practices implemented by employers to monitor those working from home, and what workers thought about returning to the on-site workplace as the COVID-19 pandemic abates.

This report summarises the results of that polling, and places it in the context of national labour force trends:

- On average, respondents reported they worked **6.1 hours of unpaid work in the week of the survey**. This was an increase from 5.3 in 2020.
- This time theft equates to **319 hours per year, or over eight standard 38-hour work weeks** per worker.
- At the economy-wide level, this equates to **\$125 billion dollars of lost income per year**. In a broader environment of stagnant wages and underemployment, this has extraordinarily damaging consequences throughout the economy—including suppressed consumer spending by households and increased financial insecurity.
- On a fortnightly basis, this time theft costs an average worker **\$460 in wage theft per pay period**.
- Even though total work hours have fallen, and much work has shifted to home, Australians are working more unpaid overtime.
- 44% of part-time employees and 49% of casual employees reported that they wanted more (paid) hours.
- Even so, 20% of casual workers report that they would prefer to work *fewer* hours. Among all workers, 12% report wanting to work fewer hours. There is a clear social and economic need to redistribute work from those preferring fewer hours to those who would prefer more.
- Three-fifths (58%) of casual workers indicated that their work hours have decreased because of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Over half (65%) of full-time workers have performed at least some of their work at home during the COVID-19 crisis – either because they were already doing some work from home prior to the crisis (22%), or changed their working patterns as a result of the pandemic (42%).
- Among those working from home, a quarter (26%) of workers indicated that their employers' expectations of their availability had increased during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Amongst workers who reported working from home, **two-thirds (65%) indicated they will continue to do at least some work from home post-pandemic**.

- **62% of people working at home are performing some of that work outside of normal working hours.**
- 31% of workers said their family and/or caring responsibilities had increased as a result of COVID-19.
- Men were more likely to get flexibility to discharge increased caring responsibilities from their employer and retain the same pay (53%), compared to women (46%).
- Those in casual and part-time employment have lost more work because of the health and employment crisis, with limited ability to pivot towards home-based work.
- Of those working from home, **39% of workers indicated their employers were remotely monitoring their activity**, with a further 17% indicating they were unsure whether they were being electronically monitored or not.
- Less than half (45%) of respondents working from home had been consulted by their employer regarding returning to work at their usual workplace.
- A strong majority of employees who were working from home at the time of the survey (71%) would like to keep working from home after the COVID-19 crisis is over, but only 5% indicated that they will leave their job if they are directed to return to the traditional workplace.

These results are consistent with previous research on the opportunities and risks of working from home,<sup>1</sup> published by the Centre for Future Work (Pennington & Stanford, 2020), as well as highlighting new themes, and reaffirm continuing concerns about how the pandemic, and the shift to working from home, are presenting new challenges to workers' ability to sustainably balance paid work with the other aspects of their lives:

- There is a continued blurring of lines between work and home lives, especially in the context of additional family and caring responsibilities imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic
- There are severe risks resulting from growing casualisation and insecurity in Australia's labour market, experienced by both individual workers and the broader economy.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Pennington and Stanford (2020).

- There is a visible bifurcation in the workforce between those workers more insulated from the economic fallout of the pandemic (thanks to their less precarious employment arrangements, and greater ability to shift to home-based work), and those who have suffered more damaging and immediate employment and health effects from the pandemic (due to less secure jobs, that also tend to be more exposed to the risk of contagion).
- The expansion of work into all areas of our lives (including our homes) has been accelerated by the growing use of electronic surveillance measures by employers, and the patchwork and inadequate regulation of those practices in Australia.

Overall, the shift towards home work has not resulted in fewer unpaid hours of work: to the contrary, the amount of unpaid overtime is growing. The experience of the pandemic seems to indicate that home work may not necessarily represent a step toward a better, more humane work-life balance for workers. In many cases it has allowed a further incursion of work into people's personal time and indeed privacy, and a further undercutting of Australia's set of minimum standards around employment (including standard hours, overtime, and penalty rates). The clear implication is that Australia's system of industrial protections requires greater enforcement and proactive expansion, all the more so if a larger share of paid work will now occur in workers' homes.

This report provides details of the hours worked and employment status of survey respondents. It then considers the polarisation of working hours: the ironic reality that many Australian workers work too few paid hours, while others simultaneously report working more than they wish. The next section presents survey results on the incidence of unpaid work in the Australian economy, the cumulative value of this wage theft, and its enormous economic costs to the broader economy. We also provide detailed findings on the employment impacts of COVID-19, and the experience of working from home of our survey respondents. The impact of electronic surveillance practices is also analysed, showing increasing encroachment on working arrangements – especially worrisome in the context of home-based work. The report concludes with proposals to better protect the rights of workers (those working from home, and those in traditional workplaces) as Australia continues to transition to a post-COVID economy.

# Hours of Work

Table 1 summarises the employment status and normal hours of work reported by respondents to our survey. 65% of respondents were employed. This figure is broadly consistent with the average employment rate reported by the ABS in its monthly labour force survey.<sup>2</sup>

Of those employed, 60.3% worked in standard permanent full-time positions, while the remainder worked in part-time (24.0%), casual (8.7%) or self-employed (7.0%) positions. In other words, in our sample two in five employed Australians experienced one or more of these dimensions of non-standard or insecure employment—again close to overall averages reported in ABS statistics.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1. Employment Status of Sample**

Of all respondents:				
	Employed		Not Employed	
<b>Employment Status</b>	65%		35%	
Of employed respondents:				
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Casual	Self-Employed
<b>Percent of Employed</b>	60.3%	24.0%	8.7%	7.0%
<b>Average Hours/Week</b>	37.6	21.8	18.9	27.9

Source: Survey results as described in text.

On average, survey respondents in paid work worked 31.5 hours a week (33.9 hours among men, and 28.8 for women).

Full-time workers in the sample reported working an average of 37.6 hours per week. Permanent part-timers worked an average of 21.8 hours per week, compared to 18.9 hours per week for workers in casual jobs and 27.9 hours per week for the self-employed.

Among employed respondents, there was considerable divergence in average weekly paid hours of work across industries and occupations. These results reflect a tendency

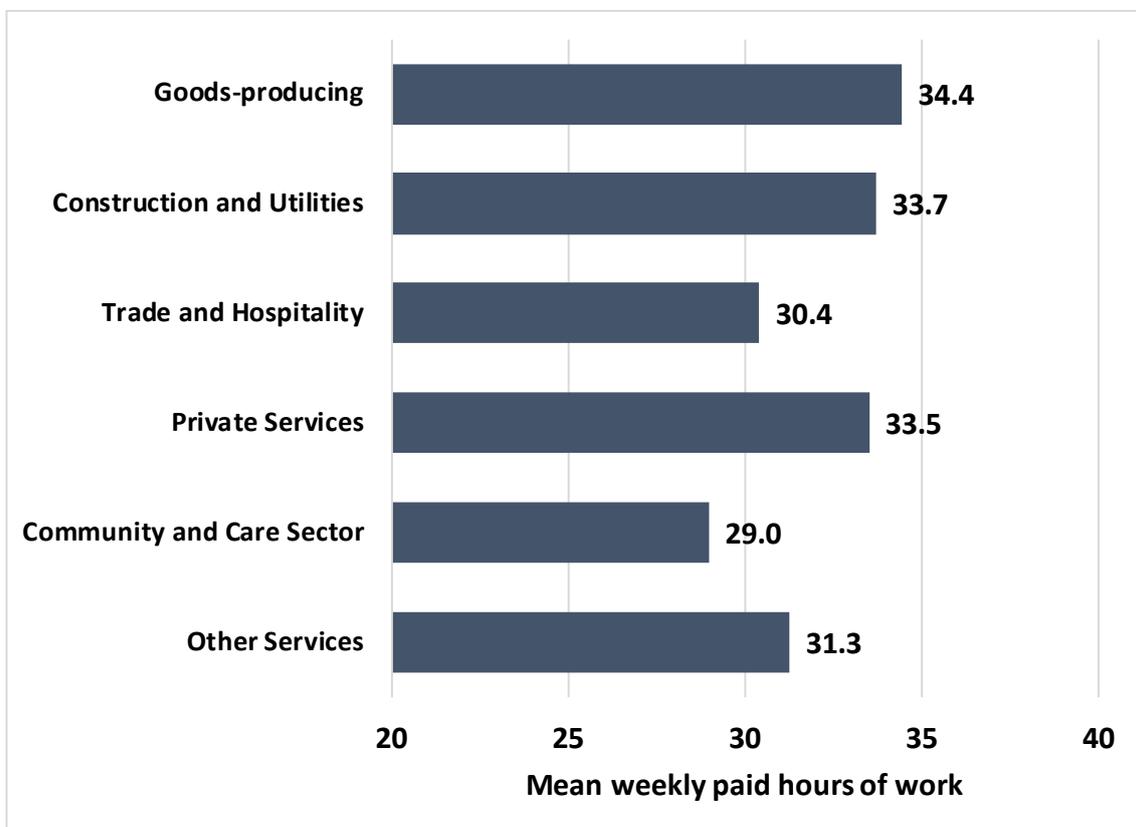
<sup>2</sup> The employment to population ratio was 62.2% in August 2021; see ABS (2021b).

<sup>3</sup> Stanford (2021) reports that in 2019, barely half of formally employed Australians held a permanent full-time waged job with entitlements. Counting the growing numbers of on-demand or 'gig' workers (many of whom are not counted in conventional employment statistics), that proportion falls even further.

for employment status (full-time, part-time, casual, or self-employed) to vary with industry and occupation. The availability of paid overtime by industry and occupation also varies, for operational, historical, and industrial relations reasons.

On average, those employed in goods-producing industries (including agriculture, mining, and manufacturing) worked more paid hours per week (34.4), followed closely by construction and utilities (33.7) and private services<sup>4</sup> (33.5). Hours of work in the trade and hospitality and community and care sectors were markedly lower (30.4 and 29.0 hours per week, respectively), reflecting the prevalence of part-time and casual employment in those industries. These results are summarised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Paid Hours of Work Per Week, by Industry**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

By occupation, Machinery Operators and Drivers worked the longest paid hours (40.2 per week), followed by Managers (35.3) and Professionals (32.9). Community and Personal Services workers worked an average of just 26.1 hours per week. These results are shown in Figure 2.

---

<sup>4</sup> Including information media and telecommunications, financial services, rental, hiring and real estate services, professional, scientific and technical services, and administrative services.

**Figure 2. Paid Hours of Work Per Week, by Occupation**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

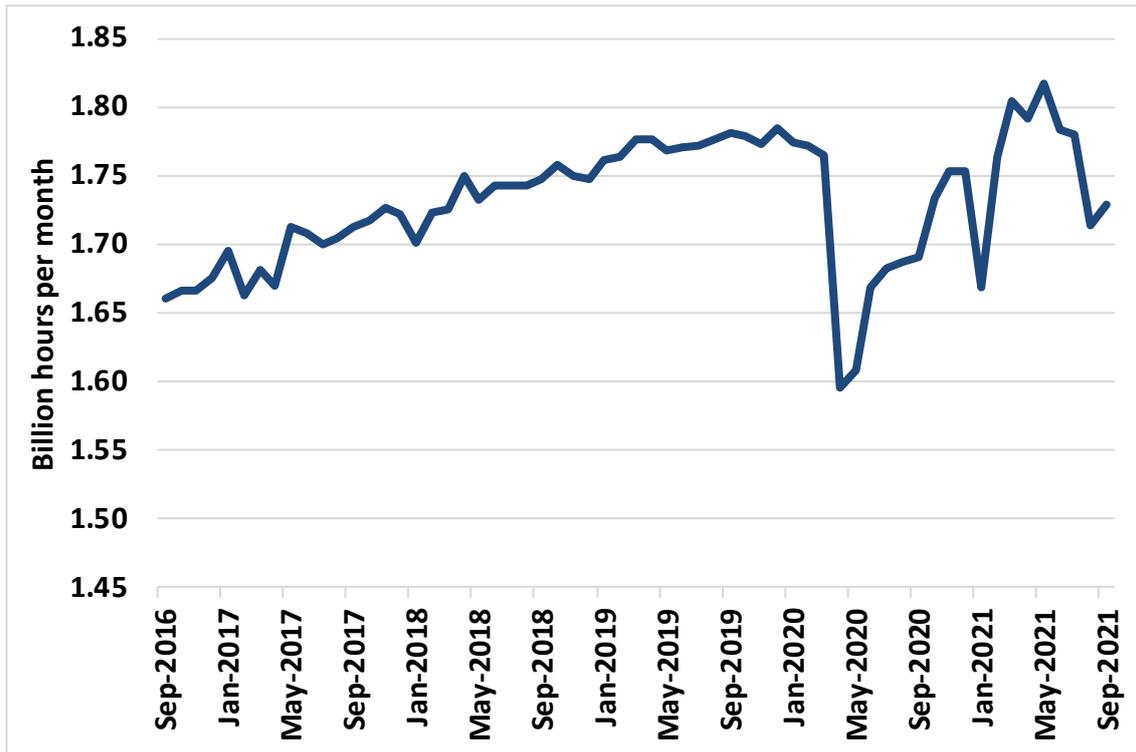
The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has produced a ‘double-dip’ in aggregate working hours: with major reductions in hours worked in early 2020, and again in mid-2021 (ABS, 2021, illustrated in Figure 3).<sup>5</sup> At time of writing, monthly working hours remain well below what they were before COVID-19, notwithstanding Australia’s initially strong recovery (subsequently reversed following the spread of delta variant infections). Part-time and casual workers experienced much steeper job losses during the first dip, followed by a mass rehiring of casuals (the fastest growth of casual employment in Australian history; see Nahum, 2021). This pattern was repeated in the second dip, with part-time and casual workers accounting for an even larger share of total job losses. It is clear that the growing use of insecure and casual employment experienced in recent years in Australia has shifted economic risk from employers to workers (since

<sup>5</sup> Figure 3 also shows a middle dip, in January 2021. The ABS (2021a) reports: “There is a fall in hours worked every January as many people take annual leave, which the seasonal adjustment process makes allowance for. However, a larger than usual number of people took annual leave in January 2021[...]Given the extent of disruption during 2020, including to people’s leave plans, it is not surprising that more than the usual amount of leave was taken in the Christmas-New Year holiday period.”

workers in insecure jobs are more easily made redundant when business conditions change).

