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CEDA report misses the mark on temporary visa workers

A new report from the Centre for Economic Development Australia distorts the nature of temporary visa work in Australia, dismissing the impact of the broken system on exploited temporary visa workforce as well as local workers.

While the ACTU welcomes the suggestion that skills shortage analysis be improved, the claims in the report that there is a positive impact of the temporary visa program on employment and wages represents a failure to examine the entire sectors of the economy where exploitation of temporary visa workers is systemic and horrific.

Multiple investigations have found that temporary visa workers are routinely paid well below the minimum wage, exploiting the insecurity of their employment and ripping the bottom out of the labour market in regional areas where youth unemployment can be higher than 20 per cent.

The suggestion that labour market testing should be removed from the visa process directly undermines the basic principle that jobs in Australia should be filled by local workers in the first instance.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

“The temporary work visa program is broken. It exploits temporary visa workers while undercutting wages and job security for local workers and driving up unemployment in regional areas.

“The systemic issues with the temporary visa system were shown clearly in the recent report from the Migrant Worker Taskforce.

“Removing market testing would exacerbate the worst elements of an already broken system. It's essential that local jobs be offered to local workers before employers are allowed to bring in workforces from overseas.

“When some employers rort the system and underpay temporary visa workers, it disadvantages all other employers who do the right thing. We need to create tighter controls on the visa system, not remove key protections for local workers.

“The workers who are brought in on temporary visas are routinely exploited and paid poverty wages. Regional areas where local workers are passed over because of lax labour market testing and open rorting are struggling with massive youth unemployment. The only group the broken system works for are unscrupulous employers.

“Unions have been working alongside temporary visa workers and local workers in regional areas to try and improve this system. We will continue to fight for a better, fairer visa system which puts workers first.”

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