

Monday, 5 June 2023

Unions welcome additional protections for migrant workers

Today's announcement that the Albanese Government will begin to tackle the systemic and widespread exploitation of migrant workers in Australia is an important step forward. Drivers of exploitation include temporary visa conditions that tie workers to single employers, no protection or guarantee that workers reporting workplace exploitation will not face deportation and weak regulation and enforcement.

The Government's proposed package of measures implement key recommendations of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce – after years of inaction by the Coalition Government. These include new criminal offences for employers coercing temporary migrant workers to breach their visa conditions or to accept exploitative workplace practices, and preventing employers who have engaged in serious, repeated or deliberate non-compliance from employing additional temporary migrant workers for a period of time.

The Government also announced it will work with unions, industry and key stakeholders to design a system that will enhance protections and safeguards for migrant workers that include protections against visa cancellation for workers reporting exploitation, a visa to enable temporary migrant workers to remain in the country while they pursue their workplace entitlements, and the creation of a 'firewall' between the Fair Work Ombudsman and the Department of Home Affairs to encourage exploited workers to report exploitation without suffering adverse immigration outcomes.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O' Neil:

"Migrant worker exploitation is a national shame – we welcome the Albanese Government taking action to protect migrant workers from exploitation and to implement key recommendations of the Migrant Worker Taskforce – after years of inaction by the Coalition Government.

"The exploitation of workers in Australia on short term visas hurts all workers and exposes the impact of a migration system that has shifted away from permanent migration towards a guest worker, individual employer driven approach.

"We commend the government for beginning to take action to protect migrant workers and increase the penalties for employers who see temporary migrant workers as an easy target for exploitation".

"More needs to be done and we will work with the Federal Government and other stakeholders on further proposals to engineer exploitation out of our migration system including an evidence-based approach to skill shortages, a guarantee against visa cancellation for short term visa workers taking action on breaches of their workplace rights, and a visa to protect workers pursuing a claim against their employer.

"Migrant workers should be able to enforce their workplace rights without jeopardising their ability to stay in the country."

ENDS

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