Overall, COVID-19 has accentuated the longer-term polarisation in working hours, driven primarily by continued growth in part-time work and growing underemployment (especially severe for workers in precarious jobs).

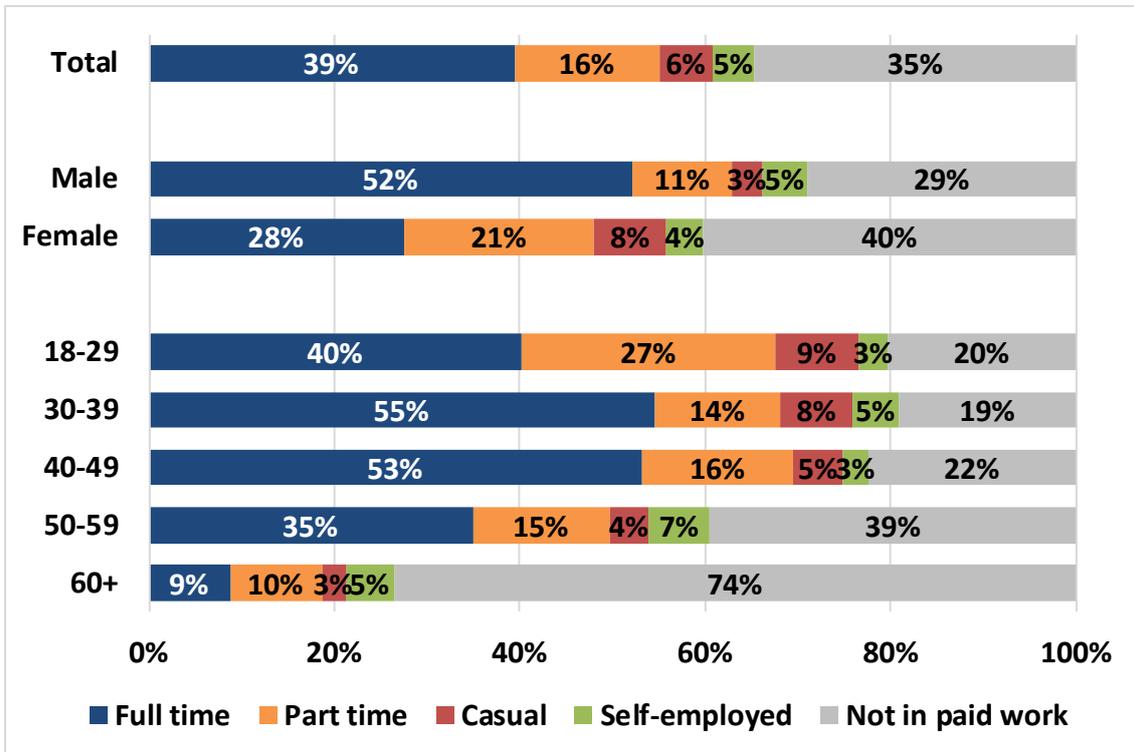
**Figure 3. Billions of Hours Worked Per Month, Australia, Seasonally Adjusted**



Source: ABS (2021b) Labour Force, Australia, September 2021, Table 19

Figure 4 describes employment status by gender and age for our whole sample (including those who reported not being in employment). Women were twice as likely to work in part-time or casual roles (28% of all respondents) than men (14%). Those aged 18-29 were the most likely to be in part-time or casual work (36%), compared to 21% overall. There was a decrease from 2020 in those reporting not being in work at all (from 41% to 35%), representing the modest labour market recovery from mid-2020 to mid-2021.

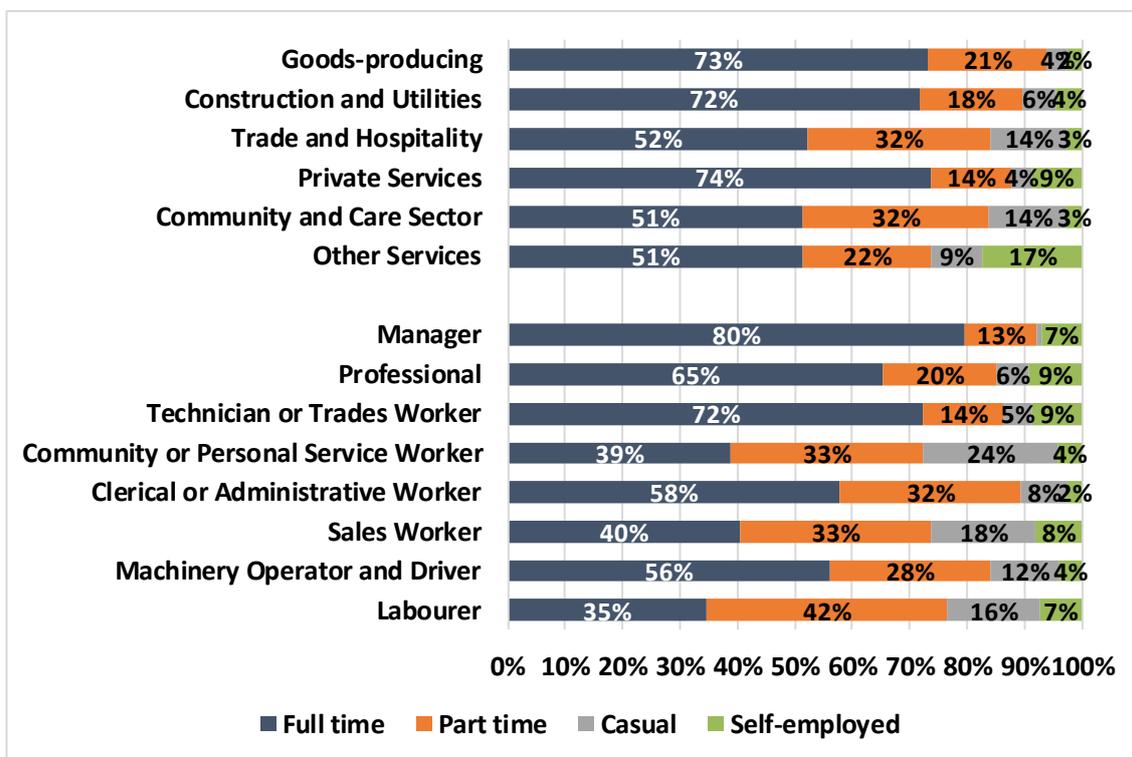
**Figure 4. Employment Status by Gender and Age Cohort, Percentage of All Respondents**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Figure 5 illustrates the breakdown of employment status by industry. There are stark differences in employment status between different sectors of the Australian economy, confirming the worsening polarisation of working conditions across the labour force. One important contributor to this year’s results has been the record rebound in casual employment during the initial economic recovery (Nahum, 2021). Other forms of precarious employment have also grown.

**Figure 5. Employment Status by Industry and Occupation, Percentage of Employed Persons**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Private services (including information media and telecommunications, financial services, professional, scientific and technical services, and administrative services) were the most likely to have workers in permanent full-time work (74%). This was followed by goods-producing industries (mining, manufacturing, and agriculture, at 73%), and construction and utilities (72%).

In contrast, barely half of workers in other industry groupings were employed on a permanent full-time basis. Casual employment accounted for around one-sixth (14%) of survey respondents in the trade and hospitality and community and care sectors.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The officially-recorded share of casual employment among employees across the economy is around one-quarter – higher in trade, hospitality, and community care. Our survey recorded much lower casual employment. One explanation may be that many casual workers don't know they are employed as such, and instead refer to themselves as part-time or full-time. This is understandable given the preponderance of ongoing casual work, often with regular or routine hours. We have critiqued this misuse of casual employment by employers in, for example, Nahum (2021). Our occupation and industry data also includes a small proportion of responses which indicated they did not know their employment status. We have excluded these responses from our analysis.

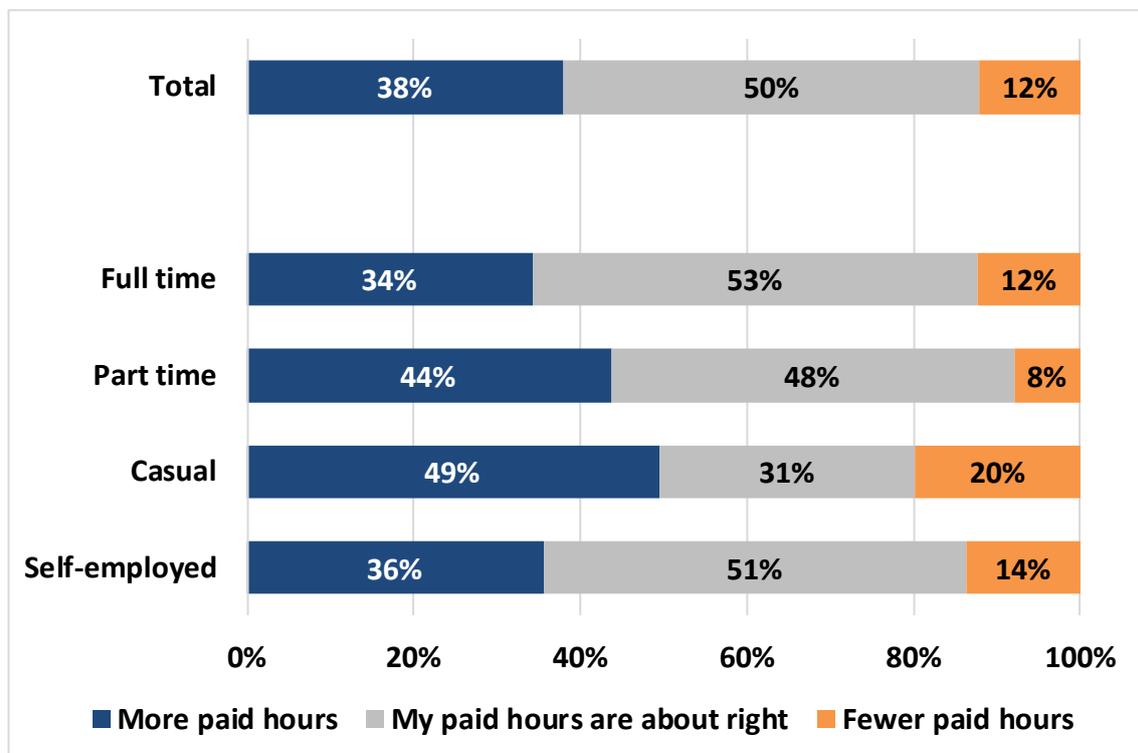
Figure 5 also illustrates differences in employment status across different occupations. Managers, Technicians and Trades Workers, and Professional staff were most likely to be in permanent full-time work (80%, 72% and 65%, respectively), but less than half of Labourers (35%), Community and Personal Service Workers (39%) and Sales Workers (40%) had permanent full-time jobs. Most Labourers (58%), Community and Personal Service Workers (57%), and Sales Workers (52%) were employed in casual or permanent part-time positions.

# Polarisation of Working Hours

Half of all employed workers in our survey indicated their hours of work were ‘about right’. 12% of workers indicated a preference to work fewer paid hours, while over one-third wanted more paid hours (38%).

There were major variations in attitudes toward working hours depending on current working hours and employment status, as illustrated in Figure 6. It is especially notable and concerning that less than half of part-time workers (48%), and less than one-third of casuals (31%), report that their paid hours are ‘about right’. In addition to the half (49%) of casuals that are not receiving as many hours as they would wish, 20% report receiving *too many* – likely because of the risks facing these workers if they turned down shifts (and who may lose future hours, or their entire jobs, as a result). Surprisingly, casual workers are now the cohort most likely to report wanting to work fewer hours. 14% of self-employed workers would also prefer fewer hours, as well as 12% of workers in permanent full-time jobs. Among permanent part-time workers, 44% report wanting to work more hours.

**Figure 6. Hours of Paid Work Preferences, by Work Type**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Meanwhile, full-time and self-employed workers were the only two categories in which a slight majority of workers reported that their paid hours were about right (53% and 51% respectively). Nonetheless, over a third of full-time and self-employed workers indicated they would like to work more hours (34% and 36% respectively), suggesting that even those with relatively more stability and autonomy in their work and income patterns are finding it difficult to make ends meet.

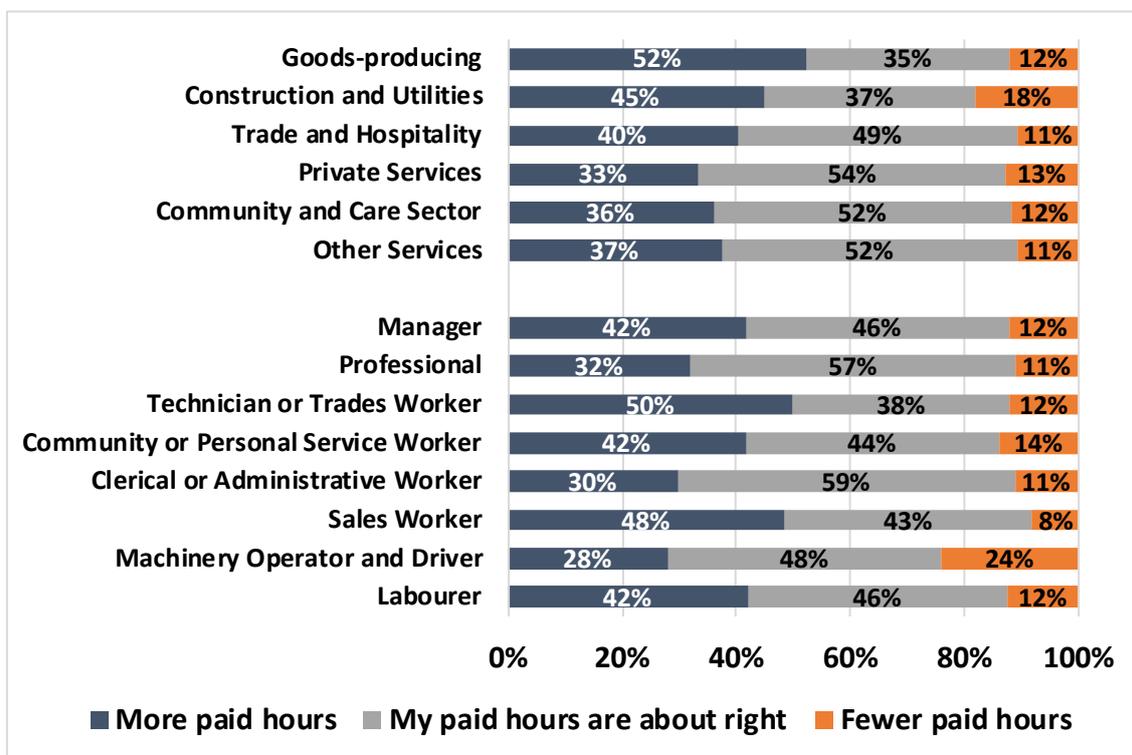
Across the whole labour market, half of all workers are unsatisfied with their working hours – wanting either more or less hours. This confirms that the much-heralded benefits of ‘workplace flexibility’ have not been experienced by workers. Instead, it is employers who have mostly benefited from the expansion of insecure and ‘flexible’ work arrangements, which have given them access to a ‘just-in-time’ workforce: ready to work whenever needed, but easily and costlessly disposed of when not.

These results also reaffirm a continuing polarisation of working hours in Australia’s labour market. Many workers (almost half of those in part-time and casual positions) want more hours of work, while some workers (many of whom are in casual roles, and may risk losing their positions if they turn down shifts) want less. For those who do not receive enough paid hours, the problems of the resulting underemployment are accentuated by the record-low wage growth demonstrated in Australia’s economy in recent years; low wages are particularly common in part-time and casual work.

Indeed, these results suggest far higher rates of underemployment than official measures published by the ABS. Our survey indicates that 38% of workers want more hours of work. That is four times higher than the 9.3% underemployment rate reported by the ABS for the same time period (ABS, 2021, Table 22). This suggests that the official measure is too restrictive in how it defines and measures underemployment. The spread between these two measures of underemployment is even greater for young workers: as detailed below, 48% of workers aged 18-29 in our survey indicated they would like more paid hours, while the ABS Labour Force data indicates that just 16.6% of those aged 15-24 want more hours, and 9.5% of those aged 25-34. Our survey indicates that the problem of involuntary part-time and casual work is much more severe than official statistics imply.

There are substantial differences in attitudes toward working hours across industry and occupation groupings (illustrated in Figure 7). Around half of workers in goods-producing industries (52%), construction and utilities (45%), and 40% in trade and hospitality indicated they wanted to work more hours. But all industry groupings showed that a third or more of workers would prefer more hours.

**Figure 7. Preferences for More or Less Hours of Paid Work by Industry and Occupational Category**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

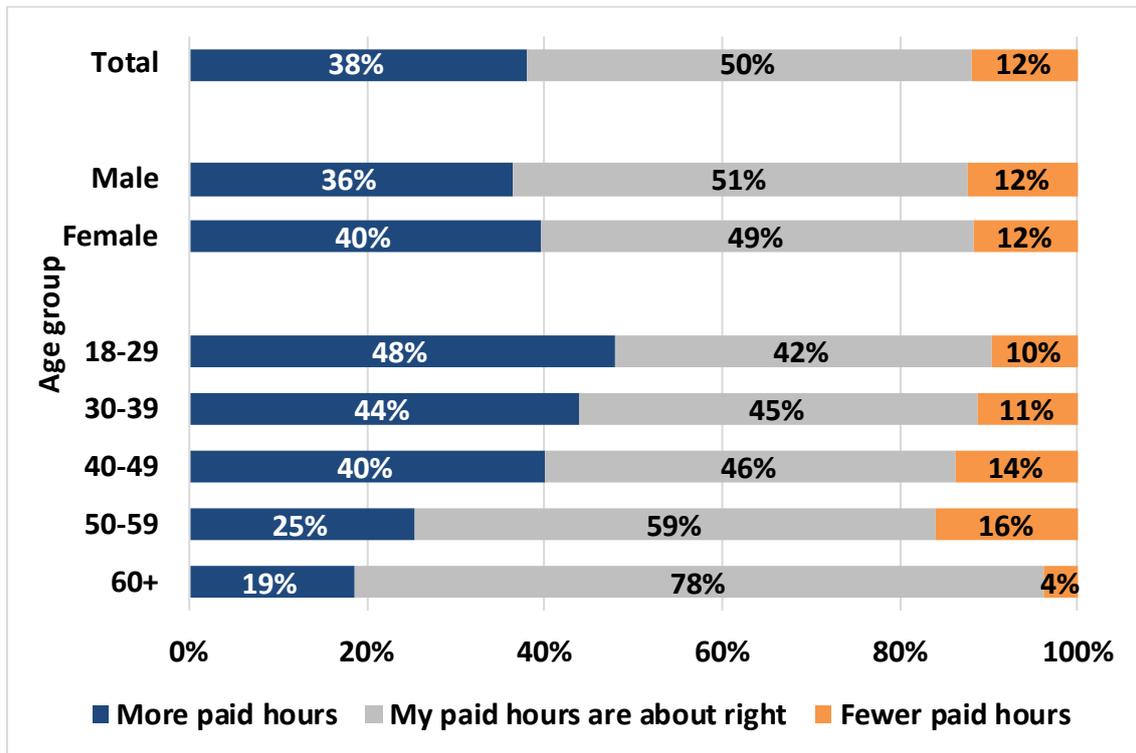
The construction and utilities sector reported the highest proportion of workers seeking fewer paid hours (18%). In other sectors, this proportion ranged between 11% and 13%.

By occupation, half of Technicians and Trades Workers expressed a preference for more hours (50%), followed by Sales Workers (48%). The heavy incidence of part-time and casual work for sales workers helps explain their preference for more hours.

Machinery Operators and Drivers were the least likely occupation grouping to report wanting more hours (28%) – and were most likely to report wanting fewer (24%). These findings are understandable in a year when supply and logistics occupations have experienced extreme pressure from repeated lockdowns and reopenings.

Women are somewhat more likely to prefer more paid hours than men: 36% for men, versus 40% for women (see Figure 8). This is not surprising in light of women’s overrepresentation in part-time and casual jobs, and the decline in working hours experienced in so many casual and part-time jobs over the course of the pandemic.

**Figure 8. Preferences for More or Less Hours of Paid Work by Gender and Age**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Younger workers are much more likely to want more paid hours. Almost half (48%) of workers under 30 would prefer more hours. The desire for more hours declines monotonically with age. Since younger people are much more likely to be in casual and part-time work (where underemployment is especially common), their desire for more hours is not surprising. Workers between 40 and 49 years old, and 50 and 59 years old, were most likely to prefer fewer hours (14% and 16% respectively).

In sum, younger people and those in casual and part-time work express strong preferences for more hours of paid work – and these are overlapping cohorts. A significant proportion of workers, ironically including those in casual employment, reported a desire for shorter working hours. But almost half of casuals and part-time workers would prefer more hours of paid work.

There is a persistent irony that many Australians would prefer to work fewer paid hours, while many would prefer to work more paid hours. The polarisation of working hours reflects the dichotomy in employer strategies between utilising a precarious, ‘just-in-time’ workforce for many jobs (shifting the risk of fluctuations in demand onto the shoulders of part-time, casual, and contingent labour), while demanding very long hours, including large amounts of unpaid overtime, from other workers (once again including many of those employed under casual arrangements). In the context of a

depressed labour market, neither group of workers is able to seek a better quality of employment that simultaneously respects their need for enough hours to earn a living income on the one hand, and their non-work responsibilities – and right to an enjoyable, balanced life – on the other.

This situation will not be resolved until casual employment is relegated to its proper place in the Australian labour market. It should be limited to work that has an intrinsically fluctuating, seasonal or temporary quality – rather than being used endemically throughout the labour market as at present (including many roles where hours of work are stable). The resulting transfer of risk from employers to individual workers is unacceptable, and imposes substantial economic and social costs on workers, their families, and communities. Employers will not resolve this problem of their own accord, or by simply responding to ‘market forces’. High-quality, permanent jobs need be ‘designed into’ our industrial relations system: including through rules limiting the use of casual arrangements, providing more meaningful opportunities for conversion to permanent status, and lifting wages so that workers in casual jobs are not so dependent on the (often illusory) loading factor which, in some jobs, is added to their pay.

In response to the Senate Select Committee on Job Security, the Centre for Future Work (Nahum, 2021) made a series of recommendations, including that governments tangibly commit to a genuine vision of full employment. Governments should directly intervene in the labour market, including through direct, non-precarious employment and preferred procurement from firms that demonstrate adherence to norms of secure employment. Regulators should act to enforce an expanded system of industrial protections for all workers, including a genuine commitment to the rights of workers to collectively bargain. Governments should provide targeted skills programs to those cohorts most liable to be precariously employed.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions has called for a national plan to halve the number of insecure jobs in Australia by 2030, meanwhile expanding non-precarious employment. Their campaign points out that unreliable incomes result in unreliable consumption – so the business sector, and overall economic resilience, benefit from quality employment as well as workers (ACTU, 2021).

While supporting workers in part-time and casual jobs to get more hours, and more regular hours, labour policies also need to support full-time workers in achieving a more desirable and sustainable balance between paid work and the other dimensions of their lives. Many full-time workers want to work fewer hours; redistributing work from them to part-timers would benefit both. Full-timers also need limits on overtime, more ability to turn down overtime, and better access to leave (including annual, long-

service, educational and family leave).<sup>7</sup> In the longer run, reinvigorating the historic effort to reduce standard working hours in full-time jobs is also essential, in order to support better work-life balance, and capture a share of ongoing productivity growth in the form of increased leisure time. This latter motivation is consistent with the overarching need to reduce the environmental footprint of economic activity.

---

<sup>7</sup> Our 2016 *Go Home on Time Day* report found that a significant and growing share of workers in Australia do not have effective access to regular paid annual holidays. Close to one-third of workers do not have access to paid leave, and more than another third did not use all the leave they were entitled to (Henderson, 2016).

# Unpaid Overtime

Survey respondents were asked about the number of hours they worked unpaid for their employer in the past seven days. This could include arriving at work early, staying late, working through breaks (such as tea or lunch breaks), working from home in the evenings and on weekends, taking calls or e-mails out of working hours, and other forms of unpaid labour.

On average, employees reported they had worked 6.13 hours of unpaid work in the last seven days.<sup>8</sup> This was an increase from 5.25 in 2020, which was in turn an increase from 4.62 in 2019. Over the two years of the pandemic, therefore, Australian workers have endured a one-third increase in the average amount of unpaid overtime they perform for their employers.

There are significant differences in the incidence of unpaid overtime across different forms of employment (see Table 2). Unpaid overtime is more severe for full-time workers, who reported an average of 6.91 hours per week. But even among part-time and casual workers, many of whom are anxious to attain more *paid* work (as reported above), unpaid overtime is endemic: 4.55 hours per week for part-time workers, and 5.03 hours per week for casual workers. The rapid growth of unpaid overtime among casual workers (almost doubling from an average of 2.71 hours per week reported last year) suggests that the pandemic has intensified the pressure on workers in insecure positions to accept employers' demands and expectations, no matter how unreasonable.

**Table 2. Unpaid Overtime by Employment Status**

	Full-Time	Part-Time	Casual	Total
<b>Unpaid Overtime per Week 2020</b>	6.91	4.55	5.03	6.13
<b>Share of Paid Hours Worked</b>	18.4%	20.9%	26.6%	19.4%

Source: Survey results as described in text

Significant amounts of unpaid overtime are incurred across all major employment categories. At the macroeconomic level, this unpaid overtime removes purchasing

---

<sup>8</sup> We exclude self-employed workers from these measures of unpaid overtime and 'time theft', given the dual nature of self-employed workers' relationship to their own businesses.

power from the economy, relative to what workers—who are also consumers—would have if they were fully remunerated for their working time. This is especially concerning during a period of labour underutilisation and stagnant wages. In turn, the loss of worker purchasing power exerts negative pressure on businesses. This then reinforces the negative impacts on wages, employment, and purchasing power, in a vicious cycle of economic stagnation.

In this context, governments at all levels have a particular responsibility to ensure their workers are properly compensated for all time worked, and that additional staff are taken on if workloads cannot be reasonably performed within paid hours. This will set a benchmark for better employer practices in the private sector, as well as directly improving working conditions and compensation for workers in the public sector.

On an annualised basis (assuming a steady incidence of unpaid overtime throughout the year), our results suggest an average of 319 hours of unpaid overtime is performed per year per worker across all forms of employment. Based on a standard 38-hour workweek, this is equivalent to more than eight weeks of unpaid work per worker per year. **Extrapolated across Australia’s workforce, this implies total unpaid overtime of 3.3 billion hours per year.**<sup>9</sup>

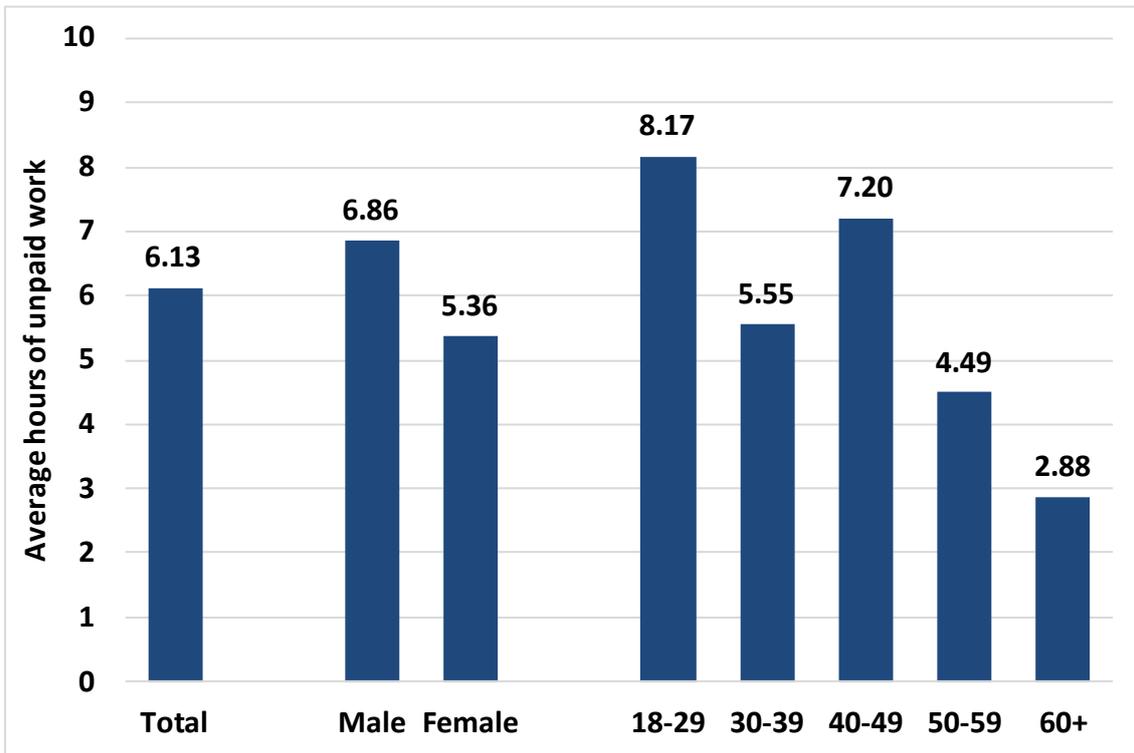
Figure 9 illustrates average unpaid overtime per week by gender and age cohort. Men reported an average of 6.86 hours of unpaid overtime per week, compared to 5.36 hours for women.<sup>10</sup> The youngest cohort, those aged 18-29 (8.17 hours), performed the most unpaid overtime. This cohort would be particularly vulnerable to exploitation at any time, but the weak labour market conditions associated with COVID-19 have exacerbated that trend. We noted above that these are also the workers who most want more hours of (paid) work. These are insecure workers, and under present labour market conditions likely feel too precarious to say ‘no’ to their boss. Younger workers are also concentrated in highly casualised industries rife with time theft, such as hospitality and retail. In these industries, it is commonplace for workers to be required to set up or close up without pay, participate in unpaid ‘training’, and perform other unpaid duties.

---

<sup>9</sup> Excludes self-employed.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, these figures do not include hours of unpaid caring and household work, a disproportionate share of which is performed by women.

Figure 9. Unpaid Overtime by Gender and Age

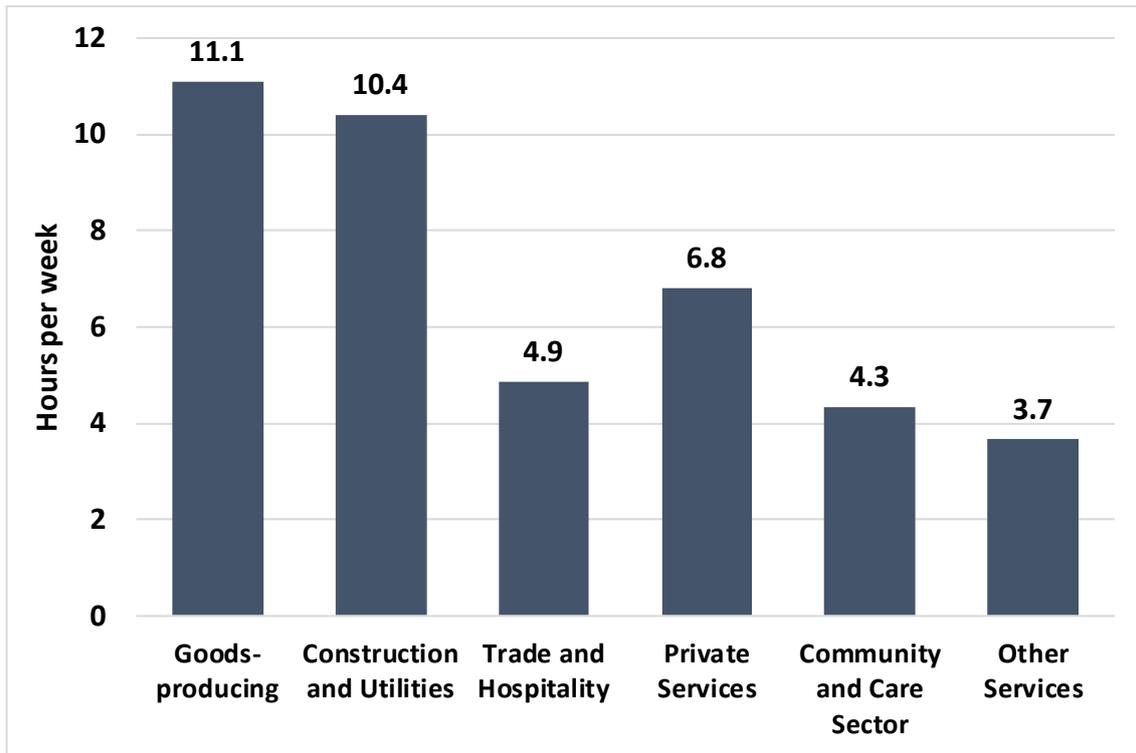


Source: Survey results as described in text.

Figure 10 reports unpaid work by industry grouping. For workers in many industries, unpaid overtime increased substantially this year. Workers in goods-producing industries (agriculture, mining and manufacturing) report an average of 11.1 hours unpaid overtime per week. Workers in construction and utilities worked an average of 10.4 hours per week, and workers in private services<sup>11</sup> worked an average of 6.8 hours per week. Workers in other industries reported working, on average, around four hours of unpaid overtime per week.

<sup>11</sup> Including Information Media and Telecommunications, Financial Services, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services Administrative Services.

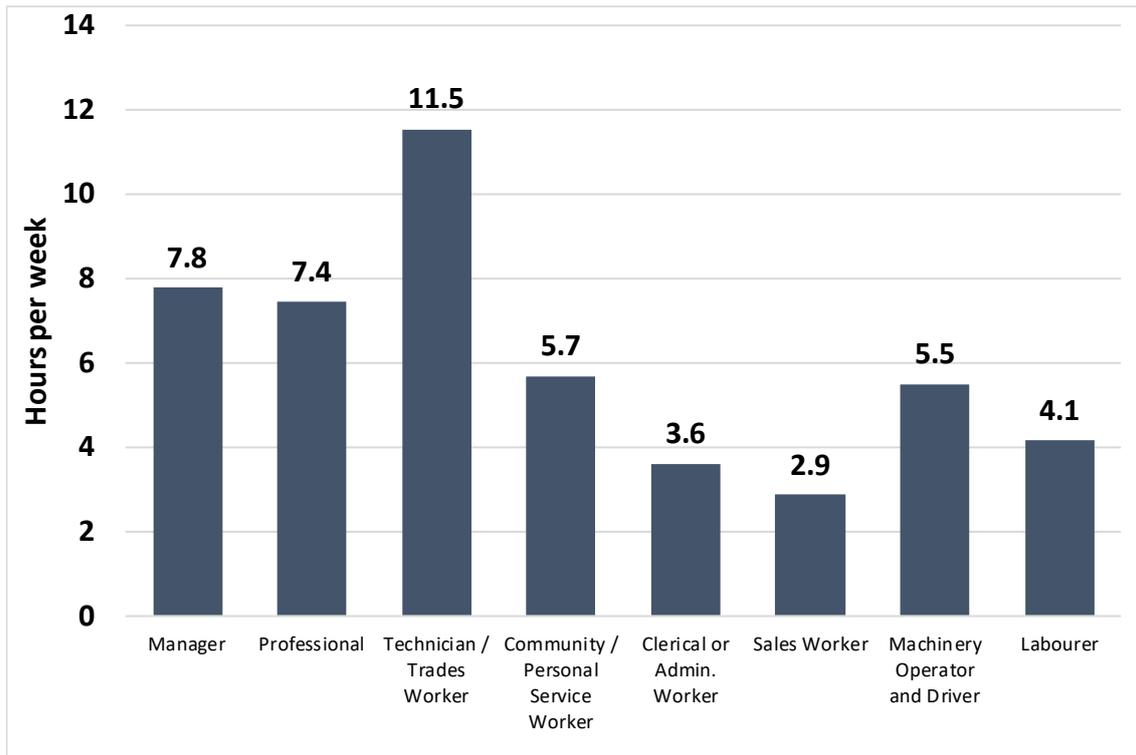
**Figure 10. Unpaid Overtime by Industry**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Figure 11 breaks down average unpaid overtime by occupational category. Technicians and Trades Workers report substantially more unpaid overtime on average than any other occupational grouping (11.5 hours per week). This group is followed by Managers (7.8) and Professionals (7.4).

**Figure 11. Unpaid Overtime by Occupational Category**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Other research confirms that unpaid overtime is a widespread and growing problem in Australia. For example, the human resources firm ADP has reported estimates even more alarming than our own, and notes that in failing to track (and pay for) workers' hours employers could be breaching the law (Elmas, 2021). However, that employers are *able* to underpay workers on such a widespread basis, with little fear of penalty or censure, confirms deep flaws in Australia's industrial relations architecture – which is permitting such widespread time theft to occur without meaningful constraint.

# The Costs of Time Theft

The COVID-19 crisis continues to exacerbate the contradictory pattern of overwork for many workers, inadequate paid hours for other workers, and demands for unpaid overtime imposed on all types of workers. Unpaid overtime also compounds the more general experience of time pressure and the struggle to balance work and non-work lives.<sup>12</sup> The persistence of time theft combined with the ongoing polarisation of the labour market into those workers with too few hours, and those with too many, also underlines the case for a shorter standard working week – accompanied by measures to redistribute work from full-time to non-standard positions.

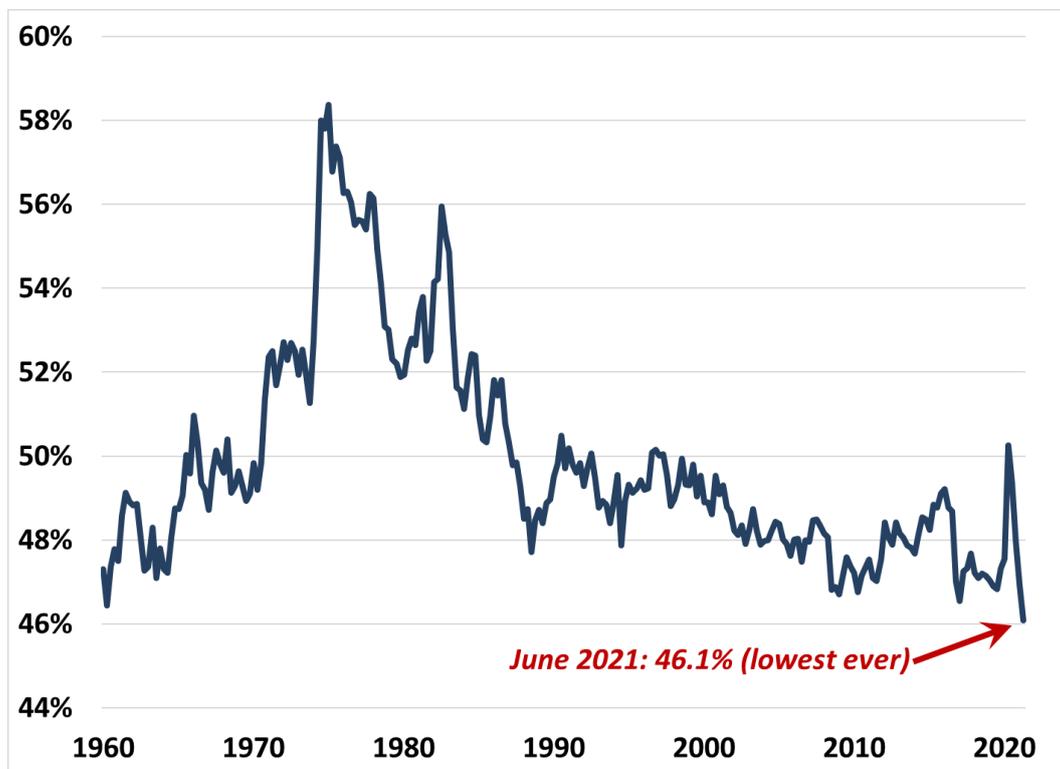
The widespread incidence of unpaid overtime described above means that Australian workers are losing substantial amounts of income. The national economy has not yet recovered from COVID-19 – evidence by ongoing labour underutilisation, persistently sluggish wage growth, and the casualisation of many previously secure jobs. Even before the pandemic, workers' share of national income had fallen to record lows: wages have decreasing dramatically as a proportion of GDP since the 1970s. Now, following the cancellation of JobKeeper wage subsidies and the end of other forms of government income support, the labour share has fallen further.<sup>13</sup> In the most recent quarter (June 2021), it fell to reaching a record low of 46.1% (see Figure 12). That is the lowest labour share of GDP since the ABS began gathering this data – and is a clear indication of the relative weakness of the bargaining power of Australian workers in the workplace. Between increasingly precarious work arrangements as described above; the reversal of workers' share of the economic pie; and the degree to which workers are not being compensated at all for a substantial portion of their labour, it is clear that Australia's industrial relations settings are persistently and dangerously out of touch with the worsening position of workers in the contemporary labour market. Asking individual workers to exercise 'confidence', 'choice' and 'assertiveness' in dealing with their employers on pay and conditions is wishful thinking in the extreme: these are systemic problems, demanding systemic solutions.

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Wade (2018).

<sup>13</sup> Initially the labour share seemed to increase during the pandemic as the result of massive government subsidies in reducing the nominal value of GDP. With the end of those subsidies, nominal GDP has recovered – and the labour share of the pie has fallen to a new low.

**Figure 12. Labour Compensation as a Proportion of Gross Domestic Product, Seasonally Adjusted, Current Prices**



Source: ABS (2021c) Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product, June 2021, Table 7

Table 3 quantifies the aggregate value of unpaid overtime in the overall labour market Australia, by estimating the income that would have been received by workers if their unpaid labour had in fact been compensated. Recall that our survey results indicate that employees perform an average of 6.13 hours of unpaid overtime per week (across all classes of waged employment, but excluding self-employment). This varied from an average of 6.91 hours for full-time workers, to 4.55 hours for part-time employees, and 5.03 for casual workers. As noted earlier, unpaid overtime increased considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is up by one-third since our 2019 survey.

Published ABS data reports the total number of Australian employees working in each category of waged employment. The ABS also reports median hourly earnings for each of those categories of employees. Therefore, we can calculate an estimate of aggregate income lost to workers by the failure of employers to pay for unpaid overtime worked. This calculation assumes that overtime hours would have been paid

at the same rate as average median earnings;<sup>14</sup> for part-time and casual workers we also include a 9.5% margin reflecting the minimum superannuation contributions which should accrue to workers for this time.<sup>15</sup> As indicated in Table 3, this suggests that **unpaid overtime represents a collective loss of some \$124.6 billion in income for Australian workers in 2021.**

To put this figure in perspective, \$124.6 billion is equivalent to over a fifth of projected expenditure (\$589 billion) in the Federal Budget for the financial year 2021-22. It considerably exceeds the Commonwealth’s annual healthcare costs (\$98.3 billion in 2021-22).<sup>16</sup> It is also more each year than the estimated lifetime cost of Australia’s nuclear-powered submarine program (\$100 billion; Wright, 2021).

**Table 3. Aggregate Value of Unpaid Overtime, 2021**

<b>Job Status</b>	<b>Number Employed (million)</b>	<b>Median Wage (\$/hr)</b>	<b>Avg. Unpaid Overtime (hrs/wk)</b>	<b>Total Value (\$billion)<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Permanent Workers</b>				
<i>Full-Time</i>	6.370	\$39.50	6.91	\$90.4
<i>Part-Time</i>	1.777	\$38.33*	4.55	\$16.1
<b>Casual Workers</b>				
<i>Full-Time</i>	0.672	\$30.00	5.03	\$5.3
<i>Part-Time</i>	1.610	\$30.55*	5.03	\$12.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.428</b>	<b>\$36.00</b>	<b>6.13</b>	<b>\$124.6</b>

Source: Authors’ calculations from survey results, ABS (2021b) and ABS (2020), Tables 1c.2 and 1c.3.

Note: \*Includes superannuation contributions for part-time permanent and casual workers.

At a time of economic fragility and uncertain consumer purchasing power and confidence (especially now that government income supports such as JobKeeper and the JobSeeker COVID supplement have been withdrawn), it is especially important that workers are fully compensated for their work—for the sake of the broader economic recovery, as well as for workers and their families.

<sup>14</sup> In practice, most overtime work should incur a higher hourly rate, so this assumption is very conservative.

<sup>15</sup> We do not include superannuation costs for full-time workers, since superannuation contributions are not legally required for genuine overtime income.

<sup>16</sup> See Budget Paper No. 1, Statements 1 and 6, 2021-22.

# COVID-19 and the Balance Between Work and Home Lives

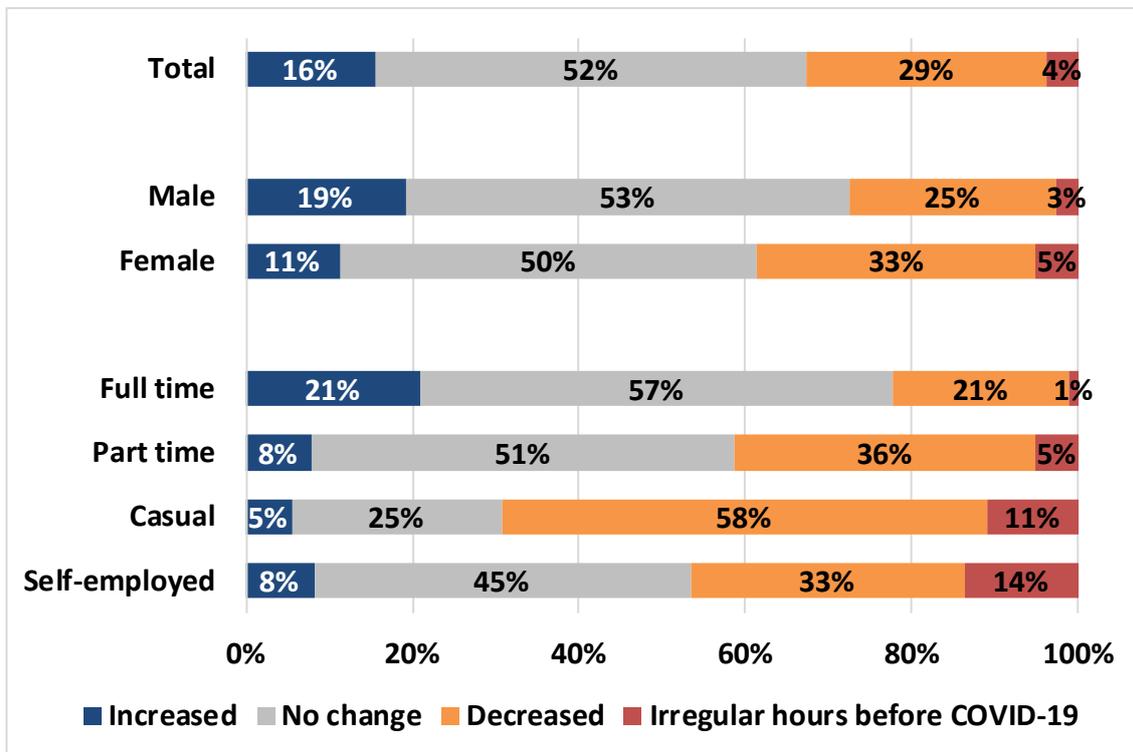
Our results confirm that the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the struggle to balance work and home lives, and the contradictory bifurcation of workers who struggle to find enough hours to make ends meet, and those who report working too many hours. In addition, many people are reassessing their life priorities with regards to the amount of time they spend with loved ones or pursuing leisure activities. It is no coincidence that, globally, this period has seen renewed and heightened interest in a shorter standard working week (e.g. New Economics Foundation, 2021; Lewis and Stronge, 2021).

Overall, 16% of working respondents' hours have increased as a result of COVID-19, 29% have decreased, and for 52% there has been no change. Note that the above results only refer to paid hours, and do not account for the increase in unpaid overtime discussed above. Nor do they account for increases in family and caring responsibilities.

Figure 13 disaggregates these results. More men than women reported increased hours during the pandemic (19% compared to 11%, respectively), while more women than men reported decreased hours (33% compared to 25%, respectively).

There were substantial differences in changes in working hours across employment types: one-fifth (21%) of full-time workers reported experiencing an increase in work hours, while three-fifths (58%) of casuals reported experiencing a decrease. This further confirms that the working population has been bifurcated into a core workforce, upon whom excessive demands are being made, and a just-in-time workforce, who are carrying undue organisational and economic risks, and whose incomes have become more precarious.

**Figure 13. Changes in Hours as a Result of COVID-19, by Gender and Employment Type**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Remarkably, twice the proportion of workers in goods-producing industries reported that their work hours had increased over the course of the crisis (32%) as in the survey sample as a whole, and a smaller proportion reported a decrease in hours (23%). This is doubly surprising when considering that these industries in particular are not among those simplest to transition to home-based work.

By occupation, 27% of Managers reported their work hours had increased during the crisis – substantially more than any other occupational grouping. Meanwhile, in the context of the health and economic impacts, including lockdowns, a number of occupational groupings – specifically those oriented around the physical workspace and/or face-to-face client contact – reported large decreases in working hours. These occupations included Labourers (48%), Technicians and Trades Workers (40%), and Sales Workers (38%).

While almost half of workers reported that their level of family and caring responsibilities had not changed as a result of COVID (47%), a significant share (31%) said their family and/or caring responsibilities had increased during the pandemic. It is notable that five times as many workers reported their caring responsibilities increased, as decreased. These results did not vary greatly across genders, although it

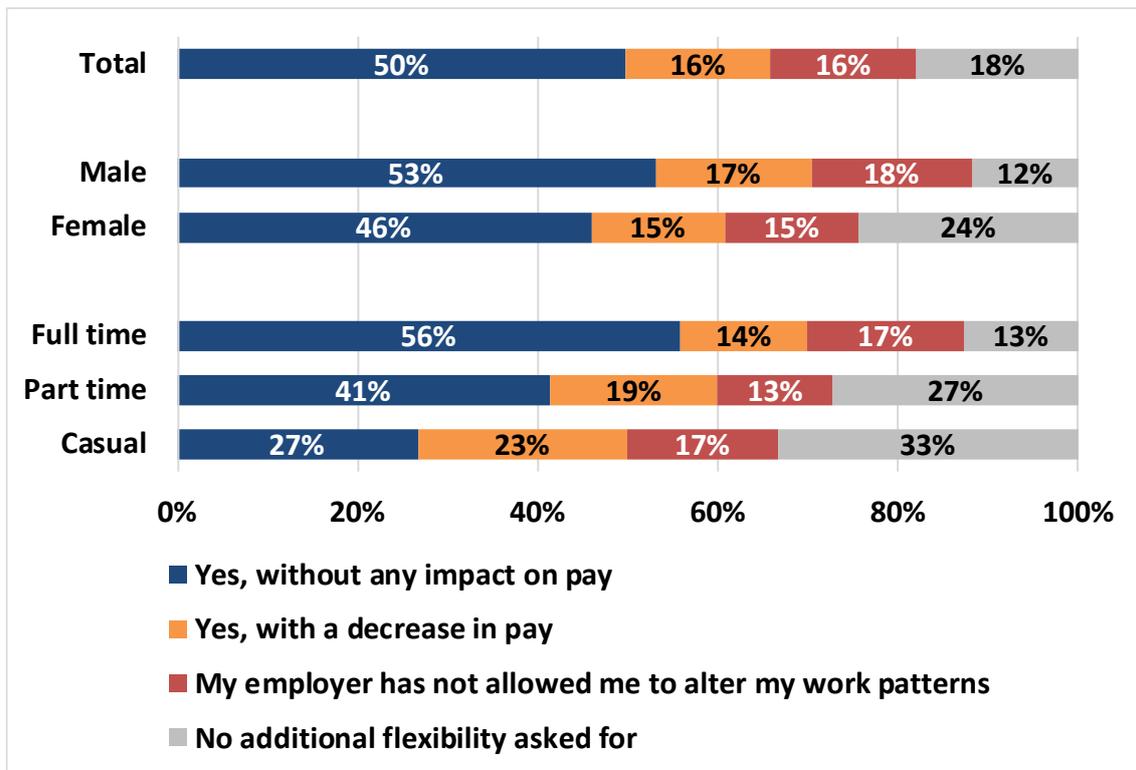
is important to note that other research (e.g. Craig and Churchill, 2020; ABS, 2008) indicates these changes in responsibility across genders began from different baselines: women did the majority of caring work in most households before the pandemic, and they still do.

Our survey asked whether, for those workers with additional caring responsibilities, their employers had made time allowances to account for these responsibilities. 16% of respondents whose employers made time allowances for them reported having lost pay if they were permitted to accommodate caring responsibilities, and another 16% were not permitted to alter their work schedules at all.

A smaller proportion of women than men were able to alter their work patterns without an effect on their pay (46%, compared to 53% for men). Given that women already do most household work, this is further evidence of the unfair and stressful double burden on women.

Over half (56%) of full-time workers whose caring responsibilities had increased as a result of COVID-19 received time allowances from their employers to account for these responsibilities (see Figure 14). This is a considerably higher proportion than in the part-time category (41%), and more than twice as many as in the casual category (27%). Disappointingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, the work type most likely to lose pay to discharge necessary caring responsibilities were casual workers (23%).

**Figure 14. Workers Whose Employers Made Time Allowances for Additional Caring Responsibilities, by Gender and Employment Type**

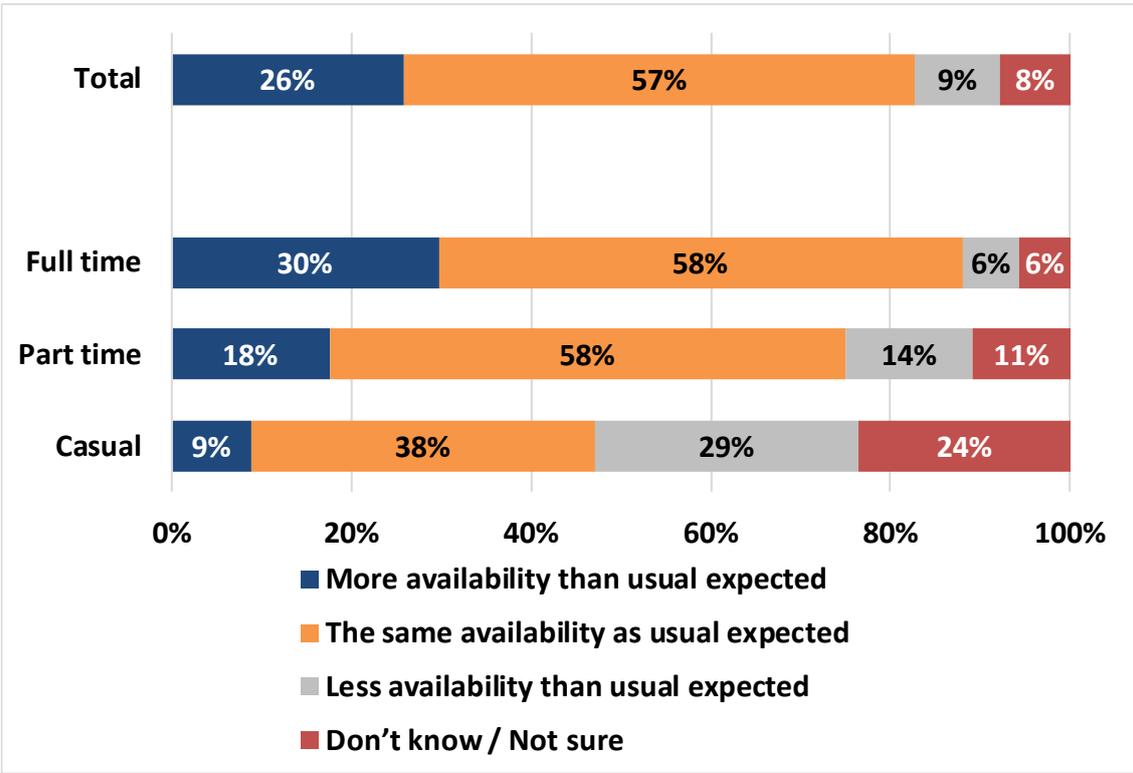


Source: Survey results as described in text.

These results confirm that more secure, better paid, more autonomous work allows workers to better adapt their schedules around caring responsibilities, without incurring a loss of working hours or pay.

Separately, one in four (26%) of those working from home indicated that their employers' expectations of their availability had increased during the COVID-19 crisis—almost three times as many as reported that their expectations of availability had decreased (9%). Full-time workers indicated they were most likely to face increased employer expectations of availability, compared with other employment types (30%; see Figure 15). These additional expectations are, of course, on top of the expanded caring responsibilities that many households experienced as a result of the COVID-19 crisis (discussed above).

**Figure 15. Employers' Expectations of Availability, by Employment Type, Percentage of Workers**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

# Working From Home: What's Happening Now, and What Happens Next

COVID-19 will affect our lives, in various ways, for some years to come. The emergence of new, highly transmissible variants produced further lockdowns across much of Australia in 2021, with corresponding effects on employment and working arrangements. While Australians are hopeful that the worst is past, the uncertain trajectory of the pandemic confirms that this unprecedented health, economic, and social challenge is not over yet.

In this section, we consider the potential dimensions of ongoing adaptations to the pandemic and its aftermath. Will we continue working from home more than before the pandemic, even when the danger of contagion is less acute? Or will Australian employers press workers to return to the traditional workplace, restoring pre-pandemic working arrangements?

Some commentators (e.g. Productivity Commission, 2021) characterise working from home arrangements as the outcome of a good-faith negotiation between parties of equal bargaining power – employers and workers – catalysed by COVID-19. Our evidence suggests a far more mixed picture, in which working from home presents benefits and risks for workers, and decisions are often dictated by employers, not negotiated with workers. Active support from labour laws, unions, and regulators will be required if the benefits of home work are to prevail over the costs, and to ensure that workers have a fair say in how work arrangements continue to evolve after COVID.<sup>17</sup>

Previous research has indicated that workers with more autonomy and independence, and who perform much or all of their work on a computer, had much more ability to shift the location of their work – including working from home.<sup>18</sup> This largely overlaps with relatively well-paid professional and managerial categories of work. (Some lower-

---

<sup>17</sup> The Productivity Commission (2021) notes that the 2023 review of Australia's work health and safety laws will offer an opportunity to ensure that they remain fit for purpose in the context of the trend towards home-based work.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Pennington and Stanford (2020).

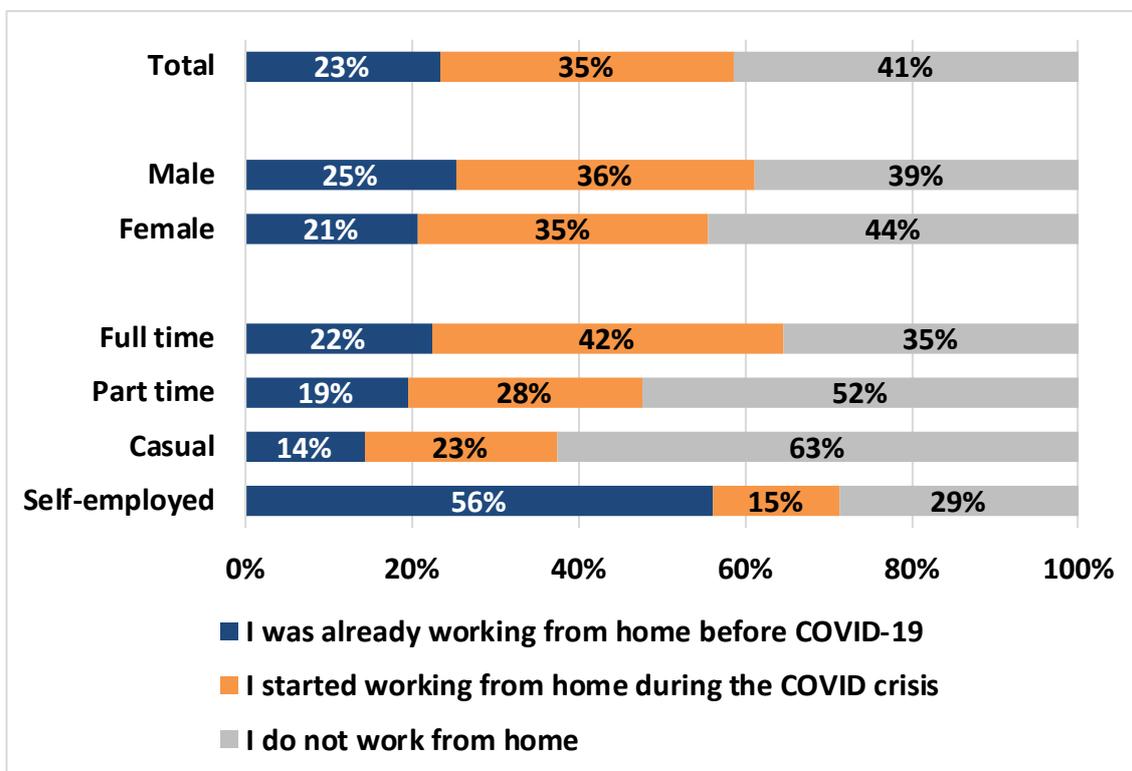
paid positions—such as many clerical and administration jobs—can also be performed from home.)

Our survey results confirm that finding. In August (when the survey was conducted), over half (59%) of respondents were performing some or all of their work from home (61% of men; 56% of women). 35% indicated that the shift to home work had arisen during the COVID-19 crisis, but 23% indicated they were already doing at least some work from home prior to the pandemic.

Notably, employment arrangements were a strong predictor of working from home, with only a minority of casual employees working from home either prior to (14%), or as a result of, COVID-19 (23%). The majority of part-time and casual employees had not worked from home at any point in the crisis (52% and 63%, respectively). In contrast, a full 42% of full-time employees pivoted to home-based work as a result of COVID-19 – in addition to more than one-fifth (22%) who already were working from home when the pandemic hit. In general, workers with the most secure and lucrative employment have also been most insulated by their working arrangements from the health effects of the crisis.

These results are summarised in Figure 16.

**Figure 16. Percentage of Workers Doing Home-based Work, by Gender and Employment Type**



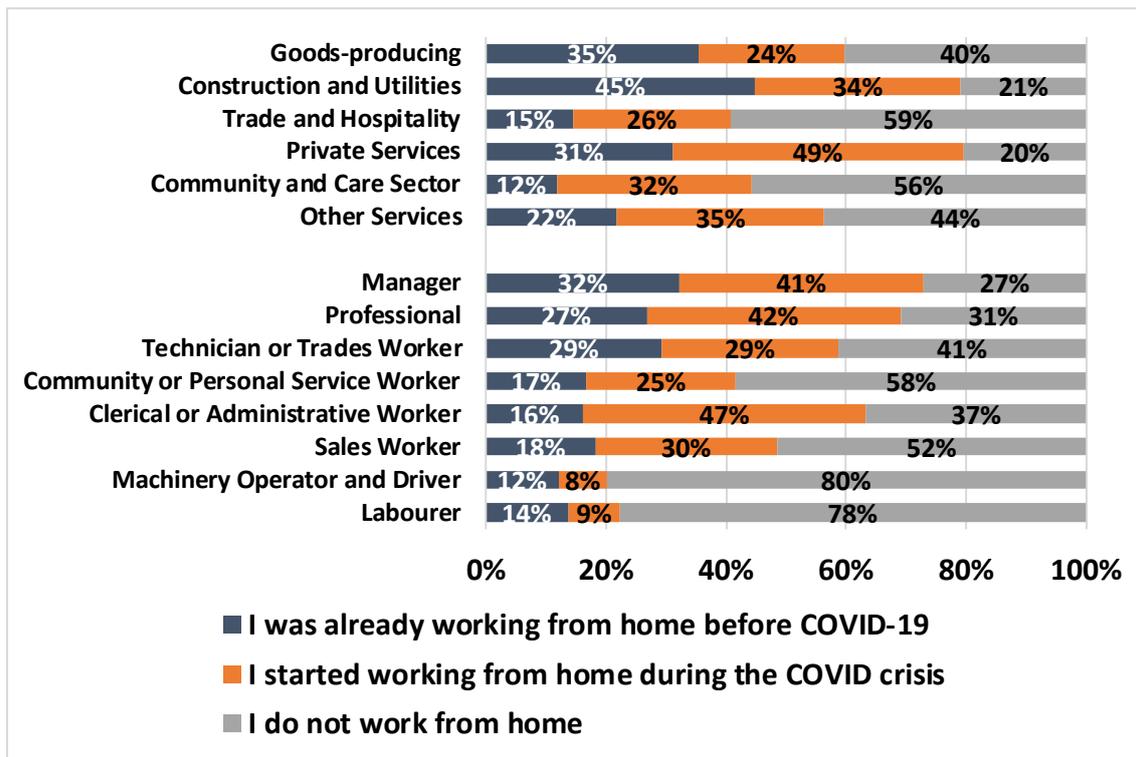
Source: Survey results as described in text.

Figure 17 examines the incidence of home work by industry and occupation. White-collar workers were not only most able to undertake work from home, but were most likely to have been working from home prior to the pandemic. They will also be most likely to retain this possibility into the future. A clear majority of Managers (73%), Professionals (69%) and Clerical and Administrative Workers (63%) indicated they had either shifted to home work arrangements or had already been utilising them.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, four-fifths of Machinery Operators and Drivers (80%) and Labourers (78%) indicated that they had not worked from home at all – unsurprising given these occupations’ close relationship with defined workplaces and physical tasks.

Among industry categories, trade and hospitality and the community and care sector—in both of which hands-on human service is inherent to work—were the only industry groupings in which a majority of workers indicated they had done no work from home during the crisis (59% and 56%, respectively).

<sup>19</sup> These findings are borne out in overseas evidence as well – see for example Statistics Canada (2021).

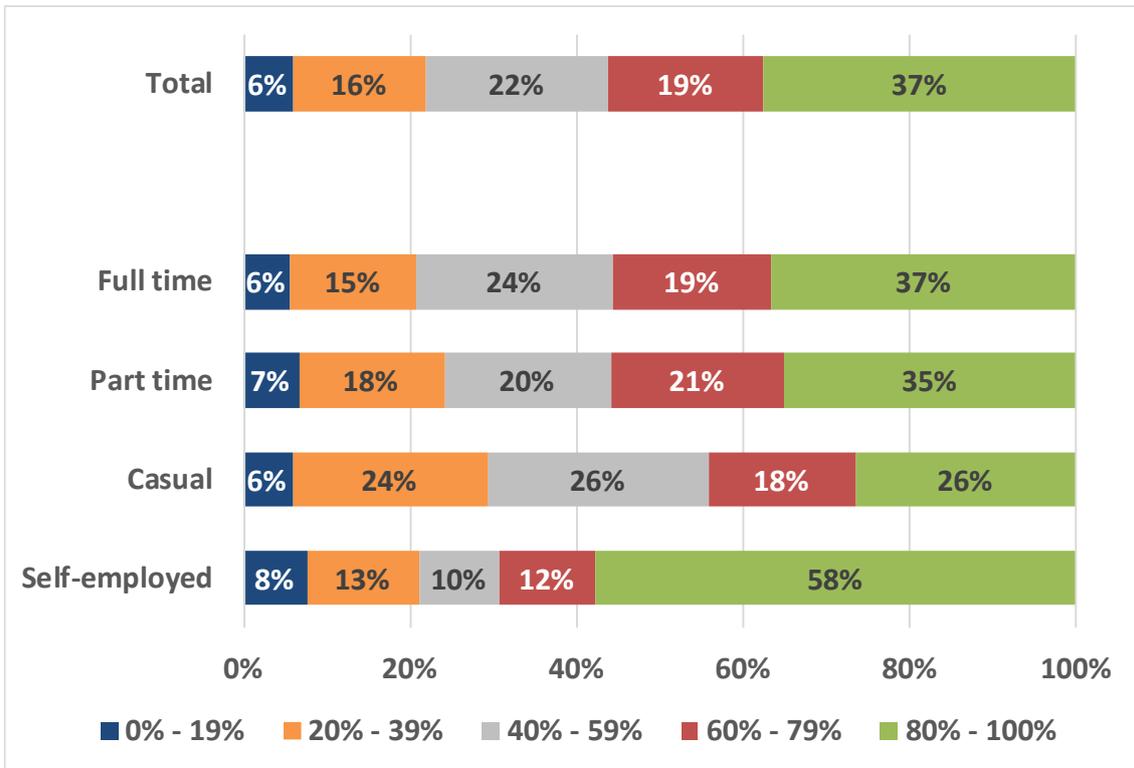
**Figure 17. Workers Doing Home-based Work, by Industry and Occupation**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

Among those who performed at least some work from home over the course of the crisis, we also asked about the amount of work they did at home. These results are shown in Figure 18. Even amongst those evidently able to undertake work from home, workers with more autonomy and security have been more able to take advantage of these arrangements. 58% of self-employed workers, 37% of full-time workers, and 35% of part-time workers were able to perform almost all of their work (80%-100%) from home. Among casual workers, only a quarter (26%) were able—or permitted—to do almost all of their work from home. Meanwhile, three in ten (30%) of casuals who did some work from home, reported it accounted for less than 40% of their total work. Workers in casual jobs were thus both more exposed to COVID-19 by being less able to work from home, but also more financially vulnerable to resulting losses of work and hours.

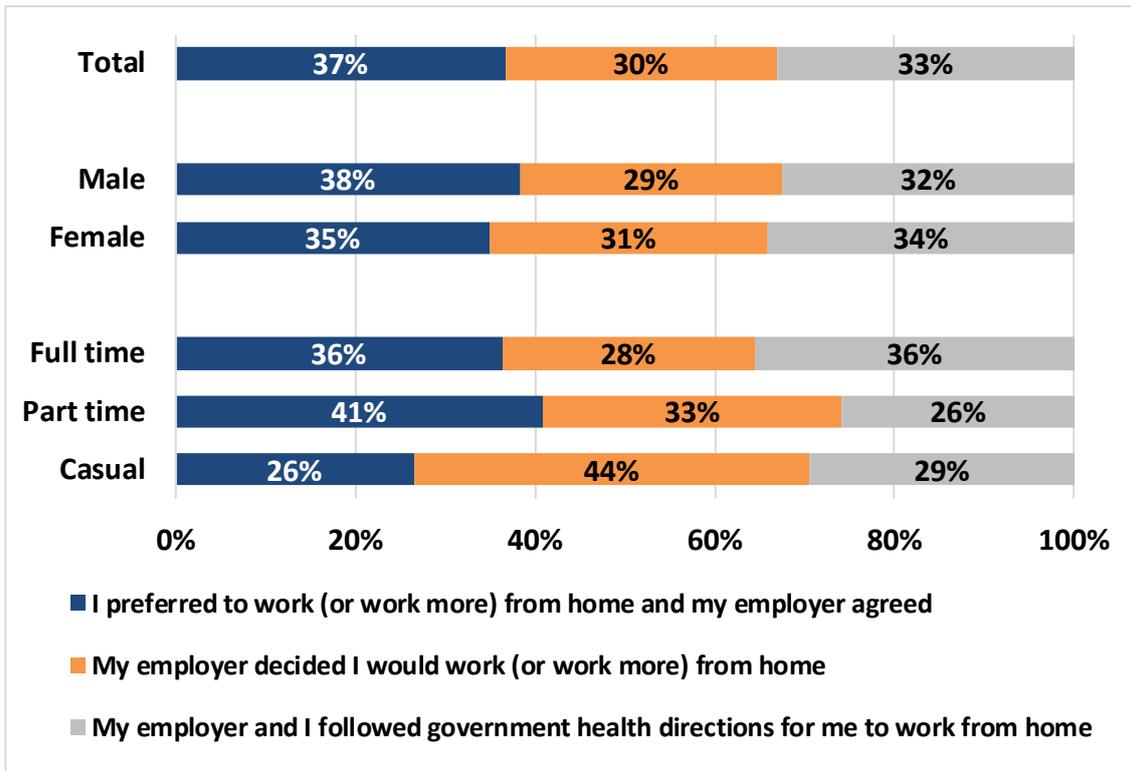
**Figure 18. Percentage of Work Done From Home, Workers Doing Home-based Work, by Employment Type**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

The reduced autonomy of workers in casual and insecure jobs is also visible with regard to *who* decided that workers would undertake work from home (see Figure 19). Overall, 37% of workers reported they had decided to work from home and sought the agreement of their employer; another 33% indicated that they had followed government health directions in doing so. In contrast, only 26% of casuals working from home indicated it was them who made the decision to do so.

**Figure 19. People Working From Home, by Decision Maker and Employment Type**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

A greater proportion of workers who reported being a member of a union were doing at least some work from home prior to the crisis (40%, compared to 17% for non-union members). We also note that 53% of union members reported they had made the decision to work from home (with their employer agreeing), as opposed to 31% amongst non-members. If the opportunity to work from home is reinforced by stronger negotiating power on the part of workers, then union membership increases that power to collectively demand access to work at home.

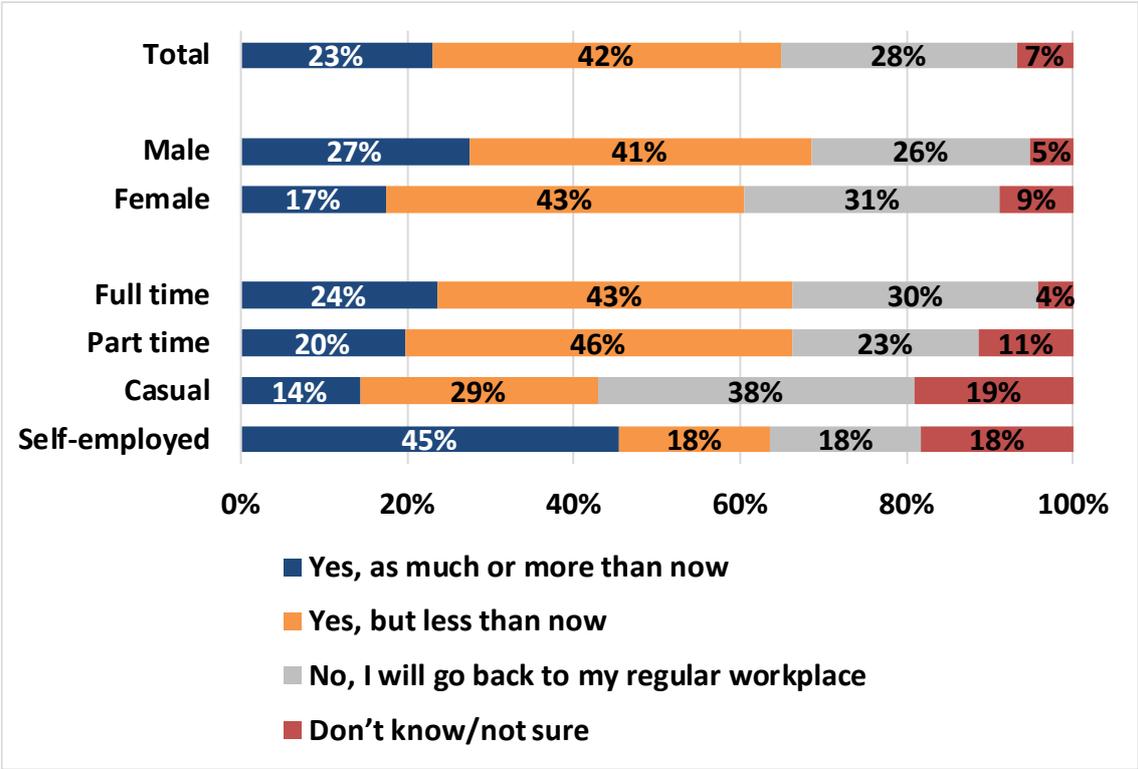
While working from home allows workers to reduce risk of COVID contagion, and also increased the likelihood they could keep their job, work-from-home arrangements also pose challenges in limiting the time and intrusions that occur as a result of home also being a workplace. It becomes harder for workers to sign off from work, and maintain a healthy separation between work and the rest of their lives. Our survey results confirm that this challenge was real. Of respondents working at home, 62% performed some of it during non-work time. This constitutes strong evidence that work responsibilities are extending into personal time, causing additional stress on work-life balance. And among those who reported that their family and caring responsibilities had increased during the COVID-19 crisis, the proportion of home-based workers

working outside of normal work hours was 72% (compared to 54% for those whose family and caring responsibilities had remained the same).

The cultural shift to home-based work is becoming significantly more embedded amongst workers. Figures 20 and 21 illustrate the responses to a paired set of questions: first, whether workers *think* they will keep working from home after the crisis dissipates, and second, whether they *want* to do so. Overall, more workers want to keep working from home (71%) than believe they will be permitted to (65%). Most of this difference reflects workers who want to continue working from home as much or more than in the crisis. There is one important gender difference in the responses to these twin questions: over seven out of ten of both men (72%) and women (71%) currently working from home want to keep doing so after the crisis, but substantially more men believe that they *will* get to do so (69%, as compared to 60% for women). Where disagreement exists between employers and workers about the continuation of work-from-home arrangements, it seems likely that employers in most cases will get their way: only 5% of employees indicated that they would respond by quitting their job if they are directed to return to their traditional, on-site workplace. Combined with the general insecurity facing many workers, this suggests that employers will be largely able to dictate return-to-work timetables without worrying about their ability to retain staff.

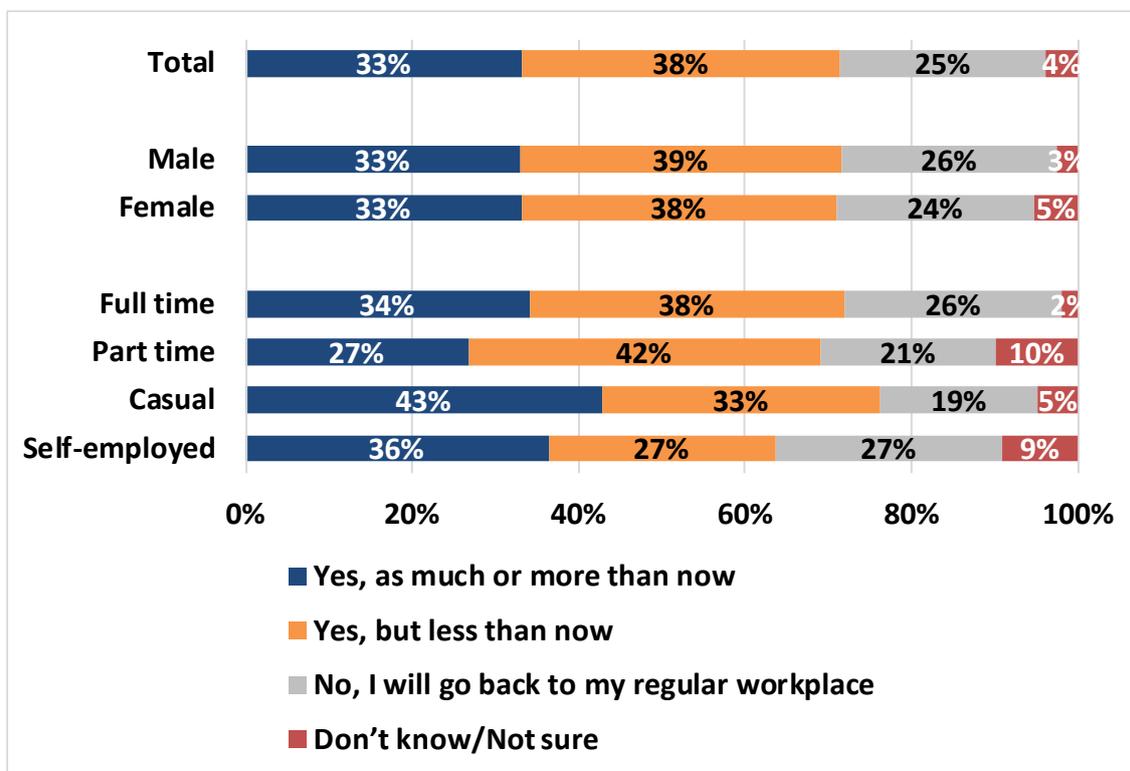
Meanwhile, most home-based workers in casual positions would *like* to keep working from home (76%). But only 43% expect that they will be able to do so. For this segment of workers in particular, the reality of working life does not accord with their hopes and wishes.

**Figure 20. Workers Doing Home-based Work, by Whether They Expect That They Will Continue to Work From Home Following COVID-19**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

**Figure 21. Workers Doing Home-based Work, by Whether They Want to Continue to Work From Home Following COVID-19**



Source: Survey results as described in text.

At the time of our survey, less than half of those working from home reported that their employers had consulted with them about returning to their usual, on-site work location (45%). This was substantially lower amongst casual workers (29%). However, it was higher amongst union members (60%, as opposed to 43% among non-members): more evidence of the right to consultation being reinforced by union representation and collective bargaining.

Clearly COVID-19 is causing deep changes in Australian management and workplace culture. Many workers and organisations have become more open to the idea of working from home, even after the acute threat of COVID-19 is behind us. In that case, staff must be adequately supported to work from home: on matters such as compensation for work-from home expenses (equipment, work space, utilities bills); ensuring safe working conditions at home; a clear separation of workers’ home and work lives (such as a legally guaranteed “right to disconnect” outside of working hours); the right to standard and predictable working hours; the right to overtime pay when overtime occurs (and the right to refuse overtime when workers prefer not to);

and legally-guaranteed freedoms from electronic monitoring and surveillance (discussed in further detail in the next section).<sup>20</sup>

Most workers, of course, have not been working from home, and/or will not be allowed to continue working from home. These workers also need continued and renewed protections as the world of work readjusts after the pandemic. They need assurances of safe practices at work (including continued distancing, mask-wearing where appropriate, and other COVID protocols). Strong testing, tracing and isolation practices are needed to reduce the risk of future workplace contagion, including income supports for workers forced to stay home from work by outbreaks or exposure. Many of Australia's most vulnerable and underpaid workers were never able to work from home. They have borne an undue share of the risk and costs of COVID-19, and enhancing their health and economic security as Australia emerges from the pandemic should be a top priority of labour policy.

---

<sup>20</sup> These policy responses are further considered in Pennington and Stanford (2020).

# Workplace Surveillance

Monitoring and surveillance of workers by employers has always been an integral aspect of the waged employment relationship. In waged labour, employers generally hire in units of time: a certain payment per hour, per day, or per fortnight. But employers want something different: productive expended labour effort by those workers. The distinction between what employers are paying for, and what they want, gives rise to an ongoing preoccupation with converting time into expended effort (Nahum & Stanford, 2020; Henderson, Swann and Stanford, 2018).

One way in which employers have reacted to the increased incidence of working offsite during COVID-19 is the introduction, or increased use, of various digital surveillance techniques. Many forms of this surveillance were already in place prior to the pandemic – such as systems which automatically monitor web, email, social media, and text activity. Others have become more significantly widespread during the pandemic, such as software that photographs workers at regular intervals via their computer-mounted webcam and transmits them to their employer (Milne, 2021). Yet other strategies involve the application of dedicated surveillance systems such as GPS (sometimes built into phone apps) and closed-circuit video equipment.

These methods intensify time pressure, pose risks to privacy (including at home), are demeaning and stressful (posing risks to mental health), and their net effects on productivity are questionable. Arguably, the use of these techniques seems to primarily reflect employers' desire to maintain control and discipline despite the changed working conditions of the past two years.

Of those survey respondents working from home, two-fifths (39%) indicated that their employers were remotely monitoring their activity. A further 17% indicated they were unsure whether they were being electronically monitored or not.

Those survey respondents who indicated that they were being electronically monitored, were then asked what forms of monitoring they were subject to.<sup>21</sup> The most common form of monitoring was regular email reports of their activities to employers (reported by 48% of respondents), monitoring of attendance through logging on and off (47%), monitoring email content (36%), webcams (34%), and keystroke counters monitoring the speed and content of computer use (30%).

---

<sup>21</sup> Responses were non-exclusive, so individual respondents could choose more than one option.

Results from this question are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Workers Who Experience Remote Surveillance by Employers, by Technique**

Monitoring technique	Percentage of respondents <sup>1</sup>
Regular email reports	48%
Monitoring of attendance through logging on/off	47%
Monitoring email content	36%
Webcam	34%
Keystroke counters or other productivity monitors (what you type, or how fast you type, or click)	30%
Monitoring web browsing	26%
Location tracking (for example, in a work phone or tracking app on your phone)	23%
Monitoring social media activity	16%
Monitoring telephone calls, including response speed as well as content	11%
Other	2%
Source: Survey results as described in text.	
1. As proportion of workers working from home.	

It is clear that digital monitoring technologies have advanced well ahead of the laws governing them. Australia’s patchwork system of privacy and workplace laws has, to date, provided only minimal protection to Australian workers against excessive and invasive monitoring and surveillance. In general, email monitoring by employers is expressly excluded from privacy protections. At the state and territory level, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory are the only jurisdictions which have passed legislation explicitly regulating electronic monitoring and surveillance of employees.

If unconstrained by labour laws, privacy laws, and social pressure, employers may continue expanding their use of surveillance technology to unduly intensify the production process (Nahum & Stanford, 2020). Prohibiting abusive and intrusive forms of monitoring and surveillance, and protecting due process (including right to notice, representation, progressive discipline, and protection against unfair dismissal) should be priorities for legislative and regulatory reform in this area.

At a minimum, employers must be required to negotiate with workers regarding the use of electronic monitoring and surveillance through collective bargaining processes. Strong employment security provisions in labour law or collective agreements are also required to limit the ability of employers to sanction or discharge workers on the basis

of digital monitoring. Workers' privacy must be protected through limits on the location and times of workplace monitoring. Workers must not be subject to digital or electronic monitoring practices at all outside of working hours. And digital activities while off the job (such as social media posts) should not be subject to punishment and sanction from employers.

# Conclusion

This thirteenth annual *Go Home On Time Day* report has demonstrated that despite major, possibly durable changes in the way many Australians are performing their work, the problem of unpaid overtime continues to worsen. The blurring of lines between home and work lives, and the additional caring responsibilities that have accompanied the COVID-19 crisis, have increasingly pushed work into non-work hours. This 'double burden' is especially severe for women.

On average, Australians in waged employment worked 6.13 hours of unpaid overtime for their employers each week, up from 5.25 in 2020. This equates to 319 hours per year, or 3.3 billion hours of stolen time in cumulative terms. This is distressing and damaging for workers, their families, and their communities. Australia's labour market and economy have yet to recover from the pandemic; weakness in consumer spending and aggregate demand is not helped by the \$125 billion per year in income lost as a result of unpaid overtime. Indeed, the business sector itself has a stake in improving the spending power of workers so that wages can cycle back through the consumer economy.

Australian workers need stronger protections from exploitation regardless of their work situation: wage theft, too few or too many hours, job precarity and income insecurity are all preventable consequences of policy choices that have favoured employers over workers, and allowed work to invade the non-work portions of our lives. The polarisation of working time suggests Australia is overdue for a reappraisal of standard working hours. Regulators must take seriously the bleed of work into non-work time, especially in the context of home-based work, and implement an enforceable 'right to disconnect'. Workers should be given as much say as is practicable through enterprise bargaining as to the location of work: continuing to work from home, or returning to their traditional workplaces. And finally, regulators must also protect the dignity and privacy of workers in the face of invasive electronic management methods.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession have imposed unprecedented uncertainty and hardship on Australians. Workers, unions, and governments have all taken extraordinary steps to help our communities through the crisis. Being open to new ways of working (including working from home, as well as making important changes in traditional workplaces) has helped our economy and society survive the pandemic without even more hardship. However, those adjustments also created new pressures and challenges – such as more intense challenges of balancing work and life

in work-from-home settings. And the pandemic also exacerbated pre-existing problems, too: such as the contrast between workers in relatively secure, permanent jobs (many of whom would prefer to work fewer hours) and those in insecure or casual jobs (most of whom need more). This report has documented the continuing struggle of Australian workers to put limits on their jobs, and defend the time, security, and autonomy they need to make the most of their lives (not just their work lives). By exercising their collective voice, and advocating for changes in both employers' practices and government policies, workers can win a better balance between work and life, long after COVID-19 has passed.

# Appendix A - Survey Questions

**Q: Are you currently in paid work?**

Yes, full time  
Yes, part time  
Yes, casual  
Yes, self-employed  
No

**Q: What best describes the industry you work in?**

Goods-producing (including Agriculture, Mining and Manufacturing)  
Construction and Utilities (including Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services)  
Trade and Hospitality (including Wholesale and Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, and Transport, Postal and Warehousing)  
Private Services (including Information Media and Telecommunications, Financial Services, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services Administrative Services)  
Community Sector (including Public Administration and Safety, Education and Training, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Arts and Recreation Services)  
Other Services  
Don't know / Not sure

**Q: Which of the following best describes the kind of work you do?**

Manager  
Professional  
Technician or Trades Worker  
Community or Personal Service Worker  
Clerical or Administrative Worker  
Sales Worker  
Machinery Operator and Driver  
Labourer  
Don't know / Not sure

**Q: Are you a member of a union?**

Yes  
No  
Don't know / Not sure

**Q: How many hours a week are you generally paid to work?**

Open answer: \_\_\_ hours

**Q: Would you like to work....?**

More paid hours

Fewer paid hours

My paid hours are about right

**Q: Unpaid work may include things like arriving early, staying late, working through lunch or breaks, working at home beyond paid hours, and so on. How many unpaid hours of work did you perform for your employer in the last 7 days (i.e. unpaid overtime)?**

Open answer: \_\_\_ hours

**Q: Have your family/caring responsibilities increased or decreased because of COVID-19?**

Increased

Stayed the same

Decreased

I don't have family/caring responsibilities

Don't know/Not sure

**Q: Has your employer allowed you to alter your work patterns to account for this extra caring responsibility?**

Yes, without any impact to my pay

Yes, with a decrease to my pay

No, my employer has not allowed me to alter my work patterns

I haven't asked for additional flexibility

**Q: Have your work hours changed because of the COVID-19 crisis?**

Increased

Decreased

No change

I did not have regular hours before COVID-19

**Q: Is your pay, not including government supplements, now higher or lower than before the COVID-19 crisis?**

Higher

Lower

No change

I did not have regular pay before COVID-19

**Q: Is your pay, including government supplements such as the COVID-19 disaster payment, now higher or lower than before the COVID-19 crisis?**

Higher

Lower

No change

I did not have regular pay before COVID-19

**Q: During the COVID-19 crisis, many workers have chosen, or been requested by their employers to do what would normally be work conducted on-site from home. Have you performed work at home during any part of the COVID-19 crisis?**

Yes, though I was already working from home before COVID-19

Yes, I started working from home during the COVID crisis

No, I do not work from home

**Q: What percentage of your work has been undertaken from home over the course of the COVID-19 crisis?**

0% - 19%

20% - 39%

40% - 59%

60% - 79%

80% - 100%

**Q: Who decided you would work from home?**

I preferred to work (or work more) from home and my employer agreed

My employer decided I would work (or work more) from home

My employer and I followed government health directions for me to work from home

**Q: As a result of working from home due to COVID-19, have you performed work tasks during what would usually be non-work hours?**

Yes

No

**Q: Have your employer's expectations regarding your availability changed during the COVID-19 crisis?**

More available than usual expected

No more available than usual expected

Less availability than usual expected

Don't know / Not sure

**Q: In some cases, employers remotely monitor the activities of staff who are working offsite (including people working from their homes). Which of the following best describes the situation in your current workplace?**

My employer remotely monitors my workplace activity

My employer does not remotely monitor my workplace activity

I don't know if my employer remotely monitors my workplace activity

**Q: To the best of your knowledge, does your workplace use any of the following forms of electronic or digital monitoring of employees?** *[Note: multiple responses to this question were possible]*

Webcam

Regular email reports

Monitoring of attendance through logging on/off

Keystroke counters or other productivity monitors (what you type, or how fast you type, or click)

Location tracking (for example, in a work phone or tracking app on your phone)

Monitoring email content

Monitoring web browsing

Monitoring social media activity

Monitoring telephone calls, including response speed as well as content

Other

**Q: Do you think you will keep working from home after the COVID-19 crisis?**

Yes, as much or more than now

Yes, but less than now

No, I will go back to my regular workplace

Don't know / Not sure

**Q: After the COVID-19 crisis is over, would you like to keep working from home?**

Yes, as much or more than now

Yes, but less than now

No, I will go back to my regular workplace

Don't know / Not sure

**Q: Has your employer consulted with you about returning to your usual, on-site work location?**

Yes

No

Don't know/Not sure

**Q: If you are requested by your employer to go back to your usual, on-site work location after the pandemic, how do you think you will respond?**

Follow that directive and return to on-site work

Discuss with my employer and try to change their mind

Leave my job

Don't know/Not sure

## Appendix B - Sample Distribution

	N=	% sample
Total Employed	1048	65%
Male*	550	52%
Female*	493	47%
<b>Age</b>		
18-29 years	184	18%
30-39 years	292	28%
40-49 years	290	28%
50-59 years	201	19%
60 years or older	81	8%
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Full time	632	60%
Part time	252	24%
Casual	91	9%
Self-employed	73	7%
<b>Occupation</b>		
Manager	254	24%
Professional	262	25%
Technician or Trades Worker	58	6%
Community or Personal Service Worker	72	7%
Clerical or Administrative Worker	161	15%
Sales Worker	99	9%
Machinery Operator or Driver	25	2%
Labourer	81	8%
Don't know/Not sure	36	3%
<b><i>Table continued overleaf</i></b>		

\*A small number of respondents did not indicate their gender as male or female.

	<b>Industry</b>	<b>N=</b>	<b>% sample</b>
	Goods-producing (including Agriculture, Mining and Manufacturing)	82	8%
	Construction and Utilities (including Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services)	67	6%
	Trade and Hospitality (including Wholesale and Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, and Transport, Postal and Warehousing)	199	19%
	Private Services (including Information Media and Telecommunications, Financial Services, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, and Administrative Services)	284	27%
	Community Sector (including Public Administration and Safety, Education and Training, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Arts and Recreation Services)	222	21%
	Other Services	179	17%
	Don't know / Not sure	15	1%
<b>Union membership</b>			
	Member	244	23%
	Non-member	771	74%
	Don't know/Not sure	33	3%

# References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2020). 'Characteristics of Employment, Australia, August 2020' (available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/aug-2020>).

ABS (2021a). 'Insights into hours worked, January 2021' (available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/insights-hours-worked-january-2021>).

ABS (2021b). 'Labour Force Australia, August 2021' (available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/aug-2021>).

ABS (2021c). 'Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product' (available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-national-accounts-national-income-expenditure-and-product/jun-2021>).

Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) (2021). 'ACTU calls for national plan to halve number of insecure jobs by 2030, address record level of multiple jobs' (available at: <https://www.actu.org.au/actu-media/media-releases/2021/actu-calls-for-national-plan-to-halve-number-of-insecure-jobs-by-2030-address-record-level-of-multiple-jobs>).

Craig, L. and Churchill, B. (2020). 'Dual-earner parent couples' work and care during COVID-19', *Gender, Work and Organization*, June 2020, pp. 1-14.

Department of Treasury (2021). 'Budget Paper No. 1, Statement No. 1' (available at: <https://budget.gov.au/2021-22/content/bp1/index.htm>).

Department of Treasury (2021). 'Budget Paper No. 1, Statement No. 6' (available at: <https://budget.gov.au/2021-22/content/bp1/index.htm>).

Elmas, M. (2021) 'Overworked and underpaid? Your boss might be breaking the law', *The New Daily*, 13 September (available at: <https://thenewdaily.com.au/finance/finance-news/2021/09/13/unpaid-overtime-law-australia/>)

Henderson, T. (2016). 'Hard to Get Away: Is the Paid Holiday Under Threat in Australia?', Centre for Future Work (available at: <https://www.tai.org.au/content/hard-get-away-paid-holiday-under-threat-australia>).

Henderson, T., Swann, T. and Stanford, J. (2018) 'Under the Employer's Eye: Electronic Monitoring & Surveillance in Australian Workplaces', Centre for Future Work (available at: <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/GHODT-2018-Under-the-Employers-Eye.pdf>).

Lewis, K. and Stronge, W. (2021) 'We Need a Shorter Workweek to Free Us From the Tyranny of Work', Jacobin (available at: [https://jacobinmag.com/2021/09/shorter-work-week-free-time-neoliberalism-labor?mc\\_cid=c7c430b5e0&mc\\_eid=8d6b938305](https://jacobinmag.com/2021/09/shorter-work-week-free-time-neoliberalism-labor?mc_cid=c7c430b5e0&mc_eid=8d6b938305)).

Milne, S. (2021). 'Bosses turn to 'tattleware' to keep tabs on employees working from home', *The Guardian*, 5 September (available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/05/covid-coronavirus-work-home-office-surveillance>).

Nahum, D. (2020). 'Work and Life in a Pandemic: An Update on Hours of Work and Unpaid Overtime Under COVID-19', Centre for Future Work (available at: [https://www.futurework.org.au/go\\_home\\_on\\_time\\_day\\_wednesday\\_18\\_november\\_2020](https://www.futurework.org.au/go_home_on_time_day_wednesday_18_november_2020)).

Nahum, D. (2021). 'Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Job Security', Centre for Future Work (available at: [https://www.futurework.org.au/senate\\_committee\\_on\\_insecure\\_work](https://www.futurework.org.au/senate_committee_on_insecure_work)).

Nahum, D. and Stanford, J. (2020). 'Technology, Standards and Democracy: Submission to the Select Committee on the Impact of Technological Change on the Future of Work and Workers in New South Wales', Centre for Future Work (available at: [https://www.futurework.org.au/submission\\_to\\_nsw\\_select\\_committee\\_on\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_work](https://www.futurework.org.au/submission_to_nsw_select_committee_on_the_future_of_work)).

New Economics Foundation (2021) 'Achieving a Shorter Working Week Across Europe', issue 8 (available at: <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/workingtime-newsletter8.pdf>).

Pennington, A. and Stanford, J. (2020). 'Working From Home: Opportunities and Risks', Centre for Future Work (available at: [https://www.futurework.org.au/working\\_from\\_home\\_in\\_a\\_pandemic\\_opportunities\\_and\\_risks](https://www.futurework.org.au/working_from_home_in_a_pandemic_opportunities_and_risks)).

Stanford, J. (2021) 'Briefing Note: Shock Troops of the Pandemic: Casual and Insecure Work in COVID and Beyond', Centre for Future Work (available at: [https://www.futurework.org.au/insecure\\_workers\\_are\\_shock\\_troops\\_of\\_the\\_pandemic](https://www.futurework.org.au/insecure_workers_are_shock_troops_of_the_pandemic)).

Statistics Canada (2021) 'Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, April 2020 to June 2021' (available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210804/dq210804b-eng.htm>).

Wade, M. (2018). 'Time pressure is stressing us out', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October (available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/time-pressure-is-stressing-us-out-20181005-p5080i.html>).

Wright, S. (2021) 'Subs set to sail past \$100 billion as defence call on budget grows', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 20 (available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/subs-set-to-sail-past-100-billion-as-defence-call-on-budget-grows-20210917-p58sj4.html>).